

Character Profile:

Sister Marguerite d'Youville

(1701-1771)

Marguerite d'Youville was born and educated in Québec. She married in 1722 and was widowed in 1730. In 1737, she founded the Grey Nuns with three of her friends. The Grey Nuns devoted themselves exclusively to providing what we would now call social services—looking after the poor, the aged and the sick. Their most important work was to care for and educate children who were orphaned or abandoned by their parents.

Character Profile:

Bishop Laval François de Laval- Montmorency (1623-1708)

Bishop Laval, as he was commonly known, was a French priest educated by the Jesuits. He became bishop in 1658, named by the Pope to serve in New France, and was named the Bishop of New France in 1674. He was given the position as the Pope's vicar apostolic to Canada, thereby overruling the authority of the King of France and reporting directly to Rome. Laval was an active champion of the Catholic faith, and actively sought to erase sin and corruption from the lives of those in New France, often upsetting the people and the government in the process.

Character Profile:

Sister Marie de l'Incarnation

(1599-1672)

Marie de l'Incarnation was born Marie Guyard. Like the Aboriginal people she was to work among in her later life, Marie believed that her dreams were sent to guide her life. As a young widow, a dream instructed her to place her 12-year-old son in a boarding school and join the Ursuline Order of Nuns. Before becoming a nun she managed a large shipping business for her brother-in-law. Another dream prompted her to open a school for Native girls in New France. She raised Money from a wealthy French patron to build an Ursuline convent in New France, which she personally supervised in 1639. When she retired as Mother Superior in 1669, more than fifty people lived in her convent, with just under half of them being nuns or priests. Like many of her Jesuit and Ursuline counterparts, she believed that she would become closer to God by mortifying her flesh—to punish or control her physical desires. She slept on a horsehair mattress and would routinely whip herself with a rope of thorns.

Character Profile:

Saint Jean de Brebeuf

(1593-1649)

Jean de Brebeuf was one of the famous Blackrobes of New France. He came to Canada as a Jesuit priest in 1625 when he was 32 years old to convert the Huron people to Christianity. He worked for many years among the Huron in the region now known as Georgian Bay. On March 16, 1649 he was tortured and killed by Aboriginal people. During his torture, it is reported that Brebeuf "suffered like a rock, insensible to the fires and the flames, without uttering any cry, and keeping a profound silence, which astonished his executioners themselves".

Character Profile:

Saint Isaac Jogues

(1607-1646)

Isaac Jogues was born in Orleans, France. He became a priest in 1636. He was sent to Canada as a missionary and worked at the Huron Missions on Georgian Bay. While working there, he and his colleagues were attacked and captured by an Iroquois war party. All were tortured. Jogues' hands were disfigured and his body was branded. He almost died several times. He was held captive for almost a year before he became a Mohawk slave. He traveled with a group of Mohawks to a Dutch village in present-day New York. A Protestant minister befriended him and worked with the governor of New Netherland to arrange for Jogues' ransom and transfer to Amsterdam. Jogues sailed on a Dutch ship back to France in 1643. Jogues returned to Canada in 1644 with no intention of returning to the Mohawks. However, he was persuaded to return to his dangerous post and was killed by the Mohawks in 1646.

Character Profile:

Comte de Frontenac

(1620-1698)

Frontenac's full name was Louis de Buade de Frontenac de Palluau. He was born in France to a noble family. Like so many young noblemen of the age, Frontenac lived well beyond his means and was constantly in debt. He probably accepted the appointment as governor-general of New France to escape his creditors. Frontenac sailed for Québec in 1672, but due to accusations and complaints directed at him, he was recalled to France in 1682. Frontenac later returned to Québec in April 1689 as governor because he was thought to be the only man able to deal with the problems of the Iroquois wars and the war with the English. He is regarded as one of the most influential figures in the history of Canada. He is particularly noted as the architect of French expansion in North America and defender of New France against the Iroquois and the English. Frontenac died at Québec nine years later, on November 28, 1698.

