



Charlevoix

## TWO VIEWS:

## French-English Rivalry in New France & New York in the late 1600s, and the Schenectady Massacre of 1690

The imperial rivalry between France and England in North America escalated with the outbreak of King William's War (1689-1697), the first of the four French and Indian Wars. The French, with their Huron and Algonquian allies, battled the English with their Iroquois allies, each side gaining little.



Smith

### François-Xavier de Charlevoix, S.J.

*Histoire et description générale  
de la Nouvelle-France, 1744*

From the year 1669 . . . the colony [of New France] had increased considerably, and by the census of this year 1688 it was found to be composed of eleven thousand two hundred and forty-nine persons. The English, indeed, as already remarked, from that time shared with the French in fur trade; and this was the chief motive of their fomenting war between us and the Iroquois, inasmuch as they could get no good furs, which come from the northern districts except by means of these Indians who could scarcely effect a reconciliation with us without precluding them from this precious mine.

Not that the Iroquois were great hunters; but besides their often robbing our allies and voyageurs<sup>1</sup> of the furs they were bearing to Montreal, they induced several tribes, and often even our bushlopers,<sup>2</sup> to trade with the English of New York, and the profit which they derived from this trade, of which their country became of course the center, retained them in the English interest. To these reasons was added the allurements of a better market, which made a great impression on all the Indians, so that the best part of the furs of Canada went to the English, without there being any possibility of bringing to reason those interested in this trade, the head men of which being in

### William Smith, Jr.

*The History of the Province  
of New-York, 1757*

Before I proceed . . . it may not be improper to present the reader with a summary view of the history and character of the Five Nations.<sup>3</sup> These, of all those innumerable tribes of savages which inhabit the northern part of America, are of most importance to us and the French, both on account of their vicinity and warlike disposition. . . .

No people in the world perhaps have higher notions than these Indians of military glory. All the surrounding [Indian] nations have felt the effects of their prowess; and many not only became their tributaries [allies], but were so subjugated to their power, that without their consent they durst not commence either peace or war. . . .

The French, upon the maxim, *divide & impera*, [divide and rule] have tried all possible means to divide these republics and sometimes have even sown great jealousies amongst them. In consequence of this plan, they have seduced many [Indian] families to withdraw to Canada, and there settled them in regular towns, under the command of a fort, and the tuition of missionaries. . . .

Dongan<sup>4</sup> [governor of New York] surpassed all his predecessors in a due attention to our affairs with the Indians, by whom he was highly esteemed. It must be remembered to his honor that though he was ordered by the Duke<sup>5</sup> to encourage

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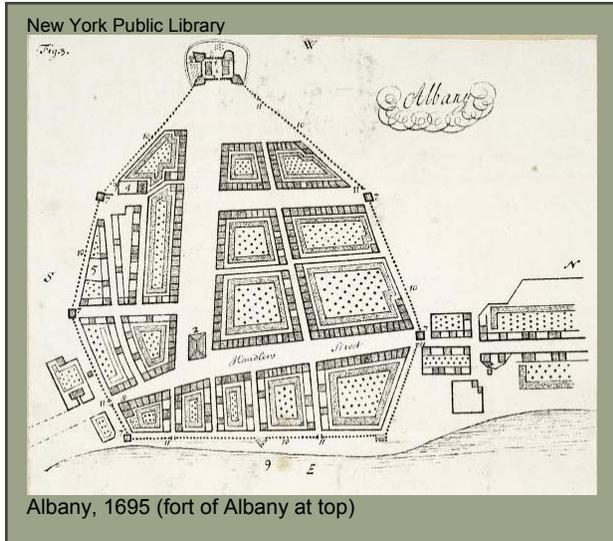
Jean Baptiste Louis Franquelin, map of North America (*Amérique septentrionale*), 1685, detail including (from east to west)

