LOUISBOURG:
ATLANTIC FORTRESS
AND SEAPORT

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LOUISBOURG: ATLANTIC FORTRESS AND SEAPORT

Fishing port, fortress, and commercial crossroads — Louisbourg was all of these and a distinct colonial outpost as well. Located on Cape Breton Island beside the principal route for vessels sailing between America and Europe, the bustling seaport regularly attracted ships from Quebec, Britain's American colonies, the West Indies, and France. As a result, Louisbourg served as the closest approximation to a free port in colonial America. The town was also the most cosmopolitan in New France. Protestants and Catholics co-existed here; Germans, Basques, and other Europeans rubbed shoulders with Blacks, New Englanders, French Canadians, and Acadians.

Located near the Cabot Strait, the only navigable approach to Quebec in the early eighteenth century, Louisbourg was constructed by France as its strongest fortified base in North America. The seaport testified to the increasing scale of military activity as well as the importance France attached to the North American fisheries. Lacking similar defences for their own settlements, New Englanders to the south viewed Louisbourg with fear and jealousy. They mounted the largest force to serve on foreign soil up to that time in order to attack (with the British navy) the fortress in 1745. The fruits of their victory turned sour, however, especially in light of the mounting Anglo-American conflict then forming part of the growing division separating Britain and her American colonies prior to the War of Independence. The British returned Louisbourg to France in 1748, despite the New Englanders' objections. The French seaport regained its commercial vigour and remained a principal focus in the clash of the British and French Empires. After Halifax was established as part of a larger British settlement scheme to counter the French presence in Cape Breton, the fortress contributed to the tragic decision to deport the Acadians from Nova Scotia. France twice sent the largest fleets it ever dispatched to North America to recapture Louisbourg and augment its defences. In response, Britain assembled the greatest amphibious expedition seen in colonial North America. It captured the town for a second and final time in 1758.

Louisbourg was an integral part of France's overseas possessions. Born of war, it provided its parent state with a vital Atlantic port and thriving commercial economy that rested on fishing and trade. Although its massive fortifications gave the superficial appearance of strength, Louisbourg represented France doggedly resisting decline as a colonial power in North America. The military weaknesses of the fortified town were tied as much to France's shortcomings as a naval and colonial power as they were to limitations in its design and location. Despite these drawbacks, during two wars Louisbourg fulfilled its essential function of delaying and frustrating British and American assaults on Quebec, the heart of New France.
Beginnings

By the Treaty of Utrecht which ended the War of the Spanish Succession (Queen Anne's War) in 1713, France lost possessions in Newfoundland and peninsular Nova Scotia to Britain. Rights to land and to dry fish along some coasts in Newfoundland were retained. France's most pressing need as a result of these losses was to replace Placentia (Plaisance), a small fishing community along Newfoundland's foggy southern coast, which previously had served as the centre of France's in-shore fishery and principal port. Not surprisingly, French eyes soon focused on Cape Breton because of its strategic location close to the cod fishing banks, to shipping lanes, and to the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The North Atlantic fisheries were considered by Europeans to be as valuable a resource as any in North America (after the silver mines of Mexico). For less than it cost to establish a sugar or tobacco plantation, the fisheries produced a marketable surplus which found ready acceptance in Mediterranean countries. The Canadian fisheries stood in the first rank of France's maritime trade; no other area of the globe attracted so many ships each year. According to prevailing economic ideas, the world's trade was a fixed commodity and the wealth of one country could only be increased at the expense of that of another. France dared not be excluded from this essential enterprise whose annual revenue surpassed the entire budget for its navy and colonies. The fisheries were also labour intensive and a vital support to naval power. Employing some 20 per cent of France's able-bodied seamen, fishing expeditions trained three times the number of sailors that conventional seafaring did, but without the losses from disease experienced in the West Indies.

Deep-sea fishing did not require settlements, but protected harbours were helpful in peacetime and a place of refuge in times of conflict. The Government of France hoped that its new colony on Cape Breton, which it renamed Ile Royale, would play the role of both its former possessions: fisheries port and colonial settlement. Refugees from Newfoundland had claimed the island for the King of France in 1713, an event which marked the beginnings of continuous European settlement on the island. But conditions then were primitive, rations short, and some officers averse to hard work. Scurvy blackened gums and loosened teeth. More arrivals brought added diseases with them. Moreover, Acadian settlers in peninsular Nova Scotia, who had been given a year to remove themselves from British rule with impunity, found the area unattractive, especially as they were interested in agricultural pursuits. Preferring a familiar environment over the risks of living under alien rulers, only a few hundred Acadians moved to Cape Breton Island in the early years, mostly to St. Peter's (St-Pierre) and Isle (Ile) Madame near Canso.
French Acadia and Nova Scotia
On Cape Breton, the French were thus in a precarious position. The turbulent history of the preceding century showed clearly that coastal settlements had to be fortified in some manner against lawless marauders who pillaged mercilessly in time of war. More disconcerting was the menacing pattern of the two-pronged attack (consisting of New England soldiers and the British navy) which had emerged during the previous two wars between France and England. That pattern was more dangerous now that the British were masters both of Nova Scotia, whose capital of Port-Royal they renamed Annapolis Royal, and of all Newfoundland, where they held the protected harbour of St. John's. Britain had also emerged during these wars as the world's foremost naval power thanks to the strength of her economy, the development of effective instruments for obtaining credit, and naval reforms. The capture of Port-Royal in 1710 and the unsuccessful challenge to Quebec in the following year revealed that warfare in colonial America had entered a new, more global phase. British regular soldiers and naval power were now ready to augment New England forces in the fight against their French enemies to the north.

