Women in New France

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The image of a founding parent is a powerful one. Most “founding mothers” are mythological creatures, such as the she-wolf who nursed the twins Romulus and Remus who founded Rome; or the Iroquois Sky Mother who fell to the sea and fashioned earth by placing mud on a turtle’s back. When it comes to real-life “founders,” the image is masculine: there are the hunters who came to America by crossing the Bering Strait in search of game; the Spanish conquistadors; and of course, the American Pilgrim Fathers. Canadian history is unusual for the number of women recorded among its founders. Indeed one of the nation’s first historians was a nun, Marie Morin, who began in 1697 to recount the early history of Montréal (originally known as Ville-Marie) along with the story of her convent. Nuns also founded the first hospital north of Mexico, in Québec City in 1639. Jeanne Mance, who with Governor Maisonneuve co-founded Montréal in 1642, occupies a place of first magnitude in many accounts of early Canada. Nearly as illustrious was Marie de l’Incarnation, who served as fundraiser, translator and educator during Québec City’s early decades. In the same era, Marguerite Bourgeoys set up our country’s first widely accessible education system.

Many historians prefer to discuss ordinary people rather than heroes or leaders of either sex. Accordingly, much of this booklet will deal with typical women of the period. First, however, we shall examine the small minority of atypical women. They included the group of religious pioneers known as dévotes, who were the “founding mothers” mentioned above. Aboriginal women and noblewomen also stand out because of the way they acted or reacted during circumstances of war or upheaval. Then attention will turn to a more representative group of settlers, the filles du roi and their descendents. These young women arrived in shiploads between 1663 and 1673 and started many of the French Canadian families who live in Quebec today. Subsequent sections will discuss later generations as New France became a developed colony, and women were able to lead more ordinary lives in town and country.

Life in New France cannot be painted in rosy hues. It was a colony haunted by war. Conflict raged for approximately one hundred years of its one hundred and fifty year existence. Some six generations lived there from the colony’s first permanent settlement at Port-Royal in 1604 to its fall to Britain in 1760; not one of those generations experienced unbroken peace. France claimed territory extending from Acadia (centring on
present-day Nova Scotia) westward past the Great Lakes, and stretching southward along the Mississippi Valley all the way to New Orleans. Since neither its English nor its Aboriginal enemies accepted these claims, New France had to guard its perimeters with scouts, troops and massive stone fortifications.

This was a colony under arms. The French were vastly outnumbered both by Aboriginal people and by the English settlers to the south. When New France finally fell in 1760 it had some 70,000 people, compared to 1,500,000 American colonists. New France endured as long as it did by employing virtually all its noblemen in the army (a contrast to France where many nobles turned their hands to administration, estate management and other peaceful pursuits) and by enrolling all other men aged sixteen to sixty in the militia.

While some men went off to war, others went off to trade. An estimated 18 to 25 per cent traded furs legally, and many others joined the illegal trade. Initially a summer event, the fur trade gradually moved farther and farther west and became the business of full-time professionals. Québec City merchants frequently sailed to Louisbourg or France. Between leaving to fight and leaving to trade, many men were periodically absent from their families. As we shall see, this had quite an impact on the women.

The dévottes
The first Europeans to settle the colony were representatives of fur companies. They clustered in trading posts on the edges of the forest at Port Royal, Tadoussac and Québec City. The population was overwhelmingly male. Then, around 1640, a handful of women left France, crossed the Atlantic, and took up life in little log convents. These were so full of holes that snow drifted onto their beds, and food on the table froze as hard as rocks. They endured these conditions while waiting for the next Iroquois attack. Because only a few people were brave (or foolish?) enough to venture forth, they rank among the founders of New France, and, by extension, of Canada. Those crude log buildings grew into strong institutions that have influenced hundreds of thousands of people over the past three centuries.

Why did they come? The Protestant Reformation, beginning with Martin Luther’s revolt against a corrupted Catholic Church in 1517, startled Catholics into a self-reform known as the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation. Dedicated religious orders sprang up to replace old, lax ones. They made the first sustained effort to convert the European lower classes, who were still intermixing their Catholicism with various pagan customs such as dancing in graveyards. Well-dressed people searched the alleys to
rescue orphans and beggars. The Jésuites, the new “army” dedicated to the Pope’s service, founded private schools to turn rich boys—Europe’s future ruling class—into devout Catholics. In court circles, a number of aristocrats stopped dressing immodestly and having illicit affairs. In place of building themselves a second château or holding a fancy-dress ball, they donated their fortunes to faraway missions. Newly awakened to the real meaning of their religion, they could not bear the thought that heathen souls in China, Brazil or Canada would forfeit heaven because no one bothered to teach them the way.

Though the Catholic Church had for centuries reserved its highest honours for males—the papacy, the bishoprics, the right to say mass and administer the sacraments—it did revere Christ’s mother Mary and various female saints; and new devotions to the Infant Jesus and his mother suggest such feminine influence resurfaced in Counter-Reformation times. Already there was a long tradition of nuns and charitable laywomen performing good deeds close to home. What was special about the seventeenth century was that so many women were so powerfully moved, and that they were sufficiently independent, wealthy or talented to go farther afield. For the first time nuns left their cloisters to travel overseas, barely blinking at the prospect of being martyred by hostile peoples.

Some of the most important women in court circles had too many responsibilities, or were too old, to leave France. Instead, they opened their purses wide so others could go. They did much to make up for the failure of trading companies to send out the promised settlers and supplies to the posts established by Samuel de Champlain and others in 1604–08. Madame de Guercheville, first lady to the Queen, was the first noblewoman to interest herself in New France. She financed Jésuites activities there, and brought the colony to the attention of other members of her class. The religious Société Notre-Dame de Montréal that founded Ville-Marie included eight wealthy women among its thirty-five directors. Anne of Austria herself, the French Queen, contributed to this society and also financed later female emigrants for Montréal. The wife of a Parisian governor gave money to found the hospital and Ursulines convent at Québec City. Madame de Bullion, widow of the French Superintendent of Finance, contributed thousands to the hospital at Montréal.

