

Unit 9: Video 1 Transcript

Q4: Describe the rural people of Quebec during the early 19th century.

A: Well, I can only talk about what I know, which is the little parish that I studied. But it seems to be fairly consistent across the rest of Lower Canada. Small farms, close to, houses close together. I think the surveyor, Bouchette, went through the Beauce in the early 19th century—I think it was around 1810, 1820—and described prosperous little farms, whitewashed houses all along the road. Fields stretching off into this—lots of forest cover still.

I looked at family sizes. Some families were, well, young families, four or five kids. Families with older parents might have six or eight, sometimes up to eleven. That would be the number of kids on the books I suppose. But also when you go through the parish records, the records of baptisms, you see that there was a great deal of infant mortality in the couple of days after birth or couple of hours after birth. The priest would record that the child didn't survive. So there's a whole level of mortality that I suppose people looking at this would assume is a given. But when you look at individual families, you know, the parents are there and the little kid dies. There's a whole emotional level that you don't see in the records so much, but when you see enough of these things, after awhile you would think that life was very hard for people.

I don't think they—they probably didn't feel it that way. But say compared to modern life, they had all kinds of risks of disease and illness and that as well. At the same time, within the communities there was this wonderful sense of solidarity, I think. You can see that through the way people got together, especially in the winter, in the period from Christmas to Easter. And all the travellers that came through Lower Canada at the time talk about the sociability of the French-Canadians. The hospitality that they gave to each other as well as to strangers. And then beside that is the role of the church, the focus of religious devotion for sure. But also a kind of a marker for when celebrations took place. So what do you get? These little tiny rural communities.

One time I asked my mom about, "Well, you know, you grew up in early 20th century Newfoundland. People didn't have the kind of things they have

now. What do you, what difference do you see?" And she said, "Well, it was much harder," but she thought people felt happier even though life was difficult. They were working hard. It's kind of hard to relate to that in 21st century Vancouver. But I think I can understand when I read about the colour and richness of people's lives, their celebrations. We've advanced a lot, but I think we've given up a lot in the process as well.