

lays siege to the Gulf of St Lawrence. Montreal gets an average of nine feet of snow every winter and sometimes as much as twelve.

Those first winters in Canada, people died. Of cold, of hunger, of homesickness. It took several years to design a house capable of withstanding the climate. "For the first two centuries," says Deffontaines, "Canadian houses were affairs of stone, damp, chills and rheumatism."

It was the invention of the closed stove, which keeps the fire in, that allowed house-builders to switch from stone to wood construction, incorporating airtight double walls, a solid roof and raised foundations insulating the house from the ground. Before the coming of the stove, the open hearth would have incinerated these dry, comfortable homes.

"Home became the centre of the world," wrote Louis Hémon, "the frail fortress where one could hold out against the assault of winter."

The peasant now has his shelter, but he is no less a slave to it. He has to lay in a mountain of logs against the cold. The timber reserves determine his pattern of land development. "The business of keeping warm was a crushing burden," says Pierre Deffontaines, "a work horizon without respite for the settler."

It was hard to maintain and feed animals in winter. So animal slaughter would be timed for the start of the cold weather, which allowed you to lay in enough meat, especially pork products, for Christmas feasting. Hunting and fishing assumed great importance. Fortunately pork lends itself to marinating, salting and smoking. Vegetables are a bit more of a problem, but they were stored along with preserves made from the fruits of summer and fall. Sugar, a great preservative, got added to everything.

It wasn't enough to house and feed yourself, you had to have clothes too. A whole wardrobe had to be devised, usually after the Indian model. Textile imports were scanty and there was little sheep breeding. People turned to the furry animals for the hides to make cloaks, mufflers, bonnets and boots. While the men prepared the leather and the fur, the women patched and repatched garments which had to serve indefinitely.



*Winter games (1): Water, water everywhere. Played by pedestrians whenever the snow melts. Object: not to step in deeper than the top of your boots.*

"Women's work was a vital element in the struggle against the cold," says Deffontaines, "to the point where sometimes a man married to assure himself of warm clothes. A proverb has it: Man without woman cannot take the winter."

Winter had determined the architecture: it also determined town planning. To minimise snowclearing and avoid isolation, they built their houses at the very edge of the road, as close together as possible. They kept to a minimum the exposure to the land stretching away behind the

house. The result was terraced housing, which proved inadequate to a prolific population and gave rise to largescale migrations.

ALL these efforts, all this energy, might otherwise have been put to better use. Some historians blame the winter in part for Canada's slow economic development compared with the United States. Probably with some justice, although the Arctic Institute's report observes that there is no direct connection between the cold and economic development.