Younger women went in person. Twenty-two-year-old Marie de Savonnières was a much-loved nun who broke her parents’ hearts when she left France forever to teach Aboriginal girls. Marie Forestier was about the same age when she became a founder of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital which still serves Québec City today. Women were there at the 1642
establishment of Ville-Marie, a forest ceremony using fireflies for altar lights. Who else but a handful of visionaries—people keener on salvation than on survival—would set up a town deep in wilderness controlled by one of the most feared nations on the continent, the Iroquois? Within a decade, 15 of the original 65 settlers would be slain. Bandaging tomahawk wounds and removing arrows from the injured was a gentlewomen with a nursing background and “the ability to be unmindful of herself” named Jeanne Mance. She had come, with Madame de Bullion's money, to set up a hospital. When things grew desperate in 1651, she took the initiative of redirecting her hospital's endowment fund to another purpose: raising French troops to save the town.

Marguerite Bourgeoys on the other hand came virtually penniless, with one small bag of possessions. She used an abandoned stable to start a school in Ville-Marie. Her equally improverished French and Aboriginal followers ventured out to set up more schools, both for Indigenous communities and European settlers. Popular with the people for many reasons, one being that they did not insist on fees, Bourgeoys's followers eventually established about a dozen schools, including one at Louisbourg on the Atlantic coast. Bourgeoys and Mance also made several trips to France to recruit female settlers for the colony.

Marie de l'Incarnation, a businesswoman from the town of Tours, was also swept up in the fervour of the times. Widowed with a baby at nineteen, she ran her brother-in-law's transport business while her son grew to age eleven. Then, no longer able to resist a strong call to enter the convent, she sent the boy, despite his cries, to be raised by relatives. She had read accounts sent from Québec City by the first Jésuites missionaries calling for dedicated women to work with Aboriginal girls. She had a dream in which the Virgin Mary beckoned her there. Crossing the Atlantic in 1639, she and two other nuns founded an Ursulines convent at Québec City for the education of girls. She attracted French interest and funding to the desperate little colony by writing some twelve thousand letters detailing missionary adventures and the Aboriginal customs. She played a part in diplomacy with Native peoples by taking their girls as boarders, which was in line with a custom of exchanging children. She knew quite a lot about their culture, enough to write dictionaries in Huron and Algonquin.

Some of these early dévotes acted in ways that are almost incomprehensible by modern standards, such as beating themselves and having visions of the devil, which might lead to suspicions about their mental health. Certainly they do not fit later ideals of femininity. Marie de
l'Incarnation was a tall, authoritative woman who, judging by her portraits, had a rather "masculine" appearance. Though she distinguished herself by rejecting the corporal punishment common at the time in homes and schools in France, she didn't mind ordering other people around; she had to struggle with herself to be less sharp with her subordinates. More gentle mothers superior would appear a little later. At the beginning, an iron constitution was an asset.

Notwithstanding these formidable women, the Church remained a patriarchal institution, well rooted in Greek, Roman and Judaic traditions of male superiority. Male ecclesiastics had formal authority over convents—their rules, their budget, their projects—and they liked to exercise it. It took a male ally in France to help Bourgeois stop her bishop's plans for confining her travelling teachers behind convent walls. Although mothers superior didn't always get their way, they subverted more than one troublesome bishop who wanted to change their convent rules.

Until 1663 when France finally set up an official government and sent out troops, the dévotes supplied essential funding and services to a colony whose collapse was a serious possibility. Although their mission work was a rather mixed blessing to Native peoples, it served Crown interests in many ways. They brought out settlers (including skilled artisans to build their schools and convents), housed women immigrants, and gave hospital care to sailors and others needed for the colony’s trade. Their hospitals belie the notion that the pre-modern institutions were places where people went only to die. The Hôtel-Dieu in Québec City won accolades from visitors over the centuries for its snowy linens and spotless wards, for dedicated nuns whose duties ranged from orderly to pharmacist to nurse-practitioner. The mortality rate in the late seventeenth century was less than eight per cent. Schools and hospitals founded by the nuns of the Ursulines order, for example, or the Soeurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame, still serve Canada today. Unlike male religious orders, the convents soon attracted many Canadian members. The dévotes became role models for many generations of Catholic women.

It is true of course, that every country has "founding mothers" who bore and raised the "great men." Some professional historians have begun to talk more about the mothers, just as oral traditions have always done. Too often though, the men make it into the history books and the women are largely forgotten when historians fail to question the absence of women in the sources they consult. The men get the laurels for going where others feared to go, recording and publicizing the first decades in the new land,
rallying supporters, interacting with Aboriginal people. A nice twist of our own history is that women did these things too.

**Indigenous Peoples**

Among the Indigenous peoples there were women who, like the dévötes, showed great courage or character. Several are recorded as standing up among their people and sounding the alarm that their new French allies had something to do with all the horrible things that had been happening lately. One Montagnais woman warned: “Dost thou not see that we are all dying since they told us to pray to God. Where are thy relatives? Where are mine? The most of them are dead. It is no longer a time to believe.”

Aboriginal peoples faced extremely difficult circumstances. French colonization marked an exceptional moment in the millenia of human evolution in the New World. Groups in close contact with the French, such as the Montagnais and the Huron, found their numbers decimated, their work, tools, religion and social customs transformed within a lifetime. As we shall see, gender relations began to change too.

The Iroquois, enemies of the French, have been singled out by anthropologists as a culture in which women had an unusual degree of power. Early American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan, while asserting that Iroquois men had superior status, drew attention nonetheless to the women's control of agricultural and marriage arrangements. Friedrich Engels went on to discuss the Iroquois as an early example of sexual egalitarianism, before the advent of private property caused males to insist on wisely obedience and fidelity, thus ensuring that paternal property wasn't transmitted to some “heir” who wasn't really his own son. Others believe Iroquoian women's role as farmers, producing and controlling most of the food supply, was a key factor. Because corn was stored in a longhouse under control of the matrons, they might refuse, for example, to provision a war party if they didn't approve of it. Kinship and place of residence were both determined through the female line. Men moved into the longhouse of the wife's family and had to supply them with game; they also had to please powerful mothers-in-law or risk losing shelter. The Iroquois were not a true matriarchy because, although matrons could choose and depose league chiefs, the chiefs themselves were male. It is difficult to assess the balance of power, partly because Iroquoian notions of property and politics were less formal than European ones. Clearly the women enjoyed a considerable degree of authority. There was also a high degree of sexual equality among the Montagnais, a hunter-gatherer people allied with the French. These women don't seem to have “asked permission” very often!
Among both Iroquoian and Montagnais peoples, pre-marital sex and relatively easy separation at the instigation of either husband or wife, were the norm. Though this pattern is not unfamiliar to Canadians today, it shocked 17th-century Europeans. In particular it disturbed the missionaries, who placed high value on chastity, especially female chastity. When the Jésuites set up villages for their converts, they tried to persuade wives to be more submissive; they humiliated independent women andcondoned men beating disobedient spouses. Many women could not comply. Marie de l'Incarnation met resistance when she tried to educate Aboriginal girls to be wives of French men. Kept too long from their people and their own ways, girls in the convent often became so melancholy it wrecked their health. After many years of working with these girls, she conceded that “of a hundred who’ve passed through our hands, we’ve scarcely civilized one.”