- ♦ Quebec on the St. Lawrence River; site of failed English attack in 1690
- ♦ Nouvelle Angleterre (New England)
- ♦ Mon[t]real on the St. Lawrence River, site of Iroquois attack in July 1688
- ♦ Long Island and Manhattan (which the French planned to attack in 1689) in "Nouvelle Yorck"
- ♦ Fort Orange (Albany, New York) on the Hudson River
- ♦ Corlar (Schenectady), site of French and Indian attack of 1690
- ♦ Lake Ontario (Lac Frontenac)
- ♦ Fort Niagara between Lakes Ontario and Erie; French fort built "to exclude the English from the lakes" as was
- ♦ Fort Duluth (Fort St. Joseph) between Lakes Erie and Huron
- ♦ Tsonnontouan, Onnontague, Onneioust, and Anniez: Iroquois towns.

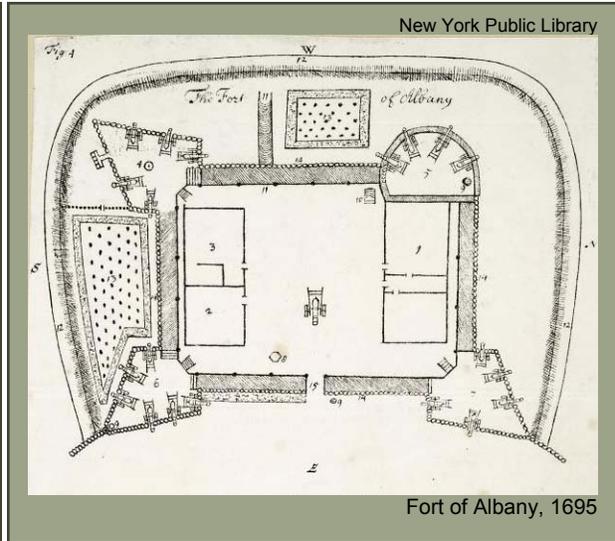
France, did not see matters as clearly as those who were in America. . . .

The sole resource of the province lay in our alliance with the Indians of those parts,<sup>6</sup> and especially of the Abénaquis, among whom Christianity had made great progress; but there was constant fear of our losing these allies, the most manageable and at the same time the bravest in all Canada. The English were incessantly making them presents and the most extravagant promises to detach them from our interest; and would certainly have succeeded but for the invincible attachment of these tribes to their religion and their missionaries. In the sequel of this history we shall see that in order to preserve their faith they often confronted the greatest perils, and that, with the slightest hope of compensation from the French for their losses, they formed on that side a rampart

the French priests, who were come to reside among the natives, under pretense of advancing the Popish [Roman Catholic] cause, but in reality to gain them over to a French interest; yet he forbid the Five Nations to entertain them. The Jesuits, however, had no small success. Their proselytes are called Praying Indians, or Caghuagaes, and reside now in Canada at the Fall of St. Lewis, opposite to Montreal. This village was begun in 1671 and consists of such of the Five Nations as have formerly been drawn away by the intrigues of the French priests, in the time of Lovelace and Andross, who seem to have paid no attention to our Indians affairs. It was owing to the instigation also of these priests that the Five Nations about this time committed hostilities on the back parts of Maryland and Virginia, which occasioned a grand convention at Albany, in the



Albany, 1695 (fort of Albany at top)



Fort of Albany, 1695

that all the forces of New England have never been able to storm. . . .

Meanwhile, the declaration of Sir Edmund Andros<sup>7</sup> in regard to peace with the Iroquois, and the agreement which it was soon known the cantons had entered into with that governor, not to take any steps in that matter without his intervention, filled the whole colony with consternation. But it often happens that, when no ordinary means appears of avoiding a pressing evil, men make efforts till then deemed beyond their strength. Indignation to see a handful of savages keep a whole great country incessantly in check inspired a design [plan] that would have seemed hardy, even had our situation been as flourishing as it was deplorable. This was the conquest of New York. The Chevalier de Callieres,<sup>8</sup> having laid the plan before the Marquis de Dénouville,<sup>9</sup> went over to France [January 1689] to propose it to the Court, as the sole means of preventing the utter ruin of New France. . . .

