

Patterns of Colonization

THE WAY OF THE FRENCH

In 1534, Jacques Cartier., searching for a short cut to the Orient, sailed into the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. There he found sailors from his native Brittany fishing for cod, as they had been doing even before the voyage of the Italian seaman, Verrazano, who had been employed by the French in 1524 to find a northwest passage to India. Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River in 1535 and wintered on the site of present-day Quebec, but his attempt to plant a colony there in 1541 ended in disaster.

The French, occupied with religious wars at home, made no further formal efforts to colonize the St. Lawrence region until 1608, when Samuel de Champlain, an experienced geographer and administrator and a passionate explorer, founded Quebec. Individual Frenchmen, nevertheless, continued to harass the Spanish Main and to pirate Spanish treasure ships. As a base of operations against French buccaneers, indeed, the Spanish in 1565 established St. Augustine, the first permanent settlement in what is now the state of Florida. Other Frenchmen continued to sail to Newfoundland waters and carry back their catch of fish. Still others, the most important of all, had begun to trade with the coastal Indians of Canada. These Indians had been introduced to metal and its great superiority over stone for tools and weapons by the first French fishermen. So eager did the redmen become for any old hook or nail or knife, that they were willing to exchange great bundles of fine fur for such prizes. The French recognized the value of the fur as quickly as the Indians had recognized the value of metal, and soon an active trade was being conducted by the two parties. This trade soon extended to French brandy and French guns, which the Indians came to value even more highly than scraps of iron and for which they paid with ever larger piles of pelts.

Champlain's voyages to America were supported by private French capitalists who, along with others organized in trading companies, hoped to make a good thing of the fur trade. Champlain himself, however, was more interested in exploration than in business. After 1608, he established a base at Port Royal in Acadia (now Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia), accurately charted the Atlantic Coast as far south as Cape Cod, and, in 1609, discovered the lake that bears his name. Skirting around the hostile Iroquois, whom he had unwisely antagonized, Champlain pushed on to the upper Great Lakes over an inland route. When he died in 1635, the French were in control of the St. Lawrence and in a strategic position to dominate the whole Great Lakes area.

And yet from the time of Champlain's arrival until 1627, there were never as many as a hundred white men living in New France at any one time. The middle-class entrepreneurs who managed the fur-trading companies found it difficult to entice qualified colonists to the unsettled wilderness. Religious bickering, royal indifference, and jealousies among the merchants themselves gave rise to a series of erratic, inconsistent policies toward the new colony. When Cardinal Richelieu took over French colonial affairs in the 1620's, he tried to infuse New France with vitality and direction by withdrawing the charters of the old trading companies and by substituting a single, government-sponsored company known as the "Company of the One Hundred Associates," or the Company of New France.

But the Company of New France failed to bring prosperity to the colony. Its supply ships fell prey to English privateers; the English seized Quebec in 1629 and held it for three years. A catastrophic outbreak of Indian wars during the next decades so weakened New France that the Crown took over control in 1663 and made belated attempts to strengthen the ailing colony.

Under this regime a semi-feudal society slowly took form in New France. The *seigneurs*, or large landowners, served as the colonial nobility; the *habitants*, or small farmers, tilled the land. Actually, the land-owners constituted no true aristocracy, nor did they live very differently from the *habitants* who worked for them only a few days each year, performing the most casual services. A French visitor reported in the 1670's that the *seigneurs* "spend most of their time in hunting and fishing. As their requirements in food and clothing are greater than those of the simple 'habitants,' they mix themselves up in trade, run into debt on all hands, incite the young habitants to range the woods, and send their own children there to trade for furs." The *seigneur's* manor house was likely to be nothing more than a two-room log cabin, and only later did manorial life take on some semblance of style and elegance. As for the *habitants*, they lived comfortably in their villages, looked to the church and to the military for direction, and never displayed the independence of the English to the south.

