

French-Speaking Canadians

The two-language pattern was established almost two centuries ago following the British conquest of Quebec. The French, who first settled Canada, retained their language, religion, culture and traditions. Today their descendants make up more than thirty per cent of the population.

Although most French-speaking Canadians live in Quebec, there are also large numbers in New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba and varying concentrations in the other provinces.

With its twin-spired churches, its wayside shrines, its distinctive rural architecture, its regional cuisine and its Gallic spirit, Quebec is quite different from other Canadian provinces. There is an impression of history here, and of established tradition, that is not found in the newer parts of Canada. Almost all French-speaking families trace their ancestry back to the earliest settlers; the steep streets of Quebec City have an old European look; the long narrow farms along the St. Lawrence are reminders of another age when each farmer needed river frontage. Quebec is predominantly a Roman Catholic province; members of various religious orders are familiar sights on the streets of the cities and the curé is a prominent figure in village life. Quebec's schools, universities, civil courts and labour unions differ significantly from their counterparts in the other provinces.

French Canada has a cultural life of its own distinct from that of English-speaking Canada but related to that of France. Its own radio and television networks produce original programmes that range from popular

amateur talent shows to highly sophisticated plays. It has its theatre, literature, music; its newspapers and magazines. Plays and revues dealing with contemporary life are produced in the Montreal theatres, popular tunes composed in French Canada are whistled in the streets, novels by French Canadian authors are widely read.

But the two cultures, which seem so distinct, sometimes merge. French and English-language drama companies compete regularly in national festivals. Art galleries throughout the country display the work of painters from all parts of the country. Many books originally written in one language are translated into the other. Television and radio programmes originally produced for French Canada are often seen or heard on English-speaking stations. A television dramatic series based on the life of a French Canadian explorer, Pierre Radisson, was produced in both languages. A popular dramatic serial dealing with the life of a French-speaking family in Quebec was also produced in English for television viewers in other parts of the country. Thus, the two main cultural streams enrich Canadian life.

French-speaking Canadians trace their ancestry back to the earliest settlers from France. Retaining their religion and their traditions, they have a distinctive culture which enriches Canadian life