The conquest of New York he [governor of New France<sup>10</sup>] had also extremely at heart, and the Chevalier de Callieres, who had succeeded in inducing the Marquis de Dénouville to favor it, wrote in these terms to the Marquis de Seignelay:<sup>11</sup>

“Mr. de Dénouville will tell you, Monseigneur, how important it is for the king to make himself master of New York, and anticipate the English in their project of ruining this country by means of the Iroquois, with whom he must not hope to make peace by ways of negotiation, so long as we are at war with the former. If we remain on the defen-

year 1684. Lord Howard of Effingham, the Governor of Virginia, was present and made a covenant with them for preventing further depredations, towards the accomplishment of which Colonel Dongan was very instrumental. . . .

Dongan, who was fully sensible of the importance of the Indian interest to the English colonies, was for compelling the French to apply to him in all their affairs with the Five Nations; while they, on the other hand, were for treating with them independent of the English. For this reason, among others, he refused them the assistance they frequently required, till they acknowledged the dependence of the Confederates [Iroquois] on the English Crown. King James, a poor bigoted, popish, priestridden Prince, ordered his Governor to give up this Point and to persuade the Five Nations to send messengers to Canada to receive proposals of peace from the French. For this purpose a cessation of arms and mutual redelivery of prisoners was agreed upon. Near 1200 of the Confederates attended this negotiation at Montreal, and in their speech to De Nonville insisted with great resolution upon the terms proposed by Colonel Dongan to Father Le Vaillant. The French Governor declared his willingness to put an end to the war if all his allies might be included in the Treaty of Peace, if the Mohawks and Senecas would send deputies to signify their concurrence, and the French might supply Fort Frontenac with provisions. The Confederates, according to the French accounts, acceded to these conditions, and the Treaty was ratified in the field. But a new rupture not long

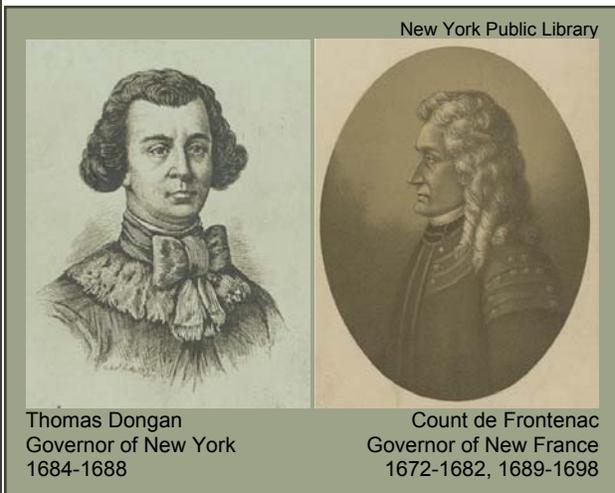
sive, the ruin of this colony is inevitable; these Indians will continue their inroads, burn and pillage everything, without our being able to oppose them, were there even twice as many more troops in the country; but by taking New York, we compel them to ask peace on such conditions we choose to impose.

“This expedition may take place before or after harvest, and there are two ways of carrying it out. The surest is to attack Manhattan with six ships, carrying an army of 1200 men, while the Canadian troops attack Orange (Albany) by land. The other means is less expensive; it consists in sending to Canada 300 recruits, who, with a like number of old soldiers, will be stationed to guard the principal posts in the country, while a force of 1000 royal troops and 3 or 400 colonists are sent to lay siege to Orange. That town taken, a good garrison will be left there, and our forces will push on to attack Manhattan (New York); but to succeed in this second siege, it is necessary to have two frigates, which can land 300 men to replace those left at Orange and to guard the canoes. These two frigates should be sent in March to Port Royal [Nova Scotia], and at the same time provision should be made for the safety of that post, exposed to be carried by the English from Boston; and a frigate to Quebec to convey his majesty’s orders, the 300 recruits, flour, and other necessary provisions.”