Some Aboriginal people of both sexes did become ardent Christians. Particularly after epidemics killed up to half their people, Hurons and Montagnais converted in large numbers. Even among the Iroquois, many eventually swallowed their hostility and came to live in mission villages such as Kahnawake and Oka. At the missions, European notions of the male as head of household, breadwinner and farmer did tend gradually to replace older, more egalitarian practices. In other ways though, missions offered a degree of isolation that helped keep Indigenous culture alive.

The attractiveness of the way of life for women is suggested by the experience of Eunice Williams. She was a seven-year-old girl in the family of a Protestant minister in Deerfield, Massachusetts. When a party of raiders took the whole family hostage in 1704, Eunice’s mother, weak from recent childbirth, did not survive the forced march through the forest to Canada. New Englanders sent diplomats and ransom money to get this highly regarded family back. Eventually Reverend Williams and his children were returned to New England—all except Eunice. Raised at the Kahnawake mission, she converted to Catholicism. At sixteen she married a Mohawk. She steadfastly refused all inducements to go back to Deerfield. In her middle age she finally relented and visited her imploring family. Even then she and her husband camped outside. They were uneasy about entering the house, and seemed relieved to return to Kahnawake. Eunice was one of a number of New England captives who shocked her contemporaries by finding Aboriginal life preferable to a “civilized” one.

Apart from “mission Indians,” there were dispersed groups in Labrador, Gaspé, and the vast regions north and west of Québec City. They had limited contact with the French and only slowly modified their traditional
lifestyles. Indigenous women and French traders contracted fur-trade marriages (sometimes permanent, but not necessarily so). The husband would benefit from trade privileges with her community, and also from her skill as a canoeist and supplier of provisions (including the endless pairs of moccasins needed when walking over rough trails). The women could acquire influence as mediators between the two cultures. They could gain a physically easier life than the arduous carrying of burdens that was often a woman's lot. Traders and their Aboriginal wives clustered in log villages around many French forts in the West. They were the first settlers of what would later become Detroit and other towns with French names scattered across the American midwest. They became Catholic, but retained elements of their language, clothing, diet and other customs. Their fur-trade marriages produced a distinctive western people, the Métis. Long after the fall of New France, they would serve as interpreters, traders and guides in the western regions of North America, as well as founders of the Province of Manitoba.

The Nobility
Let us now turn to a very different group of people in New France, who wore satin and lace rather than the buckskin and beads of the Native people. The nobility was a tiny group at the top of society, constituting between three and six per cent of the population. They held most of the positions at the head of government, army, church, and many seigneuries. In some of these noble families, women engaged in activities that surprised later historians who believed gentlewomen had traditionally been rather passive. An outstanding example is the family of Claude de Ramezay, who was governor of the District of Montréal in the early eighteenth century. Claude de Ramezay had a wife and daughter engaged in commerce and another daughter who might be described as a "warrior nun," Mother Saint-Claude de Ramezay. This family deserves a closer look; though they were more active than most, they help demonstrate a system that thrust a good number of noblewomen into public endeavours.

Mother Saint-Claude de Ramezay was born in the colony in 1697. She entered the convent of Québec City's Hôpital Général and took her vows at age nineteen. Like many noblewomen, she rose to administrative ranks in the convent. She was Mother Superior there when General Wolfe's armies scaled the cliff and defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham in September 1759. The Hôpital Général was a palatial building in the fields outside the city walls. Its functions included poorhouse, hospital and school for upper class girls. During the war Mother Saint-Claude and the
other nuns saw it as their duty to care for the wounded of both sides. Indeed they gave the British such good care that the invaders promised them protection should the colony fall. Their footsoldiers were reported "inexpressibly happy" if luck transferred them out of their filthy regimental hospitals to the clean wards and skilled care of the sisters.

The exploits of Mother Saint-Claude were recorded by John Knox. A captain in the British army that camped outside the walls of Québec City after its victory on the Plains, Knox was assigned the duty of guarding the Hôpital Général and making sure those inside did not smuggle supplies to French troops still foraging in the neighbourhood. In the officers' quarters at the Hôpital Général, the well-educated Captain Knox brought conversation to a halt when the French officers with whom he dined discovered he understood them even when they conversed in French and Latin. Not everyone shunned him, though. One morning he received an invitation to follow a messenger down a series of passageways to have a special breakfast with the elderly Mother Saint-Claude. He was treated to richly buttered bread and silver pots of milk and tea. Unfamiliar with English tea-drinking, Mother Saint-Claude had boiled the tea to a black, acrid brew Captain Knox could not stomach. She apologized profusely, and with her polite conversation helped the war-weary officer while away a pleasant morning.

Mother Saint-Claude's courtesy must have required considerable self-control. Her own brother, Nicholas-Roch, in charge of the starving and crumbling city during that harsh winter, was forced to yield it up to the British army. In those bitter months Mother Saint-Claude began to spread false rumours of French victories in hopes of demoralizing the British soldiers within her walls. Captain Knox heard a rumour that the English commander Murray rebuked her conduct with the sarcastic remark that "if she is tired of living out of the world, and will change her habit for that of a man, she being of proper stature, his Excellency will enroll her as a grenadier." Be that as it may, Mother Saint-Claude and the other nuns continued to take in streams of refugees from the demolished city and nurse the wounded of both sides.

To understand how war thrust noblewomen into such strategic positions, let us look at the Montréal family in which Mother Saint-Claude grew up. As a young woman she lost three of her brothers to the colony's various dangers. Her eldest brother, Claude, perished at age nineteen fighting with the French navy at Rio de Janeiro. Then Louis died at twenty-one, leading troops into battle against the Cherokees. Charles-Hector drowned at age thirty-six in a shipwreck. The only son left was Jean-
Baptiste-Nicolas-Roch, who had a long and illustrious military career before being left in charge of Québec City in that fatal winter of 1759-60.

