Canada: The Story of Us (Episode 1) 44:30 minutes long

Notes taken from watching the film.

* Champlain got permission from the French King to travel/explore for new land, to what became New France
* France (the country) had been exploited of its resources, so they were looking for a new source of resources to help maintain France’s economy. (This relates to a Theory of Mercantalism – exploiting and benefitting from the resources of a colony territory in order to support the economy and wealth of the original country. Ex: France economy growing because of consumers in the colonies and resources brought in from them.)
* Champlain arrived and encountered the FN there.
* He knew the first priority was to establish a shelter – built a place they could survive the winter through. He pushed his men hard to build their settlement.
* He arrived with 27 men on his ship, one of which was arranging treason against him to take over, arranging his death. Jean Duval started an assassination plot, but another young explorer told Champlain about it. Champlain executes the traitor Duval.
* “Some may think of Canadians as gentle, but there is lots of blood and guts in our past.”
* The settlement develops - over 5 months, they create a tree-lined border wall with a 4.5 ft wide moat, watch tower, and canons. First permanent European settlement in Canada.
* Quebec will become the capital of New France – Canada’s first fortified new city.
* “There must have been a stubbornness to persevere – that’s the kind of stuff Canadians are made of.”
* Dec 1608 Winter has come – Champlain and men get locked in by snow/ice and become malnourished. Scurvy sets in.
* “Nature is the dilemma of Canada – the weather overwhelmed us.”
* Only 7 of his 27 who voyaged with Champlain survived that winter.
* Champlain must show France his new colony can be profitable. Has to develop a resource to grow wealth/profitability and used the beaver to do it.
* “Here they didn’t find spices or gold, but found wealth in this creature. Upon [the beaver’s] back would be born the dream of Canada.”
* Beaver pelts had been traded between Aboriginals for millennia – but with Europeans, First nations found access to a global market to develop their own economy. (Mutual benefit initially between Indigenous and French trade of furs.)
* The First Nations had the power initially – to be able to provide this desired resource to the French. They had the skill, knowledge to deliver product. They controlled the economics.
* June 18, 1609 Ochastaguin FN Chief of the Arendaenronnon nation of the Wendat Confederacy who lived North of the Great Lakes. He met on the shores of Quebec to discuss agreements for him to have more access/control to the St Lawrence riverway as a trade route.
* The St. Lawrence was a route of power – a lifeline between the ocean to more western areas – through which people to access far into the region. It was important to gain control over that access line.
* South of that, though, was a more dominant alliance of First Nations groups – a democracy that inspires the creators of the US Constitution – the Haudenosaunee Confederacy also wanted control over that trade route.
* He has treaties with other FN groups who also want to join in with trade with the Europeans. To maintain his control over the St. Lawrence route and continue providing for his family/community, he grants a meeting to Champlain – the French man who has his own idea of the future of the fur trade – to form an alliance to work against the other Haudenosaunee Confederacy.
* “When the French first arrived, they came in small numbers, made trade via the terms set out by the Indigenous people, and made historic agreements. Champlain got rights to the furs of the area from Ochestaguin, an in return promised his alliance with Ochestaguin in their fight against the Haudenosaunee people. Champlain had an advantage – the arquebus (rifle)
* The Wendat, alongside their allies, cross South into Haudenosaunee territory to face off. The two biggest Indigenous alliances were able to battle/have a confrontation over control in the fur trade.
* Champlain joined with one side – with his gun – and used it on the enemy FN group killing the leader and another man. (direct quotes from Champlain – his journals – primary source)
* This success strengthened the bond between the Wendat and New France (the French). They then seized control of New France and gained a monopoly on the fur trade.
* Over next 50 years the furs will travel 1000 kms down St Lawrence, through 40 days journey to France, to be sold, shaped into stylish hats.
* France’s economy is booming because of the gun which gained them a new ally group. This gun upset the balance of power in the future Canadian territory.
* But to grow as a colony they’d need women.
* New France-Wendat alliance dominates fur trade along St Lawrence, but by 1670 that alliance is under attack. The British want in on the trade.
* The American revolution is still 100 years away, but the British settlers outnumber the French 18-1. The British grew populations at a much greater pace and were very prosperous.
* King Louis 14th sends 12 ships to New France as a way to combat Britain’s growth in the new world – sending women. The most vulnerable: poor, orphaned, female teen.
* Elizabeth Aubert – 24 year old woman who left an orphanage.
* Voyage was difficult in the hold of the ship -vomiting over each other, with no promise their life would be better than where they came from. “These women were starting over in that ship.”
* Known as the “filles due roi” or “Kings Daughters” – they were expected to marry and have children to populate New France. Arrive 3 months later. One in 10 will die on the journey to their new home.
* They have to marry Fr settlers and grow families. Interview for husbands. “Presented for the first time in their lives with a choice for their future.”
* These interviews for potential husbands were supervised by Jean Talon – New France’s Intendant and nuns.