Despite these setbacks in 1713, France was an equally formidable military power, but one where the army rather than the navy received greater attention. With a country of varied resources and a population more than three times as large as Britain, the French government laboured under antiquated financial machinery and an inefficient taxation system which allowed exemptions to the wealthy. France thus struggled to maintain a small navy while pursuing, as did Spain, an alternative policy of building land fortifications and preying on enemy commerce during periods of war. This was a reasonable strategy. In a protracted war, victory was likely to go to the power that could hold out the longest. France was invulnerable to naval blockade, being able to draw upon her internal riches, while England and the Netherlands were dependent on oceanic commerce for their lifeblood. Open waters could never be as securely commanded as the land might be. Wooden sailing ships were incapable of remaining at sea for more than one campaign due to technical limitations and scurvy, whose cause had yet to be discovered. Armies moved slowly and limited their objectives to the warm, dry months before settling in for winter. Certain strategic colonial ports, such as Louisbourg for the French and Havana for the Spanish, thus emerged as vital centres in overseas defence. Heavily fortified, they shielded naval squadrons and commercial fleets during periods of conflict. They also served as wasp nests from which armed merchantmen who were known as privateers — heirs to the pirates of the previous century — attacked shipping and destroyed commerce.

Louisbourg emerged from obscure fishing village to massively fortified town in order to play this strategic role. In a re-evaluation of colonial defences following the death of Louis XIV in 1715, France chose the port
over its competitors because it was the closest to Europe and to the Continental Shelf, where the Grand Banks offered the most abundant source of cod. Capable of sheltering well over a hundred ships, Louisbourg appealed as the harbour most suitable for European-style fortifications. In the heady days of postwar recovery, expansionist French military policy tossed aside earlier cost considerations. France committed itself to fortifying the site on a scale that colonials could scarcely imagine. The French government also approved the founding of New Orleans in 1718 as well as plans to upgrade defences in Montreal, Quebec City, and the French West Indies.

French planners were no more worried about the infertility of the land surrounding Louisbourg than they had been in establishing Brest as a naval port in Brittany. The fact that the harbour does not freeze over in winter was a considerable advantage, but the ice-drifts which menaced navigation in spring were not taken into account and they severely hampered use of the port as a naval or commercial base. The fogs that appear frequently from April and last through July were an additional impediment to navigation.

Despite these geographical drawbacks, Louisbourg figured prominently in France's larger policy of trying to contain the expanding British colonies during the eighteenth century. Although the town enjoyed three decades of peace in which to defend itself in the European manner, the military presence eventually worked against the economic reasons for the settlement. The construction of the fortifications occupied fishing areas and drove fishermen to other ports and waters. During this period, French fishermen withdrew gradually from the in-shore fishery to concentrate on deep-sea production.

**Building the Fortress and Town**

Louisbourg as fortified town was unique in French North America. In no other major centre did defence considerations so influence physical development. Starting with excavations for the landward fortifications in 1720, Louisbourg emerged as the largest public works project north of Mexico. Although it was modest in comparison to many European strongholds, Louisbourg represented the fullest North American expression of the French fortress-building tradition. Geometry was employed to improve lines of fire. Bastions with two flanks and two faces enhanced defensive strength by projecting beyond the curtain walls surrounding the town. Advanced works were constructed in earth and masonry in order to best resist cannon fire. No fortress was thought to be impregnable; fortifications were only to delay against enemies until reinforcements could arrive. The best provisioned and defended were expected to hold out for eight weeks.
LOUISBOURG FORTIFICATIONS, 1745
After “Plan de Louisbourg dans l’Île Royale,” by Verrier fils
(National Archives of Canada, NMC 34312)
The building of Louisbourg was an overseas extension of the French military construction industry. Army engineers from France supervised the building under general contractors, also metropolitanists, who were awarded contracts under tenders. Skilled workers were recruited in France and soldiers from the mother country were employed as labourers. Due to the limitations of site and the failure to exploit either Cape Breton’s or Quebec’s resources fully, vast amounts of construction material were also imported. Rubble stone, sand, limestone, and gypsum were available locally, but sandstone, slate, glass, and hardware were shipped from France in great quantities. Inadequate local supplies of brick and construction lumber increased the region’s long-standing trade with the English colonies, especially Massachusetts, which blossomed into even larger exchanges.

