In France, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), minister of the marine to Louis XIV, puzzled over the communications sent from his colonial officials in New France concerning their contacts with Native Americans. French activity in Canada was not new, nor was the minister ignorant of its history. The French penetrated Canada in 1534, when Jacques Cartier made his first voyage, and in 1541-1542, the Cartier-Roberval expedition wintered at Québec while on a quest for gold and diamonds. When the French realized they would find neither, they settled for fur-trading posts. In 1608, Samuel de Champlain came to New France to establish a trading post at Québec, and in the years to come Champlain founded important policies that helped shape the colony throughout most of the century. Marc Lescarbot, a Parisian lawyer, noted that Canada was a paradise for the poor and the peasant who had the patience to build a model agrarian colony. By 1610, the French colonization of Canada was an earnest endeavor.

A significant factor was the enmity between the Iroquois Confederacy and the French. The earliest recorded contact between the Iroquois and French occurred in 1534, when Cartier, having been welcomed by an Iroquois fishing party, kidnapped two sons of the party's leader. He later returned and abducted the leader, Donnacona, as well as nine other men, to report to King François I first hand about a supposed rich kingdom near the Great Lakes. In 1609, Champlain earned the hatred of the League when his party defeated the Mohawk on the banks of today's Lake Champlain. A year later, he and his Huron allies killed 100 Mohawks with guns. Continuing tension between the Huron and Iroquois, the fur trade, and alterations in demography and traditional lifestyles caused by disease and missionaries increased native hostility toward the French.
To the French side the Iroquois League committed unspeakable acts when they martyred Jesuit missionaries.\textsuperscript{4} For example, in 1646 the Mohawk killed Father Issac Jogues, whom they probably perceived as a destructive force. Similarly, Fathers Jacques Buteux, Gabriel Lalemant, and Jean de Brébeuf met their deaths at the hands of the Iroquois.\textsuperscript{5} These episodes turned French opinion against the Five Nations. For example, in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, there is a map entitled “Novae Franciae Accurata Delineatio 1657,” attributed to Jesuit François-Joseph Bressani, which has two large illustration of the martyrdom of Jesuits in the lower right hand corner.\textsuperscript{6} Perhaps in the mid-seventeenth century no map of New France could be complete without making a reference to the violent deaths of the missionaries.

Likewise, the so-called Beaver Wars of the 1640s and 1650s cemented hostilities between the League members and the French. In the 1640s, the French and their indigenous allies, the Hurons, formed a fur trading unit hostile to the Iroquois League, so the members of the Five Nations did not hesitate to go on raids and create a general state of emergency in New France. By 1660, the Iroquois dispersed the Huron, Petuns, Nipissings, Eries, and Neutral from the region that is now southwest Ontario. Although they were in a position to attack New France and her western native allies, subsequent warfare was not particularly effective, even through the League was determined to retain their hunting grounds around Lake Ontario and the course of the Saint Lawrence River.\textsuperscript{7} In 1663, Louis XIV assumed personal control of Canada from the Company of New France and put the colony on serious military footing. The new French strength and rampant disease caused the weakened Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca leaders to sue for peace in 1665. While only the Mohawk remained belligerent, they saw the need for peace with the French after de Tracy’s 1666 destruction of their villages and English assistance from Albany was not forthcoming. Suffering economically, bereft of European allies, and isolated from Five Nations members who made peace earlier, in 1667 Mohawk representatives surrendered to Governor de Courcelle at Québec.\textsuperscript{8}

By Colbert’s tenure, the French in New France had a full set of government officials, including a governor, an intendant, a sovereign council, a bishop, and numerous others.\textsuperscript{9} Both the governor and intendant were under instructions to correspond frequently with Colbert and the king, and they were to write detailed letters about all Canadian affairs, including their impressions and suggestions. Colbert also communicated with the government officials frequently. In some of these missives, Colbert expressed his opinion that the Iroquois were
the "irreconcilable enemies of the colony" and their "inhumanities" towards the colonists made the growth of New France impossible without a force of arms for protection.10 In 1665, Alexandre Prouville de Tracy led what he thought was a successful campaign against the Iroquois, and then returned to France.11 Subsequently, cultural exchange would occur at gunpoint, or, preferably at the hands of missionary groups.12 The French hoped that the Iroquois League would cooperate gracefully, but the natives had different ideas.

Colbert was confused, however, by some of the letters, especially those of the governor of New France, Louis de Baude, Comte de Frontenac.13 The wayward governor dabbled in the fur trade and squabbled excessively with his subordinates, but his letters chronicled cultural contact through the medium of the fur trade. His reports increasingly described the Iroquois as savvy business people and the League as a sovereign group that made its own decisions about trade and friendship. There exists no documentary evidence that the king or Colbert questioned his facts, but they did not like his insistence on cultivating the Iroquois as consumers and trading partners even though other colonial officials agreed.14 The interactions between this European nobleman and the members of the Iroquois League give a provocative perspective on European and Native American relations, especially relating to the fur trade.

Count Frontenac did not like the Iroquois, but his descriptions of their behavior indicated that he placed them within a spectrum of conduct very intelligible to Europeans. Before 1680 the governor described the Iroquois as intelligent potential allies; after this date, they appear as ominous enemies who had to be respected for their power and entrepreneurial skills. Gradually the governor realized that he was dealing with intelligent, cautious entrepreneurs, skillful at diplomacy, artful at trading, motivated by their interests, and the puppets of no European state. No doubt reluctantly, Frontenac assessed the Iroquois League as important in his world of New France.

