



Quebec





Quebec

A Historical Geography

SERGE COURVILLE

Translated by Richard Howard



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Preface and Acknowledgments

Traditionally, study of the past has been left to the historians. Geographers have been involved in human relationships with the land. Only recently have they tried to understand how these relationships arose and why they have lasted or changed over time. Here is the role of the historical geographer: a practitioner of political and then regional and cultural geography, who has evolved a discipline of his own, dedicated to the geographies of the past. Its primary aim is to enrich human geography through a better grasp of the conjunctures that have presided over the shaping of current geographic realities.

Pinpointing past geographic experience is no easy task. What we call “the past” merely reflects our idea of time, filtered through the concepts, values, and knowledge systems of our present. Even with the best tools, we can grasp only fragments of the subtle and complex processes of human activity. And since historical geographers are few, this immense task falls in part to other disciplines whose views and concerns will not necessarily coincide with those of geography.

But what is this geographer’s view? It can take a number of forms, sometimes close to history and the humanities – archeology, anthropology, ethnology, demography, sociology, and so on – and sometimes akin to natural sciences like geology, geomorphology, biogeography, pedology, and climatology. Though seeking a unified view of reality, it tends to work relationally at various levels to explain the complexity of phenomena, their orders of magnitude, and temporal and spatial interactions. This is why we often see the geographer look first at big entities, pondering their long-term development, then focus on the smallest to pinpoint their historical and geographic contexts. The geographer may also move on to more local analyses to flesh out general concerns.

This approach features ideas of environment, landscape, living arrangements, and way of life. We also find ideas of organization and structure, concentration and dispersal, density and diversity, duration and change, and trade and traffic equally suited to studying old realities and cycles. And since human creations arise from actions and relations stemming from the ideas, knowledge, and images of an era, they also become ways of perceiving and explaining past geographic realities.

A relational discipline, historical geography looks at all relations in a given space-time between humankind and its natural, political, economic, social, and cultural environments. Yet like human geography, it looks less at humankind as such than at civilizational streams arising from human action that shape the territory. Since these streams are constantly

evolving, the historical geographer's concern becomes one of explaining these changes over time for a fuller grasp of the originality of the age-old experiences of human societies and, consequently, their cultural development.

Here is the viewpoint of this book. As a synthesis, it offers a spacious vision of the broad cycles of Quebec's development from its origins to the present. Without retracing the steps of other books, including the *Atlas historique du Québec*, though sometimes relying on them, it offers an overview of all stages in the story of the territory of Quebec without scholarly notes but with enough references to honour the writers who inspired me. And since this synthesis is based on my work on Quebec, it includes some earlier efforts with still unpublished texts or excerpts to enrich and give my presentation more consistency. References to my work are duly noted throughout the text.

The preparation of this book has required assistance from a number of people who generously reread early versions of my text and helped to illustrate them. I wish first to express my thanks to Dominique Malack, a historian and master's candidate in geography at Laval University, for her wise comments on behalf of a younger generation less familiar with this material. I also thank the staff at Laval's historical geography lab and translator Richard Howard, who fine-tuned my thoughts, as did my UBC Press muse, Darcy Cullen. Finally, I wish to express my thanks to the Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche (FCAR), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and Laval University for their financial assistance to my research over nearly twenty years. Without that assistance, this book would not have been possible.

Introduction

This is a work of historical geography that sets out to show how the territory now known as Quebec took shape from its beginnings. This is history, but a somewhat special history, one that follows Quebec through its succession of stages and forms.

This history began several thousand years ago, when the first human groups reached the shores of the old Laurentian sea. It has continued to our own time, through a series of long cycles in which original societies developed and wove a range of relationships with their environment. These relationships reflected various ways of occupying and organizing space, which overlapped and combined over time to form the complex whole we call Quebec. For more than a legal area enclosed by boundaries, the territory of Quebec is primarily a cultural construct. Like the land itself, it is a succession of horizons of development, temporal layers that are variable and variously reflected in the collective consciousness, yet have ultimately given depth to Quebec's historical experience.

The first layer was Aboriginal. Long isolated from Europe, it did not impact on European geography until the Middle Ages, through the legends of Irish monks and the Norse. Then came real and brutal contact. In less than a century, entire populations were gone, victims less of the Spanish conquistadors' war-like greed than of microbial reaction to the first explorers. In the early seventeenth century, a colony was founded and described as "New" France, though Canadian living conditions made this a very different reality. The original geometric landscape that recalled the state's leadership role in the creation of living space was soon overlaid by another and much more fluid geography shown on no map. It expressed all the richness of the relationships forged here among family, farming, and the ownership of land. The result was a mosaic of domestic imprints that formed the foundation of the French St. Lawrence colony and made it the dense cultural hotbed that survived the British conquest of 1759-60.

Thereafter, the old French colony became the core of Britain's North American empire. The original settler population soared while thousands of newcomers, this time from the British Isles and northern Europe, settled in and around the St. Lawrence Valley. Quebec saw its frontiers stretch from Labrador to the Great Lakes, and from the border with the United States to the southern edge of Rupert's Land. Yet the American War of Independence and the arrival of the Loyalists soon changed this picture. In 1791, the province was split into two separate entities, Lower and Upper Canada, and soon everything came together to make Quebec a special society, not only in its roots, language, laws, and religion,

but also in its ways of being, doing, and thinking. Bound to the rest of Canada by the 1841 Act of Union and then the confederal pact of 1867, this society proceeded on its course, true to its traditions yet increasingly receptive to influences from outside.