* 1670 she marries. She would receive an automatic dowry – almost $1000 today. As a family can claim a lifelong pension if they produce 10 children. In 1689 Elizabeth reaches that target.
* They’re tools of the empire – doing the grunt work.
* France sends nearly 800 women. Population of New France doubles. Babies are born at a rate Canada will never see again – 5 children per family. More than 2/3s of French Canadians can trace ancestry to the Kings Daughters.
* There’s a long line of people who were rejected in their home countries or who had no where else to go that came to Canada. That’s part of our heritage. That’s who we are.
* The population boom puts a heavy strain on resources. By 1660 the French had nearly wiped out the beaver population, so they had to start seeking furs further north.
* Radisson and des Grosiellier (brothers in law) – were sent north by Indigenous guides. By Oct 1659 the brothers reach Lake Superior to meet Cree elders carrying rich beaver pelts. Unusually thick pelts = more valuable.
* Elders give them directions to a network of rivers flowing to a massive saltwater bay – Hudson’s Bay. “They’ve just tapped into the key to Canada’s further wealth, but instead of gaining benefits, they’re about to change the course of Canada’s future.”
* They hope this new source of furs will save New France’s wealth problems.
* Expedition was always about commerce – to gain wealth. Mercantile opportunities – every single expedition had to have a patron – someone with wealth who financially supported the journey.
* They return to Quebec with the thick furs hoping to excite the governor – who is annoyed with them for trading without a licence in the area. Governor D’Argenson punishes – fines them.
* After they were released from jail, they looked elsewhere for a benefactor to reward them for the richness of the furs they’ve found. Des Grossiellier is emboldened, not stopped. They consider who their next buyer could be – the British.
* Entrepreneurs – thirst for adventure and riches. Take any risk to secure a patron.
* Long journey back to Europe, to Britain – siding with their country’s sworn enemy.
* 1665 des Grosiellier and Radisson talk their way in to appear before the King of England. It is a time of dynasty and monarchy – kings wanted to expand their empires. The Frenchmen propose the fur territory – an act of treason.
* King Charles II agrees to fund the adventure. 1668 the fur traders sale home.
* Cree elders gave them a map to a meeting place. Radisson forced to turn back to Europe with one ship when it is badly damaged. After 3 months des Grosiellier reaches a salt water bay – Hudson’s Bay.
* Named after explorer Henry Hudson who died in the waters 6 decades earlier – teaming with wildlife and home to millions of beavers with the thickest furs on the planet.
* Word of des Grosiellier’s arrival spreads and Cree hunters bring him the thick pelts, and the Hudson’s Bay Company is born. King Charles II gives control over the area to Britain, but claimed it despite the First Nations existing there already. Their land, their resources, their furs.
* 1759 Britain wanted more than a trading monopoly – they also wanted New France, the territory. They go on a rampage crushing French forts along the coast.
* Their target is Quebec – British office James Wolfe is determined to take Quebec City.
* Aug 1759 – in the last year the British have taken almost all French settlements along Eastern Coast. Set to target Quebec City. This act will put North America firmly in the British hands.
* 11 000 troops – 25% of the entire British army in North America, sails north. Near invincible.
* Defenses of the French are formidable – 53 meter cliffs, the height of Niagra Falls, shield a triangular fortress, with a perimeter wall 4 meters high and 9 km long.
* French General Montcalm, known as a great leader in the Seven Years War against Britain. He knows that, if the fortress of Quebec City falls, so does French control of New France.
* He doesn’t know James Wolfe has a daring plan – Sept 13, 1759 at 4:30 am the British begin their climb up the cliff towards Quebec City.
* “Have to use surprise – in a fight, it’s what you don’t see coming. It’s about timing and accuracy.”
* Before French can react, the British attack – 4500 soldiers are up the cliff and on the Plains of Abraham.
* Moncalm rushes thousands of troops into an unrehearsed charge. Wolfe holds his men back – tells them to hold their fire. They let the French shoot at them, largely missing their targets, and when the French reload the British advance and fire on them, decimating them. The British have a shorter range and twice the firepower.
* Brutally effective tactic.
* Montcalm is no novice, though. The Indigenous allies honour their pact to fight with the French. Skilled snipers wreak havoc on the British lines, injuring Wolfe and killing him. He doesn’t live to see his British army take Quebec City. But hears the French are in full retreat – dies in peace.
* Montcalm was injured. Most iconic battle in Canadian history – over in less than 30 minutes. Montcalm didn’t want to live to see the British take New France/Quebec City and dies the next morning.
* His defeated army surrenders Quebec City.
* After 150 years of French controlled New France, French culture survives and the people submit to the British.
* Indigenous people soon suffered a great loss - injured by the plagues/illness the soldiers brought – it’s estimated 90-99% of the Indigenous population died around this time.
* British, in taking over this newly-gained territory/colony, will have to rely on the Indigenous people and cooperation of the French settlers. Complicated relationship to navigate with the culture groups – to see how they can all mutually benefit.
* Canda’s future will be build on the natural resources, triggering our nation’s greatest conflicts.