

But not even the Church was able to alter the fact that the fashion of the day in Europe demanded beaver hats for gentlemen. As a result the market was brisk and prices on occasion fabulously high. Agricultural settlement was by its very nature diametrically opposed to the interests of the fur traders, for farms push back the forests, drive away wildlife. In spite, therefore, of the efforts and expenditures of the French court, of the Government, and of the Church, the quick profits of the fur trade dictated the early economy of New France. Settlement was slow and the population was less than 60,000 when Wolfe captured Quebec. From the French point of view the colony was an economic liability rather than an asset, and as was demonstrated on the Plains of Abraham, it was not defensible in war.

During the French Régime there was no evidence of any attempt at the conservation of the natural resources of the colony. It is true that the fur trade was run by a succession of monopolies and that rigid control of the number that might enter the trade was enforced. This control, however, was directed entirely towards protecting the market and not at all towards the conservation of the supply. But the commercial history of the fur trade was not a record of unbroken profits. Fashions changed and demand fluctuated. The expense of maintaining adequate protection against the Indians - who sometimes objected to the chicanery of the traders, the seizure of their lands or the raping of their wives - was a heavy drain.

Company succeeded company as holders of the monopoly. The most important of these transfers came in 1645 when a small group of leading colonists obtained the fur trading monopoly from the Company of New France, whose headquarters were in Paris and whose directors were chosen almost exclusively from the French nobility. The significance of this change was that it was the first successful Canadian revolt - even though limited in scope and short of life - against "absentee management", and absentee management has until very recently been an important, and almost invariably an unhappy, influence in the history of Canadian resource development.

Although agricultural settlement progressed slowly under the French Régime, it nevertheless made an important impact on the system of land tenure in Canada. In the new country, as in the old, land was granted under the seigneurial system. In France the seigneur had customarily been a powerful feudal overlord and his tenants were largely subject to his control. In Canada the system was modified by the circumstances of the new land and the seigneur sometimes found himself with more obligations than privileges. He was expected to live on his seigneury and to divide his land into farms for settlers. The financial rewards of agriculture were so meagre that he was seldom able to attain a position of real affluence or power. His influence was generally less than that of the soldier, bureaucrat or priest. Nevertheless, the pattern of land-holding then established remained almost unchanged until 1854. The physical arrangement of the seigneurial boundaries - long, narrow farms stretching back from the river - remains today characteristic of the largest Canadian Province - Quebec.

The first charter of the Hudson's Bay Company, granted by Charles II in 1670, gave the Adventurers of England complete trading rights and judicial, legislative, and executive jurisdiction over all the lands watered by rivers flowing into Hudson's Bay - a watershed which extended well down into what is now the United States and westward to the great mountains. As the French fur traders moved north and westward past the Great Lakes, they came into direct conflict with representatives of the Company. Bitter and continuous feuds developed, but it was not until much later in Canadian history that this area came to exert its full influence on national development.

After the British conquest the development of what was then known as Upper Canada, and is now called Ontario, began. Here, too, the problem of landholding became a subject of furious controversy. Unlike the situation in comparable areas of the United States it was hard for the ordinary settler to get clear title to his land, while large tracts were given to people with money or influence. The establishment of Clergy Reserves and Crown reserves