



FRANCE IN THE NEW WORLD

Although France sponsored a few voyages of exploration in the early 1500's, it was too involved in domestic religious conflicts at that time to compete with Portugal and Spain for overseas possessions. Until the next century France took steps to establish settlements in America.

Among the reasons for French interest in the New world were the following: (1) It hoped to find a passage to the East Indies through or around North America. (2) It wished to build an overseas empire in the Western Hemisphere. (3) It wanted to gain control of the fishing banks off New found land .(4) French traders were attracted by opportunities to obtain furs in North America.(5) The Catholic Church in France was eager to send missionaries to convert the Indians.

I-The French Empire in America:

As a result of the French explorations, they claimed Canada, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi valley. Control of the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River system provided them with a natural highway to the interior of North America. The French established few large settlements in *New France* as their empire in North America was

called. Concerned chiefly with developing a profitable fur trade with the Indians, the French built trading posts and forts at strategic points to control the waterways and to serve as centers for the Indian trade.

II-Character of French Colonial Rule:

- 1. Government:** New France was divided into two provinces: Canada and Louisiana. Each was administered by a royal governor, or *intendant*, appointed by the king of France. The King's officials exercised complete control over the colonists. The people had no voice in the government.
- 2. Landholding:** The system of landholding in New France was similar to that used in the mother country. Large estates were granted to *seigneurs* (lords), who in turn rented small farms to habitants (settlers).
- 3. Relations with the Indians:** Unlike the English, the French did not clear the forests, drive out the wildlife, and take over Indian lands for homes and farms. Therefore, the French, on the whole, maintained better relations with the Indians than did the other Europeans in the New World.

III- France's Legacy to America:

- 1- Religion:** As a result of the work of French missionaries and priests, the Catholic Church became firmly established in Mississippi Valley and in eastern Canada.
- 2- Language and Customs:** Many people in Louisiana, in northern New York and New England, and in Canadian province of Quebec speak French and observe French customs to this day.
- 3- Place-Names:** Many geographic names in the United States are of French origin. Some well-known ones are Detroit, St. Louis, Vermont, Duluth, Lake Champlain, Maine, Fond du Lac, Eau Claire, and Baton Rouge.