Many explanations have been offered for the persistent weakness of New France. As a people, the French were reluctant to emigrate anywhere, and New France, with its inhospitable climate and thin soil, could hardly have offered much of an inducement. The French Protestants or Huguenots were the only dissidents in France who might have made good settlers, for they were mostly artisans with the skills and aptitudes useful in a new country. Excluded from Canada and despoiled and persecuted in France after the Revocation of the Edict of

Nantes in 1685, they found religious freedom in more tolerant countries. The French government's excessive interference in the lives of those Frenchmen who did come to Canada, its constant scrutinizing of their religious, political, and economic activity, paralyzed their initiative.

As explorers and traders, however, the French performed brilliantly. Jesuit priests in particular extended French claims deep into North America, while the willingness of French laymen to acquire Indian wives and Indian ways (in contrast to the more hidebound British) had enormous economic and military consequences. Their Indian allies brought them bales of furs, fought their battles, and guided French explorers on expeditions that took them as far west as the Rockies and as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, France was able to stake her claim to interior America and to formulate her grandiose plans for a colonial empire long before England turned her attention inland.

But by 1700 the Canadian population was still less than 7,000, compared with 275,000 in the British mainland colonies. The scarcity of settlers meant that New France had to depend on the mother country for food and protection—a dependency that invited debilitating intervention by the government at home. "It was the nature of French colonization," wrote the American historian, Francis Parkman, "to seize upon detached strategic points, and hold them by bayonet, forming no agricultural base, but attracting the Indians by trade and holding them by conversion. A musket, a rosary, and a pack of beaver skins may serve to represent it, and in fact it consisted in little else." These were the symbols of both the power and the weakness of New France.

THE WAY OF THE DUTCH

During the seventeenth century Holland became the commercial center of Europe and, though her population was small, the financial and cultural center of the world. Enterprising Dutch merchants pushed their activities into the East Indies, Africa, and the Americas. Concerned primarily with economic exploitation, the Dutch were content to set up only trading stations and forts. They showed even less interest than the French in planting true colonies, for they preferred to serve as the middlemen and carriers of Europe.

The Dutch adventure in America began in the fall of 1609 when the Englishman, Henry Hudson—hired by the Dutch East India Company—sailed his vessel, the *Half Moon*, up the Hudson River as far as present-day Albany. Hudson found no thoroughfare to the Indies, but he spied out a pleasant land and befriended the Iroquois who inhabited it. Five years after Hudson had regaled the Iroquois chiefs with brandy and wine on board the *Half Moon*, Dutch sea captains were exploring the waters around Long Island Sound, and a private corporation, the United New Netherland Company, had built a fort on lower Manhattan. In the next two decades, Dutch merchants established fur-trading posts in the neighborhood of present-day Albany and made their celebrated purchase of the island of Manhattan for \$24 worth of goods (1626). The higgling regulations laid down by the Dutch West India Company (which controlled New Netherland after 1621), left little room for personal initiative and discouraged Hollanders from settling in America. In order to attract settlers, the company in 1629 offered large tracts of land called "patroonships" to any of its members who would transport 50 people across the Atlantic. "Patroons" like Kiliaen van Rensselaer, an Amsterdam pearl merchant who acquired vast tracts on both sides of the Hudson, set themselves up in the New World as virtually independent feudal lords.

The Dutch consolidated their power in 1655, when they expelled a colony of Swedes (established since 1638) from a base on the Delaware River and pushed small settlements into the Hudson River Valley, Long Island, and New Jersey. Having struck up a trading agreement with the formidable Iroquois, they brutally exterminated the Indian foes of their ally. Subsequent wars against the Indians, however, weakened the colony, and the autocratic policies of the Dutch West India Company, with its overriding pursuit of trade, meant that no substantial farming class grew up to resist the encroachments of the British settlers pressing in from Long-Island and Connecticut. On the eve of its conquest by the English (1664), New Netherland had a mixed population of Walloons, Huguenots, Swedes, Dutchmen, and Negroes numbering around 8,000. In New Amsterdam alone, 18 languages were spoken. Long before America had become known as the "melting pot" of the world, New Amsterdam was a highly cosmopolitan community. But the long years of shortsighted, inflexible direction by the mother country had destroyed the colony's chances of surviving as a Dutch possession.

