

New France

As Spanish colonies sent ships loaded with gold and silver home to Spain, all of Europe watched with envy. Every year, Spain seemed to become wealthier and more powerful. Other nations wanted their share of riches from the Americas. But none was strong enough to challenge Spain's American empire. Instead, they would have to seek their fortunes in areas not yet claimed by Spain.

Claiming New France In 1534, France sent Jacques Cartier (zhahk cahr-TYAY) to explore the Atlantic coastline of North America. His goal was to find a Northwest Passage, an all-water route through the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean. Such a passage would provide a shortcut for ships sailing west to Asia.

Cartier failed to find such a passage. But he did claim for France the land we know today as Canada. He later named this land New France. Cartier also discovered something almost as valuable as Spanish gold—beaver fur. Beaver hats were a fashionable item in Europe, and French hatmakers were willing to pay high prices for beaver pelts.



Settling New France The first settlement in New France was founded by Samuel de Champlain (duh sham-PLANE). In 1608, Champlain sailed up the St. Lawrence River and built a trading post he called Quebec (kwuh-BEK). For the next 150 years, Quebec would be a base for French explorers, soldiers, missionaries, traders, and fur trappers.

From Quebec, fur trappers pushed west in search of beaver. They called themselves **coueurs de bois** (kuh-RUR duh BWAH), which means “wood rangers” in French. Catholic missionaries followed the trappers, seeking converts among the native peoples.

Like the Spanish borderlands, New France failed to attract large numbers of settlers. The harsh climate of New France discouraged French farmers from crossing the Atlantic. So did the colony's policy of granting the best land along the St. Lawrence River to French nobles

who then planned to rent it out to farmers. The few settlers who did come soon got tired of renting and left their farms to search for furs.

American Indian Business

Partners Because the French were more interested in furs than farming, they did not try to conquer the Indians and put them to work as the Spanish had done. Instead, the French made American Indians their business partners.



After founding Quebec, Champlain made friends with the nearby Indians, especially the Huron. Fur trappers lived in Huron villages, learned the Huron language, and married Huron women. From the Huron they learned how to survive for months in the wilderness. Unfortunately, the friendship exposed the Huron to European diseases, which swept through their villages and killed many of them.

Champlain even joined the Huron in an attack on their enemy, the Iroquois. He later wrote, *I marched some 20 paces in advance of the rest, until I was within about 30 paces of the enemy . . . When I saw them making a move to fire at us, I rested my musket against my cheek, and aimed directly at one of the three chiefs. With that same shot, two fell to the ground; and one of their men was so wounded that he died some time after . . . When our side saw this shot . . . they began to raise such loud cries that one could not have heard it thunder.*

The astonished Iroquois, who had never seen or heard gunfire before, fled in terror. From that day on, the Iroquois would be the bitter enemies of the French.

Claiming Louisiana The search for furs led the French far inland from Quebec. In 1673, two explorers, Father Marquette (mahr-KET) and Louis Joliet (zhal-YAY), explored the great Mississippi River. They hoped this waterway would be the long-sought Northwest Passage. But they discovered that, instead of flowing west to the Pacific Ocean, the river flowed south toward the Gulf of Mexico. Disappointed, the explorers returned to New France.

Nine years later, Robert Cavalier de La Salle explored the entire length of the Mississippi River. On April 9, 1682, he planted a French flag at the mouth of the river and claimed

everything west of the Mississippi River for France. La Salle named this vast area Louisiana for the French monarch, King Louis XIV.