

Precambrian Shield -- Originally, the Indians in this vast area were entirely dependent upon hunting and fishing for their food, alternating between periods of plenty in good game years and periods of privation and starvation when game was scarce. On the whole, hunting and trapping are still important for their livelihood, but this region has witnessed a remarkable change in recent years with the coming of modern means of transportation and communication. The pulpwood industry in the more accessible regions provides employment for many Indians, while mining and other projects are also changing employment patterns.

Indian Affairs in New France

The lure of furs and wealth brought French settlers and fur traders to Canada in 1604, more than 60 years after Jacques Cartier had travelled down the St. Lawrence befriending the Indian people. To ensure an abundance of these furs, the French soon established good relations with Algonkin tribes in the east and Huron tribes in the west while setting up trading-posts and mission stations. This firm alliance was to last until the fall of French power in Canada.

The Algonkins and the Hurons were the traditional foes of the Iroquois. Keen rivalry arose between the two tribal groups for control of the fur trade. The Hurons wanted the sole rights to furs from the interior for trading with the French, while the Iroquois wanted them to trade to their English allies.

When New England colonists and traders clashed with their French counterparts, the Indians were drawn into the struggle on both sides. The Indians were sought as allies by both English and French and soon they became an integral part of both fighting forces. From the Indian point of view, they were not only fighting for trade rights but also settling old differences with an enemy tribe.

The falling of Montreal under English control in 1760 found France's Indian allies one by one reluctantly accepting English rule by agreement and by treaty.

Administration under the British

As early as 1670, during the reign of Charles II, instructions were given to the governors of the British colonies that Indians who desired to place themselves under British protection should be well received and protected. Later it was found necessary to establish an office devoted solely to the administration of Indian affairs, and in 1755 Sir William Johnson was appointed Indian Superintendent, with headquarters in the Mohawk Valley, in what is now the State of New York. The establishment of that office was the genesis of future Indian administrative organization in North America. Following the American Revolution, the Indian office was removed to Canada. From