The minister could not but regard with favor this project of the Governor of Montreal, whom he knew to be one of the Colonial officers who planned most wisely, and was able to carry out anything confided to; but while they were busy in Canada seeking means to make conquests from the English, tidings came that the English on their side were taking measure to seize Canada. Perhaps with greater diligence they might have been anticipated, but there was no time left when information came of their design. Once more, therefore, was it necessary to renounce a conquest necessary to the tranquility of New France in order to meet an enemy who had made the first move, and who had this advantage over us, that he could raise in America sufficient forces to crush us. Fortunately for us, these were not put in good hands. . . .

He<sup>12</sup> adds that the English and French are incompatible in that part of the continent of America; that the former regard our missionaries

after ensued from a cause entirely unsuspected. The Dinondadies [Huron allies of the French] had lately inclined to the English trade at Missilimakinac,<sup>13</sup> and their alliance was therefore become suspected by the French. Adario, their chief, thought to regain the ancient confidence which had been reposed in his country men by a notable action against the Five Nations; and for that purpose put himself at the head of 100 men: nothing was more disagreeable to him than the prospect of peace between the French and the



Confederates; for that event would not only render the amity of the Dinondadies useless but give the French an Opportunity of resenting their late favorable conduct towards the English. Impressed with these sentiments, out of affection to his country, he intercepted the ambassadors of the Five Nations were coming that way. As the Dinondadies and Confederates were then at war, the ambassadors were astonished at the perfidy of the French Governor and could not help communicating the design of their journey. Adario, in prosecution of his crafty scheme, counterfeited the utmost distress, anger and shame on being made the ignominious tool of De Nonville’s treachery and addressing himself to Dekanesora, the principal ambassador, said to him, “Go, my Brethren, I untie your Bonds, and send you Home again, though our Nations be at War. The French Governor has made me commit so black an Action that I shall never be easy after it till the Five Nations shall have taken full Revenge.” This outrage and indignity upon the rights of ambassadors, the truth of which they did not in the least doubt, animated the Confederates, to the keenest

as their most dangerous enemies, and did not rest till they had driven them out of all the Iroquois cantons; that, even religion apart, it was very important to resort to every means to restore them there, and to have some among all the other Indians, over whom they have acquired a very great ascendancy; that the Iroquois have, in reality, more esteem and inclination for our nation than for the English; but that commercial interest, or rather the credit which trade give them, would always keep them in the English alliance; . . .

All contained in this memoir was well weighed, and, with few exceptions, in regard to which there was some difference of opinion in the colony, it would have been much to the advantage of New France had more attention been paid to it. But the whole attention of the court was given to more interesting, because nearer, objects. The king and his ministry, without denying the utility of conquering New York, believed all the forces of the kingdom needed elsewhere; and the celerity required by such an expedition was not as easy as they imagined in Canada. Accordingly, the proper season for dispatching ships and troops was again allowed to pass. . . .

thirst after revenge and accordingly 1200 of their men, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1688, landed on the South side of the island of Montreal, while the French were in perfect security; burnt their houses, sacked their plantations, and put to the sword all the men, women, and children, without the skirts of the town. A thousand French were slain in this invasion, and twenty-six carried in captivity and burnt alive. Many more were made prisoners in another attack in October, and the lower part of the island wholly destroyed. Only three of the Confederates were lost in all this scene of misery and desolation<sup>14</sup>. . . .

Nothing could have been more advantageous to these [English] colonies, and especially to New-York, than the late success of the Five Nations against Canada. The miseries to which the French were reduced, rendered us secure against their inroads, till the work of the Revolution<sup>15</sup> was in a great measure accomplished; and to their distressed condition we must principally ascribe the defeat of the French design about this time to make a conquest of the Province. De Calliers, who went to France in 1688, first projected the scheme [to attack New York]. . . .