THE WAY OF THE ENGLISH

At the end of the sixteenth century, the English, like the French and the Dutch, conceived of a colony primarily as a trading post or as a base for buccaneering sorties against Spain; England's first experiments in colony-planting were as inept as those of her rivals. Why was it, then, that the English succeeded so well in America? Certainly not because their colonial policy was enlightened and far-seeing. Rather, the success of the English could be attributed to social and political unrest at home, to the English character itself, and to

English political and social institutions.

All through the early years of English colonial expansion, the home country was torn by religious and political struggles and racked by depression and revolution. Puritan and Royalist, Irishman and Scotsman, Catholic, Anglican, and Dissenter—each in turn sought refuge in the New World as his cause suffered in the mother country. In contrast to New France, British America and the West Indies were peopled by malcontents and rebels, promising prospects as colonists but hardly the safest architects for building loyal dependencies. Had life in England been more serene and more stable during the seventeenth century, overseas expansion would have proceeded at a less dramatic pace. As it was, economic and political unrest at home spurred the advance across the seas.

It was these same chaotic conditions, coupled with a chronic lack of funds, that kept the Crown from taking a direct part in planting the original colonies. That responsibility was left to a small number of capitalists and merchants in southern England and to wealthy noblemen. Operating either through private associations or through joint-stock companies, these were the men who financed the pioneer expeditions. In return for paying the costs of transporting settlers and of supplying them with food and implements for a stated period, they expected to enjoy exclusive trading rights with the colonies and to exercise a voice in colonial affairs. Some of the companies that sank large sums in American plantations enjoyed little or no return on their investment. Colonial promoters had insufficient knowledge of American conditions, and the absence of any clear-cut administrative authority made realistic planning impossible. And, since each company was careful to limit its financial obligations, the colonists were often left in awkward situations; only if the company agreed to issue more stock could additional money be raised to meet the emergencies that inevitably arose.

Despite these obstacles, three types of colony had emerged by the middle of the seventeenth century: the colony that grew out of the corporate or joint-stock company, the proprietary colony, and the royal colony. In the *joint-stock company*, colonial affairs were controlled by shareholders operating under a charter granted by the king. Under the *proprietary system*, the proprietor obtained a charter from the king, established the colony at his own risk, and appointed its officials. In the *royal colony*, affairs were directed by crown officials. Organizers of the first two types performed the job of getting the first permanent colonists across the ocean and settling them in the New World. What the Crown regarded as dangerous weaknesses soon began to show themselves in both the corporate and proprietary colonies, however, and eventually some of them were taken over by the king.

THE WEST INDIES

During the English colonization of the American mainland, and even before, English merchants had recognized the profits to be gained by raising tobacco on the islands of the Caribbean. By 1627, the English colonists were exporting dyewood and tobacco from St. Christopher and Barbados; four years later, the colonial population of Barbados had risen to 1,600.

For the next century and a half, the West Indies were to play a decisive role in the history of America. Spain's loosening hold on her New World possessions, and the vulnerability of her richly laden ships to ferocious assaults by French, Dutch, and English buccaneers, ultimately forced Spain to limit her claims of sovereignty in the Caribbean. Populations in the Dutch and French West Indian Islands remained small, but English colonists continued to pour into Barbados; by 1640, there were approximately 40,000 of them in the West Indies. This was the high point of colonization, for during the next decade declining tobacco prices brought on by competition from Virginia threw the overcrowded islands into an acute depression. Prosperity returned when sugar cane was introduced from Brazil in 1642, but prosperity only for a few. The profits from sugar encouraged successful planters to buy out their smaller neighbors and to purchase Negro slaves from the Dutch. Now the white indentured servants and the displaced planters, bereft of their small holdings, turned to buccaneering, drifted to the mainland colonies, or simply perished. From 1645 to 1655, the white population of Barbados slumped from 36,500 to 23,000, and many who stayed on suffered. West Indian sugar soon emerged as a vital product in the commerce between England and the New World, and the West Indies became England's most valuable colonies. In addition to producing an indispensable crop for the mother country, the sugar planters also bought manufactured goods from England. Since they also imported fish, lumber, and horses from the American mainland their early history was closely bound up with events in the future United States.