How much faith can one place in Frontenac's perceptions of the Iroquois League, and in turn, how much do these perceptions reflect back upon him? To answer the first question, this paper considers an article by Bruce Trigger, who discusses the question of how possible it was for Europeans to describe the "Other."15 He claims that the indigenous populations acted in rational, very intelligible ways, no differently than other peoples. Therefore, European informants could and did give a relatively accurate picture of Native American and European interaction, if, as suggested in an article by Peter Wogan, one carefully separates European preconditioned sentiments from accurate observations.16 Such is the case with Louis de Baude, Comte de Frontenac, who served his first
term as governor of New France between the years 1672 and 1682.\textsuperscript{17}

Indeed, the paucity of sources concerning the position and activity of indigenous populations in the northeastern areas of the Americas make the use of old material for new insights particularly important. Authors such as Trigger, Anthony Wallace, and Daniel K. Richter stress the interactive position of Europeans and the Five Nations in the politics and fur trade of France and England. They employ, often creatively, such sources as archaeology, linguistics, and the writings of religious orders, but they tend to ignore the possibility of using French colonial official correspondence to bolster their arguments.\textsuperscript{18} Because of his position as a governor, the leader of the military, and a fur trader, Frontenac closely associated himself with indigenous populations. His sometimes negative comments may initially rebuff scholars interested in the contours of Iroquoian activities in the late seventeenth century. As will be demonstrated by this paper, however, a careful and judicious reading of the letters can allow one to evaluate some of his insights.

The count’s acrid eye examined colonists, Amerindians, and renegade trappers and his pen carefully recorded his impressions, important because of his Francocentric views and the traditional New France hostility to the Iroquois. Frontenac compared Amerindians to the French of his homeland, considered his culture superior, and that his Roman Catholic religion was the one true creed. The count gave credit to the indigenous population where he thought it was due, but some of his comparisons had definite roots in his French background. For example, when Frontenac met with spokesmen for the Five Nations, he called them “the captains of the Five Nations.”\textsuperscript{19} In the count’s realm of experience, only high-ranking personnel conducted diplomacy or discussed political and military matters with representatives of other nations. In fact, he insisted upon this formality when he had the colonists of New France swear their oath of allegiance to the French king.\textsuperscript{20} He stated that he assembled “three or four gentlemen,” some officers, and the most socially important colonists to take the oath separate from the clergy, upper level judiciary, and common settlers.\textsuperscript{21} It was the gentlemen of the first group who expressed their pleasure at the contents of the oath, which gratified Frontenac.\textsuperscript{22} It was not surprising therefore that the count considered that the men speaking for the Iroquois League had military or social superiority—thus his use of the title “captains.”

Apart from Frontenac’s superimposition of French hierarchical practices upon the Five Nations, the count was certain that the French culture and religion were far superior to any form of indigenous culture or belief. Following both his orders and his inclination, and he made it his business to learn some of the
indigenous customs in order to better "frenchify" the Amerindians within his realm. He stated that he wished the Jesuits to understand:

that I believed that in their missions they exercised rendering the Savages subjects of Jesus Christ, [and] subjects of the King...[to] inspire in them the envy of understanding our language...to attempt to render them more sedentary and of their leaving a life so opposed to the spirit of Christianity...24

Like his king, Frontenac was certain the clergy did good work.25 Similar to Louis XIV, however, the count did not always trust the Holy Orders, especially the Jesuits, and he was not certain that either the colonists or the indigenous populations received the best of care and ministering from them.26 In fact, he noted that half a league from Québec, at Notre Dame de Foy, there were no Amerindians who could speak French, despite the concentrated presence of the Jesuits. He later linked this lack to the missionaries' conflicting interest in trade.27

To Frontenac, teaching Amerindians the French language, religion, and culture was important. However, he did appreciate that the indigenous population might resist these attempts at conversion. For example, he wrote that the Iroquois: "do not wish to learn [French]."28 Typically, the count lumped the five separate nations of the Iroquois League under a generic name.29 He failed to note that Iroquois villages were autonomous units, whose leaders struggled for alliances, competed with each other, and often worked at cross purposes. They were not by any means two unified groups of natives. However, despite his ignorance about tribal autonomy and mechanics, Frontenac did not put the blame wholly on the Amerindians who did not choose to learn French ways. In a curious letter to Louis XIV in 1679, Frontenac admitted that interaction with the French "polluted" the indigenous population and was "an obstacle to the instruction that [missionaries] give [the natives]."30 The French offered a bad example and encouraged Amerindians to emulate colonists' vices such as inebriation and indolence. Like many of the count's observations, this letter tended not to demean the natives but indicated alternative explanations for events. Yet the count also tended to judge the world by how well it fit into his preconceived, pre-Enlightenment notions of reasonable behavior.

Thus Frontenac's vision was not always obscured.31 Save for believing France and Catholicism were the pinnacles of civilization, he was able to view the Iroquois League as consisting of humans who behaved understandably. As a result, his writings are an important source for understanding the French colonial experience and Amerindian responses.
The very profitable commerce in beaver and other furs heavily influenced in France's politics in North America. Beginning in 1600, Europeans began to manufacture broad brimmed hats using the soft underbelly fur of the beaver, and as these hats became fashionable, the demand for pelts increased. Russia was the traditional European source for beaver, and during the early decades of the seventeenth century the pelts were costly. Thus the French government decided to obtain furs directly from French holdings. The king and his ministers instituted trade monopolies and alliances with various indigenous groups.

The Iroquois League rapidly became involved in the European beaver trade. From 1620, the Dutch and Iroquois enjoyed a reciprocal trading alliance. The colonists gained lucrative pelts while the indigenous population got European goods, including guns, ammunition, and alcohol. The system broke down in the 1650s, when the Dutch colony experienced major economic and demographic setbacks. Cheating or stealing from natives became common. In 1664, the English conquered New Amsterdam, renamed the area New York, and began tenuous trading contacts with the natives. The Five Nations needed guns, something the English and French hesitated to trade because they were used to fight wars against Europeans as well as opposing native groups. French informants like de Courcelle and Talon noted that when the Iroquois exhausted the beaver supply south of Lake Ontario they moved into former Huron territory. When the English conclusively gained rights to New York from the Dutch in 1674, a trade system developed between the Iroquois League, the Dutch at Albany, and the English at Manhattan. No longer did the antiFrench Iroquois need to court Catholic Iroquois francophiles or governors like Frontenac to obtain weapons, alcohol, or other European goods.