Nicholas-Roch de Ramezay and his brothers were merely carrying out their duty as sons of the nobility, born to command wherever needed in the vast empire of the King of France. In theory, nobles had inherited the bold blood of ancient Frankish warriors. Members of this class stood in contrast to the commoners whose task was to toil at farming or fabricating goods, or in other ways that dirtied their hands literally or figuratively. (Though prohibitions on noble commerce had been loosened somewhat, trade was to be secondary and not to interfere with “living nobly”). Nobles were also expected to extend unfailing courtesy to other nobles of all nations. That explains the gracious way enemy officers would entertain each other in their tents on the very eve of battle. It also explains Mother Saint-Claude’s tea party for Captain Knox. The gallant noble in her was all smiles and courtesy to a fellow blueblood; but the Frankish warrior in her wanted to crush the foe!

While noblemen fought, the women spent most of their lives in the clattering halls of one or another kind of mansion, which might be a governor’s château, manorhouse of the seigneurie, or urban convent (one in five noblewomen took the veil). Their public duties tended to outweigh private or domestic ones, which were often handled by servants. Even in convents, humbly-born nuns did most of the dirty work. Certainly Mother Saint-Claude grew up in impressive surroundings, as a tour of the Château de Ramezay (still open to visitors today) will show. Her father, the Governor, boasted that his Norman castle with its four chimneys and massive stone walls was “unquestionably the most beautiful in Canada.” The handsome grounds stretched down towards the St. Lawrence. Inside, everything spoke of rank and show: the coats of arms on furniture and stained glass windows, portraits of the family and the royals, gold-framed mirrors and handsome armoires, gleaming tableware, copper bellows to assure a blazing fire. Another luxury was a writing desk. There Governor Ramezay had to pick up the quill to implore the Crown for subsidies, since the château required so “much expense to sustain... with honour.”

Honour meant more than just luxury. It also entailed public service by both sexes. In the colony’s earliest days, Madeleine de Verchères and Madame de la Tour, finding themselves the only nobles on hand during a siege, had actually commanded troops. More commonly, women participated in state pageants and official dinners at which policy matters might be determined. Official business in New France was transacted in family homes rather than in office buildings, and it was a family affair.
Mother Saint-Claude and her sisters were expected, even as little girls, to appear with their mother and father at official functions such as troop reviews. Evidently this wasn't much fun; when they were still quite young two of the more devout daughters expressed a desire to escape to the refuge of convent life. But whether they wore low-cut gowns or nuns' habits, noblewomen remained at the King's service. It was in this aristocratic tradition that three de Ramezay daughters offered to nurse Montréal victims during a smallpox epidemic in 1724. Mother Saint-Claude was continuing the tradition when she accepted the flood of refugees into the Hôpital Général in 1759. The phrase noblesse oblige had substance. In their own proud way, they served.

Did the family have a private life at all? Busy with a constant throng of official visitors, servants and kin, noblewomen commonly sent their babies out to nursemaids in the countryside from age two months to two years (where as many as half died from the experience). Often the hardy survivors were dispatched again, a few years later, to boarding schools. Later on, their marriages were calculated to advance the family's fortunes. Throughout life, family "honour" tended to outweigh individual choices.

Another interesting aspect about noble families is that the fathers cannot be portrayed as breadwinners. Like Governor de Ramezay, they besieged the Court, begging for help in supporting their families. The lack of markets for farm products ruled out the prosperity attained by many noble landowners in France. Even supplementing army pay with fur-trading did not cover expenses. The historian La Potherie recorded that officers commonly left their widows in financial distress. By petitioning the Crown, Governor de Ramezay's widow secured a pension for herself and an army captaincy for one of her sons, Nicholas-Roch. Trying to clear off the debts, she carried on the family timber and sawmilling operation located near their Richelieu valley seigneurie. But a flood carried away the mill, there was a costly legal dispute with neighbours, and a careless captain let the timber rot in the harbour.

Fortunately her unmarried daughter, Françoise-Louise, took over and settled the dispute; Françoise-Louise then expanded the timber operation. Forming a partnership with another woman, she opened a second sawmill. Later, she purchased a Montréal tannery, bringing a master-tanner into the partnership. Sometimes managing her businesses herself and sometimes employing foremen, Françoise-Louise de Ramezay travelled frequently between Montréal, Québec City and the Richelieu to oversee the various operations. She restored the family fortunes and built up a legacy for her nieces and nephews. The enterprises were sufficiently
flourishing that Françoise-Louise, like her sister at the Hôpital Général, decided to stay in Canada when her brother and many other nobles fled to France after the British took over in 1760. The de Ramezay story demonstrates how the noble lifestyle involved public activity by both sexes.

New France was not alone in this. It was within European custom for women, whether noble or not, to manage family enterprises at certain periods of their lives, particularly in widowhood. In New France, where men so frequently left home for war or trade, it became quite common for them to delegate powers-of-attorney to their wives or female relatives. When the War of Austrian Succession called men to arms in 1744, a Québec City merchant reported widespread transfer of these business powers to wives. Sizeable commercial ventures directed by women included fur-trading, contract building, textile and clothing manufactories, potteries, sturgeon fishing, seal hunting, and iron forging operations.

While men held the formal government offices, a few noblewomen openly wielded political power. The most singular was Élisabeth Joybert de Soulanges, marquise de Vaudreuil. Though she lost her father at age five, Élisabeth received government assistance to attend the Québec City Ursulines school, where her teachers described her as pretty and refined. She married a man who became Governor-General of New France. In 1709, when political enemies were spreading damaging rumours about the Governor, Élisabeth sailed to France to defend his name at Versailles. She won the ear of Jérôme de Pontchartrain, ministre de la marine (responsible for colonial administration), who accepted some of her advice on policy, and took an interest in the family’s advancement.

A great squawk soon rose from Québec City. “She controls all the positions in Canada,” fumed the Attorney General, Ruette D’Auteuil. “She writes magnificent letters for all sorts of places about the power she can exert over him [Pontchartrain]... She causes great fear and imposes silence on most of those who could speak against her husband.” At one point Madame Vaudreuil received advance warning of a raid planned on Québec City, and sent an urgent dispatch to Versailles outlining the necessary arms and strategy. For two decades colonial officials spoke of Madame de Vaudreuil, “La Gouvernante,” as a formidable force.