## The Schenectady Massacre of February 1690

Charlevoix, *New France*

Smith, *New-York*

One afternoon, about four o'clock, our braves arrived within two leagues of Schenectady; here the Great Mohawk, chief of the Iroquois of Sault St. Louis, harangued them with great eloquence, speaking with an authority acquired not only over the Indians, but even over the French, by his great services to the colony, actions of admirable conception and heroic valor, eminent virtue, and untiring zeal for religion. He exhorted them all to forget past hardships in the hope of avenging the evils suffered the last few years on the perfidious English, who were the main authors of all. They could not, he added, doubt of Heaven's assistance against the enemies of God, and in so just a cause.

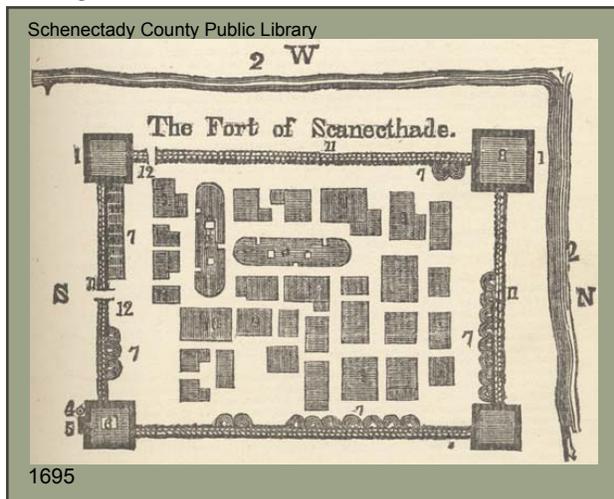
They had scarcely resumed their march when they fell in with four Indian women who gave them all the information required to approach the place securely. Giguière, a Canadian, was detached at once with nine Indians, on a scout, and discharged his duty perfectly. Unperceived, he

Among other measures to detach the Five Nations from the British interest and raise the depressed spirit of the Canadians, the Count De Frontenac thought proper to send out several parties against the English colonies. D'Aillebout, De Mantel, and Le Moyne commanded that against New-York, consisting of about two hundred French and some Caghnuaga Indians, who being proselytes from the Mohawks, were perfectly acquainted with that country. Their orders were, in general, to attack New-York; but pursuing the advice of the Indians they resolved, instead of Albany, to surprise Schenectady [which], tho' they [residents of Schenectady] had been informed of the designs of the enemy, [they believed they] were in the greatest security; judging it impracticable for any men to march several hundred miles in the depth of winter, thro' the snow, bearing their provisions on their backs. Besides, the village was in as much confusion as

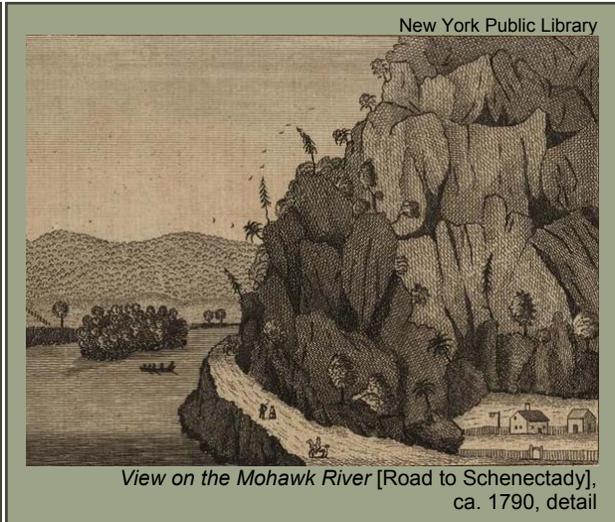
reconnoitered Schenectady leisurely and returned to the force which was only a league distant. It was at first proposed to defer the attack till morning, but the excessive cold changed their plan. They resolved to march at once, and attack on arriving.

