

Our Canada
Origins – Peoples – Perspectives

Le programme scolaire de l'Alberta comprend ce livre d'histoire. Les auteurs sont David Rees, Darrell Anderson Gerrits et Gratien Allaire. Au chapitre 3, les pages 92 et 93 font suite à une entrevue avec Pierre Frigon⁴ et la page 95 suite à une entrevue avec Gérald Frigon¹¹⁶.

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CHAPTER 3

Early European Colonies

What's Chapter 3 About?

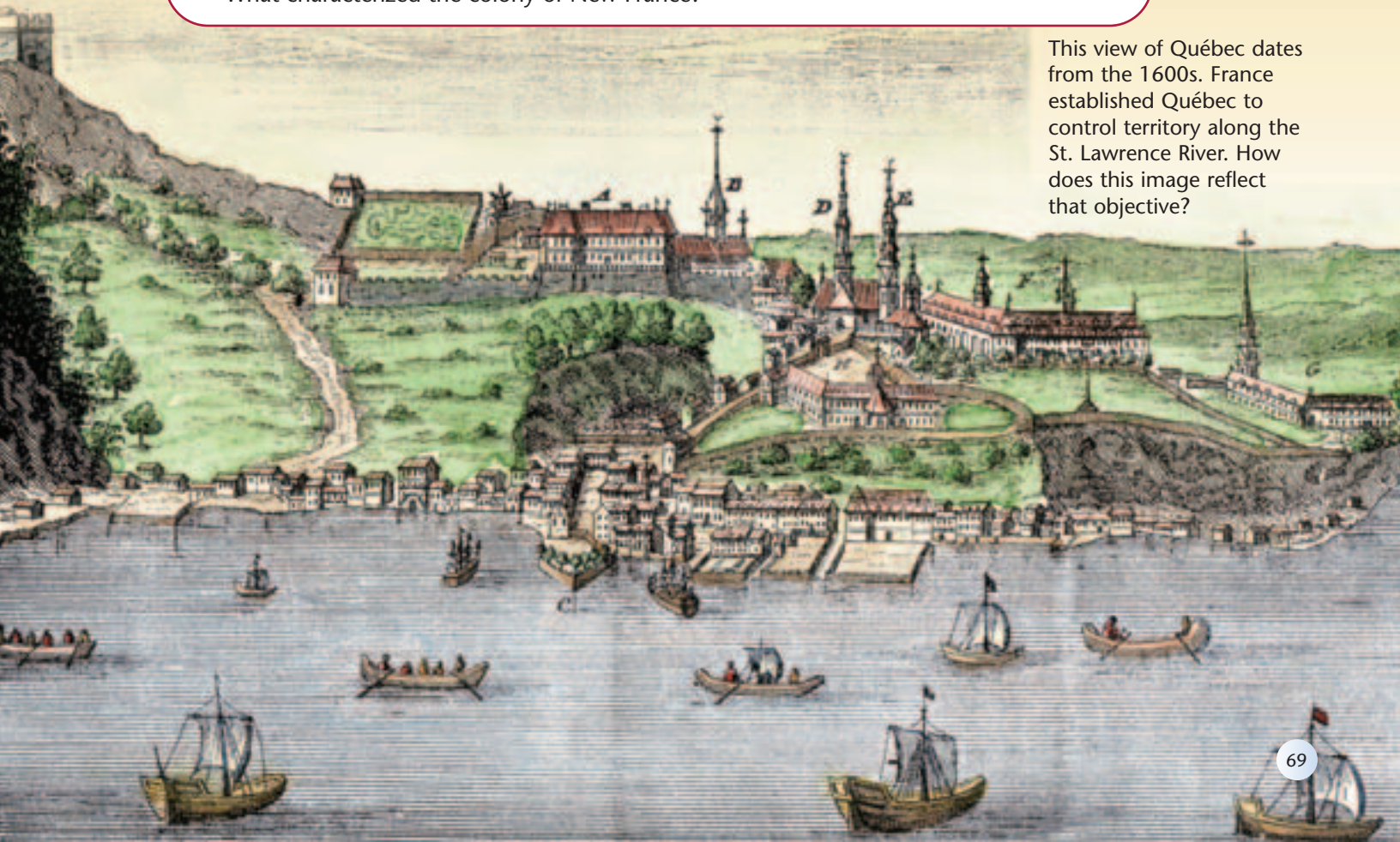
After the voyages of Giovanni Caboto and Jacques Cartier, France and Britain lost interest in exploring North America for many years. They concentrated on fishing cod off the northeast coast.