Meanwhile, her family grew up without her in the governor’s mansion at Québec City. Madame de Vaudreuil first went to France to look after family legal affairs in 1696-7. Tutoring was arranged for the children. She left again in 1709, turning her two-month-old daughter Marie-Élisabeth over to a nursemaid. When her mother returned, Marie-Élisabeth was twelve.
All in all, it seems that noble families did not conform to what are sometimes seen as "traditional" gender roles. The mothers seem remote and unreliable as nurturers; the fathers seem equally inadequate as breadwinners. But both sexes were ready to serve caste and country. If the women resemble modern ones in their willingness to delegate childcare to others, and in their economic and political involvement, they were probably driven more by dynastic honour than by personal ambition. Their public actions brought credit to their God, their King, their family, and the nobility as a whole. Their stories have come down through the centuries as rather startling examples of the deeds of forceful women—_femmes fortes_ as the old French records call them—in those distant and dangerous times. We turn now to the colony's ordinary women, many of whom were either _filles du roi_ or their descendants.

**The _filles du roi_**

"Surtout qu'elles soient choisies bien saines."

"Above all, healthy ones should be selected"—and preferably of country background, capable of working on a farm.

Such were the injunctions of the energetic Royal Intendant Jean Talon at Québec City as he pleaded for women to be sent to the colony. He wanted healthy ones. With so much landclearing to be done, and continuing threat of war, the colony of the 1660s was still no place for the faint of heart.

The response came in the form of 770 women, 24 years old on average, who left farms and orphanages and took sail from France to a colony that was virtually unknown to them. (What they did know probably had something to do with the most memorable stories sailors brought back, about blood-curdling massacres.) Because the King paid passage for all and dowry money for many, they were termed _filles du roi_ or king's daughters. Because many of them arrived in such a short space of time, between 1663 and 1673, they are quite a distinctive group. In making their leap into the unknown, they gave the colony hope of something the nuns were in no position to supply: babies!

There is a famous picture by early-twentieth-century illustrator C.W. Jefferys showing confident, smiling _filles du roi_ in handsome gowns stepping ashore at Québec City while gentlemen in embroidered frockcoats bow and raise their feathered hats in greeting. How accurate is this image?
Since the filles left virtually no letters or diaries, historians have to rely on remarks written by officials and nuns, clues from passenger lists, marriage contracts and baptismal records.

It is true that about eighty of the filles du roi were of privileged background, members of the nobility or the bourgeoisie. Historian Yves Landry, who has made a careful study of the filles, surmises that most of the eighty came from families that lost a father or a fortune or had too many children to support in style. For them, the royal offer of a double-size dowry (100 livres) to secure marriage to a colonial officer or merchant held out a chance of keeping up their station.

Though it may require a magnifying glass, one can see in the background of C. W. Jefferys’ illustration several more uncertain-looking, plainly clad women, trudging along behind the fine ladies landing at Québec City. They are more representative of the majority of the filles, who came from humble circumstances. About a third of them had been sent to live at the big Parisian Hôpital Général where the orphaned, handicapped, aged, unemployed and otherwise unwanted were collected to keep them from hunger and hopefully teach them literacy and a trade. Most babies sent there died. The diet was poor—mainly bread—leading to scurvy and skin infections. The majority of filles had lost their father, which may go a long way towards explaining their seeming deprivation, and their hard landing in the Hôpital. Since most had not yet learned to write, Yves Landry surmises they had generally come from poor backgrounds, and that those at the Hôpital had not been there very long. About a quarter could sign their names, in contrast to a third of the men they married. Probably historian Louise Dechêne is correct in her assessment that most filles were escaping greater miseries than were the early male immigrants to New France.

We know so little about the individual history of the filles that we cannot even estimate how much their trip was their own decision, and how much they were strong-armed by guardians or government officials. But they must have known the idea was for them to marry and stay forever in Canada, where there were about six bachelors for every marriagable woman. Contrary to the Intendant’s request for country girls, the majority were from Paris and other urban areas; but they probably knew the plan was to go out and establish farms with their new husbands. Many had no close kin, which must have made it easier to pack their bags and leave forever. They travelled light. Historians have found a list of clothing of one young immigrant which is thought typical of what the filles might have brought:
deux habits de femme, l’un de camelot de Hollande, l’autre de barracoconde, une méchante jupe de forrandine, une très méchante jupe verte, un déshabillé de ratine, une camisole de serge, quelques mouchoirs de linon, six corinettes de toile et quatre coiffes noires, dont deux de crêpe et deux de taffetas, un manchon en peau de chien et deux paires de gants de mouton.

Two women’s coats, one of camlet [silk and wool cloth] from Holland, the other of barracan [worsted cloth], one tattered petticoat of ferrandine [silk and wool cloth], one very tattered green petticoat, one housedress of ratine [ribbed wool cloth], one short serge jacket, a few lawn kerchiefs, six muslin cornets and four black coifs, two of crepe and two of taffeta, a dogskin muff and two pairs of mouton [fur made from sheepskin] gloves.

There was a mixture of classes, of urban and rural, a sprinkling from other Mediterranean countries, a few who gave their good Catholic chaperone trouble on the way over. Marie de l’Incarnation, a tall figure sizing up the arrivals at Québec City, called them “mixed merchandise.” But if they didn’t come up to the dévotes’ idea of virtue, they conformed to the moral standards of the day: few babies were born out of wedlock, or less than nine months after the wedding day.

There were plenty of weddings—on average less than six months after the filles stepped off the ship. Although most bachelors didn’t turn up in fancy frockcoats to greet the arriving boatloads, they did show up. As for any who might fancy some other lifestyle, a government decree required they come courting—or lose their fur-trading privileges. Some of the filles for their part had second thoughts about their fiancés as they got to know them; thirteen per cent broke their first engagement and made another.