Schenectady was almost rectangular in form, and was entered by two gates: one leading to Albany (Orange), which was only six leagues off; the other opening on the main road, where our men were. The order of attack was thus arranged: Mantet and Sainte Helène took charge of the second gate, which the Indian women had assured them was never closed, and which they, in fact, found open. D'Iberville and Repentigny moved to the left to take possession of the first gate; but they could not find it, and rejoined Mantet: so that there was only one attack.

The gate selected for assault was not only open, but totally unguarded; and, as it was night, the whole party entered, unperceived by any of the inhabitants. The two commandants at first separated in order to reconnoiter all points at once; and, as they had enjoined strict silence, they met again at the other end of the town, without



any movement being perceived. Then a yell was raised in Indian style, and each one struck where he was. Mantet attacked a kind of fort, where he found the garrison in arms. Here the resistance was quite vigorous; but the door was at last forced, the English all put to the sword, and the fort reduced to ashes. Few houses in the town were defended. Montigni alone was stopped at one; and, as he persisted in endeavoring to enter, received in the arm and body two blows with a partisan, which put him *hors de combat* [out of



the rest of the Province; the officers, who were posted there, being unable to preserve a regular watch or any kind of military order. Such was the state of Schenectady, as represented by Colonel Schuyler, who was at the time Mayor of the city of Albany, and at the head of the Convention. A copy of his letter to the neighboring colonies, concerning this descent upon Schenectady, dated the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1689-90, I have now lying before me, under his own hand.

After two and twenty days march, the enemy fell in with Schenectady, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February; and were reduced to such straits, that they had thoughts of surrendering themselves prisoners of war. But their scouts, who were a day or two in the village entirely unsuspected, returned with such encouraging accounts of the absolute security of the people, that the enemy determined on the attack. They entered on Saturday night about eleven o'clock at the gates, which were found unshut; and, that every house might be invested [attacked] at the same time, divided into small parties of six or seven men. The inhabitants were in a profound sleep and unalarmed till their doors were broke open. Never were people in a more wretched consternation. Before they were risen from their beds, the enemy entered their houses; and began the perpetration of the most inhuman Barbarities. No tongue, says Colonel Schuyler, can express the cruelties that were committed. The whole village was instantly in a blaze. Women and child ripped open and their infants cast into the flames, or dashed against the posts of the doors. Sixty persons perished in the massacre, and twenty seven were carried into

combat]; but Sainte Helene coming up, the door was forced, and Montigni's wounds avenged by the death of all who were shut up in the house.

It was soon only massacre and pillage, but after two hours the leaders thought it necessary to place guards at all the avenues to prevent surprise, and the rest of the night was spent in refreshing themselves. Mantet had given orders to spare the minister, whom he wished to take prisoner; but he was killed without being recognized and all his papers were burned. Coudre, Mayor of the place, escaped across the river, and seemed preparing to entrench himself with his servants, some soldiers, and Indians, who had followed him. The Commandment sent to summon him at day-break; and as they did not wish to injure him, because he had on several occasions acted very humanely to the French, d'Iberville and the Great Mohawk undertook to summon him. They not only promised him quarter, but also assured him that they would touch nothing belonging to him. On this pledge he laid down his arms, followed the two deputies to Schenectady, after treating them hospitably; and they strictly adhered to all they had promised.

One of the first cares of the chiefs, when they saw themselves complete masters, was to stave in the barrels of liquor, for fear the Indians should become intoxicated. The houses were then set on fire, only the Mayor's being spared, with that of a widow, to which Montigni had been carried. There were about forty, all well built, and well furnished; and no plunder was taken, except what could be readily carried away. Life was granted to sixty, chiefly women, children, and old men, who had escaped the first fury of the assailants, as well as to thirty Iroquois, who were recognized; the object being, to show the cantons that the French struck only at the English, whose loss was estimated at 400,000 lives.