Starting in the early 1600s, this changed. France and Britain began to establish colonies in North America. The colonies aimed to develop — and to control — new resources.

This chapter is about those colonies — especially about New France. In the lands that became Canada, New France was the first permanent European foothold. It's a fact that lies at the foundation of our country.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What purpose did colonies serve?
- What were the similarities and differences between French and British colonies in North America?
- What impacts did colonization have on First Nations?
- What characterized the colony of New France?



This view of Québec dates from the 1600s. France established Québec to control territory along the St. Lawrence River. How does this image reflect that objective?

Marie-Claude Chamois

1656–1705

dowry: money a woman brings to a marriage — an old custom

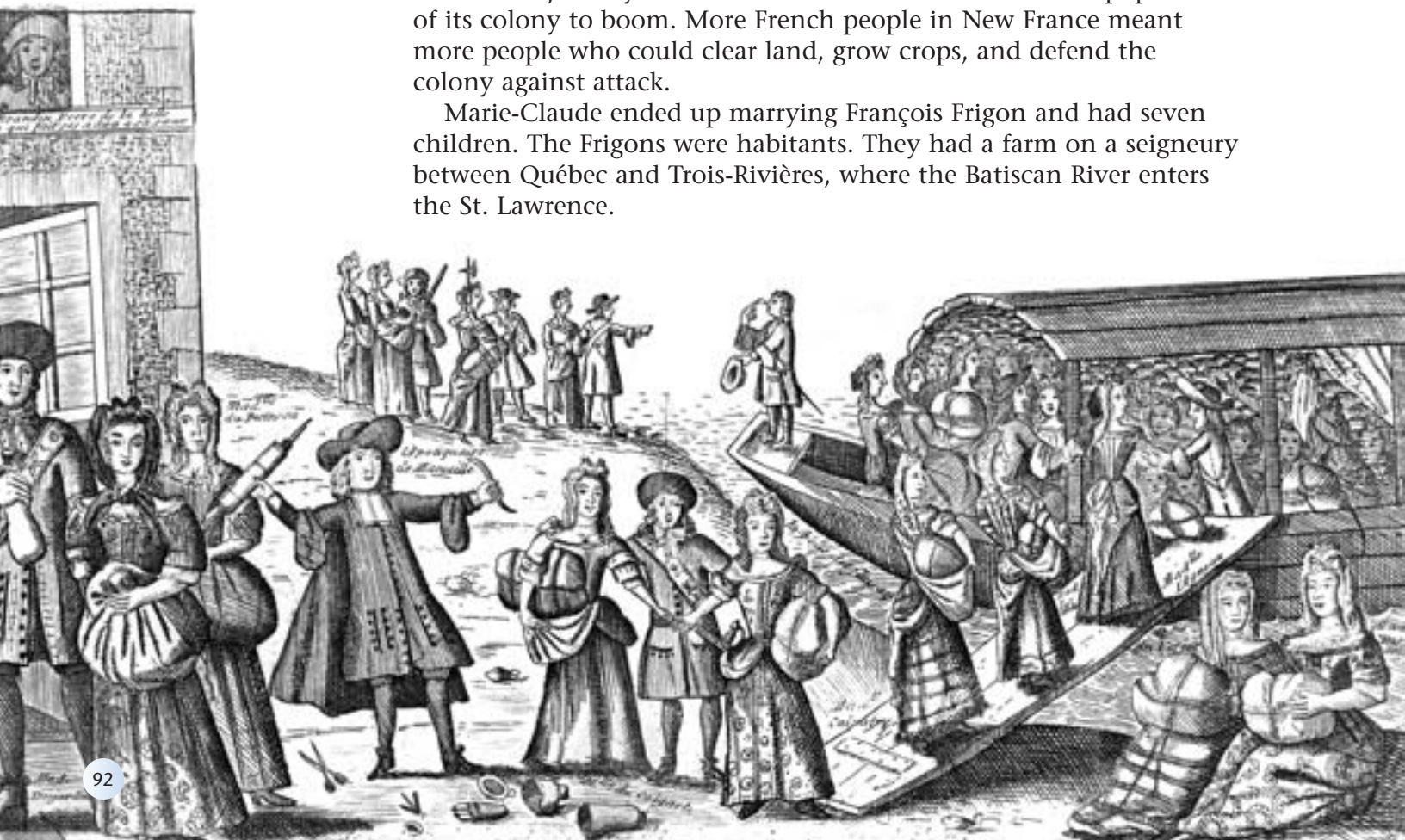
Marie-Claude Chamois, alone and fourteen years old, wonders what her new life will hold. She can see the fortifications of Québec, towering from the cliff over the wide river below, as her ship slides towards the dock. Weeks ago, she had left the squalor of Paris, without so much as a goodbye to her mother. She may regret that some day, but she's not thinking about that now. She's worrying about where she will sleep tonight, where she will find a meal, and where and when she will find a good husband.

