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**SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE**

By

LORNE PIERCE

*ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES W. JEFFERYS, R.C.A.*

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

CANADA, when our story begins, was an almost impenetrable forest. Few woodsmen or ploughmen had as yet built homes and gathered harvests here. Along the banks of lakes and rivers stood the smoky huts and wigwams of the Indians. Hochelega and Stadacona were at best but miserable Indian encampments, swept by war and plague in turn. Between the settlements ran trails through the dense woods, the war paths of the Huron, Iroquois and Algonquin tribes. Upon the rivers sped the gaily painted birch bark canoes, almost always coureurs of war.

Little did Cardinal Richelieu know what lasting glory would crown his foundation of "The New Company of the Hundred Associates." The charter gave the company possession of New France, that is, Canada, Acadia, Newfoundland and Florida. In return the company swore allegiance to the

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King of France, and promised to give each successor to the Throne of France a crown of gold. Upon these brave men he imposed the task of providing for the maintenance of the Gospel in the New World. Religious rivalry was abolished by the simple means of a decree, by which it was ordered that no Huguenot should set foot in New France. Canada was to be Roman Catholic. How well this trust was discharged is one of the most remarkable stories in the realm of sacrifice and adventure. Samuel de Champlain, first and greatest of empire builders in New France, was half crusader and half colonist. "The welfare of a soul is more than conquest of an empire, and kings should think of extending their rule in infidel countries only to assure therein the rule of Jesus Christ." Thus spake Champlain, the founder of Quebec, and so lived from generation to generation, an army of devout men and women in New France. Great is the glory of pères Jogues, Daniel, Bréboeuf, Lalement, and others who pushed

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
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MAISONNEUVE'S FIGHT WITH THE IROQUOIS



MAISONNEUVE CARRIES THE CROSS TO THE SUMMIT  
OF MOUNT ROYAL

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## CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

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on into the wilds alone, and fell wrapped in the garments of martyrdom.

In 1828, eight years after the Pilgrim Fathers had landed from *The Mayflower*, "a shivering group of stern-eyed exiles on the rocks of Plymouth Bay," war was declared between England and France. De Roquemont was already on his way from Dieppe to Quebec, being sent out by the New Company with a fleet of eighteen vessels, loaded with supplies to relieve Champlain's starving colony. Admiral Kirk with an English fleet was also making for Quebec, and arrived first. Demanding the city, its defenders, knowing of the approach of de Roquemont, proudly defied him. The admiral withdrew, but off Gaspé he met de Roquemont's fleet, captured it, and the following year returned to set the flag of England for the first time above the Citadel of Quebec.

By the Treaty of St. Germain (1632) Canada was restored to France the following year, and Champlain reappointed as Gov-

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ernor. On Christmas Day, 1635, he died and was laid in a private tomb which may remain for ever unknown. The work he had accomplished was of lasting importance. It was fortunate for New France that such men as Laval, first Bishop of Quebec, and Champlain, were associated in laying the foundations of empire in America. Further, it was no mere accident that sent de Montmagny, d'Ailleboust, Major Closse and Maisonneuve to the New World. The history of empire contains no brighter pages than those which record the heroism of the founders of New France.

One of the most interesting histories ever written was *The Relations of the Jesuits*. This remarkable record is our main source of information regarding the beginnings of Canadian history for over forty years. The Jesuit priests were accustomed to keeping a journal in which they recorded their pious duties, meditations, humble labours, and oftentimes brave adventures and almost un-

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believable sufferings. These *Relations* were printed and widely circulated in France, being eagerly read by high and low alike. Many things we should like to know are unfortunately omitted, but so far as they go they are trustworthy records. Their whole passion was to show the glory of the advance of the cross in America. Nothing else mattered to them. So while the Jesuits lost no opportunity of relating the accomplishments of their own order, and possibly desired at some future time the canonization of their martyrs in Canada, their *Relations* marvelously stirred the religious life of France, and enlisted a host of self-sacrificing men and women in the service of missions.

And so it happened that one of the numbers of the *Relations* contained a letter from Père Le Jeune. "Is there," he asks, "no charitable and virtuous lady who will come to this country to gather up the blood of Christ by teaching His word to the little Indian girls?" That prayer was fulfilled in the

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foundation of the Convent of the Ursulines at Quebec. Other *Relations* followed and other heroines and heroes freely offered themselves, among them Marguerite Bourgeois and Paul de Chomedey Sieur de Maisonneuve, founder of Montreal. Francis Parkman, speaking of these two has written, "in the martial figure of Maisonneuve, and the fair form of this gentlewoman, we have the true heroes of Montreal."

But we are getting a little ahead of our story.