Quebec's emergence in this period was both distinct yet comparable to those of adjacent societies, with growing pains but also with significant growth in trade, which benefited from urban and village development and the rise of rural industry, yet could not accommodate the demographic outpourings of the countryside. One context was passing while another settled in, intensifying the long rural exodus that began with the nineteenth century and now sent hundreds of thousands of Quebecers out of the province, bound mainly for the US. Reacting to this hemorrhage, the political and religious elites of that era called for the agricultural settlement of the highlands. Inspired by the words of British colonizers concocted to lure immigrants to imperial colonies of settlement, they made the highlands a place of new beginnings where an entire society could enshrine its identity. The territory was enlarged, and new regions opened up for settlement, often under harsh conditions in contrast with the comfortable lowlands.

The twentieth century opened with a surge of optimism. Quebec's borders were extended to Ungava, cities grew, and industry diversified, ushering in an era of prosperity that was clouded by the First World War and then the Great Depression of the 1930s. Following the Second World War, Quebec entered a new phase of growth, led this time by expansion in the mining and forest industries with massive hydroelectric power projects and brand-new towns. After 1960, everything accelerated. The role of government increased, laws were passed to channel and support Quebec's economic and social development, cities exploded, the countryside was transformed, and the North was engulfed in mining and hydroelectric activity that made this territory an extension of the old Quebec but stirred new tensions with Aboriginal peoples. The troubles of the 1980s and the long 1990s recession cast these advances in doubt.

Today finds Quebec at a turning point in its history. The nationalist outbreaks of the past century have returned – refreshed, to be sure, but still not commanding a popular majority. Is this a mere reaction to Ottawa's centralizing plans? Or fear of the political and economic ramifications of a Quebec "separation" that would reduce its boundaries and resources to confront market globalization? A limited but persistent solidarity with the rest of Canada? A feeling that the future lies within large political and economic formations? The hope of an eventual success with the social union? Or, as some mischievously claim, the result of centuries of colonization that have left a knife-like fear in the Quebec soul? All of the above, no doubt. And since the Québécois have always also harboured a certain suspicion of their political and religious elites while habitually idealizing their past, a solution seems ever farther off. For it is one thing to wish for Quebec sovereignty but another to bring it into being. This requires both knowledge of one's past and the confidence of self-criticism – the indispensable conditions, to my mind, for one day, in a new set of circumstances, tackling Quebec's destiny problem.

PART 1

The Territory



1

Historical Depth

The land of Quebec, more than a geographic territory behind boundaries, is a historical depth resonating to a distant past. As it exists today, it describes an enormous parallelogram with dense settlement only in the south. Perched on the northeastern North American continent, it now has more than 7.5 million residents. Its characteristics are those of a new country, still largely ruled by nature, though humankind has managed to tame it as a living space. Long settled when the first Europeans came, Quebec did not emerge as an established entity until the early sixteenth century, part of the immensity of New France that proclaimed French ambitions in America. Limited initially to ribbons of settlement along the St. Lawrence, it spread after the Conquest to encompass the entire Great Lakes region, then shrank to its Laurentian heartland again before expanding by degrees into new and more northerly territories.

General Characteristics

School texts have already taught us much about the territory of Quebec. The important thing to remember is that this is a northern land, very big indeed, with a diversity of features. Geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin ([1975] 1980) has eloquently described Quebec's "northernness." Anyone hardened to its winters knows their cruel pressures, even worse for our forebears, who lacked our resources to oppose them. Low temperatures bring heavy snowfalls, punctuated by rainy days that turn thoroughfares into skating rinks. In January 1998, southwestern Quebec was memorable in this respect: rain fell for several days, bringing down a thousand hydroelectric pylons along with their power lines. More than 1.4 million hydro customers were cut off for weeks on end. The areas most affected were Montérégie and Montreal's south shore, but others hit hard included Montreal's archipelago and north shore, the Laurentian foothills, and the Outaouais, where the damage reached the Ontario side.

A first myth, then, is the ability to adjust to winter. It happened, of course, but at what cost! The pain of early winterings attests to this. And though the season seems under better control nowadays, it remains a challenge, especially during major cold spells, February thaws, and the fearsome storms of March. The summers scarcely put these out of mind: hot and humid, they are never very long and are often struck by late or early frosts that

cut the growing season unexpectedly. No wonder Quebec's agroclimatic zones seem to favour farming and forestry only in the south (Figure 1.1): everything here breathes abruptness – winter frosts, often broken by thaws, followed by quick, overwhelming growth in May, then summer budding everywhere, and, soon, the phosphorescent shades of autumn.