The fortifications were designed to protect Louisbourg from assault by land or sea. Landward defences were intended to seal off the arm of the harbour where the town was planted. These fortifications consisted of two full and two half-bastions with connecting walls. Beyond each stood exposed slopes of earth, called glacis, that posed the first challenge to any attacker. Construction was begun later on the island battery at the entrance to the harbour where over thirty guns were placed. The royal battery at the back of the port, which later contained even heavier firepower, was also started. Artillery from the Dauphin half-bastion at the harbour edge of the landward defences augmented the seaward defences; so did the cannon of the right flank of the king’s bastion. Later, two more bastions were built at the other end of the town facing towards the sea at Rochefort Point, an additional battery was constructed on the harbour side, and the entire town enclosed within walls.

The interior of the king’s bastion served as the town’s citadel. The centre of government was seated there in the most impressive public building constructed. The wings on either end of this grand edifice were intended as spacious residences for the colony’s two chief officials, but a large chapel and barracks were also included in the complex. The citadel was created as a protected area within the larger defensive work. The military might retire there in case of a surprise attack or use it as a secure base from which to quell a civil disturbance. Beyond the ditch and graded slope of the citadel on the town side, no building was allowed. One city block within the town was reserved entirely for official purposes. The king’s storehouse, a bakery for making bread for the colonial regulars, and an impressive house for the chief engineer stood there. The royal hospital was also an imposing public structure with one hundred beds and its own apothecary, chapel, bakery, kitchen, laundry, and morgue.

Louisbourg was a continuous construction project. Building and repairing never ended, and both were prolonged by the need to make alterations to the
original plans and by the limitations of the site. Climate and geology conspired to create constant trials for engineers and contractors. Costly masonry construction was required in many areas of the fortifications to retain unstable clay soils, although revetted masonry was also employed at Quebec and Montreal. Frequent freezing and thawing, combined with the use of poorly washed sea sand mixed in mortar, necessitated additional covering with wooden planks. The active construction season was restricted to between thirty and one hundred days annually as a result of poor weather.

Public construction pitted government initiative against private enterprise. Both sectors competed for scarce human and material resources, generally to the advantage of the state. The government project was imposed on a flourishing though rudimentary settlement, creating expropriations, demolitions, and interminable court cases. The imposition of an official grid-iron plan in 1723 to align most of the town's streets in a regular fashion further aggravated these conflicts. Buildings too close to the fortifications had to be torn down and bark was outlawed for roofing because it was a fire hazard. The height of private residences was restricted by law to ensure the movement of air necessary to drying cod, although the regulation went unenforced. Other conflicts were created by a royal ordinance favouring resident fishermen for lots along the waterfront.

In the end, many fishermen were driven from the protected town. The fortifications, which extended to the beach area on the harbour, included a quay that became the chief commercial access along the waterfront. Although the fortress was home to a wide variety of people, the military and other officials were granted a major portion of the lots as their private property. The government never conceded all the land within the town itself, but a suburb emerged outside the Dauphin gate, the principal landward entrance to the town. Fishing entrepreneurs and merchants occupied waterfront lots there as they did around the harbour. Access to the water dictated strip development around the port as it did along the St. Lawrence River, although there as no seigneurial land tenure as at Quebec. Private residences both within the town and outside were naturally more modest than public buildings. Few people could afford to build in stone. The first houses were made of simple wooden posts stuck in the earth vertically, but this style soon gave way to timber-framed houses on foundations. Homes were small, often ten metres by six metres. Sometimes a central chimney with two fireplaces divided the residence into a kitchen on one side and a main room, with sleeping alcoves adjacent, on the other.

As an expression of European ideas. Louisbourg differed from other French towns in Canada principally in the extent of its fortifications and their expense. Delays, cost overruns, and conflicts were inevitable in such a massive and continuing construction project. Detailed historical research
has uncovered remarkably little fraud, despite tales to the contrary. Construction (though not operating) costs to erect the fortifications and public buildings of Louisbourg amounted to over four million French livres, a sum which might be estimated at about $60 million in today's (1990) Canadian currency. Amounts spent annually were a tiny percentage of the naval budget. Stories of Louis XV arising from sleep disturbed by a nightmare about Louisbourg's streets being paved with gold remain purely apocryphal.

Louisbourg's precursors had been fortified on a very modest scale. Montreal and Quebec were also protected with surrounding walls containing more rudimentary bastions, but they were constructed in combination with local taxation and statutory enforced labour (corvée). Much greater attention was lavished on Louisbourg due to the value of the fisheries and to the strategic thinking at the time. Officials in France come to consider Louisbourg "the bulwark of Canada" (le rempart du Canada), strong enough not only to resist assault from New England, but even to deter such an enterprise. In the event of war, the fortress was to serve as the spearhead for an attack on the British colonies to regain territory lost in 1713.

