Chateau Richer

New France

Since the 1600's, the king of France sent people to what is now called the province of Quebec in Canada. This colony was called New France. The people from France settled near water and usually in areas where First Nations people lived. After the end of the French and Indian War in 1760, New France was controlled by the British from the United Kingdom.

The Seigneury, the Seigneur and the Habitant

All farms in New France, which was later called Lower Canada under the British, were organized into a seigneury. It was a large block of land that was split into smaller blocks for the farmers that lived there. The farmers of the seigneury had to give some of their crops and some time working to a person called the seigneur. A seigneur was the head of the seigneury. A farmer was called a habitant.

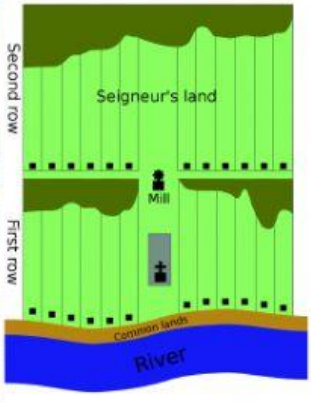
The Seigneury of Chateau-Richer

Today we are going to talk about a seigneury called Chateau-Richer. Chateau-Richer is close to Quebec City. Since 1640, French settlers started to live in this area because there was good land to farm and many animals to trap. The farmers of Chateau-Richer sold their furs and extra crops to trade for things they needed.

Under the French and then later under the British, Chateau-Richer was a successful farm community. At first the farmers, or habitants, learned how to grow or make foods, such as corn or maple syrup, from the First Nations people who lived nearby. Habitant farms were usually long narrow strips next to the river. The farmers lived close to each other. In the painting below, you can see the farm houses all near the water. The habitants worked together to clear land, build farm houses, and other important structures, such as grist mills.



A painting of Chateau-Richer around 1790



A view of a seigneury from the sky

Habitant Houses

Habitant homes were made out out logs. The roofs were very steep because of the heavy winter snow in early Canada. Most homes had a big stone fireplace for heating and for cooking. People slept on beds with straw mattresses. Floors were made of dirt or wood, and furniture was made from wood. Food was kept cold in a root cellar because there were no refrigerators. Unlike modern houses, habitant homes did not have conveniences such as running water, electricity or indoor toilets.



Inside view of a habitant home in the 1800's

The Church

The Catholic church was important in the life of a habitant. The church was a place to meet neighbours and attend services, such as masses, weddings and funerals. The habitant farmers gave some of their crops or money to support the church.

Daily Life in Chateau-Richer

The habitant or farmers worked hard to survive. They had to grow most of their food, make their clothing and chop wood for heating and cooking. Crops were planted in the spring and harvested together in the autumn.

The Roles in the Seigneury

Everyone worked hard in a seigneury but men, women, children and the seigneur had different roles or jobs.



Here is a picture of a seigneur, Gabriel Elzéar Taschereau, around 1780.

The Seigneur

Here is an example of one seigneur. This is a picture of Gabriel Elzéar Taschereau, who was the seigneur of Sainte-Marie-de-la-Nouvelle-Beauce in the late 1780's. He was also a politician, lawyer and judge. Look at how he was dressed. His clothing was fancy and he wore a wig.

The seigneur was the owner of all the land in the seigneury. He was usually richer than the habitants and could read and write.

Here are some of his jobs: He ran the seigneury and organized the farmers to build roads and buildings, such as the church and grist mills. The seigneur had a public role too. He would be a judge for the local court and collect fees for such things as the use of the grain mill or the right to fish in the river.



Here is a picture of habitants in the 1800's. Look at their clothing. It was simple and practical.

Habitant Men

Habitant men farmed, fished and trapped animals for food and for trading. They cut wood for cooking and heating. Each year the men had to work a few days on a the seigneur's farm and help build around the community. To pay to use their land, they gave the seigneur some of their crops and fish every year.

Habitant Women

Habitant women cared for the children. They prepared food by cooking and baking. Habitant women also looked after the farm. They raised animals, such as chicken and pigs. If they had a cow, they would milk it. They planted crops. They also spun wool and made clothing for their families.

Habitant Children

Habitant children had many chores. They might help the family by weed the garden, collecting eggs, picking berries, or getting firewood. Boys usually helped their fathers while girls helped the mothers.

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Pick the best answer.

Who first sent people to New France?

Which country took over New France after 1760?

What was the head of a seigneury called?

What was a farmer in a seigneury called?

What was the usual shape of a habitant farm in a seigneury?

Out of what materials were habitant homes mostly made?

Why were the roofs of habitant homes steep?

Who organized the building of roads and grist mills in a seigneury?

Who usually hunted and trapped in a seigneury?

Who milked cows and made clothing in a seigneury?