Jerome le Royer de la Dauversière was a collector of taxes at La Flèche in Anjou. One day, while at prayer in his home, he fancied that he heard a voice calling him to found a hospital to be conducted by nuns on the Island of Montreal in distant Canada. He went at once to Paris, where he had another vision. Another voice spoke to him: "Where can I find a faithful servant?" In his quandary he was led to the old château of Menden near St. Cloud.

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Meanwhile a young priest prayed in the church of St. Germain des Près in Paris. Suddenly a voice from heaven startled the air. It called to Père Jean Jacques Olier, for such was his name, and commanded him to found a society of priests on the Island of Montreal, Canada. By some strange influence he made his way towards the dilapidated château of Menden. The two men, who had seen visions and heard voices, met, and although it was for the first time, they instantly knew each other and embraced.

Some will say that the voices were those of angels. Others will declare that the voices were only the thrilling missionary stories of the *Jesuit Relations* scattered everywhere. Be that as it may, these two men met and formed the idea of establishing at Montreal three religious communities, one of priests to convert the Indians, one of nuns to nurse the sick, and another of nuns to teach the children of the Indians and colonists.

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Shortly afterward friends were interested in the enterprise, wealthy penitents of the priest and acquaintances of the tax collector. Four others later joined them, and they formed themselves into the "Société de Notre Dame de Montreal."

Everything was now nearly ready, but one further thing was needed—a crusading knight to lead the band. This leader was shortly forthcoming and, like the others, seemed to be divinely appointed. Paul de Chomedey Sieur de Maisonneuve was his name, "a devout and gallant gentleman in whom lived again the spirit of Godfrey of Bouillon, leader of the first Crusade." He steps forth "with a sword in one hand and a psalter in the other." Maisonneuve had seen much service in the European wars, and had but recently tested his sword on the fields of Holland. If the portrait we have of him be authentic, the high, square forehead bespoke a thinker and a doer. A full eye indicated imagination, while a prominent

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nose, firm mouth and strong chin gave promise that the mystic qualities of the religious zealot would be accompanied by robust character and determination.

Before leaving France for Canada, Maisonneuve went to bid farewell to his aged father. He was inconsolable. Surely this was a wild escapade, and upon such madcaps he would not pronounce his benediction. Maisonneuve replied: "Any man who shall leave his home, his brother, his sister, his father, his mother, for the glory of my name, shall inherit eternal life." His father broke into sobs and yielded. Having bid his father farewell, also his sisters, Madame de Chuly and Sister Louise de Sainte Marie, he joined his associates. In February, 1641, they assembled in the church of Notre Dame at Paris, and, before the high altar of the Virgin, solemnly consecrated Montreal to the Holy Family, and named it Ville-Marie de Montreal. Maisonneuve accepted an image of the Virgin on which was engraved this quaint prayer in gold letters:

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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*Holy Mother of God, heart so pure and loyal,  
Protect our home yonder in your Mount Royal.*

In May, 1641, two small vessels sailed from La Rochelle, on one Maisonneuve with twenty-five men, soldiers and artizans, and on the other Mlle. Mance, a Jesuit priest and twelve men. In due time they arrived safely at Quebec, and as the season was far advanced they decided to remain there. Governor Montmagny, successor to Champlain, endeavored to persuade Maisonneuve and his party to live permanently at Quebec, offering them great inducements, among them the Ile d'Orleans, but all to no avail. The main reason for these flattering overtures was that the Company of One Hundred Associates were jealous of this new colonizing experiment and greatly feared Maisonneuve. Maisonneuve departed shortly for Montreal to take formal possession of the Island, and then returned to Quebec for the winter. Maisonneuve's party were entertained by Puiseaux in a large but crude

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dwelling near Quebec. Their spare time was employed in building *bateaux*, large flat-bottomed boats, for the transfer of themselves and their supplies to Montreal as soon as navigation permitted.

On May 8, 1642, Maisonneuve embarked from St. Michel, and "on the 17th of May his little flotilla, a pinnace, a flat-bottomed craft moved by sails, and two row-boats, approached Montreal and all on board raised in unison a hymn of praise. Montmagny was there to deliver the island, on behalf of the 'One Hundred Associates.' Here, too, was Father Vimont, superior of the Missions. On the following day they glided along the green and solitary shores, now thronged with the life of a busy city, and landed on the spot which Champlain, thirty-one years before, had chosen as the first site of a settlement. It was a tongue or triangle of land formed by the junction of a rivulet with the St. Lawrence. This rivulet was bordered by a meadow, and beyond rose the forest with its van-

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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guard of scattered trees. Early spring flowers were blooming in the younger grass, and the birds flitted among the boughs.

