



France and the Catholic Church also placed a high priority on converting First Nations to Catholicism. This painting, by Claude François around 1670, shows “France” as a woman who is teaching the faith to a First Nations man. What challenges of coexistence might this situation pose?

New France Who’s Who

The Catholic Church and Clergy

The Catholic Church played an important role in the identity of New France.

In Europe, divisions between Catholics and Protestants had become deep and bitter. People of the two faiths discriminated against each other. For example, Britain was a Protestant country and had laws preventing Catholics from serving in government. Measures such as this made people more aware of the connection between their faith and identity.

The Jesuits — a Catholic religious order — formed a key part of the presence of the Catholic Church in New France. The Jesuits first came to New France in the early 1600s. They established missions among the Mi’kmaq, the Kichesiprini, the Haudenosaunee and the Ouendat to convert these nations to the Catholic faith. Many Jesuits learned and documented First Nations languages.

For forty years (1632–1672), the Jesuits supplied important information about New France and their work through the *Relations*, a sort of annual report. A Jesuit, Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, wrote the first history of New France: *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle-France*. The Jesuits’ writings, written from a European perspective, contain a wealth of information about First Nations peoples and their ways of life in the 1600s and 1700s.

The church also established schools, hospitals and orphanages in New France, and played an important role in governing the colony. The clergy were among a small group of educated people who could read and write. Many people consulted them before making important decisions, including decisions that affected the politics and economy of the colony.

LANGUAGE LIVES!

“T’was in the moon of wintertime, when all the birds had fled.”
Can you sing the tune that goes with the words of this well-known Christmas carol?

These words are a translation. Father Jean de Brébeuf, a Jesuit priest and missionary in New France, wrote the original carol in 1643, in the language of the Ouendat.