We say that Quebec is three times the size of France or equal to forty Switzerlands. Its territory covers 1,667,926 square kilometres, excluding Labrador but including land under federal jurisdiction, viewed as provincial by Quebec, and a 171,526 square-kilometre marine environment. Quebec spans nearly two thousand kilometres north-south and nearly sixteen hundred kilometres east-west at its widest extent. It has nearly 3 percent of the planet's freshwater reserves. It also has ten thousand kilometres of borders. This vast space makes Quebec the biggest of Canada's provinces – even at the 1.5 million square-kilometre area recognized by Ottawa – and the country's second-biggest political formation after Nunavut, created in 1999 from the Northwest Territories. Yet it is only partly inhabited. Except for northern Aboriginal settlements and a few North Shore communities, the population is massed in the lowlands of the St. Lawrence River and its main tributaries, and the fringes of the Laurentians and Appalachians, though penetrating quite deeply in some places. Elsewhere, settlement is sparser, spread out as in Abitibi and Témiscamingue or clustered around mines or bodies of water as in Chibougamau and Forestville.

Three major physiographic complexes sum up the main features of the face of Quebec: in the north, the Canadian Shield, its southern range the Laurentian terrain, a froth of lakes and rivers; to the south, the St. Lawrence Valley, much broader in the Montreal area and south of Lac Saint-Pierre than around Quebec City and down to the Gulf; still farther south, the Appalachians, stretching in long parallel folds from the border with Ontario and the United States to the Gaspé Peninsula.

Cold, immense, simple – these describe Quebec's geography, which has many other, more local features: the gash of the Saguenay, the basin of Lac Saint-Jean, the broad Abitibi plain, and the Mingan archipelago, not to mention all the micro-landforms shaped over time, which fascinate by their sheer diversity. These landscapes are better explored by road or water than by air, which affords a broader view but leaves much hidden. Immortalized by painters and writers, they define the settings in which Quebec society has evolved.

Legal Evolution

The notion of confining peoples within fixed and stable territorial boundaries is relatively recent (Brossard et al. 1970, 7ff.). In antiquity, for example, borders were areas, and boundaries between civilizations were large spaces left unpopulated. Only private estates were marked off. Even Roman *limes* eluded definition, like the Great Wall of China: these merely severed what was Roman or Chinese from what was not. In the Middle Ages, the border concept was still vague. It would not coalesce until the sixteenth century, in order to keep

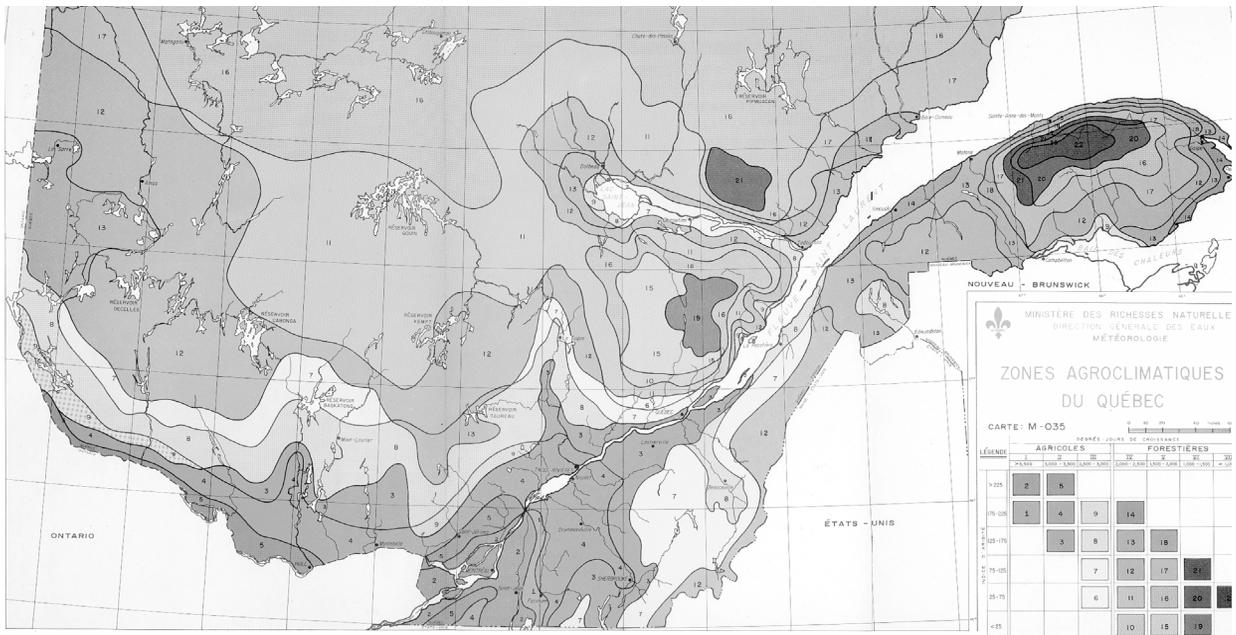


FIGURE 1.1 Quebec's agroclimatic zones. In the south, Quebec's agroclimatic zones favour farming and forestry.

Source: Quebec, Ministère des richesses naturelles (1971).

pace with the new mathematics and map-making, and reflect the rise of the state and national identity. Territory then ceased to be property and became a tool of authority, describing the physical bounds within which sovereignty was exercised. These borders could be natural or conventional but were always relative and fluid. In Quebec, it would take some time to anchor the concept of territory as we define it today. This coincided with the arrival of the whites, who superimposed it on the Aboriginals' geography.