Character Profile:

Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys

(1620-1700)

Marguerite Bourgeoys was born in France. She came to live in the tiny settlement of Ville-Marie (Montréal) in 1653. She was not married when she arrived, and had no means of support. She dedicated herself to educating the children of the colony eventually founding the Congregation de Notre-Dame, an order devoted to teaching. In 1655, she began to work towards building the first stone church in Montréal, Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, a project completed twenty years later. Bourgeoys was given the task of caring for the King's Daughters ("Filles du Roi"), young women sent over from France to be wives to the men of New France. She died in Montreal in 1700.

Character Profile:

Jean Talon

(1625-1691)

Jean Talon was born in France. He was trained as a military administrator. In 1655, King Louis XIV appointed him as the Intendant, or provincial administrator, of New France as part of a royal attempt to save New France from decline. Talon was responsible for justice, peace and finance. He arrived in Quebec in 1665, and carried out the first Canadian census in 1666. His reforms began a transformation; agricultural activity in New France increased dramatically, as did trade in fish and furs. He returned to France in 1668, and worked from there to advance New France's interests. He was re-appointed Intendant in 1670, and sent out explorers into the north, west and south. Under his direction, France claimed three quarters of North America. Before returning to France in 1672, he established a number of seigneuries along the St. Lawrence River, bringing the social and economic system of France into the new world, providing a foundation for colonization.

Character Profile:

Dollard Des Ormeaux

(1635-1660)

In 1660 Adam Dollard Des Ormeaux led a small group of 16 volunteer soldiers up the Ottawa River outside Montréal. They were involved in an unsuccessful attempt to ambush the Iroquois who were threatening Ville-Marie, the tiny European settlement (population 600) on the island of Montréal. He and all his men, 16 in number, died in the battle, as 700 Iroquois drastically outnumbered them. The Iroquois failed, however, to launch their expected attack on Montréal. Dollard is sometimes portrayed as the saviour of Montréal.

Character Profile:

Chief Donnacona

(?-1539)

Chief Donnacona was the first member of the Iroquois nation to greet Jacques Cartier on his first voyage to the new world in 1534. Cartier was befriended by Donnacona and his two sons. During the harsh winter, Cartier learned from Donnacona how to make tea from cedar bark that cured the scurvy that many of the Europeans had contracted. Donnacona is also credited with naming this country. The story goes that shortly after they met, when Donnacona was leading Cartier into his village, Cartier asked the chief what the land was called. The chief replied "kanata", their word for village, as well as their name for the area around their home, Stadacone. "Canada" has remained the name of the whole vast territory that comprises the northern half of North America. Cartier took Donnacona's two sons with him when he returned to France in 1535. The following year, Cartier took Donnacona with him to France, where he died.

Character Profile:

Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve (1612-1676)

Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve was born in France early in the 17th century, and died in Paris. Maisonneuve was attracted to New France by reading the Jesuit Relations—stories about the lives of priests in Canada. He arrived in New France in 1641 as part of a group of religious men who wanted to establish a holy city at Ville-Marie—the present site of Montréal. He encouraged colonization and the development of agriculture and industry. While Ville-Marie was involved with many battles with the Iroquois, he worked to improve relations between the Iroquois and the French. He was a magistrate and was known for his fair decisions. When he left the colony in 1665, he had helped to turn Montréal into a settled, well organized and Christian place, and is known by many as the Father of Montréal.

Character Profile:

Marquis de Montcalm

(1712-1759)

Lieutenant General Louis Joseph Montcalm de Saint Veran, Marquis of Montcalm was born in France in 1712. He began his military career at 15. He fought in a number of battles throughout his life, gaining high regard for his military accomplishments. In 1755, he was offered the opportunity to lead his troops in Canada, and in 1756 he established troops at Fort Carillon, Fort Frontenac and Fort Niagara. Over the next two years, he won some considerable victories against the English. He was killed at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, when France lost Québec to the English.

