Chapter 5: Life in British North America

In the 1800’s, British North America took up approximately the same area as Canada does today.
FACTS and FIGURES

Two events happened that helped shape British North America (BNA).

1. Britain won France’s North American colonies in 1763 and they became part of BNA.

2. The British Colonies south of New Brunswick rebelled against Great Britain in the American Revolution of 1776. They gained independence from Britain and created the United States of America.

Colonies – are lands or territories owned by a country in another part of the world.
Politics:

Colonies of Great Britain included:

- Vancouver Island
- Province of Canada (Canada West and Canada East)
- New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia
- P.E.I.

Newfoundland included “coast of Labrador” and the French Shore
The Royal Proclamation of 1763 (basis for later treaty-making) stated that no First Nations land was to be taken without a meeting and agreement between First Nations and the British gov’t.
The British fur-trading company known as the **Hudson’s Bay Co.** (HBC) controlled the following territories:

- New Caledonia
- Rupert’s Land
- North-Western Territory
The **French Shore** is the area on the west coast of Newfoundland where people (fishers) from France were allowed to live and fish. The treaty that allowed this existed until 1904. (Approximately 100 years ago) This is why the French language and its customs are evident in this area at present.
A Census - is an account or record of the people within the colony or country. It tells us what the people do for a living, where they live, and what their heritage is.
Beginning in 1836 the government did a census every 10 years. They gathered information similar to the following:

- From 1851 to 2003 the population of BNA (later Canada) grew from 2,536,000 (2 ½ million) to 31,714,637 (31 ½ million).
  This was a dramatic increase.
- Most of the people lived in the eastern colonies.
- The largest city in BNA was Montreal, located in Canada East.
- The largest city in the Maritimes was Saint John, New Brunswick.
- There were more Europeans living within the colonies than First Nations and Inuit.
- There were more First Nations and Inuit living on HBC land than Europeans.
- By the mid-1800s most people – 85% - lived in rural areas (outside towns and cities) and 15% lived in urban areas (towns and cities).
Economics

- In BNA the economy was a Pre-Industrial economy because most jobs were involved with the harvesting of natural resources such as fish, fur, lumber and crops.
- Manufacturing was present in the colonies but was not big enough to employ a lot of people.
- In Atlantic region First Nations struggled to survive with the effects of European settlement. In Maritimes many worked in lumber industry.
- In HBC Aboriginal people participated in the fur trade, but also carried on traditional economies.
A Closer look at the Colonies (P.79-81)

Province of Canada

- Divided into Canada East and Canada West
- Canada West (present day Ontario) had people involved in farming, lumbering and manufacturing
- Canada East (present day Quebec) had people involved in farming
- Montreal, in Canada East, was an important centre for shipping and business. Many of the wealthiest business owners in BNA lived there.
Newfoundland

- Fishing was important
- 1/5 of the population lived in St. John’s
- Along the Labrador coast fur-trading was important. The Inuit and Innu trappers traded furs at posts along the coast.

New Brunswick

- Main center for shipbuilding
- 100 ships built yearly
- farming and logging
- Saint John was a busy centre of trade with the U.S. and Great Britain
Nova Scotia

- People lived mainly along the coast and worked as fishers, sailors and shipbuilders
- Some small farming communities
- Some manufacturing of wood, leather and metal goods
- Halifax was a centre of trade and an important port of the British Navy
- Goods were shipped to and from the U.S., Britain and the West Indies
Prince Edward Island

- Shipbuilding and farming were important
- Most farmland was owned by people living in England and farmers using the land would pay rent to the absentee landowners living in Britain.

North-Western Territory, Rupert’s Land, Vancouver’s Island and New Caledonia

- Fur-trading posts were built along rivers
- Furs and goods transported by canoe
The Peoples of BNA (p.82-89)

Many groups of people from Africa and parts of Europe came to North America in the 1700s and 1800s and mixed with the aboriginal peoples.
British / Irish

The Elite – a class of people with more political, economic and social power than the majority.

- Most (approximately two-thirds) of the European population living in BNA was of British or Irish heritage.

- United Empire Loyalists were people from the U.S. who wanted to be under British rule and came to live in Canada West, N.B. and N.S. after the American Revolution. They made up part of the elite because they were given large areas of land and later sold it when the value of it increased.

- British Merchants in Newfoundland were also part of the elite.
Newer Immigrants – 800 000 English, Scottish and Irish immigrants came to BNA between 1815 and 1850.

- Left their homes because of hard times and hoped for a good life in BNA
- English and Scottish fit in fairly well to life in the colonies.
- Irish immigrants had the toughest time because
  - the English were prejudiced against the them due to problems between them in the past and
  - the English owned many of the businesses and would not hire the Irish since they were R.C.

- prejudice – a dislike of a person or group based on false information
- discrimination – unfair treatment based on prejudice
Religion in BNA

In BNA your religion could affect your opportunities in life.