Under French Rule

Under the French, the colony then known as "Canada" was limited to the St. Lawrence lowlands. It did not include Acadia, or Labrador, or the king's posts, separate entities that were recognized as such. Its territory reached from Pointe de Vaudreuil, immediately above Montreal Island, to Les Éboulements on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, and from Châteauguay to Rimouski on the south shore, though to a depth of only a few dozen kilometres.

Beyond this clearly delimited space, looking west and south, lay the High Country of the Great Lakes Basin and Louisiana – Haute-Louisiane or Illinois country, with a few major centres like Vincennes, Cahokias, Nouvelle-Chartres, and Kaskaskias, and Basse-Louisiane

about a thousand kilometres farther south, with just one major centre in New Orleans. The land stretching westward from the Great Lakes – the “Western Sea” – was a vastness still largely unexplored.

As long as France governed the St. Lawrence Valley, settlement was kept to thin shore-line strips. Only after the British Conquest of 1759-60 were the borders of this territory expanded and then amended as a result of a series of decisions that laid the foundations of Canada’s constitutional history.¹

The Royal Proclamation of 1763

Under the Treaty of Paris of 10 February 1763, the various possessions France ceded to Britain included “Canada, with all its dependencies, as well as the island of Cape Breton, and all the other islands and coasts in the gulf and river of St. Lawrence, and in general, every thing that depends on the said countries, lands, islands, and coasts, with the sovereignty, property, possession, and all rights acquired by treaty, or otherwise” (quoted in Brossard et al. 1970, 52-53).

On 7 October of the same year, a proclamation by King George III established the borders of what would thereafter be the Government of Quebec in these terms:

Bounded on the Labrador Coast by the River St. John, and from thence by a Line drawn from the Head of that River through the Lake St. John, to the South end of the Lake Nipissim; from whence the said Line, crossing the River St. Lawrence, and the Lake Champlain, in 45. Degrees of North Latitude, passes along the High Lands which divide the Rivers that empty themselves into the said River St. Lawrence from those which fall into the Sea; and also along the North Coast of the Baye des Chaleurs, and the Coast of the Gulph of St. Lawrence to Cape Rosieres, and from thence crossing the Mouth of the River St. Lawrence by the West End of the Island of Anticosti, terminates at the aforesaid River of St. John.²

Generally speaking, this proclamation recognized, though in slightly greater depth, the territory of the old Laurentian colony. Two later acts, however, would give new dimensions to this territory.

The Quebec Act of 1774 and the Constitutional Act of 1791

By the Quebec Act of 20 May 1774, the colony, now British, was called the “Province of Quebec” and extended from latitude 45° north to the lands of the Hudson’s Bay Company ceded to Britain by the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which history has generally shown as a vast entity covering all of northern Quebec, though some jurists, including Henri Brun

(1992, 939ff.), would limit them to a more riparian position. On the east, this colony encompassed the Labrador coast and gulf islands, and, on the west, the Great Lakes Basin and Ohio Valley. Specifically, the province would be bounded

on the South by a Line from the Bay of Chaleurs. along the High Lands which divide the Rivers that empty themselves into the River Saint Lawrence from those which fall into the Sea. to a Point in forty-five Degrees of Northern Latitude. on the Eastern Bank of the River Connecticut. keeping the same Latitude directly West. through the Lake Champlain, until, in the same Latitude. it meets the River Saint Lawrence: from thence up the Eastern Bank of the said River to the Lake Ontario; thence through the Lake Ontario. and the River commonly called Niagara and thence along by the Eastern and South-eastern Bank of Lake Erie. following the said Bank, until the same shall be intersected by the Northern Boundary, granted by the Charter of the Province of Pennsylvania. in case the same shall be so intersected: and from thence along the said Northern and Western Boundaries of the said Province, until the said Western Boundary strike the Ohio: But in case the said Bank of the said Lake shall not be found to be so intersected, then following the said Bank until it shall arrive at that Point of the said Bank which shall be nearest to the North-western Angle of the said Province of Pennsylvania, and thence by a right Line, to the said North-western Angle of the said Province; and thence along the Western Boundary of the said Province, until it strike the River Ohio; and along the Bank of the said River, Westward, to the Banks of the Mississippi, and Northward to the Southern Boundary of the Territory granted to the Merchants Adventurers of England, trading to Hudson's Bay ... [and the Labrador coast, Magdalen Islands, and Anticosti Island].³

Necessitated by unrest in the American colonies, this act enlarged Quebec to include the old High Country, where the conqueror recognized Aboriginal jurisdiction, which France never had. Primarily to assert the British presence in these lands, the act drew borders for the Province of Quebec that remained unchanged until the Loyalists arrived in the wake of the American War of Independence. Reaching a British colony, the Loyalists refused subjection to seigneurial tenure and French civil law and called for a separate district under English law. Their demands led to the Constitutional Act of 1791 and the creation of Upper Canada, the future province of Ontario.

The main changes to Quebec's borders occurred in the west. In 1788, there was a plan in London to use a rhumb line northwest from the southwest corner of the Vaudreuil seigneurie (Vaugeois 1992). However, the Constitutional Act of 1791 used a more complex line from the north shore of Lac Saint-François to the cove east of Bodet Point, then along the western boundaries of the Vaudreuil and Rigaud seigneuries, including the parcel of land behind the latter that would become a township (Vaugeois 1992). From there, it would follow the Ottawa River to Lake Timiskaming, then head north to the edge of the country generally known as Canada or, as was later claimed, the watershed.