They were too near Albany to remain long in the ruined town. The army decamped about noon. The booty; Montigni, who had to be carried; the prisoners, to the number of forty; and, after a time, want of provisions—as they had neglected to provide sufficiently—greatly retarded the march homeward. Several even would have starved to death had they not had fifty horses, of which only six were alive when the victors reached Montreal on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March. This dearth of food had even compelled them to scatter. Some were attacked;

captivity. The rest fled naked towards Albany, thro' a deep snow which fell that very night in a terrible storm; and twenty five of these fugitives lost their limbs in the flight thro' the severity of the frost. The news of this dreadful tragedy reached Albany, about break of day; and universal dread seized the inhabitants of that city, the enemy being reported to be one thousand four hundred strong. A party of horse was immediately dispatched to Schenectady, and a few Mohawks then in town, fearful of being intercepted, were with difficulty sent to apprise their own castles.



The Mohawks were unacquainted with this bloody scene till two days after it happened; our messengers being scarce able to travel thro' the great depth of the snow. The enemy, in the mean time, pillaged the town of Schenectady till noon the next day and then went off with their plunder and about forty of their best horses. The rest, with all the cattle they could find, lay slaughtered in the streets.

The design of the French in this attack was to alarm the fears of our Indian allies by showing that we were incapable of defending them. Every art also was used to conciliate their friendship, for they not only spared those Mohawks who were found in Schenectady but several other particular persons, in compliment to the Indians, who requested that favor. Several women and children were also released at the desire of Captain Glen, to whom the French offered no violence; the officer declaring he had strict orders against it, on the score of his wife's civilities to certain French captives in the time of Colonel Dongan.

The Mohawks, considering the cajoling arts of the French, and that the Caghnugas who were



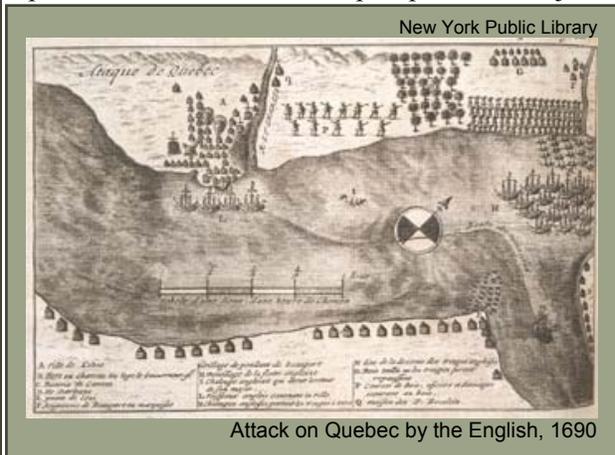
three Indians and sixteen Frenchmen were killed or taken; so that want of forecast [preparation] cost this party much more dearly than the attack on Schenectady, where they lost only one Frenchman and one Indian. . . .

I have nevertheless observed, and this must not be lost sight of, to understand the whole tread of the Iroquois maneuvers, so apparently variant with each other, that these Indians would not calmly have beheld the English sole master of all Canada. They were not ignorant how much they should have to fear at the hands of the English, had the latter no rivals, and at bottom they aspired only to hold the scale evenly balanced between the two nations, whose mutual jealousy made the Iroquois sought by both and ensured their safety. . . .