Count Frontenac became not only an important observer but also participant in the pelt business. Born in 1622, Frontenac was a godson of Louis XIII, and his mother belonged to the influential Pontchartrain family. He entered the army as a teenager and fought in several campaigns during the Thirty Years War and for Venice. Like many other nobles of his era, the count lived luxuriously and amassed large debts. He married Anne de la Grange, whose wealthy father disinherited her to protest the marriage. In 1672, just as creditors were ready to seize Frontenac's belongings, they learned to their chagrin that he was appointed governor of New France, because with the commission he obtained an order from the council of state saying he could repay his debts at the king's pleasure. With a mind to recovering his fortune, Count Frontenac sailed to New France.

Colbert's orders for the new governor reflected the minister's strategy. Colbert
wanted two things: to restrict the fur trade and to control westward expansion. His idea was to promote a stable, agrarian culture and large families in New France. Although the fur trade was New France’s major revenue source, the minister regarded it as a force that if uncontrolled could undermine the compact colony he envisioned as the ideal. A booming fur trade would necessitate western garrisons, which Colbert rightly envisioned as sparsely populated, weak, and prone to attack.  

Frontenac immediately realized the wealth that could be made in the fur trade. A seasoned soldier with a pressing need for money, the governor ignored Colbert’s order not to involve himself with the fur trade and swiftly went about making his contacts, both French and Amerindian. The mission Indians near Montréal undoubtedly helped the count, as did experienced Europeans trading partners. Using his office and his prestige, Frontenac attached himself to important New France entrepreneurs including Talon, Sieur Bairze, and Sieur le Bére, as well the ambitious adventurer, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle.  

Before Frontenac arrived in Canada, Colbert had refused permission for Intendant Talon to build a garrisoned fort on Lake Ontario to guard the area from Iroquois or English attacks. Undaunted, the count improved upon Talon’s idea and established not a garrison but a fur trading post on the Kataracoui River at eastern Lake Ontario (1673). When the governor finally reported to Colbert the existence of Fort Frontenac almost a year later, the minister predictably expressed displeasure. However, Frontenac claimed that the fort and a soon-to-be-built boat would secure the lake for the French, while adding that its placement was strategic to tap incoming trade.  

Evidently, Frontenac and other French colonial officials were not excessively concerned about Colbert’s instructions when they interfered with personal economic interests. One should not assume that either the indigenous population or the French settlers who called themselves habitants realized the governor broke the law; such information was only shared by the highest level of government officials and was not a public concern. Thus, one cannot rightly analyze Iroquoian reluctance to trade with Frontenac as a reaction to the count’s misdeeds. To further his ambitions Frontenac went into partnership with la Salle, whose land grant they used to promote their western fur adventures and to form a monopoly. In 1676 the count neglected to inform Colbert that he had built a new fort at Niagara, in order to block the western Algonquian access to Albany and to monopolize the fur trade. With Albany as a trade entrepôt, natives enjoyed excellent prices for their furs and inexpensive European goods, while the English and Dutch obtained pelts that they sold in Europe at a large
profit. It was into this trade Frontenac hoped to intrude, yet the governor was only beginning his fur trading enterprise. With Frontenac's backing, La Salle circumvented Colbert's nonexpansion policies and gained permission from the king on 12 May 1678 to explore the Mississippi Valley and set up forts as needed. The same year, a trading post opened on the Saint Joseph River. In 1680, Frontenac and his partners built Fort Crèvecoeur on the Illinois, then Fort Prudhomme (1682) on the Mississippi below the Ohio River, and Fort Saint Louis (1684) at present-day Port la Vaca, Texas.

Soon after his arrival in New France, Frontenac realized the importance of the Iroquois. He used two methods to handle the Five Nations: alliances with the Iroquois, as well as efforts to limit their ability to trade freely. To curtail the Five Nations middlemen, the governor built Fort Frontenac. The presence of the fort irritated the League, which saw French fort building as expansion into their hunting grounds and thus a threat but they were not in a position to destroy it. Frontenac also tried to obtain an alliance with the Iroquois League prior to 1680, when the Five Nations needed access to European weapons and goods and before the establishment of the Albany-Manhattan-Iroquois trade relationship. Apparently he thought that the Five Nations had some interest in becoming trading partners with the previously reviled French if the terms were good. Although he never directly reported any personal arrangements he might have had with the League, the count did reveal his opinion about their role in politics and the fur trade.

The count wanted to bolster his sagging fortunes from the fur trade, and he was not about to let the king or Colbert interfere with his fur trade scheme. For example, Louis XIV directed the governor to issue permits to trade in order to keep tabs on the number of traders and to discourage the outlawed western trappers known as coureurs de bois. The king did not envision that Frontenac would further his pocketbook by issuing trading licenses to his clients. Colbert ordered an end to this practice on 30 May 1675. Frontenac got around this ordinance by issuing not trading but hunting licenses, until the king commanded him to cease in 1676. The enterprising Canadian governor improved his troubled finances at the expense of Colbert's policy. Such dealings caught the attention of many officials and colonists, especially of Intendant Jacques DuChesneau. An intendant was an official, of equal stature with the governor, whose responsibilities were all colonial judicial and financial matters. Old military men like Frontenac often had a problem keeping to their own affairs, namely the military, and often intruded into their intendants' domain. DuChesneau resented Frontenac's encroachments and thus began a bitter battle over juris-
diction, the fur trade, and personal matters. They fought over liquor trade to the natives, about the fur commerce, on questions of rank, over the law, with the sovereign council, and even on where they sat in church. In general, DuChesneau and Frontenac rarely agreed on anything. Tired of the incessant bickering and the concurring turbulent state of New France, Colbert and the king recalled DuChesneau and Frontenac in 1682.

