

Thus the handsome stone churches that one sees everywhere in the Quebec countryside, while they can be said to represent an age passing more than a present reality, are nevertheless real and present symbols of the history of the French Canadian identity. The quiet revolution of the 1960s was really the taking over from the Church, by a secular government, these main lines of educational development, and in the process, to modernize them. It was done peacefully, and effectively, but it meant the transfer of the care and control of French Canadian civilization from the Church to the Province of Quebec. One effect has been not only to strengthen the powers of the government, but also to make French Canadian nationalisation less temperate. The nationalism of Quebec of the 1980s is driven by secular ideologies, not as civilized as the Roman Catholic Church, but nevertheless effectively harnessed to the idea of French Canada. They range from highly conservative and somewhat authoritarian social and political positions right through the political spectrum to socialist, or Marxist ones, the latter as authoritarian as the conservative. The present Parti Quebecois cabinet is a vivid illustration of how separatism, and its defence of French languages and nationality, is the cement that holds together diverse political and social beliefs.



Notre Dame des Victoires in Place Royale, Quebec City.

Photo: Mia and Klaus.

The Seigneurial System

This system of land tenure has been much misunderstood because both it, and the mediaeval institutions of which it was a new and improved edition, when looked at by a 20th century telephoto lens, appear very much the same. They were not, however. The seigneurial system was modern (that is to say, it was 17th century) and it reflected what were Louis XIV's 17th century priorities, as well as what he, and his *Ministre de la Marine*, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, believed was wrong with the old feudal traditions. The seigneurial system represented a correction process, and was well adapted to the conditions of New France. A peasant in New France



Notre Dame de Bon Secours in Montreal.

Photo: Jim Merrithew.

had very different rights and privileges from his counterpart in Old France. An emigrant needed an incentive to come. Incentives were offered. He could buy and sell the land he occupied, although technically it belonged to the seigneur. The peasant bought or sold the usufruct of the land and the improvements that had been made to it. The advantage of this was that it gave property its real value in a country where there was a plethora of land. The value of a habitant's land was the value of its improvements: the trees that had been cut down, the fields made, the fences put up, the barns erected. The seigneurial system thus avoided almost wholly the curse of English Canadian landholding, absentee ownership. It avoided futile attempts to rent out land in a country where there were lots of it, and where the whole value of land lay in the improvements put on it. Thus did the seigneurial system avoid almost wholly too, the curse of speculation in land. The system was not well adapted for military defence, but it was well adapted to develop the instinctive gregariousness of the Norman peasant, as well as encouraging something else about Norman peasants found in the short stories of de Maupassant, who knew them well — their instinctive litigiousness.

The seigneur had rights and privileges, but he had also duties, and his role was such that few English-speaking men chose to buy a seigneurie. So English-speaking immigration flowed around the old seigneurial lands of the St. Lawrence and Richelieu valleys, not into them. The English-speaking settlers preferred, not unnaturally, Crown grants in free and common socage to old seigneurial lands *en fief et seigneurie*.