*Colonial Life at Louisbourg*

Louisbourg was dependent on the sea for its wealth, food, and human resources. As an outpost of empire, it was the most European of the northern colonies. Micmac Indians in the region exercised little influence because they visited the town infrequently. The Old Regime society of France was modified only slightly by the material values of North American life. There were few nobles, but great prestige was attached to service in the colonial officer corps. Prominent members of the merchant community frequently sought official recognition through appointments to public office or through marriage into military families. Society was highly stratified. Thirteen per cent of the people commanded 73 per cent of the colony's wealth. While such divisions were not dissimilar from other contemporary North American towns, official rank held a more prominent place at Louisbourg just as it did at Quebec, another capital with a strong administrative and military presence. Wealth was sought for what it would buy, but rank and office brought elevated social status in the community.

The population was dynamic and grew steadily. Growth was fostered by legislation requiring ships from France to transport indentured servants. For more than a decade, petty criminals and unwanted sons were shipped to Louisbourg as they were to Quebec, but most people came on their own or under contract, lured by opportunities for material advancement. The
majority were either French-born arrivals or first-generation inhabitants. Immigrants from Atlantic France predominated, especially Brittany, Guyenne-Gascony, and Normandy. Due to the fishing industry and trade, seasonal fluctuations in population were enormous. Males always greatly outnumbered females. As a result, Louisbourg women married earlier (mean age of twenty years at first marriage) and men later than in many places. The population was also more varied than in other parts of New France. In addition to a small core of Irish Catholics, there were both free Blacks and Black slaves as well as Protestants and a variety of European nationalities who arrived principally as soldiers.

### POPULATION OF THE COLONIAL TOWNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Louisbourg</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>Montreal</th>
<th>Boston</th>
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<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1718</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>853</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1737-1740</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>4,603</td>
<td>17,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1752-1754</td>
<td>4,174</td>
<td>7,995</td>
<td>4,432</td>
<td>15,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The military presence was always strong and accounted generally for one-quarter of the population. Most soldiers were naval infantry (troupes de la Marine) recruited in France, but several companies of the Karrer Regiment, mercenaries raised by a Swiss colonel, were also posted to the island as they were to the West Indian colonies. Soldiers served as the local constabulary, but were themselves frequently a disruptive influence on colonial life. Theft, extortion, and violence committed by enlisted men were not uncommon. The effects of the military presence on sexual mores was best illustrated when a priest asked a group of children he was instructing in the catechism what Hope (l'Espérance) was. "Oh," one girl replied, "l'Espérance in a big sergeant from the Artois regiment who goes to bed every night with my mother." Officers acted as suppliers to their men, especially in selling drink which contributed to resentment against superiors and general unruliness. One drunken soldier with the name of Le Bon ("The Good") inadvertently desecrated the altar in the royal chapel and was sentenced to public humiliation after he sobered up. Dressed in only a long shirt with a rope about his neck, carrying a candle, and wearing signs front and back that read "Profaner of Sacred Places," he was ordered to swear forgiveness from God and king while kneeling at the chapel's door. He was banished from the colony subsequently.
The character of the town was heavily influenced by the annual influx of transients passing through Louisbourg. While the number of recorded illegitimate births was not unusual, 11 per cent of brides arrived at the alter already over a month pregnant, a rate higher than Quebec but considerably lower than some New England seaport towns. Numerous inns and taverns served as the principal social centres. Seventy-five were legal, but as the government never regulated all the town’s taverns successfully, there were more than those officially recognized. Rum was the preferred drink due to its cheapness, but wine imported from France was also common. Commandant Duquesnel, who died at Louisbourg in 1744, owned more than five thousand bottles stored in his residence. In contrast, poor fishermen, soldiers, and others brewed a barely palatable drink called spruce beer (sapinette) by fermenting spruce boughs, water, molasses, and a little brandy.

Inns tailored their services and prices to their clientele, but cramped quarters and crude conditions in even the best would have horrified the most intrepid modern traveller. In better establishments, luxury foods such as suckling pig, goose, and duck might be prepared for those able to pay. As the pork cost a skilled carpenter the equivalent of seven days’ wages, and duck two days, such delicacies were reserved for special family occasions or holiday festivities. Cows, sheep, turkeys, and chickens were raised on the island, but were only less expensive. Pigs foraged on garbage in the town and became so wild that they threatened the lives of young children. A local regulation ordered them penned. Gardens abounded not only to grow fresh vegetables, but also to produce medicinal herbs. Hunting offered variety to a diet dependent on fish and salted or dried foods in winter, but relieved in other seasons by shipments of more exotic fare such as lemons. Tea and chocolate had been consumed by Europeans for some time, but coffee provided a new beverage only recently introduced to the West. Louisbourg residents were passionate about its rich flavour. Game abounded on the island, but humanity’s adverse effects on ecology were seen and smelt in harbours where massive amounts of offal were thrown overboard while cod were gutted on anchored ships.