Character Profile:

Marie-Anne Barbel

(1704-1793)

Marie-Anne Barbel married a merchant named Jean- Louis Fornel in 1723, at the age of 20. Between 1724 and 1741, she gave birth to 14 children. While her husband was alive, she acted as his business representative. After his death in 1745, instead of selling the business, she kept the business intact and ran it herself. She obtained a permit to trade in furs, invested in real estate, sued a number of businesses and bought a pottery factory. She made good investments and supported several of her adult children.

Character Profile:

Pierre Esprit Radisson

(1632-1710)

Radisson arrived in Canada in 1651. He hoped to transport the luxurious furs from the far north in large sailing ships from the shores of Hudson Bay to Québec or France, but instead had to carry them in small canoes down rough rivers. On the second trip (1659-60), Radisson and his brother-in-law Des Groseilliers entered Lake Superior and were the first Europeans in what is now the northern United States. They traded the Aboriginal people for a large cargo of furs, but these were taken away at Montréal because they had traded without a license. This episode led Radisson and Des Groseilliers to transfer their allegiance to the English, and, backed by Prince Rupert, they set sail in 1668 for Hudson Bay. They persuaded the English prince, Charles II, to grant a charter to "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay", and changed the course of history of the Northwest.

Character Profile:

Medard Chouart Des Groseilliers

(1618-1695/98)

Des Groseilliers was born in France in 1618. Little is known of him until his arrival in New France in 1641. He was taken into the service of the Jesuits as either a servant or an interpreter, and lived and traveled with them until 1646. He traveled to Hudson Bay, and was the first Frenchman in New France to recognize the great possibilities for fur trade in that area. When he presented the fur traders in Quebec with his fine furs, the government wanted only to punish him for trading furs without a license. He and his partner (also his brother-in-law) Pierre Esprit Radisson then approached the British, who with the backing of Prince Charles II, went on to found the Hudson's Bay Company and changed the course of history of the Northwest.

Character Profile:

Pierre Du Gua de Monts

(circa 1558-1628)

Not much is known of de Monts' early life. He fought well for the king during the religious wars in France and was able to use his connections at court to obtain a trading monopoly in North American furs. In 1604 de Monts formed a company involving business interests on the eastern coasts of New France. He led an expedition to Acadia in 1604, in search of furs. Samuel de Champlain accompanied him. A year later he established the first permanent European settlement at Port Royal. Champlain, who is sometimes known as the father of Canada, could not have continued without de Monts' support.

Character Profile:

Louis Hebert

(1575-1627)

Louis Hebert was born in France. In 1604, having received training as an apothecary from his father, he decided to take his family to Acadia, arriving possibly with the de Monts' expedition, and settling near Port Royal. After the fall of the tiny colony, he returned to Paris. In 1617, he decided to return to the New World, to establish a farm in New France. He travelled with Samuel de Champlain, and took up land near Québec to live with his wife and three children. Up until this time and for years after, there were no European families (i.e., European parents and children) in New France. For this reason he is known as New France's first "habitant" or settler.

Character Profile:

Pierre Gautier de Varennes, Sieur de La Verendrye (1685-1749)

La Verendrye is known as the person who established the presence of the first Europeans, the French, on the Canadian prairies. When he was a commander of a fur trading post on the Nippigon River, he heard from Aboriginal peoples about a "great river" to the west—a river that he hoped would turn into the legendary North West Passage. In 1732, La Verendrye was led by a chief of the Kenisteno, whom he called La Martleblanche, on a journey by canoe into the interior of the continent. Over the next few years, La Verendrye and his sons established a chain of fur trading posts from Lake Superior across the plains, as far west as the Saskatchewan River. He encouraged French men to establish trading relations with the Cree and Assiniboine by marrying into their families. He took pride in capturing Sioux, traditional enemies of the Cree and Assiniboine, to work as slaves in New France. La Verendrye lost his fur trade monopoly in 1744, and died a poor man.