This illustration shows some *filles du roi* preparing to board a ship bound for New France. What challenges do you think they will face in their new home?

Marie-Claude Chamois came to New France as a *fille du roi* — a “daughter of the King.” Like many destitute or orphaned girls in Paris, she had found shelter with a religious order, or in a government institution for the needy. Louis XIV, the King of France, offered these girls a fresh start in New France, as wives to the soldiers and other men making a living there.

The king provided Marie-Claude with a **dowry** and covered the cost of her journey across the Atlantic. France wanted the population of its colony to boom. More French people in New France meant more people who could clear land, grow crops, and defend the colony against attack.

Marie-Claude ended up marrying François Frigon and had seven children. The Frigons were habitants. They had a farm on a seigneurie between Québec and Trois-Rivières, where the Batiscan River enters the St. Lawrence.



They cleared the land themselves, which was a huge and difficult task. They cut down the trees with axes, and used oxen to pull the stumps. Only after they had cleared the land could they plant crops and raise animals — provide the food they needed themselves, and that supplied the growing villages of New France.

The Frigons had what they needed to live modestly, but decently, for their time — a house they built from rough-hewn timber, a barn and a stable, two oxen, four cows, three pigs, and a few sheep and goats. They had seven chairs, a pine table and even a small feather mattress, according the records that still exist today in the parish of Batiscan.

Like other habitants, the Frigons learned about their new land as they built their new lives with their own hands. Foods of the Innu and Kichesiprini, such as blueberries, maple sugar, and moose, became part of their diet. They adopted First Nations clothing and technology — mittens, snowshoes and toboggans — designed to cope with the harsh winters of Canada.

For their part, the Innu and Kichesiprini valued French products, such as metal pots and knives, cloth, guns and ammunition. Habitants and First Nations often traded with each other.

Marie-Claude and François Frigon worked and they endured — the first of many generations of Frigons who lived along the St. Lawrence.

What aspects of habitant life can you glean from this painting created by Cornelius Krieghoff (1815–1872)?



IDENTITY THEN AND NOW

Les Frigons: Still Here

An Interview with Gérald Frigon

Marie-Claude and François Frigon became the ancestors of more than three thousand descendants who now live in North America. Chances are, if you meet someone with the last name Frigon, they can trace their roots to New France, and to the *premier rang* — “first row” — ribbon farm fronting the St. Lawrence that Marie-Claude and François cleared and tilled.

The Frigon family has reunions every five years at Batiscan, to celebrate their heritage and culture, more than three centuries old. Gérald Frigon, president of the *Association des familles Frigon*, says as many as two hundred fifty people attend the grand family meetings.

“The reunions give us a chance to meet and exchange stories about the lives of our ancestors. We laugh, we eat and we talk about the future. And we remember.

“We are amazed at the courage of these pioneers who had only their two hands and a few rudimentary tools to build a home and a future for their children. It’s not hard to cut trees and build houses today. You can do it very quickly. But with only an axe, a hand saw, a hammer and a few knives, it was quite a different matter. And the trees were big three hundred years ago!”

Monsieur Frigon marvels at how historic documents and shared stories have helped him know and feel connected to his ancestors. “I feel a great deal of pride in being a descendant of such courageous people.”



The Frigons of today know exactly where their ancestors started life in Canada. The top photo shows the site of the original farm at Batiscan. It was taken at the Frigon family reunion in 2005. Two people have dressed up to portray Marie-Claude and François Frigon.

You can still see the imprint of seigneuries on farms in Québec, as the bottom photo of the Richelieu River shows.

RESPOND

Collective, or group, identity comes from sharing a language and culture. It also comes from sharing a history. What aspects of history are important to the identity of the Frigon family? Find at least two examples.