Colbert did not shy away from privately admonishing Frontenac for his misconduct. A stream of letters from Colbert to the count censured the governor for misusing his authority and disobeying the minister's policy against western expansion. On 4 December 1679, the minister wrote a revealing dispatch to Frontenac. According to Colbert, Louis XIV hoped:

that you can change the conduct that you have given up to the present, because [the King] sees clearly that you are not capable of adopting the spirit of concord and of tolerance necessary for impeding all the dissensions which arise and which are always the main cause of defeat and ruin in the new colonies.

Following up DuChesneau's allegation that Frontenac dealt with coureurs de bois, Colbert accused the governor of protecting the outlawed coureurs and indigenous traders. Frontenac's answer was to put an accusing light on other people, like DuChesneau and his secretary, Denis Riverin. Frontenac received a harsh letter from Louis XIV, charging him with self-promotion and poor service. To the king's indictments the governor replied: "Your Majesty will clearly understand that I never suffered more than when I was represented as violent and as a man who would trouble the Officers of Justice in the performance of their duties." Frontenac refused to be held accountable for his illicit colonial dealings, and not surprisingly, the king and Colbert had their fill of the count. His actions, his behavior, and his schemes demonstrate amply that France did not have an overseas empire but rather a nascent colony whose leaders often did as they pleased. Frontenac's recall came on 9 May 1682.

Despite his illegal and imperious activities, Frontenac was a keen observer of the Iroquois League. His evolving views of the League should be understood within the contemporaneous political situation. His early letters from 1672 to 1679 were written at a time of increasing tensions between the French, English, and Iroquois in North America. The Dutch War (1672–1679) caused French and English colonial authorities to ally against the Dutch until 1675, but between them peace in 1679 did not reduce the strain over land and trade. Frontenac's partner la Salle had voyaged into Illinois country and opened trad-
ing posts, while England made the most of its seizure of the lucrative trading area of New York to cultivate a friendship with the Iroquois intending to thwart French expansion. Frontenac responded by courting the indigenous traders and consumers and joining in the struggle for Amerindian allies and fur trading routes. From 1680, tensions in North America escalated. In September 1680, angered by la Salle’s voyages and French-Illinois trade, six to seven hundred English-supplied Iroquois attacked the Illinois and Miamis, the prelude to a deadly war. It was within this context that Frontenac wrote his comments.

The count’s first recorded observations concerning the Iroquois League were written soon after his arrival in New France, before tensions had escalated and when the Five Nations considered replacing their former Dutch trading partners with the French. Frontenac’s need for money caused him to see the Iroquois League as potential partners who needed to be cultivated. He hoped to offer them terms of trade beneficial to the French and, of course, himself, but he did not consider them unintelligible nor without business sense. In 1672 his opinion mixed as he tended to see the natives as both primitive and modern.

Frontenac’s 1672 memoir to Colbert proves instructive. The lengthy letter consisted of an explanation about the need to protect New France’s widening boarders, hinted at the desirability of building a fort on Lake Ontario, and made observations about the Iroquois. In the first portion of the letter, Frontenac established the Iroquois League as important actors in the fur trade. He stated that they were “threatening to build forts and to repair [the trading activity] towards Manatte and Orange [Manhattan and Albany],” a perceptive observation that proved prophetic. The Five Nations did hope that their old Dutch trading partners and the new English intruders could help them obtain needed European goods and guns at a fair price, yet even at this early date, the natives were also willing to listen to French offers. Here Frontenac understood the savvy Iroquois League as ready to threaten if their economic terms were not met, a strategy quite intelligible to a European gentleman. Thus he tried to demonstrate to Colbert the importance of capturing their clientage from the English.

Because of his lack of knowledge about native customs, however, Frontenac contradicted the image of the indigenous people as agents. Perhaps to reassure the minister that he remembered the warnings about the danger of the Five Nations, Frontenac claimed that the Iroquois were warlike savages, fickle, and inconstant, and whose going to war only depended “on a dream that one of their old women has at night...” In this deprecating and misogynistic statement, the count assured Colbert that the Iroquois were ignorant and hostile.
Disparaging the dreams of old women completed the picture of irrational "savages" who had a propensity for war without cause. Frontenac showed his unfamiliarity with the crucial role of women in the Five Nations, provided an example of the negative attitude of some Frenchmen towards native women in New France, and hinted, but failed to understand, the importance of dreams to the Iroquois.

In the tribes of the Iroquois League, women determined the fate of captives and kept an eye on new adoptees. The family of a woman received thirty strings of wampum compensation if she were murdered, while a male murder victim was worth only twenty. The clans were matrilineal, in that the child received a name belonging to his or her mother's clan. When a clan "chief" died, the clan mother (a recognized senior woman) consulted other women in that clan of the same tribe and chose the man who would be successor. Also, the dream had a special significance for the members of the Five Nations. Dreams were respected and interpreted as wishes of the spirit. An unfavorable dream might mean disaster in battle, and therefore the clan matron's dream might stop a war party. Frontenac was apparently unaware of ideas so alien to his patrilineal world where the children took the father's last name and social position. While some outstanding French women of the seventeenth century led battles, planned military campaigns, and served as governors, a strong sexism pervaded many aspects of society, especially in the writings of religious orders. Nor were dreams taken too seriously in Europe. Frontenac, a product of his era, would use an elderly woman and her dream as an example of primitive superstition. This characterization was inconsistent with the image of savvy, entrepreneurial Iroquois, but given the nature of the memoir, Frontenac probably emphasized the "savagery" of these Amerindians to thrust home his opinion about the need to contain hostile excursions into French fur-trapping land.