This policy of two nations, too proud to esteem each other, and too restless to remain on a good understanding longer than their interest demanded, had ceased to be a mystery for those who had any share in the affairs of New France. Frontenac knew this better than any other, and if on the side, it obliged him to be ever on his guard, it reassured him on the other, and induced him to

with them, were once a part of their own body, behaved as well as could be reasonably expected. They joined a party of young men from Albany, fell upon the rear of the enemy, and either killed or captivated five and twenty. Several sachems, in the meantime, came to Albany and very affectingly addressed the inhabitants who were just ready to abandon the country; urging their stay and exciting an union of all the English colonies against Canada. Their sentiments concerning the French appear from the following speech of Condolence. "Brethren, we do not think, that what the French have done can be called a Victory: it is only a further Proof of their cruel Deceit: the Governor of Canada, sent to Onondaga, and talks to us of Peace with our whole house; but War was in his Heart, as you now see by woeful Experience. He did the same, formerly, at Cadaracqui [Kingston, Ontario], and in the Seneca's Country. This is the third Time he has acted so deceitfully. He has broken open our House at both Ends; formerly in the Seneca's Country, and now here. We hope however to be revenged of them."

. . . But what rendered this year [1690] most remarkable was the expedition of Sir William Phips against Quebec. He sailed up the river with a fleet of thirty two sail and came before the city in October. Had he improved his time and strength, the conquest would have been easy; but by spending three days in idle consultations, the French Governor brought in his forces and entertained such a mean opinion of the English Knight that he not only despised his summons to surrender but sent a verbal answer, in which he called King William [of England] an usurper and poured the utmost contempt upon his subjects.



listen to the Iroquois, whenever they sent him deputies, with whom he could treat [negotiate], without exposing the dignity of his character. Moreover, by this means, he always recovered some prisoners, and generally gained a few months' peace, of which he availed himself to give the colonists time to breathe, sow their lands, and reap their harvests.

The messenger who carried the summons insisted upon a written answer, and that within an hour; but the Count De Frontenac absolutely refused it, adding "I'll answer your Master by the Mouth of my Cannon, that he may learn that a Man of my Condition is not to be summoned in this Manner." Upon this, Sir William made two attempts to land below the town but was repulsed by the enemy, with considerable loss of men, cannon, and baggage. Several of the ships also cannonaded the city, but without any success. The forts at the same returned the fire and obliged them to retire in disorder. The French writers, in their accounts of this expedition, universally censure the conduct of Sir William, though they confess the valor of his troops.

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<sup>1</sup> Voyageurs: fur traders licensed by the government of New France.

<sup>2</sup> Bushlopers: unlicensed fur traders, known as "coureurs des bois" ("runners of the woods").

<sup>3</sup> Five Nations: the Iroquois Confederacy—Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca; referred to as the Confederates in Smith's *History*. The Mohawk were the primary Iroquois allies of the English colonies.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Dongan, governor of New York, 1684-1688.

<sup>5</sup> Duke of York: later King James II of England, deposed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

<sup>6</sup> The French were allied with Algonquian groups and with the Huron, an Iroquoian group not allied with the Iroquois confederacy (Five Nations). "In these parts": Acadia, composed of eastern Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and part of Maine.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Edmund Andros: governor of the Dominion of New England, 1686-1689.

<sup>8</sup> Chevalier de Callieres: governor of Montreal, 1684-1698.

<sup>9</sup> Marquis de Dénonville: governor of New France, 1685–89; spelled De Nonville in Smith's *History*.

<sup>10</sup> Count de Frontenac: governor of New France, 1672-1682, 1689-1698.

<sup>11</sup> Marquis de Seignelay: Navy Minister of France.

<sup>12</sup> Dénonville, in a memorandum (mémoire) to the Marquis de Seignelay.

<sup>13</sup> Missilimakinac (Michilimackinac): French fort at the northern strait linking Lakes Huron and Michigan.

<sup>14</sup> Note in Smith, *History*, p. 69: "I have followed Dr. Colden in the account of this attack, who differs from Charlevoix. That Jesuit tells us that the invasion was late in August, and the Indians 1500 strong; and as to the loss of the French, he diminishes it only to 200 souls." [Colden's account: Cadwallader Colden, *History of the Five Nations of Canada*, 1727]

<sup>15</sup> "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 in England, with the removal of James II, the authoritarian and Roman Catholic king.