

From La Rochelle to Quebec : early 17th c. transatlantic migrations and the making of the French diaspora in North America

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Abstract

In the early 17th century Samuel Champlain and Pierre Dugua de Mons, two local merchants established near Rochefort, France, devised a bold emigration project, aimed at founding a French colony in Acadia, part of New France. Between the early 17th century and the late 18th century nearly 2,000 French emigrants crossed the Atlantic, including soldiers, merchants, churchmen, seamen, but also transported smugglers, orphans, convicts. The colonists rapidly established emigration chains or networks facilitating trade and people's mobility. There was a significant return migration too in the second half of the 18th century when Acadia was ruled by England. Using primary material (passengers' lists, parish registers), drawn from French local archives, this paper will analyze the motives and profiles of these emigrants, and explain the making of a French diaspora in the newly-founded colony and how it succeeded in maintaining strong links with the home country.