This lack of understanding of tribal customs and the role of women caused him to fall into an old trap of criticizing something he did not understand, yet his failure to grasp some crucial aspects of Iroquoian society did not mean that the count was completely oblivious. Understanding potential allies and previous enemies was important in order to secure trade and peace, and Frontenac was not blinded completely by prejudice. His increasingly informed opinion of the role of the League in trade relations during this era can be demonstrated from the pages of his 1673 letter to Colbert and his journal recording his voyage to Lake Ontario. This journal, intended for both public consumption and as a private record, detailed the long trip through the wilds of New France. In the opening, he wrote that breaking off trade would disrupt peace because the
Iroquois... being in a position to dispense with us, and finding greater facility in their hunting and trade, would more easily resume that inclination they naturally feel for war, inasmuch as they had an idea that they could undertake it with less risk on the arrival of a new governor, whom they knew had no troops.\footnote{74}

These were astute Iroquois taking initiative, cognizant of economic and military advantages, and not Amerindians motivated solely by fickleness or threats. Despite Frontenac's stereotypical analysis of the indigenous people's "natural" inclination for war, he perceived their active role in trade and politics.\footnote{75} The fact that he had limited troops in New France also shaded the description. Perhaps Colbert would be more likely to send reinforcements if he thought that the enemies were warmongers, that Frontenac was vulnerable with few soldiers, and that the natives did not depend upon the French for trade goods. The tenor of the letter implied that if the French could capture Iroquoian commerce, war might be averted. Thus Frontenac hoped to justify his insubordinate establishment of new forts. Self-service was not new for a French colonial governor.

In another section of the journal, Frontenac discussed how he tried to win the Iroquois League to a partnership in fur, a proposition that could only be made before the start of the Illinois conflict (1680). Forming strong trade bonds with the Iroquois, and of course profiting personally on the side, would bond the Five Nations to the French and help pay back the governor's creditors in the likely event he lost his post.\footnote{76} The governor noted that the Iroquois spokesman, Tarontishaty, was "the most skillful and the most experienced" of the leaders of the Five Nations.\footnote{77} Indeed, he paid him a compliment when he called him an "orator."\footnote{78} He was quite impressed with the Iroquois delegation. He wrote to Colbert that

> You would have assuredly been surprised, Monseigneur, to see the eloquence, the address, and the finesse with which all their deputies spoke to me, and if I had not the fear of looking ridiculous before you, I would tell you that they behaved to me reminiscent of the manners of the Senate of Venice, although their skins and their coverings were rather different from the clothes of the procurators of St. Mark.\footnote{79}

Frontenac opined that Tarontishaty could be persuaded that Iroquois policy should include trading with the French because it would be a mutually beneficial experience.\footnote{80} The way Frontenac planned to gain the goodwill of this prominent individual was by courting him with all the attention that would be lavished on a fellow entrepreneur.\footnote{81} If Frontenac thought the League consisted of
articulate "savages," as he stated in one portion of his early 1672 letter, then wooing Tarontishaty would entail some serious talk. The actual 1673 negotiations were quite revealing.

Frontenac discussed the fort’s benefits with Tarontishaty in an intelligent and balanced fashion. The count tried to persuade Tarontishaty to choose his fort because the post was convenient and the League members would receive the same good treatment and terms as a French trader. Appreciating Iroquois trade skills and independence, Frontenac offered an explanation for the possible disparity of price between Albany and Fort Frontenac, observing that because of the great distances involved in transporting trade goods to the isolated fort, prices might seem a little higher in comparison.

In turn, Frontenac recorded how the indigenous spokesman, "in an address which exhibited nothing barbarous," stated that the League needed to know precisely how much it could get for pelts and the cost of the trade goods. Frontenac avoided committing himself to price but also spoke reasonably when he replied that until the fort was built and material shipped in, he would not know the cost of the merchandise. The Iroquois, according to Frontenac, appeared satisfied to come to the fort when it opened and discern the advantages for themselves. Frontenac’s depiction of the Iroquois League was one of careful, thoughtful consumers and merchants who had a voice in how they managed their furs and their alliances. They had a rational policy of creating competition for their furs by choosing, at times, not to deal with the Dutch at Albany.

Another interesting section of the journal concerns Frontenac’s meeting with the “Captain General of all the Five Nations,” in whom the count was delighted to report that he could see “submission and peace.” Many seventeenth-century letters used to word “submission” to denote compliance or general agreement, while the word “peace” meant not just the opposite of war, but also being satisfied with oneself and one’s situation. The next portion of his sentence was striking, however. Having assured his reader that the League was now in general agreement and satisfied, the count continued that the captain general “assured him he should ever entertain [peace and submission], though naturally he might be induced to wage war, and his interests may obviously lead him there.”

Significantly, Frontenac realized that Iroquois interests might require war to fulfill, so all the more reason to obtain their friendship and make them dependent upon trading posts that could compete with the Dutch and English!

In 1674, Frontenac reinforced his observation that the Five Nations consisted of careful consumers and central agents in the fur trade. The governor informed Colbert that only two things kept the Iroquois trading with the French:
the general fairness of Frontenac's dealings with them, and the convenience of fort. The count's boasting about his "fairness" aside, he noted that accessibility won over the indigenous consumer, not threats or manipulation. By 1674, the count's experience with the Five Nations did not cause him to like them, but he did stop deprecating native customs and society. He had come to respect the Amerindians as savvy business people who resisted even his best laid plans if terms were not favorable.

Frontenac's respect for the Five Nations as astute traders only increased with time. In his 6 November 1678 missive to Colbert, Frontenac informed the minister about the latest trading news and colonial difficulties. He noted that indigenous groups were coming in large number to Québec, but this trade gave the French little profit as they brought only a few pelts. The English gave a higher price for beaver skins and sold their goods quite inexpensively, thus, the convenient Albany fort was "a great lure" for Amerindians, who shopped in a discriminating fashion. Business was so good, claimed Frontenac, that the English wondered if "they will not completely attract [indigenous peoples] there and not destroy from there all commerce that we have with [Amerindians]."

Once again, the governor demonstrated discernment concerning native people, but perhaps such observations explained why Frontenac did not have greater success in bringing the League into the French trade circle, since the governor was an old soldier, not a diplomat. Yet instead of calling the League members "savages" because they were reluctant to trade with the French, the count blamed French prices, merchandise, and policy against establishing trading posts in areas convenient to the natives.