“Maisonneuve sprang ashore and fell on his knees. His followers imitated his example; and all joined their voices in songs of thanksgiving. Tents, baggage, arms and stores were landed. An altar was raised on a pleasant place near at hand; and Mademoiselle Mance, with Madam de la Peltrie, aided by her servant, Charlotte Barr, decorated it with a taste which was the admiration of all beholders. Now all the company gathered before the shrine. Here were the ladies with their servant; Montmagny, no willing spectator; and Maisonneuve, a war-like figure, erect and tall, his men clustering around him—soldiers, sailors, artisans, and laborers—all alike soldiers at need. They kneeled in reverent silence as the Host was raised aloft; and when the rite was over the priest turned and addressed them: ‘You are a grain of mustard seed that shall rise and

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grow until its branches overshadow the land. You are few, but your work is the work of God. His smile is on you and your children shall fill the land.'

"The afternoon waned; the sun sank behind the western forest, and twilight came on. Fireflies were twinkling over the darkened meadow. They caught them, tied them with threads into shining festoons, and hung them before the altar. They pitched their tents, lighted their fires, stationed their guards, and lay down to rest. Such was the birth-night of Montreal."

Father Olier was well acquainted with the heroic tales of the Jesuits. While honouring these men, who had gone alone to scattered tribes in the far north and west, he believed that many of their deaths were unnecessary. Consequently he decided to follow the Benedictine plan, and establish centres of piety protected by the arms of France. With such a plan in mind the citizens of Ville-Marie set to work immediately. The

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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very next day after their arrival Maisonneuve felled the first tree. And so the work progressed, first a roof of bark with which to cover the altar, then a palisade. As time went on buildings made of hewn timbers were erected inside the fortifications, and by winter houses and stores were ready to be occupied by the French and the friendly Indians who had embraced Christianity. At best, however, they were but a few rude shelters against cold and snow, huddled together in sight of the Indian village of Hochelaga, and surrounded by a dense forest in which lurked those terrors—wild beasts and hostile savages.

On the evening of August 18th Maisonneuve visited the mountain accompanied by two old Indians. About them spread a pageant of surpassing beauty, forest, hills and the mighty St. Lawrence, a noble heritage indeed! One of the Indians spoke: "We were a numerous people, and all the hills which you see to the East and to the South

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were peopled by us." A new era, another civilization, confronted an old one, and the ancient empire of the Red Man declined and gradually disappeared. Its glory, however, its greatness and its own treasured beauty should be held in lasting remembrance.

In December the St. Lawrence, blocked with ice, rose in a most threatening manner. Before the inhabitants of Ville-Marie were scarcely aware of what was happening the dark, cold waters were surging over the banks. The little settlement was now thoroughly alarmed. Little by little, the icy waters crept relentlessly towards the palisades, and threatened to sweep away their stores and the results of all their hard toil. Finally the flood, as if resolved to destroy every vestige of the settlement, reached the foot of the fortifications. Maisonneuve, with a sublime gesture of faith, planted a cross at the margin of the hungry waters, and committed the little company to the protection of the Virgin, under whose name they dedicated

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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and undertook the bold colonizing venture. He also made a solemn vow, that if the people were spared, and their humble beginnings preserved, he would carry a cross on his own shoulders and erect it on the top of Mount Royal. The swollen waters as if rebuked, receded slowly, and Ville-Marie was spared.

Ville-Marie was all astir. It was the Day of Epiphany, January 6, 1643, and the sun rose in splendour, flooding the crisp air, as if in pledge of heaven's blessing. The trees, crowding to the top of Mount Royal, were mantled in snow, and through them ran a narrow path to the summit, recently cleared by the French and some friendly Indians. Within the stockade stood the simple dwellings, stores, and the chapel of the colony. The open space before the buildings was thronged with French and Indians in gala attire. In the centre stood the distinguished figure of Maisonneuve, severe, proud and every inch a soldier. Presently a cross was brought, hewn out of a stout cedar tree, about

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ten feet long and very heavy. A procession was then formed. The Jesuit fathers, first servants of Ville-Marie, lead off. Next, bearing the cross, and staggering under its weight, came Maisonneuve, and then the colonists and Indians bearing muskets and other arms. Painfully, slowly, they ascended the mountain by the freshly cut trail chanting together as they climbed.

At last the summit was reached. About the cross the company gathered, while the priest read the ancient prayer of consecration: "Almighty God, Thou who hast consecrated this cross, imbuing it with the precious blood of Thy Son. . . ."

The cross, having been consecrated, was raised and set in place, its arms outspread to possess and to protect all those who should, in years to come, make their homes beneath the shadow of the Mount. The Sacrament was then administered, while the little company knelt in silent worship. So was the vow fulfilled!

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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In 1644 the Island of Montreal was made over to the Sulpicians of Paris, and they became Lords of the Isle. Later the Island became the property of the Seminary of that order at Montreal. The formal possession of the new masters was marked by the Mass, celebrated in a tent.

