

The Centenary of the Visit of *La Capricieuse*

A HUNDRED YEARS ago this summer, a corvette of the French Navy, *La Capricieuse*, paid an official visit to Canada. It was the first occasion on which a French naval vessel had entered a Canadian port since the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1763, under which France gave up its claim to New France. Everywhere during their visit to Lower and Upper Canada, the ship's commander, Captain Belveze, and his crew were greeted enthusiastically. Captain Belveze wrote of the voyage up the St. Lawrence River:

The arrival of *La Capricieuse* was known in advance and crowds gathered on the shores to greet it with cheers and bursts of musketry; along the magnificent Ile d'Orleans despite pouring rain, the people—all of French origin—saluted the ship from the shelter of their homes or, braving the inclement weather, ran along the waterfront in order to watch the corvette's passage as long as they could.

On July 8-9, 1955, the centenary of this historic event was marked in France at La Rochelle, Rochefort, Marennes and Brouage in the Department of Charente-Maritime by a series of Franco-Canadian celebrations. *La Capricieuse* had sailed from the port of La Rochelle, the former capital of Aunis which was the home of many of the settlers of New France. Today, Rochefort, is the seat of the maritime prefecture. It is a town of some 25,000 people while La Rochelle has more than 50,000. Marennes is a small town but is known the world over as a centre of oyster-breeding. The romantic, little, walled village of Brouage has a particularly close connection with Canada as the birthplace of Champlain, the founder of Quebec.

Original Idea

The celebrations in Charente-Maritime were the result of the initiative of a number of people in France who were particularly interested in the history of Canada and in the advancement of economic and cultural relations between the two countries. The idea was first put forward by M. Charles Braibant during the visit of the Prime Minister of Canada to the National Archives of France in February 1954. M. Braibant showed Mr. St. Laurent the original report of Captain Belveze and thought how appropriate it would be to commemorate the centenary of the voyage of *La Capricieuse* by organizing an exhibition at La Rochelle of documents and museum pieces bearing on the history of the two countries. As work on the project went forward, it gave rise to plans for other events to mark the centennial including the issue of a special postage stamp.

The opening of the exhibition at La Rochelle and the celebrations throughout Charente-Maritime were attended by the Minister of National Education of France, M. Jean Berthoin. Canada was represented by its Ambassador to France, Mr. Jean Désy, and by the Minister of Labour, Mr. Milton Gregg, V.C. The programme of the first day of the celebrations included a reception at Rochefort (where the official party was shown the rooms which had been