

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands make up the rest of southern Ontario and contain most of the population, industry, commerce and agricultural land.

Ontario's climate ranges from humid continental in the south to subarctic in the north. The Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River form the province's southern boundary; Hudson Bay and James Bay the northern boundary. These bodies of water cool the summer, lessen the severity of winter, delay autumn frosts and reduce the difference between day and night time temperatures. The cold polar air sweeping down from the north and the warm moist air flowing north from the Mississippi River give Ontario adequate precipitation throughout the year.

History

In the early seventeenth century, the region between Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe was home to the Huron Indians and their neighbours, the Petuns. These tribes lived in large bark-covered longhouses within fortified villages. Their loose grouping of family-linked bands subsisted by cultivating fields of Indian corn. To the east, the nomadic Algonquian-speaking tribes relied on hunting and fishing for their livelihood. The Hurons and Petuns numbered about 25,000 — a match for their arch-

rivals south of Lake Ontario, the Iroquois.

Soon after the founding of Quebec City by the French explorer Samuel de Champlain in 1608, the Hurons began travelling to the colony by river to trade beaver pelts. During the next century, explorers, fur traders, missionaries and soldiers travelled extensively over Ontario's waterways, but there was little permanent settlement. There was, nonetheless, an intense rivalry between British and French fur traders. In 1749, in an effort to prevent Indians from trading with the British at Oswego on Lake Ontario's southern shore, the French built Fort Toronto at the mouth of Humber River.

During the American Revolution, there was a steady flow of Loyalists (who preferred British rule to independence) into the Niagara Peninsula. After the war, Loyalists continued flooding into the area and surveyors were hard-pressed to keep ahead of them as they took up British land grants. Settlement spread eastward along Lake Ontario's northern border and the St. Lawrence shore and westward as part of the general movement to the west.

The settlers were anxious to have government in their new province. In 1791, the British Parliament passed the Constitutional Act, which divided the old "Province of Quebec" into