Character Profile:

Samuel de Champlain

(1567-1635)

Samuel de Champlain was born in France in 1567. Little is known of his early life, except that he learned to be a sailor from an uncle. In 1603, after he had made a number of trading voyages in Europe, he sailed (without sponsorship from any government) with a business associate to the St. Lawrence in North America. He explored the river as far as what is now known as Montréal. He returned to France that year, but returned to the coast of present-day Nova Scotia in 1605, staying there until 1607. After a year in France, he returned to Canada in 1608, and founded the trading post of Québec, which became the capital of the colony. He remained here until his death in 1635.

Character Profile:

Jacques Cartier

(1491-1557)

Jacques Cartier made three famous voyages from France to the "new world". He was born in St. Malo, France but not much is known about his life before he sailed for North America in 1534, in search of the North West Passage for the King of France. Near the Gaspé Peninsula he traded with the Mi'kmaq. He also met 200 Hurons, led by Chief Donnacona, with whom he became friendly. Two of Donnacona's sons accompanied Cartier back to France, acting as interpreters, but it is unclear whether they were kidnapped by Cartier, or went willingly. He made his second voyage in 1535. He had heard of a wondrously rich mythical kingdom, the Saguenay, from Donnacona's two sons. Cartier returned them to their father on his way up the St. Lawrence. He sailed to present day Québec where he built a small fort, Stadacona, and then he traveled on to Montréal (an Indian village named Hochelaga). He returned the following year to St. Malo, kidnapping Chief Donnacona, his two sons and four other members of their nation. All but a young girl died in France. Cartier made his third and final voyage to Canada in 1541. When he returned without their Chief, the Iroquois were angry and hostile. The Iroquois killed 35 of Cartier's men before the remaining party returned to France in 1542. Cartier did not return to Canada, and died in France at age 67 in 1557.

Character Profile:

Étienne Brûlé

(1582-1632)

Étienne Brûlé was born in 1582 in France. He was a servant of Samuel de Champlain. He left in 1610 for the Huron interior, either sent by Champlain to explore, or of his own accord. After living with the Huron people for some years, he brought 200 Hurons with him to trade with Champlain at Québec. He took a number of the French west into Huron country to trade with the Aboriginal people for valuable furs. He guided the first Europeans to Lake Ontario and lands to the west. Brûlé was probably the first coureur de bois (fur trader) from the newly formed Québec settlement. On one of his exploratory journeys to the south, he was captured by Aboriginal people and tortured, but he escaped to live with the Huron. He was killed by the Huron in a quarrel.

Character Profile:

Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville et d'Ardillieres

(1661-1706)

d'Iberville was born in Montreal in 1661, the son of a Montréal fur trader. He went to sea at an early age. He battled against the English on behalf of the French in Hudson Bay, and in 1697 he captured all of the English settlements on the coast of Newfoundland. Later that year he sailed for France, and was given an expedition to lead to the mouth of the Mississippi, which he found in 1699. He went on to colonize Louisiana for France.

Character Profile:

René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle (1643-1687)

René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle was born in Normandy, France. For a time he was a Jesuit priest but because of "moral weaknesses" he asked to be released from his vows. In 1667, La Salle found himself in New France with no trade and no money. He was so determined to find a route to the Orient that his seigneurie was jokingly known as "La Chine" (the area in Montréal is, to this day, still called Lachine). Working on behalf of the French to secure control of the fur trade, La Salle built many forts across what is now Ontario and central United States. As a reward for his service, La Salle was given the right to explore the area between Florida and Mexico. In 1682 he arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi and claimed the land for the French thereby extending New France to the Gulf of Mexico. King Louis XIV appointed La Salle to establish a French colony in Louisiana. La Salle was murdered in what is now modern-day Texas in 1687.

Character Profile:

Jean Nicollet

(circa 1598-1642)

Jean Nicollet was born around 1598 in the Cherbourg region of Normandy. He is credited with being the first European to encounter Lake Superior. Nicollet came to New France in 1617 to serve as an interpreter. While wintering for two years with the Algonquins on the Ottawa River and for nine years with the Nipissing on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, Nicollet learned to speak Aboriginal languages. He endured considerable hardship; sometimes going for as long as a week without eating. He "spent seven full weeks with no food other than a little tree bark". He acted as an ambassador and peacemaker between the French and Aboriginal peoples, who referred to him as "Manitouirinio", or man of wonders. In 1642, while traveling across the St. Lawrence River from Québec to Sillery on a mission to save an Iroquois prisoner, his boat overturned and Nicollet drowned.