Compared to people almost everywhere in Europe, the filles did very well in their new lives. The statistics suggest they overcame the family traumas and bleak institutions of their youth in France. They lived to an average age of about fifty, an unusually long life in those times. Those who survived the childbearing years (one to two per cent of births killed the mother) and reached age forty could expect to go on until about seventy. They were healthy enough to bear so many children that the population shot up from three thousand to nearly nine thousand within a decade. Growing up amid fields of wheat and vegetable gardens, those children would never know the malnutrition of the French poor.
Rural and Urban Life

Using what historians have taught us about the lives of ordinary people in New France, we can construct a fictitious family and watch the evolution of three generations of women. Let us begin with a fille du roi whom we shall call Louise—born, as many filles were, in Paris around the year 1645. When she was eleven her parents—a father who drove a cart and a mother who was a domestic servant—died in one of the many epidemics that plagued their crowded, unsanitary neighbourhood. Neighbours placed Louise and her brothers in the big Parisian poorhouse where she learned the basics of religion, housekeeping and knitting. Sent out at thirteen to work as a domestic for a wealthy old lady, she returned at twenty-four to the Hôpital when the old lady died—leaving Louise with a little money with which she bought, second hand, a worsted coat and a green petticoat (let us say the possessions mentioned above were Louise’s). Before she found another position, a government agent arrived with the offer to pay transport for women who would become farmers in New France. Having experienced loneliness, and with little chance to enjoy herself or to meet young men while living with the old lady, Louise leapt at the chance. Moreover, when her father was alive he had often spoken of his own farm childhood as a time when hard work usually ensured plenty of cabbage, fruit, oil and other things they had to scrimp and save to buy in Paris. She was terrified, though, of crossing the ocean; no one in her family had ever been near the sea. With a group of other filles, she arrived at the port of Dieppe on a stormy day, and boarded a ship that rocked and groaned in the howling wind. She wanted to go back to Paris, but it was too late.

After a ten-week crossing, seasick much of the way, she arrived at the towering cliff at Québec City. The harbourfront looked like a miniature version of Dieppe with wharves, taverns and storehouses. She and the other filles stayed at a boarding house and met a number of bachelors who came to call. After several visits from a young fur-trader who lived near Trois-Rivières, they were engaged. The celebration, on a beautiful October day in Québec City, was attended by a few of the filles who were still left in town.

The next morning, as chilly winds began to whip around the narrow streets, they went on a riverboat to their land. There her husband had erected a tiny cabin near the river’s bank, an isolated clearing in a forest blazing with scarlet maples and yellow birches. The site had only a small patch of recently harvested wheat. With her dowry money, they purchased a cow and half a dozen chickens. That first year, milk and eggs supplemented the flour, which her husband travelled a long distance to
grind at the seigneur's mill. In his absence, Louise spent two days in terror of the sounds of the forest outside, imagining Iroquois ambushes and hungry wolves. She rejoiced when her husband returned, and he reassured her the Algonkians in the immediate neighbourhood were friendly. He grumbled that the seigneur had kept an excessive amount of the flour. That first winter, neighbours taught Louise to make candles from suet they traded for socks she had knit. Come spring, her husband left for a few weeks' fur-trading west of Montréal. She learned to bake bread at the outdoor oven, where she met another new neighbour.

In summer the couple's first baby was born. The work grew heavier: more water to haul from the river and heat on the fire; more hours beating the wash in a cauldron. She endlessly stoked fires and shovelled ashes, filled and tended pots and pans. She turned the spit to roast deer shot by her husband, all the while rocking the cradle with her foot. She mended their old clothes, and went out to tend the cow when she could. She was alone with the baby between seedtime and harvest, when her husband went off to spend a few months west of Montréal with a group of fur-traders.

As the years went by, other children joined the family on the crude benches around the kitchen table. On Sundays, whenever the travelling priest reached their parish, they lingered at church several hours to visit other filles du roi and their families. On those new farms even the youngest hands were welcome, especially in late summer when men, women and children gathered in the fields to bring in the harvest. (The fact that so few children were conceived during these months gives historians a little clue of how exhausted the adults were when they went to bed at night). The older children tended the farm animals, helped their mother hoe corn, and kept the toddlers away from the fireplace and the river.

Tragedy struck one summer when Louise's husband did not return from his trading expedition. She learned that he had drowned while canoeing through rapids. Her heart was heavy, and bringing in the hay and wheat with the help of the children was almost more than her body could bear. Two unhealthy backs resulted: the baby's from being kept too long in tight swaddling clothes because no one had time to look after him; and Louise's, from falling while lifting too heavy a load of hay onto a cart.

Under the French law known as the Coutume de Paris, Louise took charge of the family when her husband died. She was entitled to one half the estate, and she managed the rest for her children until they reached the age of majority. Since habitant men were typically about five years older
than their wives and since many risked their lives at war or trade, the Coutume's assertion of property rights for widows was important. Nonetheless, Louise was all too happy to marry a widower just before seeding time the next year. In France such hasty remarriages were frowned upon, and might result in a charivari where local youths serenaded with pots and pans outside the bridal chamber until given money to head off to the tavern. In the colony's pioneering stage the work of both spouses was so essential that quick re-marriage was accepted. Because men outnumbered women until about 1710, widows also found it easier to remarry than in France.

The Coutume de Paris promoted fairness more than it promoted buildup of large farms. It contrasted with English law, where the farm typically went to the oldest son under the law of primogeniture, and a man could sell or bequeath the farm outside the family without his wife's consent. The principle of the Coutume was to provide for all members of the family, and family claims tended to take precedence in court, as Englishmen who tried to amass land after the Conquest discovered to their chagrin. It is true this egalitarian system could create a problem if farms were divided up between too many children. But families tended to prevent this by giving larger portions to some in exchange for their agreement to reimburse the others for their share. When possible, nearby lands were acquired so siblings could stay in the neighbourhood.

The law could also be used to look after the elderly. When Louise grew too old to do farmwork, she might move into a back room or even into the village. Some old folks turned the farm operation over to one or more of the children in return for a pension alimentaire. A notarized document stipulated exactly how much flour, pork, peas, cabbage, maple sugar, firewood, candles, cloth and clothes the retirees would get from their children each year.

**Children of the filles**

Meanwhile, Louise's children were heading out into the society of the St. Lawrence Valley. The eldest daughter, Madeleine, received her inheritance in livestock and furnishings, for she was marrying a young farmer who already had plenty of land. In her more prosperous, second generation family, a brick stove with a stovepipe provided more efficient cooking and heating than the fireplace her mother had used. Madeleine's farmyard had many more animals than her mother's. There were several horses for travel and plowing. Sheep supplied wool. Geese allowed beds to be filled with feathers rather than scratchy straw. In the orchard, plums and apples
ripened. Madeleine's garden enriched their meals with herbs, cucumbers, melons, cabbage and carrots. With three cows and an efficient churn, Madeleine was able to sell milk and butter in the nearby town of Trois-Rivières. A spinning wheel and a loom meant her household did not rely on expensive clothes imported from France.

