

Urban profile:

Quebec City cradles Canadian history

By Alan Harvey

Distinctive is the word for Quebec City. It proudly lays claim to being a Canadian community unlike any other. It is North America's only walled city, the most tenaciously European of any on the continent, a bit of old France lovingly preserved in an Old World setting, a showplace of tourism and cradle of Canadian history. Its old stone buildings speak a storied past. It has charm and cachet.

Set on commanding heights overlooking the broad St Lawrence river, a natural fortress with water access to the heartland of North America, Quebec City in olden times acted as a springboard for French explorers probing a vast new continent, from the Rocky Mountains in Canada's far west to the Gulf of Mexico thousands of miles to the south.

Within this compact city, high on the Plains of Abraham, French and English soldiers fought in 1759 an historic battle that, with an irony rare in any nation's history, brought together what later became Canada's two founding cultures. The story of The Two Solitudes began. More than

two centuries later, the consequences for Canadian unity are still not wholly resolved.

Here, explorer Samuel de Champlain threw up a trading post in 1608, the year usually accepted as the city's founding date. Here Jesuit priests sought to civilize nomadic Red Indians, and here in 1775 Quebec was saved from American assault. In its embattled history, the city withstood all told six sieges.

Today, Quebec City is the capital and seat of government of Quebec province, largest of the 10 provincial areas which make up the Confederation of Canada. In many ways it represents the true heart and cradle of French Canada, holding to its francophone traditions more tightly than cosmopolitan Montreal. The Province's largest and most dynamic city. With its area of 594,860 square miles, Quebec province accounts for 15.4 per cent of the total

Below

The provincial legislature building, now called the Legislative Assembly, in Quebec City, capital of the province of Quebec and heartland of French Canada.

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