The Roman Catholic Church, officially subsidized by the state and subordinate to it in matters not pertaining to faith, struggled against secular enticements for people’s attention. Life’s uncertainties promoted a religious outlook in some quarters. Every third burial was a child five or younger, although infant mortality was much lower at Louisbourg than in Europe. There were fewer old people. Existence was more perilous, whether through the dangers of ocean travel or the devastating effects of contagion. Despite precautions, smallpox invaded Louisbourg from Boston in 1732 and 1733, killing nearly two hundred, especially the young. Bones protruding through
the thin soils of cemeteries from bodies buried only in shrouds graphically reinforced the precariousness of life.

Rocollet friars from Brittany ministered in Louisbourg and the outports, but they were frequently criticized for unorthodox religious practices and personal intemperance. They conducted no parish school and catechized children infrequently. No parish church was built by the local populace, who worshipped in the royal chapel, and no tithe imposed. A priest-to-people ratio of 1 to 555 in 1734 was high for the period. Bishop Saint-Vallier of Quebec became so incensed with the conduct of the Recollets that he sent an emissary who officially suspended the town's parish priest following high mass one Sunday. The five Brothers of the Order of Saint John of God who served in the royal hospital did not escape criticism either, but their work was the most arduous. Disputes with government over high medical costs surfaced frequently, although people with other means avoided the hospital as it was intended for soldiers without family. One of the Brothers served as a nurse and another as a surgeon, although there were numerous other barber-surgeons in the colony. While controls were placed on entry to the practice, barber-surgeons were classed as manual workers. Trained through apprenticeship to treat the body's external ailments, many were barely literate. Bleedings, enemas, infusions, seatings, and starving were common forms of treatment in an era that possessed little understanding of disease. Mid-wives delivered babies, but no physicians — educated in medicine — ever practised in Louisbourg.

Autocratic government in this, as in other French colonies, internalized politics within the colony's administration through the factions surrounding its two chief officials. Governors and naval commissaries regulated the entire life of the colony, subject only to decisions from France, but they frequently sought informal advice from overseas. Governors were always foreign-born senior naval and army officers. Sometimes old seadogs like the peg-legged Duquesnel who had lost his limb in a sea battle off the coast of Spain, they represented the king. Duquesnel brought a sedan chair, symbol of royal authority, to Louisbourg to make visible his prestigious position. Although commander-in-chief responsible for military and foreign affairs, including Indian relations, governors were forced to rely on naval commissaries (commissaires-ordonnateurs) who directed colonial finances, public order, and justice. These officials, generally younger in years, formed part of the network through which the greatly diverse Kingdom of France had been unified administratively. Controlling appointments in their respective areas, the governor and naval commissary served as patrons to clientage groups which they mobilized when quarrels flared between them.

Louisbourg served as the capital for Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, and a number of smaller French possessions. By the 1750s, some ten
thousand Europeans and two thousand Micmac Indians lived within its territory. Three courts performed minor regulatory functions in addition to dispensing justice: a court of first instance (bailliage); an Admiralty court for maritime concerns; and the high court of appeal (the Conseil Supérieur), composed of officials and eminent residents appointed by the king on the recommendation of the governor and naval commissary. Parisian law as found in the Custom of Paris, modified by traditional practices observed in the fisheries, served as the basis for civil litigation. The judicial system was inquisitorial rather than accusatorial. Lawyers were banned because they were said to create too much costly litigation. Torture, employing burning coals until the victim fell unconscious, was permitted in criminal judicial procedure, but regulated carefully and infrequently used. The job of the executioner and torturer was the most despised in the colony. Dank jails functioned only as short-term detention centres.

Sentences were not prescribed by law, but accorded in consideration of the crime. Deterrence was the uppermost concern. Thieves might be branded with the “V” for voleur (thief); more serious criminals whipped and banished to perpetual slavery in the king’s galleys. Minor offences invited no more than public humiliation suffered in the iron collar and manacles of the pillory (carcan) — the equivalent of the New England stocks — which was placed for maximum effect along the commercial waterfront. Convicted murderers, whose cases were appealed automatically to the Conseil Supérieur, were hanged or, for heinous crimes, had their limbs broken while strapped to a diagonal cross. Strangulation followed. Deterrence even applied to suicides. In one Louisbourg case, a person had the unpleasant task of representing the corpse of a servant. Following a verdict of suicide, the sentence ordered that the body be dragged face down through the town, hung upside down outside his master’s residence for twenty-four hours, and then thrown into the sea. Justice was generally swift and frequently severe in the manner of the times, although England had abandoned judicial torture and France did so after 1780.