Why, in this more comfortable and affluent household, were Madeleine and everyone else usually so busy? Even with their surplus, they could not hire anyone to help. With farmland readily available to anyone strong enough to clear it, why would anyone spend time working in someone else's house for paltry wages, or mere upkeep? Madeleine's family grew up, as all habitants did, with a better diet and more property than the average peasant in France, who was land-poor and heavily taxed to pay for the King's imperial wars. But they could never become as rich as the most successful commercial farmers in France who might hire landless labourers to work for them and sell large yields to the many urban centres. In the Canadian countryside, wealth was fairly evenly distributed. Dues to Church and seigneur were relatively low, though it has been pointed out by historian Allan Greer that they played a part in keeping anyone from building up much of a surplus.

Were men and women equal? Given European traditions and institutions premised on male superiority, it does not seem likely. Legally men headed the household during their lifetime. They had the power to chastise disobedient wives with "moderate physical force," as though the wives were children rather than adults. Historians have rightly pointed out that women who took over male roles when men were away would often have viewed this as work and worry, not power and privilege. Nonetheless, women of the colony, as we have seen, did enjoy some benefits. Dedicated nuns provided inexpensive girls' schooling (which manifested itself in a smaller than usual gap in male and female literacy rates). Also important were the legal protections. Not only was the civil law more egalitarian than British common law; it compared favourably with the Roman legal traditions of southern Europe too. Being in scarce supply during the colony's first century probably also enhanced women's position. Some travellers at the time, and historians since, thought women fared well compared to their French counterparts. Certainly Yves Landry believes the filles du roi found themselves a better life in Canada. Let us return, though, to Madeleine and her family.
The Third Generation

Madeleine, like the average woman who survived her childbearing years, had seven children. Two of them died young. The midwife, an experienced older woman who had been elected to the position by the women of the parish, could not save one very premature infant. Another child died at the age of five from flux (diarrhea), a common malady. The surviving boys were allowed to take a few lessons from the parish priest. The family sold enough produce in town to send a younger daughter, Anne, to board at the Congrégation de Notre-Dame school.

Fortune seemed to smile on them. The biggest fright of Madeleine’s life came when her husband went off with the war party that attacked Deerfield; but her prayers were answered when he returned alive. Then, in a family where no one from the dawn of time had ever been able to write, it was a wonder of wonders when their daughter Anne came back after three years at the boarding school able to calculate roughly how much they would net from buying chickens and selling their eggs.

Anne had her dreams, too. On one of her selling trips into Trois-Rivières, Anne developed an attachment to the travelling agent of a Québec City shipper. It was cases such as this which would cause army engineer Louis Franquet in 1752 to shake his finger at the schooling the nuns of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame gave the country girls:

*Ces sœurs sont répandues le long des côtes... leur utilité semble être démontrée, mais le mal qui en résulte est comme un poison lent qui tend à dépeupler les campagnes; d’autant qu’une fille instruite... est maniéré, qu’elle veut prendre un établissement à la ville, qu’il lui faut un négociant...*

The sisters are spread out across the countryside... their usefulness seems evident, but the harm which results is like a slow poison which leads to a depopulation of the countryside, given that an educated girl... puts on airs, wants to set herself up in the city, sets her sights on a merchant... .

Unlike her grandmother's small, rushed wedding on a long-ago autumn day in Québec City, Anne's was the sort of big three-day celebration the farm people loved, with abundant food, card games and talk. Relatives arrived from miles around. They danced late at night to the tune of a fiddle, then slept in barns and lofts wherever there was space. The morning
of the fourth day, Anne hugged them all goodbye and boarded a boat to reverse the river journey her newlywed grandmother—now in her grave—had made sixty years earlier. Anne and her new husband were going to manage a shop in Québec City. Along the shore, where her grandmother and other filles du roi had once seen wooded shores dotted with the occasional log cabin, they now saw “one continuous village”—farmhouse after farmhouse fronting the river, and occasionally a stone church or manor house.

Anne and her husband Jacques landed at a big wharf near where her grandmother had once disembarked from France. Since Anne had never seen a bigger town than sleepy little Trois-Rivières with its several hundred people, she was astonished by the hustle and bustle of Québec City with its several thousand. In the teeming streets of Lower Town, the couple was jostled by Black and Aboriginal slaves, and by French troops in their blue and white uniforms. Farmwomen hawked baskets of apples. Carters whipped the horses hauling wagons of wine casks from the ships to the inns. They passed women from the mission selling porcupine quill boxes. There were blackrobed Jésuites and—at last a familiar sight, des Soeurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame. They blushed, and Anne laughed, as a young woman lurched out of a tavern shouting to all the world about how awful it was to live with an impotent husband. Two tipsy prostitutes came out arm in arm with sailors. Walking up one of the winding streets, Anne and her husband reached the stone building that housed their shop and upstairs apartment.

Within a week Anne was at home alone, keeping the accounts and minding the shop while Jacques embarked on a trip to the South Shore to buy up farm produce for export to Louisbourg. He intended also to buy some eels from the widow Forcel, a merchant involved in the Labrador fishery who had expanded her husband's activities after he died.

**The Seven Years’ War**

Bearing six children, Anne lived to a ripe old age. Perhaps she lived a little too long. In the 1750s her dimming eyes saw war once again rip apart family units and send men off to die. With the Seven Years’ War, the long struggle between France and England for control of North America reached its climax. In the countryside where Anne’s relatives still lived, women and children were left to harvest the wheat as the men marched to the Ohio Valley, Niagara and Lake Champlain. For the first time, the country people knew real hunger, with harvests too small to feed the army and the people. In Québec City prices doubled and tripled as the corrupt
Intendant François Bigot engaged in war profiteering. Women had varying responses to this. Madame Péan, witty wife of a Canadian official, became Bigot’s mistress and passed the war ensconced in a fine mansion, gambling and feasting with the officers from France. More ordinary women worried about feeding their families as the government rationed bread and substituted horsemeat for beef in the butcher shops. In Québec City four hundred women took to the street and rioted over the shortages (neither sex had the franchise, but both used rioting as a form of political expression).

The final hour was approaching. When the snowy linen, the wards and the convent of the Hôtel-Dieu were destroyed by fire in 1755, those nuns were just a few of the many refugees who went streaming into the Hôpital Général outside the city, into the stout, welcoming arms of Mother Saint-Claude de Ramezay. When the outer port of Louisbourg fell to the British in 1758, everyone knew the next year would be fateful. Young boys and grandfathers came to help defend Québec City. The bombardment of 1759 destroyed eighty per cent of the town. The cemetary of the Hôpital grew fuller, and the big building was filled with terrified families and their belongings. Neither Mother Saint-Claude’s hospitality nor her white lies of French victories could stave off bitter defeat as the French forces made their final surrender in 1760. The fleur de lys was lowered and redcoated troops marched into French forts all over North America. But many of the merchants—mere shopkeepers like Anne and more important ones like the widow Fornel—would remain. So would the midwives trained in the French system. So would those thousands of families in the countryside who were descended from the filles du roi. Canada was their home; they had little money and no other place to go. While British newcomers filled the towns, they clung all the more tightly to their customs and their kin on the seigneuries. Only very gradually, over many decades, would there be an erosion of the Coutume de Paris protections of women’s property rights. The convents, schools and hospitals of town and country would continue to be run by femmes fortes, who managed to incorporate English schoolgirls and even English mother superiors into their ranks—and English governors into their long tradition of friends in high places.