Nine years in New France sharpened Frontenac's business sense and his assessment of the Iroquois League. Written during the uneasy early years of the Illinois conflict, these letters demonstrated that the Iroquois League were volatile potential enemies, people who needed to be handled with care, and yet acknowledged them as rational individuals. In his correspondence of 1681, the count openly recognized the Iroquois as autonomous actors. As tensions mounted, the count's respect for the indigenous trader grew, and even sometimes overshadowed his dislike of dangerous "savages." For example, in a letter to Louis XIV dated 2 November 1681, Frontenac informed the king about important events in Canada. He detailed his efforts against the coureurs de bois (renegade fur trappers), problems with the English, and relations with the indigenous populations. The count noted that the Iroquois League had been maneuvering trade between Montréal and Albany for some years. He even wrote the word "entrepôt" to describe the Iroquois use of Montréal.
enous people persisted in this endeavor not because they were threatened or manipulated, but because, as noted in an earlier letter, they discerned that

the English rate the Beaver... one third higher than it is rated [in New France]... and they pay ordinarily in piastres, without making a distinction about who brought it, and when merchandise is preferred, they furnish it at a lower rate by half than do our merchants.95

Military alliance also played a part in the Iroquoian penchant for English trade, because Frontenac continued to note that the Iroquois favored the English with permission to cross their lands.96 The Five Nations seemed to approve warring against the French on the side of the English, thus making them a dangerous and cunning ally.

A year later, in 1682, Frontenac wrote an angry letter concerning the Iroquois to the intendant, Jacques DuChesncau. The purpose of the missive was to acquaint the intendant with the count's preparation for the possibility of a League uprising against the Illinois. Refraining from discussing trade, Frontenac stated that the indigenous people were “insolent” and possessed great “arrogance” because they insisted that the king's representative in New France, the governor, come to their land for a peace talk, rather than the meeting place at Fort Frontenac.97 From the Iroquois point of view, such a demand was not unreasonable, since earlier they met the count near the fort.

To Frontenac, however, such a request was an affront to the dignity of his office, and it was not unlike the insults he had received from his intendant. Frontenac confessed that he would not come to this peace talk, not because the action was beneath his dignity, but because it would “give them reason to believe that we fear them dreadfully, and that it is in their power to dictate the law to us.”98 A complex nobleman of the seventeenth century, Frontenac was alert to any potential depreciation of his lofty station, and he was certainly not going to go begging after the Iroquois. However, he was frustrated that the Five Nations often actively dictated terms. Such a meeting might have proven beneficial to both sides, but Frontenac could not bow to anyone but his superiors, the king and (usually) Colbert. In this instance, the count used strong language against both the League, whom he accused of an affront, and the intendant.

Frontenac answered the speech of the “deputy” of the Five Nations on 12 September 1682. Optimistic that war could be averted, the governor paternalistically threatened the Iroquois and asked them “not to undertake anything without considering well all the inconveniences and evil consequences that may
follow on the one side and on the other." Frontenac was not in a military position to carry out his threats of war and punishment, so his only hope to avert war between the Iroquois and Illinois was diplomacy. The count's words suggested his opinion of the Iroquois mind. His association with the indigenous people had shown him their intellect and their ability to evaluate situations. Frontenac would not have asked them to look at the Illinois side of the argument, to put themselves in the other person's place, had he believed they were witless "savages." If that were the case, the governor would have appealed to Iroquoian suffering and loss alone. Instead, he asked that they consider their options as well as the plight of their neighbors. He knew that the welfare of the French and his job depended upon peaceful solutions to problems with natives. Always prepared to hedge his bets, Frontenac left an interesting memoir concerning the state of Amerindian affairs before his recall to France. His purpose was to highlight his own usefulness in Canada and to blunt the edge of ministerial criticism. His recall did not include the possibility of a prison sentence, and despite Iroquoian reluctance to join Frontenac's fur trading ventures, the count left New France fairly wealthy. His recall did not embitter him about the League; instead, his correspondence demonstrated a mature and informed opinion about the natives.

The letter opened with the governor's summation of the Iroquois perched on the brink of war against the French-allied Illinois. He stated: "This nation, moreover very warlike, also aims at the subjugation of all the others, and at making itself feared by them, so that there is no difficulty in persuading it to go to war and to avenge itself when it has any cause thereof." This portrayal contained conflicting ideas. One can appreciate that Frontenac wanted Colbert to understand that without adequate troops he could do little to avert a war between two peoples with such great a sense of honor. He depicted the Iroquois League as a deadly enemy and yet ambitious in a fashion that a European soldier understood. He mentioned that the Five Nations, in response to French friendship to the Illinois, refused to trade beaver pelts for French goods, a form of early day economic sanction. His tenure of office caused him to see the agency of the Iroquois, to appreciate (if dislike) their business sense, and to emphasize their warlike features as peace moved into conflict.

Count Frontenac did not necessarily like the Iroquois, but his descriptions of their behavior indicated that he placed them within a spectrum of behavior very intelligible to Europeans. Indeed, as a principal player in the fur trade and French colonial politics, he provided an interesting look at the activity of the Iroquois. Before 1680 the governor characterized the Iroquois as intelligent
potential allies. After this date his writings showed them as ominous enemies who were to be respected for their power and entrepreneurial skills, a difference no doubt created by impending war. For their part, the Iroquois discerned no advantage to trading with the French because the cost of French merchandise was higher than English goods. Thus they went about forming their own commerce with the Dutch and English. Yet instead of lashing out verbally at the natives for his lack of trading success with them, Frontenac continued to admire their savvy and to look for ways to obtain their pelts. His deprecating statements were the result of misunderstanding, a need to make the urgency of military help felt in France, and from the wounded ego of a seventeenth-century French count coming to terms with the realities of the New World.

