

COLONIES AND CANADA—ERA SUMMARY

BRITISH EMPIRE—1585 TO 1885

ROANOKE COLONY TO SASKATCHEWAN REBELLION

The exploration of Canada by French and English explorers commenced very soon after the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, although permanent settlement of the new world colonies did not occur until the early seventeenth century. The early explorers of North America, whose names are still recorded on lakes, bays, and rivers of the region, began with the voyage of [John Cabot](#) in 1497, and include [Jacques Cartier](#), [Henry Hudson](#), [Samuel de Champlain](#), [Martin Frobisher](#), [John Davis](#), [William Baffin](#), [Alexander Mackenzie](#), and many others. Most were in search of the elusive Northwest-passage, from the Atlantic to Asia, which would have meant enormous riches for its discoverers, had it existed.

Early French and English Colonies in Canada—England's first attempt to colonize Canada was a failed expedition to Newfoundland by [Humphrey Gilbert](#), during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. It was France, led by the explorers Cartier and Champlain that claimed the regions of Canada along the St. Lawrence Seaway. The earliest French colonies were at Montreal and Quebec, which were established as trading posts for the French missionaries and trappers who went to live among the Indians.

From the beginning, the region of Canada was disputed between England and France. England controlled Hudson Bay, Newfoundland, and the southern coastal areas, while France centered its colonies around the St. Lawrence seaway and the great lakes. Britain's domination of the seas meant that its settlements were better supplied, and in closer contact with the mother country, but France's close relations with the Indian tribes gave it almost complete control of the fur trade, and easy access to the interior regions. During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, France and Britain were often at war, and although these conflicts went by different names in Europe, in the Americas, they were called the [French Indian Wars](#). These Indian wars even continued when France and England were official at peace, but in spite of over seventy years of fighting, and many heroic and horrible events, nothing was permanently resolved until 1759, the year in which [Britain conquered Quebec](#). Within a few years of that battle, fought between the famous Generals [General Wolfe](#) and [General Montcalm](#), Britain had driven France from North



IROQUOIS ATTACKING FATHER JOGUES AND CONVERTS

America, and taken possession of all of her French colonies in the region.

Canada under British Rule—When Britain took control of New France, she allowed the French settlers to continue to govern themselves according to their own customs, and allowed freedom of worship for all Catholics. One exception to this general tolerance of their French subjects, occurred in Nova Scotia, where an independent settlement of Acadians refused to take an oath of loyalty to the British government. In consequence they were forcibly deported from the region, and many ended up in New Orleans. Many ethnic Cajuns in New Orleans are the descendants of these deported Acadians. The French-speaking colonies of Canada continued as a British province until 1791, when New France was partitioned into French-speaking Lower Canada, (modern Quebec), and English-speaking Upper Canada (modern Ontario). The reason for this, was that following the revolutionary war, a great number of Tory settlers had migrated to Upper Canada, and the two settlements were too dissimilar to rule under a single government. During this time other British colonies were also settled in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia.

Most of the British settlements at this time were located off the eastern seaboard, but traders from the Hudson Bay Company, a company first chartered by [Charles II](#), were busy discovering and mapping the vast land to the west. The colonization of the western plains began in 1811 with the settlement of the Red River Valley, but the settlers there ran into many of the same troubles that plagued the earlier settlers in America: hostile Indians, disease, and hunger. Over a long period of time, however, the southern parts of Manitoba became a thriving colony. In the far west, [George Vancouver](#) explored the Columbia River basin and Vancouver Island, and claimed the entire region for Britain. Like most of the rest of western Canada, however, permanent settlement occurred slowly until the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1885.

Confederation of Canada—In the early 1830's, the elections reform bill in Great Britain resulted in a grand restructuring of the British Parliament. After this occurred many of the colonies, including the provinces of Canada, became enamored with the idea of democratic self-rule. In 1837 there were [widespread riots](#) in both Upper and Lower Canada in protest against the British colonial government. Lord Durham went to investigate and proposed the Union of the two provinces under limited self-rule. While the residents were still British subjects, they were allowed to elect parliaments and pass laws that pertained to local matters. In 1867, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia joined the confederation, followed by Manitoba and British Columbia in 1870, and Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905. The last province to join the Canadian Federation was Newfoundland in 1947.