

Quebec

The Land

Bordered by Ontario, New Brunswick and Labrador (the mainland portion of the province of Newfoundland) and by the United States, Quebec has an area of 1 450 680 km², three times that of France and seven times that of Great Britain, making it the largest of Canada's provinces. The province is almost entirely surrounded by water: by Hudson Strait to the north, the St. Lawrence River and Gulf to the south, and James Bay and Hudson Bay to the west.

From north to south, Québec takes in three main



geographical regions: the Canadian Shield, the St. Lawrence lowlands and the Appalachian Mountains. Extending from the shores of the Canadian Arctic to the Laurentians, the Canadian Shield covers about 60 percent of the land mass, and is the world's oldest mountain range. Permafrost reigns in the northern part of the Shield; only dwarf birches and lichen are able to grow there.

The St. Lawrence River, the province's dominant geographical feature, links the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes. The St. Lawrence

lowlands are dotted with more than a million lakes and rivers. Quebec's forests are equal in area to those of Sweden and Norway combined. To the south, the foothills of the Appalachians separate Quebec from the United States.

Almost 80 percent of Quebecers live in urban centres located along the St. Lawrence. Montreal and its suburbs have a population of three million; Quebec City is the province's capital and third-largest city.

The History

The name Quebec, which comes from an Algonkian word meaning "narrow passage" or "strait," originally meant the narrowing down of the St. Lawrence River off what is currently Quebec City.

Quebec was originally inhabited by members of the Algonquin and Iroquois aboriginal people. The northern part of the province was, and still is, inhabited by the Inuit (previously known as "Eskimos").

The European history of Quebec began with the arrival of the French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534. The succeeding era was characterized by the establishment of a thriving fur trade, relatively friendly relations with the aboriginal people and a continuous rivalry between French and English colonists.

Founded in 1608, Quebec City became the capital of New France. During the French regime, the fortified city was an important centre

of trade and development. Today it is regarded as the cradle of French civilization in America, and was named a World Heritage City by UNESCO in 1985.

French-English rivalry in North America culminated with the Seven Years' War, which saw the fall of Quebec City to British forces in 1759. With the Treaty of Paris in 1763, New France became a colony of Britain. In 1774, under the Quebec Act, Britain granted official recognition to French civil laws, guaranteed religious freedom and authorized the use of the French language.

In 1791, the colony was divided in two to reflect the large influx of Loyalists who, wishing to remain British subjects, fled north after the American Revolution, to settle in western Quebec. This led to the creation of Upper Canada (now Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). After rebellions in both regions in 1837, the two were reunited by the Act of Union, 1840 and became the Province of Canada. In 1867, Quebec became a founding member of the new Dominion of Canada.

For a long time, Quebec's rural roots and domination by the Roman Catholic Church made it a traditional, agrarian society. With the advent of the second industrial revolution between 1920 and 1940, urbanization and higher living standards came to the province.

Beginning in 1960, Quebec entered a period of transition: the "Quiet Revolution". It was marked by rapid economic expansion, cultural pride and a revamping of political institutions to meet the needs of contemporary society.