

THE CHARM OF THE GIRLS IN THE 17TH CENTURY

The administrator of New France, Jean Talon, had recommended to the recruiting committee of the *king's daughters* that they be of high morality, robust, intelligent and good-looking. The more severe climate in New France forced them to adopt a different attitude, which contributed to differentiate the Canadian woman from the French woman.

The Jesuits' Relations of 1642 quotes: "Loving and sensitive girls who were afraid of a few snow flakes in France get used to walk through snow banks here... A simple rime was enough to give them a cold in their French homes, while here a rough and long winter, with snow and ice from head to foot, caused them no harm other than a hearty appetite."



Front page of a pamphlet who is said to have been written by Charles Chiniquy and published by him under the title : *The dreadful revelations of Maria Monk*.

Our long and hard winters make them look lazy. Denonville mentions in a letter to the king in 1687: "Most of the women in this country are lazy. It takes time to remedy to this situation." This was exaggerated, because domestic tasks and children education kept them busy all day.

It is not unusual for girls to get married at 12 years old. Two daughters of the ancestor Jacques Archambault, Marie and Marie-Anne got married at 12. Anne and Jacquette were only 16 when they got married. In the case of Anne, married to the bigamist Michel Chauvin, she was certainly attractive since she got married again to Jean Gervaise, who preferred Anne to the 12 *king's daughters* arrived with him on the same boat. In another case, Jacquette Toureau, sister-in-law of the ancestor, got married a second time in 1654 to a hardened bachelor, Maurice Arrivé, master mason, who was overcome by her charm. In Trois-Rivières in 1654, the marriage of Jean Aubuchon and Marguerite Sédilot, future parents-in-law of Jacques Archambault, grandson of the ancestor, was declared void because Marguerite was only 11. A new marriage took place in Montréal in 1655.

Baron de La Hontan wrote: "Young men and women get married easily in this country, because of the difficulty to talk to people of the opposite sex. A young man must declare his intention to the parents of a young woman after four visits. They must talk marriage or cease to see each other. Moreover, the parish priest keeps an eye on the relations of his parishioners. He watches the conduct of girls and women more closely than fathers and husbands."

The French officers differ in opinion about the beauty of Canadian women. Chevalier de Baugy wrote: "They are generally in a good humour, but they are not well built."

The clergy agrees on women's taste for luxury and vanity. In 1682, Monseigneur de Laval declared: "What crime are they guilty of and what punishment do they deserve those who appear in places dedicated to prayers and penitence in immodest clothes, showing scandalous nudity of their arms, shoulders and breast... We forbid expressly all girls and women to partake of the Sacrament in the indecent apparel that we just described and to all the priest of our diocese to accept them in this condition." Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier goes even further: « The confessors should not absolve or even hear the confession of persons of whom they themselves have been participants or accomplices of their sins.

"The beauty of women is a two-edged weapon. In some churches, women take up the collection to incite parishioners to be more generous. Some priests accept this practice, but others are opposed to it. The priest of Notre-Dame parish in Montréal expressed his opposition in those terms: "Too often the collections are taken by persons chosen for their beauty and attractiveness. For fear of these abuses, girls and women were smoothly excluded from the parochial collection, knowing that their presence was more likely to cause sins than to collect more money¹."

¹ Jacques Lacoursière et Claude Bouchard, *Notre Histoire*, Québec-Canada.