- French Canadians, Acadians and Irish were mostly Roman Catholic.
- English were mostly Protestant and followed the Church of England known in Canada as the Anglican Church of Canada. This was the official church supported by the elite.
- The elite in Canada East were R.C. and therefore supported the Roman Catholic Church.
French Heritage

Two main groups:

1. French of Canada East (present day Quebec)
2. Acadians of P.E.I., N.S. and N.B.
French in Canada East

- most were habitants - farmers who lived in rural areas. When Britain took over these colonies in 1763 these people were allowed to keep their language, customs, laws and religion.
Acadians

- the descendants of the first French settlers in North America
- Farmers and fishermen
- In the Grand Derangement (the Expulsion) of 1755 the British forced the Acadians from the area because they believed they might be more loyal to France than Britain.
  - An estimated 50% of those forced from their homes died. Those who survived went to colonies farther south, to colonies in NL and to France.
  - When they were allowed to return their farm land was now owned by British Settlers. They lived in poverty.

Watch the Video on the EXPULSION
Aboriginal Peoples

- Colonial leaders saw aboriginals as being under their control. They were no longer treated as separate nations.
- Also many people had racist beliefs about First Nations, Inuit and Metis. (A racist belief is a prejudice based on a person’s heritage or skin color)
- Many settlers took over aboriginal lands and left them with only a small area of poor quality land
- Their population dropped from 500,000 to 100,000 due to disease. (They had no resistance to European diseases like smallpox, TB and measles)
One aboriginal group, the Metis, settled in land that was controlled by the HBC.

The largest Metis settlement was in the Red River settlement in the south end of Lake Winnipeg.

They worked in the fur trade transporting goods by canoe, wagon and on foot

They supplied buffalo meat and crops from their gardens to the fur traders

They saw themselves as separate people and took pride in what they did.
Black Colonists

- Slavery was legal in BNA until 1834.
- Many Black people immigrated to BNA because they had a better chance of not being enslaved.
- 3000 Black Loyalists came at the time of the American Revolution.
- They did not receive the same benefits as the United Empire Loyalists.
- Received small pieces of land.
- Had a hard time getting official title (a legal record that the land was theirs).
- Could be forced from their land if title was not acquired.
• When slavery was outlawed in BNA about 30,000 people came to BNA to escape slavery in the U.S.A.
• They were not treated like the White colonists.
• Received low paying jobs and poorest land to live on.
• Were forced to move farther away from water supplies and roads as white communities grew larger.
• Set up strong communities that provided medical care, places of worship and education.
Daily Life in British North America (p.90-97)

When historians speak about 'daily life' in a particular time period it must be noted that there is never only one kind of daily life. Culture, wealth and opportunity all influence one's daily life.
Homes

Variety of homes and furniture

- Wealthy people had large, elegant homes.
- Farmers may initially only have a one room cabin built of rough logs.
- Aboriginal people still lived in traditional homes.

Certain things in common

- Light would come from oil lamps or candles
- Heat would come from a fireplace or a wood stove
- No indoor plumbing
- Water came from a well, spring or lake
- In wealthier homes a hand pump was used in the kitchen to get water
Transportation

*This was a big challenge for people living in BNA*

- There were very rough roads in the colonies.
- Many people traveled by river so they lived along the rivers and the coast.
- Travel on land was by foot, horse and oxen.
- In winter sleighs were used.
- In 1836 the railway opened in Canada East.
Health Care

- Many children died young due to the many childhood diseases like whooping cough, measles and scarlet fever.
- Deaths were also attributed to diseases and serious injuries from accidents.
- Health care was provided at home
- Traditional medicines were prepared and used
- For example flagroot, a wild plant, was used for colds
- No antibiotics for infections.
- No Aspirin for pain
Education

Learning a trade or working on the family farm were seen as the best way to get ahead.

- Europeans settlers could read and write and were taught by family members.
- Books were highly valued.
- Reading was a favourite past-time.
- Most schools were run by religious organizations.
- Proper behaviour and religious instruction were very important.
- Wealthy families had tutors for their children and were taught in their own homes.
• Later, **publicly funded** schools were set up and were paid for with tax money.

• Open for all children but **mostly white children** went to these schools.

• Language used in schools was either French or English depending on who was in the majority in the community.

• Minority groups would pay to set up a separate school.

• Schools for the First Nations and Inuit communities were run by church groups and the goal was to teach these children about **European culture and religion**.
Pastimes

Many pastimes were similar whether people lived in urban or rural areas:

- Playing or watching outdoor sports
- Crafts such as needlework or carving
- Making music with friends
- Reading
- Storytelling
- Playing games
- Hockey
Some games were unique to a particular culture.

- Snowsnake was played by First Nations boys.
- Curling was played by the Scottish.

People living in urban areas had more opportunities to go to special events such as plays and musical performances.

There was also sports clubs and organized competitions.

Colonists in rural areas often held 'work bees' (get togethers to make a quilt or build a barn).