Ville-Marie flourished. Her annals of heroism read like fiction. Had we time we could tell of Olier and Dauversière, whom we already have met; of Jeanne Mance, first sister of charity, Marguerite Bourgeois, the first institutrice, Major Closse, Le Moyne, hero of Long-Sault, Sieur des Ormeaux, Dollier de Casson, and many more. There were expeditions to be undertaken, land to be cleared, and blood-thirsty Iroquois to be repelled. Everywhere there was stuff to try souls upon! At best the crude fortification was little better than a Castle Dangerous. The real defences of Ville-Marie were the incessant prayers of the religious, and the brave hearts of the soldier-artisans.

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On one occasion a party left the palisades to work on the edge of the forest. Pilot, the dog, and her puppies, became frightened at the shadows of Indians lurking among the trees. The Ville-Marie men, seized with terror, fled. Maisonneuve with thirty soldiers, led by the dog Pilot, who had a keen scent for Iroquois, dashed into the forest. Alas! they had been too eager, and soon to their consternation, found themselves surrounded by howling savages. Slowly retreating through a shower of bullets, Maisonneuve covered his men with a pistol in each hand, keeping the Indians at bay. Without warning the Indian chief, recognizing the leader of the palefaces, hurled himself at Maisonneuve, only to receive a shot through the heart. The Indians, horror-stricken, rushed to carry their chieftain away, and Maisonneuve returned to the fort. On the site where this engagement took place, Place d'Armes, is erected a statue of Maisonneuve, a heroic bronze by Phillippe Hébert,

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SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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himself a descendant of the first families of New France. On the four corners of the base you may see Jeanne Mance, Le Moyne, Closse and even Pilot, her sensitive nose still outthrust to scent the foes of Ville-Marie.

In spite of many hardships there were great joys as well for Maisonneuve and his people. Upon a return visit to France he induced one hundred men to return with him, among them d'Aillebout. He also brought word that Madame de Bouillon had donated 42,000 francs towards a hospital.

Maisonneuve also discovered Jeanne Mance, daughter of a magistrate, who was determined to cross to New France. Seeing a letter in the *Relations* from Père Le Jeune she wept over the barbarisms. Aided by the rich and pious widow Madame Bouillon she arrived to take charge of the hospital as directress. In addition to the 42,000 francs she was allowed another 2,000 to do with as she pleased. The object of her enterprise was "to nourish, treat and cure the poor sick

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people of the country, and to have them instructed in the things necessary to their salvation."

A few years later, in Paris, Maisonneuve met Marguerite Bourgeois, attached to the Sisters of the Congregation of Troyes as an externé. She was a young woman of thirty then and eager for the colonies. Waiving her right to an inheritance, and giving all she possessed to the poor, she accompanied Maisonneuve upon his return to Montreal. You will read of this beautiful heroine in another book of this series. Jeanne Mance had been in Montreal eleven years when Marguerite Bourgeois arrived. These two women are rightly called "Mothers of Montreal."

Later, as the mission progressed, Madame Bouillon sent more money, also carpets, utensils, two oxen, three cows, and twenty sheep, (horses, which the Indians called "the Frenchmen's moose," did not arrive until 1663.) So Ville-Marie now had milk and wool, and a hospital to which they could go when they were ill—what luxury!

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## SIEUR DE MAISONNEUVE

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In 1657 Abbé Queylus arrived in Montreal, with other deputies from the Seminary of Paris, to take possession of their estate and found the Seminary of St. Sulpice at Montreal for the conversion of the Indians. As soon as they had formerly taken possession, they established a hospital for the sick. In the same year Marguerite Bourgeois laid the foundation of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

Other interesting things might be related of Maisonneuve and those brave spirits associated with him. The colony was founded in faith and self-forgetfulness. No work thus begun but has the seeds of greatness in it. "The love of learning and charity gave birth in Canada to all the great establishments destined for public instruction and the alleviation of human suffering."

Maisonneuve was ever jealous for the independence of the Sulpicians as Lords of the Isle. Consequently he did not readily submit to any authority at the seat of govern-

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ment in Quebec, which might jeopardize their proud rights. On one occasion he even dared to refuse the keys of that fort to the Governor General, M. d'Argenson, an insult which the latter never forgave.

Maisonneuve was Governor of Montreal for twenty-two years. When the Marquis de Tracy became Governor General in 1665 his first act was to dismiss Maisonneuve as unfit for his position. Maisonneuve humbly submitted and returned to France. Finding no possibility of reinstatement he resigned. Strange to say he was succeeded by François Marie Perrot, handsome, well bred, a court favourite—and a swindler. His one object was personal gain. Perrot is forgotten, but never shall we cease to remember Sieur de Maisonneuve, that brave and gallant gentleman, who carried the spirit of a worthier crusade into the unfriendly wilds of New France.

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# THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

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