In fact, the proclamation did not deal with borders (Tousignant 1971). The line between Lower and Upper Canada was established by an order-in-council of the same year (24 August 1791, Appendix C of the document). This order had Lower Canada extending much farther north, “from the head of Lake Tomiscanning (Temiscaming, or Temiscamingue) to the boundary line of Hudson’s Bay” (quoted in MacNeil 1982, 22; Brun 1992, 935). The same definition was used by the Imperial Commission of 30 March 1838 that appointed Lord Durham Governor General of all the British provinces in North America: the line separating Lower and Upper Canada ran north from the head of Lake Timiskaming “until it reaches the shore of Hudson’s Bay” (quoted in MacNeil 1982, 23). This raised the whole problem of the southern edge of Rupert’s Land, transferred to the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1670 by the English Crown.

Rupert’s Land

The most generally and long-held opinion on Rupert’s Land was that it encompassed the whole drainage system of Hudson Bay and its pendant, James Bay. Yet the vague terms of the 1670 Bay Company Charter suggest instead that this grant covered only a coastal territory, subject to other jurisdictions:

And by these presentes for us our heires and successors do give grant and confirme unto the said Governor and Company and their successors the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas Streights Bayes Rivers Lakes Creekes and Soundes in whatsoever Latitude they shall bee that lye within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudsons Streights together with all the Landes and Territoryes upon the Countryes Coastes and confynes of the Seas Bayes Lakes Rivers Creekes and Soundes aforesaid that are not already actually possessed by or granted to any of our Subjectes or possessed by the Subjectes of any other Christian Prince or State. (quoted in MacNeil 1982, 6)

What were these other jurisdictions? Back in 1609, the London Company had secured a large part of the North American continent with the Virginia Charter. Similarly, in 1628, William Alexander obtained all lands within fifty leagues of the St. Lawrence drainage basin. Since, however, British holdings in “New France, Acadia and Canada” were handed back to France by the 1632 Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the only real difficulty was with the French possessions and their northern border.

There is no doubt that the territory was already known to France, as contemporary maps tell us (Robitaille 1989; Warkentin and Ruggles 1970, 28-35). Proclamations had already been issued, for example, by Father Druillette and the Sieur de la Vallière, who in 1662 claimed the “Baie du Norde” for France from the shores of Lake Mistassini. Proclamation, however, does not necessarily mean occupation. That region’s first trading post

was established by Médard Chouart Des Groseilliers and Pierre-Esprit Radisson in 1668-69. Turned down by the French authorities, they approached the English with a proposal for a northern trade route. Seemingly, no more was needed to establish the French claim. And when France and England went to war again, the region became a scene of rivalry.

By the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick, England ceded its claim on the territory to France. Commissioners were appointed to review the claims of both monarchs and define their respective holdings. Their work went no further. However, in 1700, the Hudson's Bay Company, though maintaining its claims to Rupert's Land, suggested a compromise: the southern edge of its territory would follow the Albany River west from James Bay and the Rupert River to the east. The next year saw this boundary moved north to the "Canuse" River, probably our Eastmain River.

The issue was still not settled when a new war broke out in 1702. By the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, France ceded all its Hudson Bay holdings to England. In light of the Ryswick Treaty and later proposals, this transfer did not actually enlarge the Hudson's Bay Company's domain, but upheld the 1670 Charter that limited these holdings to territories not already possessed by other Christian princes (MacNeil 1982, 24; Brun 1992, 933). So England, not the Hudson's Bay Company, became their owner.

This was echoed by the 1791 order-in-council extending the border between Upper and Lower Canada to Hudson Bay – or in fact to its southern arm, James Bay. The measure's full significance emerged later on, when the time came to describe the northern boundary of Quebec. Taking possession of Rupert's Land in 1870, Canada wanted to use the watershed. As the issue had ceased to be international with the Conquest, the land between the watershed and the Eastmain River unquestionably belonged to Britain, which had seen no point in relinquishing it to the Hudson's Bay Company – especially since, in the period 1713-63, that company had been unable to prevent France from strengthening its positions in the continental interior.

This matter was not resolved until the late nineteenth century, when, contrary to the Ontario case, the Rupert's Land border in Quebec was subject to an agreement and not a court decision (MacNeil 1982). In fact, it would not be settled until 1912, when Ottawa ceded the rest of Rupert's Land to Quebec.

From Lower Canada to Quebec

In 1809, an imperial statute again attached Labrador to the Government of Newfoundland, along with Anticosti and other offshore islands – though not the Magdalens, which remained with Lower Canada. In 1825, however, much of this territory was restored to Quebec, which saw its jurisdiction extended to the part of Labrador south of the 52nd parallel, except for a point east of Blanc-Sablon Bay, some nearby islands, and Anticosti, which was not returned to Quebec until later on.

Except for these transfers and a few clarifications in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, which established the border with the United States, an 1851 imperial act establishing the border with New Brunswick, and a United Canada statute of 1860 defining the boundary between Upper and Lower Canada, Quebec's borders went unchanged until the late nineteenth century. When Quebec became a member of the Canadian confederation in 1867, it joined with the territory it had at that time, as had occurred in 1840 when the Act of Union brought it into the combined province as Canada East.