Economic and social life took place within the web of family connections. Most women married, but some worked independently as fishing proprietors, innkeepers, tavern owners, dressmakers, gardeners, laundresses, and servants. Older women married men much their juniors on occasion. Businesses were family affairs, frequently run out of part of the house converted for this purpose. Partnerships were formed, but the joint stock company was unknown. Economic life everywhere in the West was governed by scarcity rather than abundance. As the state provided no social security, marriages were often arranged with complicated legalities to foster a family’s fortune. Children were vital to a comfortable old age and not legally independent until twenty-five years of age. The church required young men up to thirty to have parental consent before they married. When
that permission was denied, Louise Samson, an Acadian, and sea captain Jean Lelarge jumped up at the end of mass in the chapel one Monday, approached the altar railing, and married themselves following a popular custom frowned upon by the church. While the priest sought refuge from this sacrilege in the sanctuary, the couple sought signatures to testify to their marriage. "Off to bed with you," was the immediate response. Imprisoned, fined, and subsequently allowed to marry for love, their first child was born nine months and nine days later.

Social class heavily influenced, but did not always determine one's chance in life. Louisbourg offered a vivid contrast between the powdered wigs of the well-to-do and the tattered clothes of its labouring classes. An unknown teenager found dead in a pool of water was immediately identified by his clothes as either an indentured servant or a sailor. If parents were poor, children as young as seven were sent to work outside the family through indenture. Training of the young was more common than education. Children who learned to read and write did so at home with simple readers purchased from local shops. Sometimes there were private tutors to help. The sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady, whose efforts were always lauded, came from Quebec to operate a small school where they taught young women reading, writing, and handiwork. They received no regular state subsidy. Struggling to make ends meet, they sold items they made, but they still accepted some charity cases. More advanced education was sought abroad in Quebec and France by those who could afford it. Illiteracy was higher in Louisbourg than Trois-Rivières, but lower than in Montreal. Forty per cent of brides and 57 per cent of grooms were able to sign their names at marriage, the standard used by historians to determine literacy. Women often encountered harrassment and abuse, offences against community values dealt with by the courts. Records for 1752 and 1753 revealed eight instances of soldiers disciplined for beating women, but when a man in a tavern tried to steal a kiss, the women he slighted took him to court where he was fined. Common insults against women impugned their sexual morality by calling them slut and whore (putain, garce) while men were more likely to have their character challenged by being called rogues, wretches, or thieves (fripon, coquin, voleur).

While tavern society attracted many, those with means held dinner parties, listened to music, and attended dances. Reading was a common pastime. Books on practical sciences, philosophy, and religion were found most frequently in Louisbourg's private libraries. Cards and games of chance were a passion everywhere. Government subsidized two annual religious festivals, those of Corpus Christi (fête-Dieu) and of France's patron saint, Saint Louis, when there were processions through the town, artillery blasts, and bonfires (feux de joie). Each year Mardi Gras, the carnival that preceded Lent, provided an occasion when all celebrated with great merriment.
The Economy

The sea rather than Cape Breton Island was Louisbourg's real hinterland. Following the implanting of the colony, the in-shore or sedentary fishery was quickly re-established not just at the capital, but also in numerous outports around the Atlantic coast. The three-person shallows of the in-shore fishery that returned to shore each day to land their catch were augmented by larger schooners adapted from those used in New England. Deep-sea fishing vessels accounted for more of the annual catch than their in-shore counterparts. These ships did not need to stop in the colony other than to augment their profits through trade in supplies.

Cod was the basis of Louisbourg's prosperity. The fishery accounted for between 66 and 90 per cent of the colony's exports, a place equivalent to furs in Quebec's economy. Competition was keen, especially for scarce labour. Numerous government regulations attempted to favour local fishing proprietors over non-residents in terms of shore space and labour practices, but in the end to no avail. Importation of the colony's fish into France, however, was facilitated by the removal of traditional excise duties. Up to the late 1730s, the French in-shore fishery on Cape Breton expanded until it was worth about thirty-six million (1990) dollars, while the total fishery was valued at three times that amount. A change in the migratory patterns of the cod and the renewed wars in the 1740s led to a decline in the output of the resident fishing industry, a trend also observed at the British Newfoundland fishery slightly later.

Behind Louisbourg's emergence as the busiest port in what is now Canada — and fourth on the continent — stood the rising prosperity and growth in trade witnessed in the early eighteenth century. Economic expansion in the Caribbean sugar islands was particularly rapid. Louisbourg was ideally suited for the transhipment of goods in vessels sailing from France, New England, Quebec, and the West Indies. By the 1730s, over 150 ships visited the seaport annually in addition to smaller vessels that plied the coastal trade. The Atlantic ports of France remained the principal suppliers both in terms of number of ships and tonnage. Coming to trade and fish, French ships brought to Louisbourg food, wine, manufactured goods, and supplies for both the fishing and construction industries. Fish was the principal product they carried home.