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Notes
1. King François I also claimed he gave permission for the Cartier-Roberval expedition in order to convert the natives to Christianity. However, no missionaries sailed with the expedition. For a brief overview, see Philip Boucher, Les Nouvelles France (Providence, RI: John Carter Brown Library, 1989), 5–6.
2. For example, Colbert and Champlain desired stable, agrarian communities and alliances with indigenous peoples such as Algonquian nations like the Ottawas and Montagnais and Iroquois-speaking Hurons.
5. Although, as Trigger rightly points out, Hurons captured and adopted by the Iroquois played a major role in killing Brébeuf and Lalemant. They had intimate knowledge of French missionaries among the Hurons and blamed them for the destruction on the Huron. See Trigger, Natives and Newcomers: Canada's 'Heroic Age' Reconsidered (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), Chapter 5, especially pp. 267–68.
6. A more accessible reproduction can be found in Dennis, Cultivating a Landscape, 241–42.

9. The governor was in charge of military matters, indigenous affairs, and relations with other European colonies. The intendant who was theoretically something of an equal, presided over judicial and civil matters, as well as finances. The bishop named council members, and had charge of all religious matters. Finally, the sovereign council was a group of men including the governor, intendant, and bishop, as well as other individuals appointed by the king, the governor, the bishop, or voted into office. The council promoted the king's laws, prosecuted criminal and civil cases, appealed cases to higher courts, and heard petitions. An excellent explanation of their positions and duties can be found in William J. Eccles's *Le gouvernement de la Nouvelle France* (Ottawa: La Société historique du Canada, Brochure Historique 18, 1975).


13. As will be noted at the conclusion of this paper, other officials gave valuable observations that should not be neglected. However, for the purposes of this work, only Count Frontenac will be examined.

14. Indeed, usually corroborating information came from other colonial officials such as Intendant Jacques Talon (dates of office: 1666–1668, 1670–1672), Intendant Jacques DuChesneau (1675–1682), Governor Daniel Rémy de Courcelle (1665–1672) and Governor Antoine le Febvre de la Barre (1682–1685), for example, whose papers reinforced many of Frontenac’s assertions and impressions. The correspondence of Talon, DuChesneau, and de Courcelle is mostly in Paris, at the Bibliotheque Nationale and Archives Nationales. De la Barre’s correspondence may be perused in *La Nouvelle France sous Joseph-Antoine le Febvre de la Barre*, Pauline Dubé, ed. (Sillery, Québec:Septentriion, 1993).

When Frontenac was not corroborated it generally occurred when he or his antagonists wrote about personal feuds, such as his battle with his hated intendant, DuChesneau, or when he tried to justify his importance and his accomplishments in order to gain or regain royal favor.


villagers kept clan headmen in their position. See "Cultural Brokers," 42. A spokesman for the Iroquois was not necessarily a headman.


21. RAPQ, 1: 21. Frontenac seemed to have trouble remembering if there were three or four estates in the French Estates General (there were three). Since the last Estates General met in 1614, there is little reason to wonder why sixty-eight years later the count was confused.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 1: 44, 35.


25. Ibid., 1: 33, 35. See also 1: 62.

26. There are many examples of these sentiments contained within Frontenac's letters. For examples, see Ibid., 1: 20–21, 31–34, and 1: 63.

27. Ibid., 1: 21. These Iroquois were the so-called francophile Christians, who quit their tribes in the mid-1670s to join missionary communities in New France as domiciles or mission Indians.


29. The Iroquois League, or Five Nations, was not a unified body of homogenous Amerindians but a great league of peace consisting of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. This confederacy had a group of autonomous villages.

The Mohawk controlled the eastern part of the Iroquois Confederacy. Their proximity to Albany and their access to the fur trade made them a powerful part of the Five Nations. Likewise, their proximity to the east gave them early contact with Europeans. Early French alliance with their enemy, the Algonquin, caused many costly raids and losses of warriors in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Becoming dependent on Dutch trade, the Mohawk continued the tradition under the English flag (William Fenton and Elisabeth Tooker, "Mohawk," Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast (henceforth HNAI), vol. 15 (Washington: Smithsonian, 1978), 466–70.

The Oneida controlled Oneida Lake and the upper Mohawk valleys. At the time of European contact, there was a single Oneida village of about sixty-six houses. Soon involved with the fur trade, the Oneida faced hard times in the 1640s when the fur supply could not match their demand for European goods. Competition for furs and goods between the Oneida-Iroquois Confederacy and the French-Huron-Algonquin caused the Oneida to war furiously and to adopt replacements for deceased warriors captured from enemy tribes (Jack Campisi, HNAI, "Oneida," 481–82).

The Onondagas were the most central of the tribes of the League. Such a location kept them relatively safe from invasion from the east and west. They were the designated “firekeepers” of the League, thus they kept wampum records and convened meetings. In the seventeenth century, the Onondagas had two villages: a large capital and a smaller village. They were the diplomatic center of the Five Nations and housed a pro-French faction. They traded with the Dutch as well as the French (Harold Blau, Jack Campisi, and Elisabeth Tooker, HNAI, "Onondagas," 491–94).

The Cayuga were located between the Onondagas and the Seneca, the keepers of the western Iroquois region. The Cayuga relied heavily upon hunting, and in the seventeenth century they had three main villages. As their dependency upon the fur trade increased, so too did their raids on neighboring Huron, Petun, and Neutral lands. In 1661, a Cayuga chief lead a delegation to Montréal to arrange a peace settlement with the French, with whom they and the rest of the League had fought for years. The establishment of peace would allow the Cayuga to pursue their fight against the Susquehannock. However, by 1687, relations with the French worsened and the Cayuga enjoyed the singular good fortune of being the only

The last member of the Confederacy was the keeper of the western lands, the Seneca. The biggest group of the League, they enjoyed large hunting grounds. Archaeological evidence points to two groups of Senecas, an eastern and western branch, during the seventeenth century. Like the rest of their Confederacy, the Seneca became involved in the fur trade as their desire for European goods increased. As heavier thinned out, they looked to expand their territory to the north, against the Huron. Hatred and fear of the Susquehannock caused the Seneca to band with other League members when traveling to Albany to trade furs, and also to seek peace with the French to free their braves for war against their indigenous enemy. With the Susquehannock defeated in 1675 and the French expanding westward, relations deteriorated between the Seneca and the French (Thomas Abler and Elisabeth Tooker, *HNAI*, "Seneca," 505-07).