Change came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the return of Hudson's Bay Company territorial rights to the British Crown and their transfer to the new Canadian federation. In 1898, Quebec secured all the territory from the Eastmain River and the shores of James Bay to the Hamilton River and along that river to Anse-Sablon Bay, though it lost much of the northeastern territory recognized by the Quebec Act of 1774. In 1912, it won the remaining former Hudson's Bay Company lands from Ottawa as far as Ungava, Hudson, and James bays, though without the adjacent islands, which remained under federal jurisdiction. Not everything was settled by this expansion, though, from the legal standpoint, Quebec's territorial integrity was assured. The only matter left outstanding was the thorny issue of Labrador.

Labrador

The oldest document to mention this area after the Conquest, the 1763 Treaty of Paris, attached the Labrador coast to Newfoundland. Afterwards, the Quebec Act of 1774 shifted the region to Quebec's jurisdiction. Then the 1809 act returned it to Newfoundland until it was shared with Quebec in 1825. The difficulty lay in defining what was covered by the expression "Labrador coast." The wording of the Treaty of Paris suggested an actual coast in the geographic sense of a strip of land where the continent met the sea. However, based on old maps, some writers felt this "coast" included all territory east of the watershed above latitude 52° north as regained by Quebec under the 1825 statute.

In 1927, the dispute reached the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, which opted for the watershed line. Quebec was thus deprived of a vast area of approximately 290,000 square kilometres. The issue has fuelled endless debate since then, with some seeing the Privy Council's decision as a mere opinion, while others find it binding on Quebec. In any case, when Newfoundland entered the Canadian confederation in 1949, the 1927 Privy Council ruling was used to establish the western border of the new province.

In 1966, the Quebec government created a Commission Studying the Territorial Integrity of Quebec chaired by the geographer and jurist Henri Dorion, known for his research on the Quebec-Newfoundland border (Dorion 1963). Tabled in 1967, the commission's report featured Labrador as a leading issue (Quebec 1967). Other issues involved the precise location of other boundaries, chiefly with Ontario and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence,

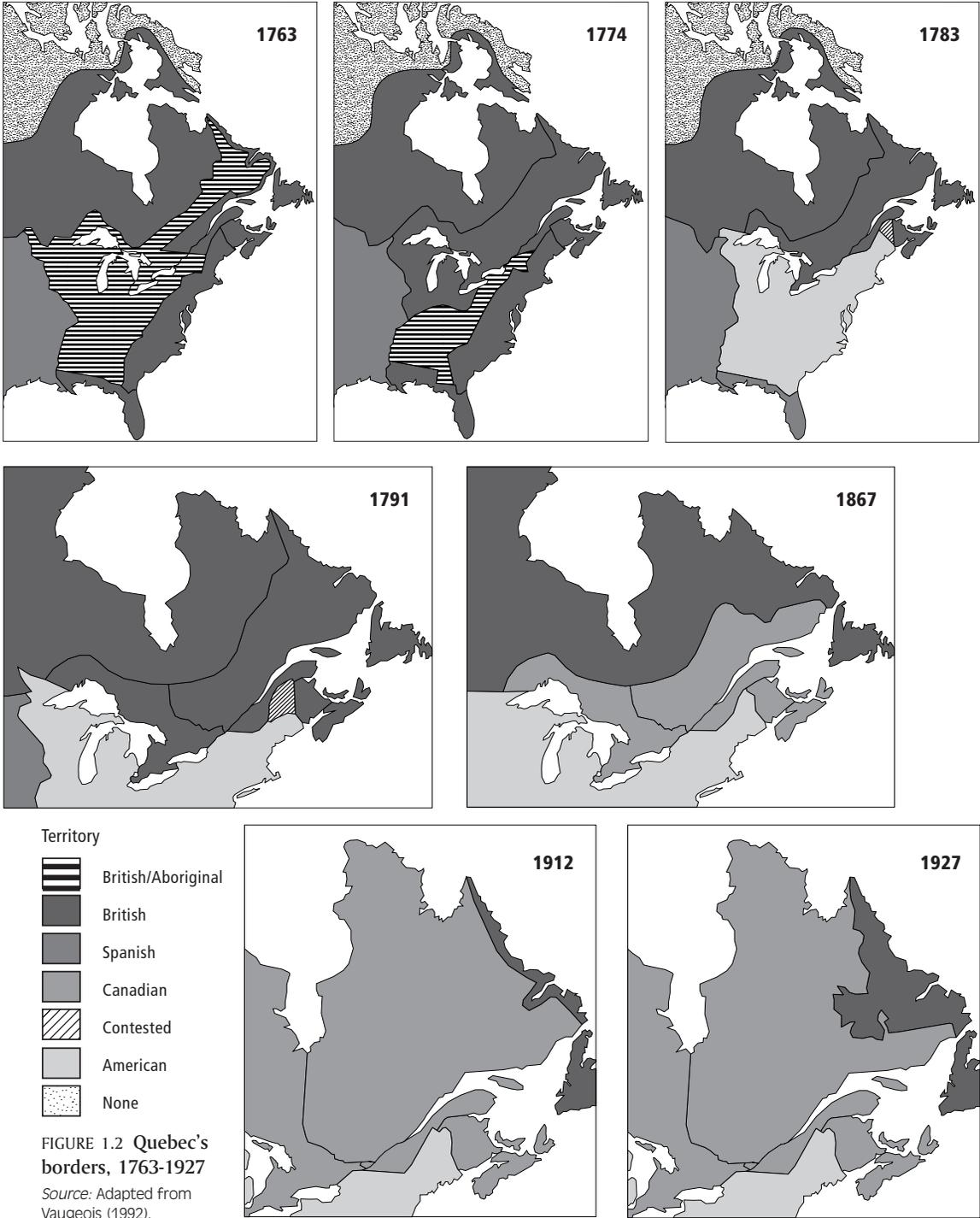
and Ottawa's territorial jurisdiction. For federal sites on Quebec soil are numerous indeed: parks, ports, airports, military camps and reserves, public buildings, and so on. Though Quebec's territorial integrity seems fairly cut and dried relative to the United States and other Canadian provinces, things are otherwise internally, where it remains subject to various federal encroachments.

