

The first settlement above Montreal was at Cataragui, which later came to be Fort Frontenac (now Kingston), where the lake becomes the river at the Thousand Islands. Actually there are less than a thousand, more like five hundred, some very small, some only tens of feet apart with a deep river current running between them.

The fort was erected as a component in the complex and murky Indian diplomacy of Governor-General Frontenac. On the initial journey in 1678 a priest who was with Frontenac kept a diary in which he said that the oak trees along the St. Lawrence "are very clean and lofty, forming a forest equal to the most beautiful in France. Both banks of the river are lined with prairies, full of excellent grass, interspersed with an infinity of beautiful flowers." The country he was describing in this July entry he described as being between the head of Lake St. Francis and the "rapids." Iroquois Indians there told the party that by way of the river that flowed into the St. Lawrence at that spot (the Lacquette?) there was five days easy navigation, three when the waters were lower.

Frontenac sought to impress the Indians with the ease in which a group of armed Frenchmen could navigate the St. Lawrence with the large and heavy bateaux, but the rapids took their toll in the exhaustion of cutting trees so that the large boats could be carried around the white water. They required help from the Indians to portage craft so big. It was difficult going. Frontenac left a cache at Indian Point (Town of Lisbon, later).

Finally, behind schedule, he entered the lake with fanfare, firing off his small cannon. He reached the final destination and called together a council so that he could address the Iroquois from all the Five Nations whose representatives had come to greet him. He called them his children, using a common conceit in the religious style of speech common to the day. The 'children' were urged to follow the teachings of the one true God through the teachings of His only Son. The speech reveals that he was worried about their intentions.

A few years later, in 1684, French soldiers conducted a punitive expedition against the Oneida villages in the vicinity of the 80-square-mile lake of the same name, coming south from the river by way of the lowlands of the eastern lakeshore. On their way they referred to Stony Point as La Pointe de la Traverse. The attack against the palisade log barriers of the Oneidas was not successful.

Trouble was brewing that would by 1742 erupt into full scale war between the French and the English. Already there were skirmishes taking place between them in the lowland woods and fields. The Indians were being forced by the pressure of events to choose sides. Through their work at religious conversion, the French sought to impose a hegemony on the Longhouse country. But they never really came close to asserting authority over the Five Nations. When missionary work among the Iroquois, especially the Mohawk, became something akin to suicidal, the Jesuit fathers decided to leave the majority to the Devil. They took groups of the loyal and converted to the fortified outposts in the St. Lawrence River country, to settle them permanently, to teach them how to farm, for them 'to become intelligent,' maybe even literate.

The Indians who remained unconverted—about 90 per cent—traded with both sides. As early as 1675, a group of emigres from the Mohawk Nation were relocated to Saut St. Louis in the vicinity of Montreal. This was the result of missionary work on the part of LeMoynes and de Lamberville. The founding of the St. Louis Christian Indian community—the prototype of a reservation—was a way of separating out those who had found the Way. The remainder were judged hopeless and "enemies of God."

As exploration and trade increased, several accounts from the time mentioned "oaks of extraordinary height" along the St. Lawrence. They were spaced apart from each other, combining at their tops to form a tall leafy canopy. There was also a lot of mention of the richness of game in all varieties, particularly in the wetlands; of loons; tremendous flocks of migrating passenger pigeons settling along the shore to rest; of cormorants that made human-like distress cries at night along the great river. And of seeing soil of very fine farming quality along the lowland countryside.

Coming in the next issue: the growing military pressure on the Five Nations; the outbreak of the French and Indian War, 1742 to 1760; the patterns of trilateral alliances and diplomatic relations up to General Sullivan's raids into the Longhouse country, 1777; the clearing of the land for potash and cultivation, and the arrival of settlers; commentary on tree types, traditional uses of various kinds of wood; successional stages of an open field returning to a wooded state; explanation of 'entropy' and the concept of energy lost; the health of the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Basin; physiography; damage—deliberate and willful—to the land, air and water in the North Country—a catalogue of disasters so far; speculation on what is to come....



#### SOURCES & CREDITS:

This article is a combination of natural and human history drawn from a variety of sources but leaning very heavily on *The History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, by Franklin Hough (pronounced "Huff"), who published this work in 1853. It is now available as a reprint. The reader is urged to read it for the full details of what took place between 1609 and the first heavy influx of settlers to the Black River and St. Lawrence Valleys around 1807. But there is a serious problem with Hough. He was a thoughtful and well-educated man, but at the same time a racist according to the prevailing belief of his day. The Indians are described as indolent and their subjugation is passed over in a light manner. The illegality of the take-over of the Longhouse country by white settlers promises to become a major political issue soon with imminent land claims suits being brought to the state and Federal courts, notably by the Oneidas, on the heels of a precedent-setting decision in this area of law in Maine. The racism, of course, still persists as a grassroots phenomenon among white people in the North Country. The issue of land claims will become a heated controversy fairly soon.

The second paragraph in section 2. ("It deposited its enormous load of debris...") is from an article written by William Bray in a bulletin of the (then) Syracuse School of Forestry, from 1930.

The ninth paragraph of section 4. ("The entire area is profoundly modified by glaciation...") is quoted from a wonderful book now out of print, *The Deciduous Forest of Eastern North America*, 1950, by E. Lucy Braun.

The remaining information on trees and natural vegetation of the St. Lawrence Valley and eastern Lake Ontario shore was gathered by interviewing local biologists at SIU and SUNY Potsdam, people at the local office of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, Fred Ashworth and his successor, Bill McKentley, and other knowledgeable local people.

climbing Red Bug Hill in dense fog  
scrub branches at my coat sleeves  
I spread out my life and body on a rocky knoll  
where the hills step up out of the cultivated valley

wooded hills rising  
towards the mountains behind  
farm house scattered lights  
spread among the pastures  
all covered by grey  
a warm moist blanket of night

dream I can't hold my eyes open  
have to peel off  
the dead leaves  
first

somehow I get up  
in the morning  
go down the hill  
how easy to get up and move  
there's dew on the clover flowers  
to the still water pool  
is a window  
to the creek bottom

— Alan Casline