Women played an unusually prominent role in the history of New France. Aboriginal women made essential contributions, including the powerful ones of the Iroquois culture with strong wills for ruling the longhouse. The names of French founders such as Jeanne Mance, Marguerite Bourgeoys and Marie de l’Incarnation have come down even
in history books which otherwise ignore the actions of women. Those dévotes dared too much, wrote too much, established too many lasting institutions, and were remembered too respectfully, to be shoved aside. As for the filles du roi, they wrote not a word. Yet they founded their own, living institutions in the little families that cut their clearings in the vast forests, then grew and roamed. They intermarried with others and produced, in time, a great part of the population of more than twenty million people of French Canadian background in North America today. The footsteps of all these women—bold or terrified, pious or lovelorn, as they embarked from their ships onto city streets or riverside paths—have echoed through the centuries. Their legacy is with us still. It is part of your history and mine.
For Further Reading


See the chapters on New France in M. Conrad, A. Finkel and C. Jaenen, History of the Canadian Peoples (Toronto, 1993) which is (at last!) a textbook that treats male and female endeavours as matters of equal significance. André Lachance’s La vie urbaine en Nouvelle-France (Montréal, 1987) also remembers history has two sexes. La Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française (Montréal, 1949–) is a treasure trove of articles on society in New France, with news and reviews of books and theses. Whether the student is researching demography, sexuality, family life, female piety, material history, hospital conditions, criminality or inheritance practices, she or he should pass through these portals. Robert-Lionel Séguin’s 1960 essay in that journal, “La Canadienne aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles,” is a place to begin. Jacob E. Cooke, ed., Encyclopedia of the North American Colonies (3 vols, New York, 1993) has essays on gender relations, sexual mores, marriage, families, folkways and crafts in the French colonies that permit comparison with the Spanish and English colonies also featured there. Particularly useful primary sources on colonial women are Louis Franquet, Voyages et mémoires sur le Canada (Montréal, 1974), Élisabeth Bégon, Lettres au cher fils (Montréal, 1972) and Peter (Pehr) Kalm, The America of 1750 (New York, 1966); the latter is available in French and English.

Powerful religious traditions in French Canada caused dévotes to be well documented. The student can dip into printed primary sources, of which the letters of Marie de l’Incarnation—available in Joyce Marshall’s Word from New France (Toronto, 1967), and Guy Oury’s French edition—are
perhaps the most luminous. Also valuable are Marie Morin, *Histoire simple et véritable. Les annales de l’Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal* 1659-1725 (Montréal, 1979). Dollier de Casson’s 17th-century history of Montréal indicates the importance of Jeanne Mance in the eyes of a contemporary. Studies detailing the character and contributions of Bourgeoys, l’Incarnation, Mance and Madame d’Youville (founder of the Grey Nuns) are legion; some of the most scholarly work was produced by Claire Daveluy, Guy-Marie Oury and Albert Jamet. *Saintes artisans* (Montréal, 1944-49) by Marius Barbeau reveals the convents’ importance in craft production. The first four volumes of Sister Sainte-Henriette’s *Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal* (Montréal, 1910-13) deal with New France. The erudite and imaginative reconstruction in Emilia Chicione’s *La métairie de Marguerite Bourgeoys à la Pointe-Saint-Charles* (Montréal, 1986) has the flavour of a young Marc Bloch, but was evidently written by an elderly nun who pursued research passions when not guiding schoolchildren through the site.

Recent scholarship concerned with the balance of power between the sexes includes Micheline D’Allaire’s analysis of the *Hôpital Général* at Québec City and other convents and Marguerite Jean’s *Évolution des communautés religieuses de femmes au Canada, 1639-1973* (Montréal, 1974). Elizabeth Rapley provides European background in *The Dévotés: Women and Church in Seventeenth Century France* (Montréal, 1990). Missionary misogyny and Aboriginal women’s response to it is the subject of Karen Anderson’s *Chain her by One Foot* (London, 1991). Eleanor Leacock and Carol Devens discuss Montagnais and Huron women in successive editions of Strong-Boag’s *Rethinking*. In a class of their own are John Demos’ imaginative discussion of Eunice Williams, *The Unredeemed Captive* (New York, 1994) and the vivid glimpses of homes and convents in Emma Coleman’s 1925 study, *New England Captives Carried to Canada* (Portland, Maine).

Computer-assisted demographic work helps recover the lives of those who left few writings. See for example Hubert Charbonneau et al., Vie et mort de nos ancêtres : étude démographique (Montréal, 1975) and Naissance d'une population: les Français établis au Canada au XVIIe siècle (Montréal, 1987) as well as Danielle Gauvreau, Québec. Une ville et sa population au temps de la Nouvelle-France (Québec, 1991) and Lorraine Gadoury, La noblesse de Nouvelle-France: familles et alliances (Montréal, 1991). Yves Landry’s fine demographic study Orphelines en France, pionnières au Canada: les Filles du roi au XVIIe (Montréal, 1992) has largely supplanted earlier works by Gustave Lancôt and Sylvio Dumas. For a vivid reconstruction of early Montréal at the time of the filles du roi, see the beautifully illustrated Pour le Christ et le roi: la vie au temps des premiers Montréalais (Montréal, 1992). For domestic interiors see Nicole Genêt et al., Les objets familiers de nos ancêtres (Montréal, 1974).


Other works discuss the young. See Claire Gourdeau in Les délices de nos coeurs: Marie de l’Incarnation et ses pensionnaires amérindiennes 1639-1672 (Sillery, 1994); Roger Magnusson, Education in New France (Montréal, 1992); and Denise Lemieux, Les petits innocents: l’enfance en Nouvelle-France. Micheline Dumont’s booklet on girls’ education in Quebec, 1639-1960, is available from the Canadian Historical Association (booklet number 49).