The mere fact that the problem of Quebec's territorial integrity could be raised tells us that the land has shaped an identity over time. The Francophone population will entertain no doubt that Quebec extends to the shores of Ungava. And although they are prepared to compromise on Labrador, they are much less ready to do so on the old Rupert's Land territory, which is seen as belonging to Quebec even if resources have to be shared with Aboriginals. This view is not shared by the First Nations, who claim the territory as their own.

The problem reopened debate around the southern boundary of Rupert's Land. If this was the watershed, as had always been claimed, it confirmed the existence of an Aboriginal corridor in Quebec under the Royal Proclamation of 1763. That text clearly stated that the king wanted to preserve "for the use of the said Indians, all the Lands and Territories not included within the Limits of Our said Three new Governments [Quebec, East Florida, and West Florida], or within the Limits of the Territory granted to the Hudson's Bay Company."⁴ Since the proclamation also made this provision "for the present," and later maps of "Indian territory" placed that area more to the west and outside Quebec, the problem was less a matter of knowing who owned the territory between the watershed and the Eastmain River than of wondering why, in Canada's constitutional history, Quebec was refused full recognition of the border set out by the order-in-council of 1791.

Admittedly, the problem was more apparent than real, since in 1912 the entire northern territory was annexed to Quebec, which now extended from the Eastmain River to the shores of James and Hudson bays, Hudson Strait, and Ungava Bay, minus Labrador to latitude 52° north as agreed in the early nineteenth century. Yet, as Henri Brun (1992, 939) reminds us, "this question might become one of crucial legal significance should circumstances lead the courts to find that the territories annexed to Quebec after 1867 could be taken back." The province's northern boundary was established at the Eastmain River by an 1898 joint Quebec-Canada agreement, not a court decision that would have set out the parties' territorial entitlements. We may wonder, however, about the basis of such a decision, rejecting history as well as Canadian constitutional law and custom, which had accepted the territorial law-making power of federation members since 1867.

Whatever the case, the fact remains: more than a legal entity, Quebec territory has now become an issue for a people who, without fully occupying the space, at least in the sense of the land settlement advocated by the political and religious elites of the nineteenth century, have made it their framework for economic and social development. The process began with the French regime and the fur trade. It has continued since, with the development of forest, mining, and hydraulic resources, to become the symbolic extension of the Quebec reality.



Horizons of Development

Anyone looking at the face of Quebec will recognize this evolution. Yet another phenomenon is visible, involving the spatial coexistence of various forms of development, sometimes highly variable in age and echoing widely different historical eras. The Aboriginal villages in the shadows of Montreal and Quebec City, our rural concession-road grid, old urban industrial tracts, dormitory suburbs coalesced around old village cores, and recent industrial parks are all telling examples of this. The same contrasts can be seen in residential built form, where old structures jostle with the latest construction in different architectural styles, next to buildings of glass and concrete rising by roads and squares with names from a bygone age.

Unfolding over time, this diversity tells of all the transformations undergone by Quebec since its beginnings. It somehow conveys depths of history, reflecting a layered organization of Quebec territory, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict. And as the richness of these layers varies with locations, they leave a sense of different historical periods and meanings.

Two ideas emerge here. The first is of a succession of broad contexts or horizons of development (Courville 1985-86) in which shapes and relations define specific kinds of growth. The second is of transitions between these contexts, where initial shapes adjust to new influences moving through Quebec. This movement from one developmental context to another is anything but orderly or continuous over time. Sometimes slow, sometimes fast, its continuities and breaks extend or amend earlier balances. And since it is often accompanied by difficulties, mainly demographic, the movement becomes extremely important for defining collective behaviours that may or may not be consistent with this process in terms of the ideologies and images of the time.

Applied to the territorial study of Quebec, this process reveals four long developmental cycles, each punctuated by a transition with all the turmoil of a dawning new age. Each of these cycles or epochs has a specific population-resources ratio and original habitat forms (see Figure 1.3).

The first of these epochs is very old, harking back several millennia and forward to the early sixteenth century of our own era. It was characterized by scattered settlements and resources. This cycle had not one but several living areas, human settlements that differed in culture and way of life. The main activities were predatory, sometimes supplemented by meagre agriculture, its habitats limited to camps and villages that could attain impressive proportions.