36. For the rift between Catholic Iroquois and non-Catholic Iroquois, see Richter, "Iroquois versus Iroquois," 1-16.
38. This policy becomes clear when perusing Colbert's letters and instructions to the governor of

39. *Royal Fort Frontenac* (henceforth *RFF*) Richard Preston, ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society for the University of Toronto Press, 1958), 121 and 319; and *RAPQ*, 1: 26–52, 60–78.

40. The refusal came because Colbert wanted to stop Canadians from migrating west, and Lake Ontario constituted the west. See *RFF*, 102 and 300. In the margin of the letter is Colbert’s answer: “Establishment on Lake Ontario. To wait.”

41. *RAPQ*, 1: 58, 68.

42. Ibid., 1: 26–52.


46. *RFF*, 125 and 323.


49. *NYCD*, 3: 347, 772. For later dates, see 3: 442 and 510.

50. See *Archives de Québec: ordonnances, commissions, etc., etc. de gouverneurs et intendants de la Nouvelle France*, 2 vols., P.G. Roy, ed. (Beaucer ville: L’éc lair e, 1924), 1: 210 for a sample of the permits. Trading licenses were supposed to limit how many French could go into the wilds as Colbert did not want to allow the colonists to spread thinly in North America.


53. The governor and his intendant created turmoil both in the colony and, no doubt, in Colbert’s stomach. On his return to France, DuChesnau left government service and devoted himself to his family and estate at Ambrant in Berry, where he died in 1696 (*DCB* 1: 287–90).


55. Ibid., III,2: 641.

56. Archives Nationales, Colonies, C11 A5, 198–204. Both men used *coureur de bois* and their official capacity to get rich on the fur trade, and they took turns arresting the other’s *coureurs* and setting free their own imprisoned men like La Salle and Greysolon de Dulhut attached themselves to Frontenac and Charles Aubert de la Chesnaye and Jacques Lalande belonged to DuChesnau’s illegal fur operation (*DCB* 1: 289).


60. The governor excelled at imperious behavior when he decided someone undermined his authority. For example, once he arbitrarily jailed a clerk of the court, and another time he had a Montréal judge who annoyed him put in prison for two months and fined 200 livres. In the winter of 1678–79 he tried to subjugate the council and intendant by planning to preside over meetings, which was illegal since the king’s edict of 1675. When the sovereign council refused to allow Frontenac to preside, the governor sent the attorney-general, council member Ruette d’Auteuil, and two other members packing to France for refusing to submit to the command of the king’s representative. In the end, only one member went to France, and he convinced the king and Colbert that Frontenac was to blame. It took all the influence of Frontenac’s
friends and family to retain his position in the face of such abuses (DCB, 1: 136). Eventually, however, their lobbying failed to soothe the anger of the minister and Louis XIV.

61. Because of the lack of qualified individuals for high posts in colonial areas, the crown gave the count back his position as governor of New France in 1689. He died in office on 28 November 1698 at Québec and was laid to rest in the church of the Recollets of Québec.


63. RAPQ, 1: 14.

64. Ibid.

65. The role of the Iroquois as sort of middlemen is disputed by authors such as Schlesier in “Epidemics and Indian Middlemen,” 129–145. He states, “The Iroquois never attempted to become middlemen of the fur trade, neither did other Indian tribes, including the Huron and Ottawa” (131). He goes on to suggest that disease, especially smallpox, and not economic fights, decimated the natives. Ultimately his argument is not convincing because weapons necessary to compete with French-supplied natives and with Europeans in general came from the fur trade.

66. RAPQ, 1: 15.

67. HNAI, 15: 423, 482.

68. Ibid., 424.


70. Ibid., 319.


72. Since Frontenac did not understand that in a matrilineal society a mother's brother had a more important role in the family than a father, he often referred of himself as the “father” of the Iroquois League and not as their mother’s brother (NYCD, 9: 85, 95–96). For more information on this interesting nomenclature, see John Steckley, “The Warrior and the Lineage: Jesuit Use of Iroquoian Images to Communicate Christianity,” Ethnohistory 39:4 (1992): 500–01.

This is not to diminish the possibility that European perception of indigenous customs caused a possibly erroneous form of address, or the problem of interpreters changing Amerindian speeches to conform with preconceived European norms. See Lawrence Leder, ed., Livingston Indian Records, 1666–1773 (Gettysburg: Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1959) and Archives de Québec.

73. NYCD, 9: 85, 95–96. A letter repeating some of the information in the journal can be found in RAPQ, 1: 26–52. See also NYCD, 9: 106–07.

74. NYCD, 9: 96.

75. According to a memoir from 1 October 1668, the French on Madagascar also had a “natural” inclination for war and rapine (B.N., Manuscrits Francaise, Nouvelles Acquisitions #9342, 66).

76. Frontenac only needed to consider the fate of the Marquis de Mondevergue, lieutenant-general of the East Indies and governor at Madagascar. Accused of ill deeds, de Mondevergue lost his post and died in prison at Château Saumar, France, in 1672.

77. RAPQ, 1: 38.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., 1: 39.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.


83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., 9: 110.
85. Ibid., 9: 111.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 9: 113.
88. Ibid.
89. RFF, 1125.
90. CDM, 1: 266.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. RAPQ, 1: 126.
94. Ibid. No doubt, these were domiciles who were settled near Montréal in fair numbers. The French treated them carefully, and they were not subject to the French judicial system in most cases. See Jan Grabowski, “French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal, 1670-1760,” Ethnohistory 43:3 (1996): 405-29.
95. RAPQ, 1: 127.
96. Ibid.
97. NYCD, 9: 175.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid., 9: 188.
100. RAPQ, 1: 141.
101. Ibid., 1: 143.