

QUEBEC'S LOWER NORTH SHORE



Throughout its history, the Lower North Shore has attracted people of different cultures to hunt its rich marine resources of sea mammals and fish. The earliest Amerindian people arrived on the Lower North Shore almost 9,000 years ago, as the glacial ice cap retreated. They lived in small bands along the coast and river valleys. Today's Innu people in Pakua Shipi and Unamen Shipu are mostly likely descendents of some of these earlier Amerindian people.

Amerindian people were later joined in the region by Paleo-Eskimos who travelled in the area 3,000 years BP (Before Present). Later, the Thule Culture people arrived in northern Labrador sometime between 700 and 800 BP. Their cultural descendants, the Inuit, came seasonally



Innu woman making snowshoes

to the Coast between 1300 and the 1500s, but generally did not get along with the European fishermen and whalers. By the mid-18th century, the Inuit ceased their seasonal travels to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. However, some Inuit, women mostly, did intermarry with settlers. Their descendents are the Metis people who live in several communities on the Lower North Shore.

BASQUES FISHERY

After John Cabot made the first 15th century European exploration of Atlantic Canada, it is not known for sure who began the lucrative cod fishing industry here. However, in the first half of the 16th century Basques fishermen from Southwestern France and North-western Spain did come to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to fish cod. Noticing the abundant population of whales, they established a whaling industry, considered the first commercial industry in North America. Basque whaling in the region lasted to the mid-1600s when whales became too scarce to maintain a viable industry here.



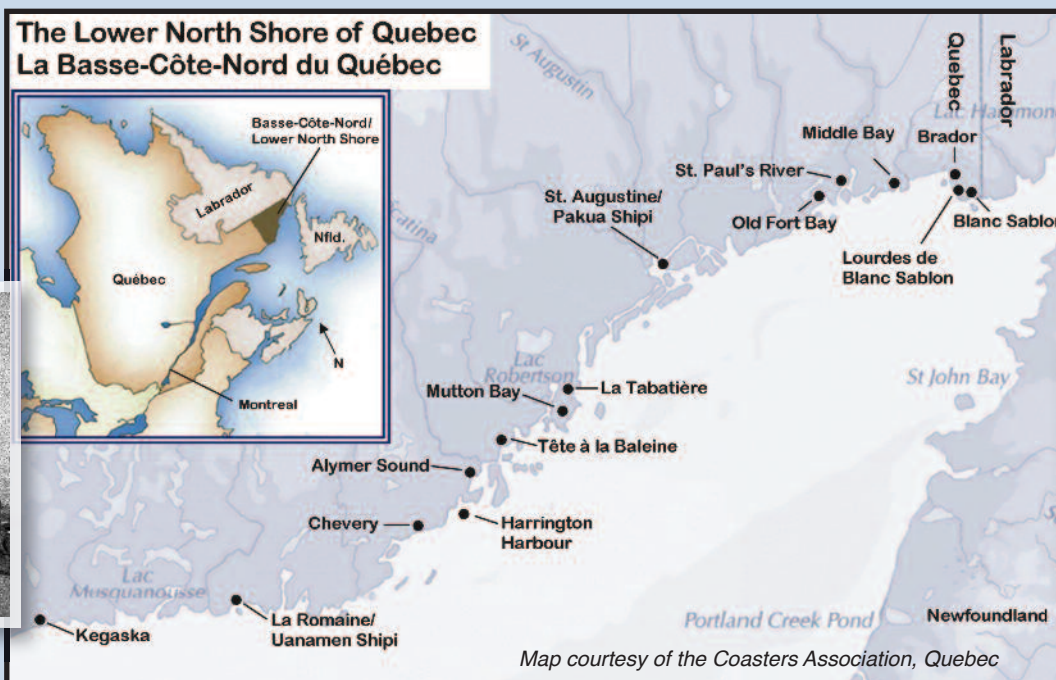
Grenfell hooked mat of fishing schooners

Since the days of early European exploration in Gulf of St. Lawrence, France and England have fought over territory and resources. After France's loss of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), England took control of most of New France,

which included the Lower North Shore. The French fishing and merchant establishments were driven out, and the fishing harbours were taken over by an Anglophone group called the *Labrador Company*.

The *Labrador Company* did well at first but eventually went bankrupt in 1820.

After the company was closed, its fishing concessions were sold to individuals. This new situation attracted more people to the area, many of whom became the first permanent settlers on the Lower North Shore. These settlers, originally from the British Isles, the Channel Islands, Quebec, and Newfoundland mainly fished seals, and to a lesser extent cod. They were often joined season-



Map courtesy of the Coasters Association, Quebec



Early whalers

ENGLISH AND FRENCH SETTLEMENTS

At the same time, French fishermen were catching cod, salmon and seals along the Lower North Shore. At the end of the 17th century, the King of France began to give land grants in the region to New France based entrepreneurs. Land grants, called a concession, gave exclusive hunting and fishing rights to the grantees, who also traded furs with the Inuit and Innu.

ally by fishing schooners from around the Gulf of St. Lawrence and New England.

The prospect of a good life and decent income attracted many Francophone settlers as well. From the 1840s to 1860s, the new settlers on the Lower North Shore were mostly French Canadians from other regions in Quebec, where they had left overpopulated lands, hoping to find a better life on the Coast.

COD AND SEAL FISHERIES

Unfortunately by the 1860s the seal fishery, as well as the salmon fishery, had become less productive. As a result,



the living conditions deteriorated for most of the fishing families on the Lower North Shore. In spite of the economic downturn, settlement continued on the Coast. Between 1860 and 1900 most of the new settlers came from Newfoundland. They introduced cod fishing on the Lower North Shore as a regular fishery. A fisherman and merchant from Boston, William Henry Whiteley, revolutionised the cod fishery when he invented the cod trap in 1871. The cod trap, an anchored net, quickly became the most efficient way to fish cod. It was in use as the primary tool of the cod fishery well into the 20th century.



Harrington Harbour

While there was no more significant immigration on the Lower North Shore during the 20th century, the overall population continued to grow with increasingly large families until the 1970s. In recent years many people have moved away in search of better economic opportunities outside the fishery. This outmigration does not include the Innu communities of Pakua Shipi and Unamen Shipu, where the population is growing. The Innu continue to combine their traditional cultures with modern economic activities and the latest communications shared by all the people on the Coast.

After 500 years of intense commercial fishing of cod and salmon, the fish populations have significantly diminished. Today the government has put a very strict quota on cod fishing and banned commercial salmon fishing completely in an



Cod fisherman 1980s

attempt to stabilise and hopefully rebuild the fish stocks. Meanwhile, local residents continue to enjoy their way of life, combining traditional culture with modern communications and travel in close-knit and hospitable communities. For some this means migrating off the coast seasonally for work, but always returning home at the first opportunity.



For More Information:

www.thelownorthshore.com/history/timeline
www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/gateways
www.tourismlowernorthshore.com



Quebec-Labrador Foundation



Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien

History of Quebec's Lower North Shore