The second cycle began with the earliest French settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley and continued to the mid-nineteenth century. Its horizon of development was based on the introduction of trading posts, the future colonial towns that supported settlement, and the clearing of new land for farming. As arable land was the main resource, the population was dispersed, though with a lowland concentration. The outcome was an original geography contrasting with the previous era.

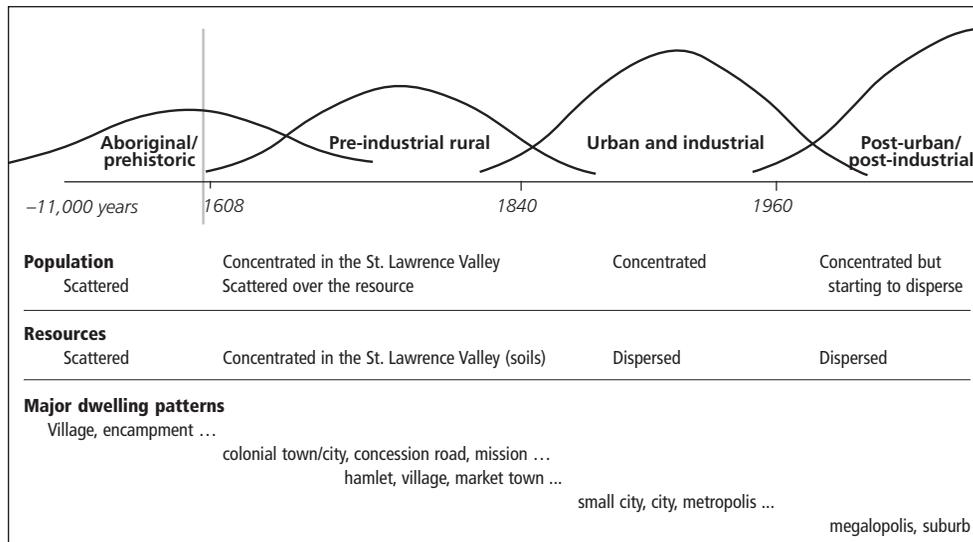


FIGURE 1.3 Civilizational epochs in Quebec: From Aboriginal/prehistoric to post-urban/post-industrial

The third cycle stretched from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries and featured strong demographic growth, a major upsurge in cities and villages, expanding industry, and a revolution in transportation and technology that stimulated rising trade. The initial territory grew, the resource harvesting area expanded, and new human concentrations emerged that brought sweeping change to Quebec's economic and social landscape.

This cycle was followed in the late 1950s by a new development phase, typified this time by urban sprawl, the renewal of transportation and communication infrastructures, and industrial suburbanization and extra-urban migration. Resource harvesting continued to expand and the population continued to concentrate. Yet as needs and means were no longer the same, we also saw a redeployment of the urban population, first to the urban outskirts, substantially increasing pressure on farmland, and then to the old frontiers, where new recreational complexes sprang up.

Figure 1.4 summarizes the demographic shifts that characterized each of these phases of development. They suggest the changes occurring in the Quebec landscape since human settlement began. Each cycle favoured the emergence of specific forms of spatial organization that tended to become entrenched and profoundly affected today's living environments. For example, we find that the concession road, though dating back to the sixteenth century, still anchors the basic living space in rural and urban settings. By the same token, the cores of many of Quebec's small towns contain old village structures with sacred and profane precincts enclosed by modern suburbs.

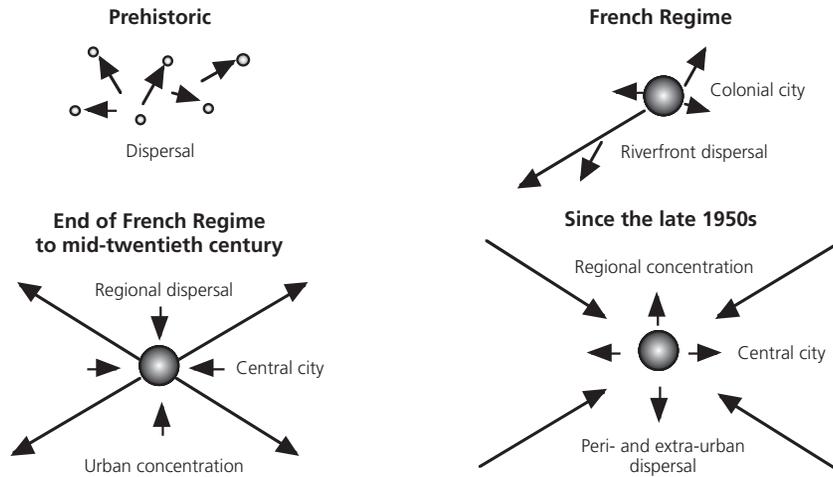


FIGURE 1.4 Population shifts in Quebec. Each cycle favoured the emergence of specific forms of spatial organization.

Source: Dickason (1992); in Courville, ed. (1996); Statistics Canada (1999).

It is the goal of the historical geographer to revisit this evolution, seeing current geographic organizations and forms as reflecting the societies that produced them. For geography is not just a spatial science but chiefly a social one, more interested in evolving places and societies, the ways in which human communities have known and used what we call their spaces. And like history, it is less interested in the time or event than in the ways these communities built and wielded their collective consciousness.