Character Profile:

Thanadelthur

(1697-1717)

Thanadelthur, also known as the "Slave Woman", was a member of the Chipewyan nation, a northern Aboriginal people. As a young woman, she was captured by the Cree people and forced into slavery. Eventually she escaped and travelled to York Factory, a trading post on Hudson Bay. She guided a Hudson's Bay Company employee on a difficult journey through the northern barrens into Chipewyan territory. Her introduction of the Europeans to her countrymen resulted in the creation of Prince of Wales Fort (now Churchill) which opened up the fur trade for the Chipewyan people. She also helped to negotiate peace between the Chipewyans and her former captors, the Cree.

Character Profile:

Marie-Joseph Angelique

(?-1734)

Marie-Joseph Angelique was an African slave sent to New France. In 1734, she was a servant in the house of a rich Montréal merchant named Monsieur de Francheville. She worked in the kitchen, washed the clothes, cleaned the house and did the errands. One day, as an act of resistance, she set fire to the house. The fire spread through the Francheville house and burned about fifty houses across town. As her punishment, she was hanged in market square. She was denied a Christian burial; her body was burned at the stake and her ashes thrown to the wind.

Character Profile:

Jeanne Mance

(1606-1673)

Jeanne Mance was one of the first European women to settle in New France, and was the first secular (nonreligious) nurse of North America. She founded Montreal's Hotel-Dieu Hospital. Jeanne was called the "Angel of the Colony" by the people of Montréal. She worked throughout her life to obtain money and volunteers for the hospital, which survives to this day.

Character Profile:

Madeleine de Verchères

(1678-1747)

Madeleine de Verchères, also known as Madeleine Jarrett Tarieu, was 14 years old when the Iroquois attacked the family seigneurie on the St. Lawrence River near Montréal. Everyone working outside was killed except Madeleine. She ran back to the fort, shouting "To arms! To arms!" and slammed the gate in the face of her pursuer. She then proceeded to order two of the soldiers left inside and her younger brother to keep shooting their rifles at the Iroquois. In this way, she gave the Iroquois the impression that the seigneurie was well protected by soldiers. She held out for over a week before help arrived.

Character Profile:

Rene Goupil

(1608-1642)

René Goupil was from Angers in France. As a young man he desired to become a Jesuit, but his deafness and poor health forced him to abandon his dream of a religious life. He nevertheless travelled to New France in 1640 to work as a lay apostle. Initially, Goupil served the local Jesuit superior by performing menial chores.

Because of his natural ability and his caring manner, he eventually was asked to serve as a surgeon in Québec, caring for the ill and needy, both European and Aboriginal. He was said to have "dedicated his life, his heart, and his hand to the service of the poor Indians." Goupil was eventually tortured and killed by the Iroquois for making the sign of a cross on an Aboriginal child's forehead.

Character Profile:

Nicolas Perrot

(1641/44-1717)

Nicolas Perrot was born in France, perhaps in Burgundy. Perrot was raised by the Jesuits and "financial necessity had obliged Perrot to put himself in the service of the Jesuits". Because of his skill and character, he was effective at building and maintaining positive relations between the Aboriginal peoples and the French. Aboriginal people called Perrot "Metamiens" or "the man with the iron legs". On many occasions Perrot was sent out on diplomatic missions to negotiate peace, including the famous "Peace of Montréal" involving 1,300 Aboriginal delegates. Governor Frontenac wrote that "Perrot has acquired, through his long practice and knowledge, the humour, customs and language of the nations, and he has much credit among them". However, this credit was not much use to Perrot in his later life.

Unlike most people in public administration, Perrot asked for little for himself. When he retired in 1696, he was broke. The only favour ever granted him was to protect his wife's property from seizure when creditors were taking Perrot's property because of debts accumulated while trying to support his family.