Louisbourg allowed the French to realize their long-held dream of intercolonial trade, although much of the commerce appears to have consisted of single voyages with Louisbourg as the sole focus rather than following a triangular pattern. West Indians, who had always feared navigating the treacherous waters of the St. Lawrence River, found the new colony suitable for making two voyages a year as did Louisbourg merchants themselves. They carried sugar products and rum from the French colonies
in the Windward Islands and the island of Santo Domingo, taking lumber, cod, and other foodstuffs on the return voyage. Cape Breton also emerged as a major market for agricultural and forest products from Quebec, especially after 1728 when that colony was entrusted with supplying flour for the Louisbourg garrison. French Canadians desired Caribbean sugar and its by-products such as rum and molasses. This exchange, while vital to Quebec, was small in the greater constellation of Louisbourg's export and import business.

New England was a larger and more dependable supplier of natural products and construction materials from the earliest years. This commerce was in large part technically illegal, but authorities of both empires generally turned a blind eye to such a mutually profitable trade. Louisbourg's appetite was voracious and supplies from French sources were inadequate to meet all its needs. The French government therefore permitted trade with the British American colonies in livestock, foodstuffs, and building materials. The New Englanders traded for West Indian sugar products, which they could obtain from Louisbourg at prices one-third those in Boston, as well as cod and French manufactured goods. A smaller but equally vital trade was also carried on with Acadians in Nova Scotia. At its height, Louisbourg's commerce with New England, particularly Massachusetts, accounted for some 20 per cent of the colony's total. Outright smuggling was commonplace, but due to the openness of trade with New England and the huge volumes of cargo that annually passed through the port, the extent of illicit traffic has been exaggerated. For the most part, French officials at Louisbourg attempted to comply with regulations by not permitting entry of those commodities that would compete with Quebec products. Customs officials in the British colonies generally did not interfere with this profitable commerce. The Board of Trade in England ruled that the trade was not illegal, but that a means should be found to stop it in order to weaken the French colony.

Louisbourg had a strong commercial air with many small shops and warehouses. Business life centered on the area along the quay which bustled with life during the navigation season, but was dormant from November to April. The resident business community was a diverse lot engaged in fishing, wholesaling, retailing, ship brokerage, government supply, and ship chandlery. Resident merchants controlled the majority of the local catch. By law, they were the only ones permitted to engage fishermen for the autumn fishery. Some merchants acted as agents for large businesses in France and New England, but such factorship was only one of a variety of business pursuits. The local business community was as stratified internally as the larger society of which it was a part, but even the fortunes of the largest Louisbourg merchants paled in comparison to those of their metropolitan counterparts. Local merchants owned a little more than one-quarter of the
commercial vessels weighing anchor in the colony and their ships were smaller than those sailing overseas.

The extensive trading network centred on Louisbourg allowed the port to overcome the disabilities imposed by its unproductive surroundings. When fishermen began to abandon the island for the cod banks and the in-shore fishery declined in the 1740s, creating a drain on currency, trade with the West Indies and New England later increased to compensate for this change. Louisbourg, in other words, did not suffer economic collapse despite these fluctuations; it was never forced to resort to using playing cards as promissory notes as was Quebec. Yet the French colony clung to the coast and made little impact on the interior of Cape Breton. Great hopes were pinned on making Prince Edward Island the colony’s bread-basket, but they failed to materialize. Being dependent on oceanic shipping, the local market at Louisbourg experienced both periodic shortages and not infrequent gluts that sparked fierce fighting among the variety of traders involved. Louisbourg was caught short of food supplies on a number of occasions, but both times the fortress was attacked, there were adequate provisions of food and gunpowder with which to resist the enemy.

_Pawn of Empire_

The long peace that had permitted the creation of Louisbourg ended in 1744 when France and Britain went to war once again. In line with their advance planning stretching back a decade, French forces operating out of Louisbourg immediately captured the small fishing station at Canso. They then proceeded to lay siege, unsuccessfully, to Annapolis Royal. From their protected seaport, French privateers swooped down on British colonial commerce, winning the initial round at sea and reaping rich rewards in booty. Settled in behind their protected walls, the French garrison mutinied in response to rotten provisions and the failure to distribute the spoils from Canso. Soldiers held the town for ransom until pacified by the general staff.

In Massachusetts, a small number of people headed by Governor William Shirley determined to mount an amphibious assault on the French stronghold. In elaborating a rationale for the capture of Louisbourg, New Englanders (and later, British writers) described the French Atlantic capital in exaggerated terms that strongly influenced much that was subsequently written as history. They used the word “fortress,” or “walled city”, and exclaimed that this “Dunkirk of North America” which held the “key” to the North American continent must be subdued. Their argument proved effective in securing legislative approval for a combined attack by the New England colonies. William Pepperell, a prominent merchant from Piscataqua in Massachusetts who was actively involved in political life,
commanded the expedition consisting of three thousand men. They set out early and arrived at Canso on 15 April 1745. There they were joined by a squadron of the British navy which had sailed from the Caribbean under Commodore Peter Warren and by some one thousand men sent from Connecticut and New Hampshire.

