

Fifty-five years after the foundation of Quebec, New France was still in its cradle. The population, all numbered, did not amount to more than 2500 souls. Richelieu's well-devised plan had proved abortive in the hands of his favourite company, either through indifference or want of means to comply with the terms of their charter. After thirty years the Associates had failed to bring over the 4000 emigrants they had agreed to transport to Quebec in half that time, and Louis XIV became convinced that they had outlived their usefulness. It was therefore resolved in 1663 to cancel their charter. With the dissolution of the One Hundred Associates ended the first period of colonization.

In what part of Canada were these 2500 colonists established? They had been located in three different groups—near Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal. Quebec at that period appeared to the greatest advantage. Champlain's settlement could boast of a few public buildings on Cape Diamond, with houses and stores on the shore below. Eight hundred Frenchmen had made their home in the town. From Cap Tourmente, twenty-one miles below Quebec, the seigniories of Beaupré, Beauport and Island of Orleans were then pretty well settled with a population of 130, 180 and 450 souls respectively. Ascending the St Lawrence, we find the Three Rivers group subdivided into two sections and separated by the River St Maurice; their combined population numbered about 400. Ninety miles farther west, Ville-Marie, the most recently established settlement, could only count 500 souls. A year after Maisonneuve's arrival there were in Ville-Marie only fifty-nine colonists. A certain number of soldiers, who had been sent later on, helped to increase the population by becoming permanent settlers.

From time to time, as the number of men grew larger, contingents of girls were sent from France to provide wives for the settlers. The courtship did not last long: a few weeks after having set foot on the Canadian soil they found themselves installed in the homes of stalwart husbands. The king of France, the governor and religious authorities favoured early marriages. Young men wedded girls of sixteen, fifteen, and even occasionally of twelve years of age.