The French thought that the enemy might attempt to blockade Louisbourg or challenge its sea defences, but they did not contemplate an amphibious attack directed against its landward fortifications. Only three men-of-war were dispatched from the mother country to augment the town's defences and deliver a counter-attack on the English settlements. The French side was further weakened by the death of Commandant Duquesnel late in 1744 and his replacement by an acting governor, Louis Du Pont Duchambron, a timorous individual whose indecisiveness cost the French dearly. His forces were numerically much weaker, consisting of 590 soldiers of uncertain loyalty and some 900 armed civilians. Good fortune assisted the Anglo-American force as much as did their opponent's lassitude. Fine weather aided their landing at Kennington (Cormorandière) Cove in Gabarus Bay some five kilometres from Louisbourg. The French vacillated. A small force eventually sent to repel the invaders was itself repulsed. The suburb outside the Dauphin Gate was razed to deny the New Englanders cover or firewood. The grand battery was abandoned where repairs remained incomplete and the position thus appeared indefensible. Unfortunately, its guns were spiked improperly and were later directed against the fortress itself, an easy target because the slope of the land and the walls of its fortifications had created an amphitheatre in which the town lay exposed.

The New Englanders were animated by the hope of rich plunder and by their traditional animosity towards the French with their Roman Catholic religion. Serving as their own draught animals, they hauled their cannon from their landing place through swampy terrain to Louisbourg. They established field batteries behind small promontories, revealing yet another flaw in the fortress design on the landward side. Bombarding the right flank of the king's bastion as well as the Dauphin battery and gate, they failed to effect a breach. The isolated island battery, surrounded by rocky shores slapped by ocean swells, presented an even more formidable challenge that frustrated various attempts to silence its guns. One failed assault cost the New Englanders 60 dead and 116 prisoners. A soldier remarked on how it was "an awful thing to see men wounded and wallowing in their own blud and breething their last breths." Eventually, only a battery established at Lighthouse Point on the other side of the harbour neutralized the island's guns.

On the French side, port captain Pierre Morpain acted as a rallying force. Although nearly sixty years of age, he constantly urged an attack on the
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The decision by the Government of Canada to reconstruct Louisbourg stimulated an outpouring of historical research, although much of it remains in historical journals and unpublished government reports. Christopher Moore's award-winning Louisbourg Portraits (Toronto, 1982) is the most readable and easily accessible introduction to Louisbourg's social history as reconstructed through the lives of five ordinary individuals. The Roman Catholic church at Louisbourg and the services it provided are examined extensively in A.J.B. Johnston, Religion and Life at Louisbourg, 1713-1758 (Montreal, 1982). The last chapter of this book concerning faith, morals, and popular customs is particularly instructive. Johnston had also published The Summer of 1744: A Portrait of Life in 18th-Century Louisbourg (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1983), a detailed look at the year chosen as the focus for the modern reconstruction of the fortress. The social history of Louisbourg was one of a number of topics discussed in the special issue (vol. 1, no. 4, June 1974) of Canada: An Historical Magazine devoted to Louisbourg. Much can also be learned from the extended essay by Blaine Adams on the barracks of the king's bastion in Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archeology and History No. 18 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1978) Many individuals who lived at Louisbourg are profiled in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vols. II-IV.


In Atlantic Empires of France and Spain, Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763 (Chapel Hill, 1986), John Robert McNeill compares and contrasts the imperial defence and economic policies of the two European nations. Frederick J. Thorpe examines the administration of building fortifications in the Atlantic region during this period in Remparts lointains: La politique française des travaux publics à Terre-Neuve et à l'Ile Royal 1695-1758 (Ottawa, 1980). The town's defences are analyzed with extensive illustrations in Bruce W. Fry, "An Appearance of Strength": The Fortifications of Louisbourg (two vols., Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984), an endeavour that assumes the approach of the historical archaeologist. Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archeology and History No. 2 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1971) contains three essays concerning various aspects of Louisbourg's archaeology.


There still is no satisfactory published history of Louisbourg’s economy, but Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Early Geography of Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison, 1968) is useful. B.A. Balcom has analyzed *The Cod Fishery of Isle Royale, 1713-1758* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984), and John F. Bosher draws the larger picture of merchant trade in *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763* (Oxford, 1987).
Why was a fortress built at Louisbourg? What was life like in the eighteenth century town? What role did Louisbourg play in the First French Empire and why were New Englanders so jealous that they captured it in 1745? Why was Louisbourg thereafter returned to France, only to be attacked a second time before its fortifications were finally demolished?

This authoritative and indispensable guide to the history of Louisbourg provides answers to these questions and a host of others. For the general reader, it offers a comprehensive and colourful overview of life at Louisbourg based on the most recent historical scholarship.