

*In this watercolor France's Indian allies are shown attacking Deerfield, Massachusetts. Already much of the town is in flames in this scene. What do you suppose was the function of the red building in the center of town?*



Photo: Dan McCoy/Rainbow

## Preview & Review

Use these questions to guide your reading. Answer the questions after completing Section 3.

BRITISH COLONIAL FRONTIER? 2. Using your historical imagination, write Robert Dinwiddie's message, which young George Washington delivered, to Marquis Duquesne. Explain Dinwiddie's objection to building forts west of Virginia.

## 3. FRANCE CHALLENGES ENGLAND

### The French and English Wars

From the time of the Glorious Revolution until the 1760s, England was almost constantly at war in Europe, always against France. Americans were involved in these wars because the French had also become a colonial power in North America.

The French, who had begun their explorations of America in 1524, did not build many permanent settlements in America. While the English were clearing land and planting crops along the Atlantic Coast, the French were ranging deep into the continent, hunting, trapping, and setting up trading posts where they bought furs from the American Indians.

Whenever war broke out in Europe between England and France, French and English colonists fought in America. It was difficult for them to get at each other because their posts and settlements in America lay far apart in the wilderness. Most of the battles consisted of sneak attacks and raids on frontier outposts. Relatively few colonists actually took up arms. Much of the fighting was done by Indians allied with one side or the other.

The first colonial conflict was known as **King William's War**. It went on with interruptions from 1689 to 1697. The French, with Indian support, attacked **Schenectady** in New York and a few villages in New England. American colonists responded by marching against

Port Royal in Nova Scotia, which they captured and then lost. An attempted invasion of Canada failed miserably. When the war ended, the treaty of peace returned all captured territories to their colonial owners.

Both sides followed a similar strategy in **Queen Anne's War**, which began in 1702 and ended in 1713. France's Indian allies attacked several New England settlements and destroyed **Dorchester**, Massachusetts. The English colonists responded by making raids on Nova Scotian villages. Once again they captured Port Royal. Far to the south a force of Carolinians struck a blow at France's ally, Spain, by burning St. Augustine, Florida. The outcome of this war was decided in Europe, where England won a series of decisive victories. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave England control of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Hudson Bay.

The third English-French clash in America, **King George's War**, lasted from 1744 to 1748. Once again Indians friendly to France crossed the St. Lawrence and attacked settlements in New England. New Englanders sailed north and captured Louisbourg, a fort on Cape Breton Island that guarded the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. England fared badly in the European phases of this war. To the New Englanders' disgust Fort Louisbourg was given back to France at the peace conference ending the war.

The French and English wars involved few of the colonists. Still, they increased tensions between settlers from both nations, who blamed each other for their troubles on the frontier. We can easily see the attitudes of both sides from the following excerpts. The first is from a letter written in 1718 by Alexander Spotswood, deputy governor of Virginia to the British Board of Trade.

“The French have built so many forts that the British settlements almost seem surrounded by French trade with the numerous Indian tribes on both sides of the lakes. The French may, in time, take over the whole fur trade. But even if they do not they can, whenever they please, send bands of Indians to the outskirts of our settlements and greatly threaten His Majesty's subjects there. If the French should increase their settlements along these lakes, in order to join their lands in Canada to their new colony in Louisiana, they might take over any English settlements they please.

Nature, it is true, has formed a defense for us with that long chain of mountains which runs from the west of South Carolina as far north as New York and which is passable only in a few places. But even this natural defense may become a danger to us, if we do not take over before the French do. Now, while both nations are at peace, is the time to prevent all such dangers caused by the growing

power of the French which threaten His Majesty's holdings. While the French are still unable to seize all that vast area west of our lands, we should attempt to make some settlements along the Great Lakes. At the same time we should also take over the passes of the mountains in order to safeguard communications with such settlements. . . . We could also cut off or disturb the communication between Canada and Louisiana if a war should break out. Once such a settlement was made, I can't see how the French could dispute our right of possession. The law of nations recognizes the right of the first nation that settles an area. And if the French should try to make us leave the area by force, we are closer to our settlements and aid than they are to theirs.<sup>1</sup>”

The English acted on Spotswood's advice, building forts along the Great Lakes. But the French reacted strongly as we see in this excerpt from a letter written in 1750 by a French settler in Canada.

“The St. Lawrence River and the lakes which supply the waters of that great river stretch across the interior of Canada. Its navigation and trade can be halted more easily than people may think. One of the best ways to avoid this misfortune is further to strengthen not only Quebec and Montreal, but also Fort Frederic. It is essential to establish at that fort a large, well-fortified French village in time of peace and to attract an Indian village in time of war. This effort will cost little if we settle some farmers on Lake Champlain at the same time and form some villages there.

Fort Frontenac is at the outlet of Lake Ontario, on which the English have established a post or fort called Oswego. This is clearly illegal, and is a serious threat to Canada. This Oswego post is located on a lake that has long been claimed by France. And it has been built by the English during a period of peace. The Governor of Canada has protested but taken no further action. Although it ought to have been pulled down in the beginning by using force, the post is still there.

This post, which has been regarded as of little importance, can, in fact, destroy Canada, and it already caused the greatest harm. . . . It is there that the English hand out rum to the Indians, even though the King of France has forbidden this trade. It is there that the English try to win over all Indian nations. They not only try to corrupt them with gifts but also urge them to kill the French traders throughout the vast forests of New France.

<sup>1</sup>From *The Official Letters of Alexander Spotswood*, edited by R.A. Brock

## The French Menace

As long as the English occupy Fort Oswego, we must distrust even those Indians who are most loyal to the French. . . . Shipping on the lakes will always be exposed to danger. Agriculture will make very slow progress, and will be limited to the heart of the colony. In short, we will face all the difficulties of war and none of its advantages. Everything possible, then, must be done to destroy this dangerous post.

We must also have free and dependable communication from Canada to the Mississippi. This chain, once broken, would leave an opening where the British would doubtless move in. . . .”

Though considerable blood had been spilled between 1689 and 1748, neither England nor France had gained much from the other in America. In 1752 the French governor of Canada, the Marquis Duquesne de Menneville, ordered the construction of a new chain of forts running from Lake Erie south to the Ohio River, in what is now western Pennsylvania. These forts, Duquesne believed, would keep English fur traders and settlers from crossing the Appalachian Mountains into territory claimed by France.

Duquesne's action alarmed many people in the English colonies, none more so than Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia. Dinwiddie was very interested in buying land beyond the frontier, which could later be sold to settlers at a big profit. When Dinwiddie learned what the French were doing, he sent a young planter and land surveyor named George Washington to warn them that they were trespassing on Virginia property. Washington was only 21 years old, but as a surveyor he knew the western land well. In November 1753 he set out with a party of six to find the French commander. After weeks of tramping through the icy western forests, Washington delivered Dinwiddie's message. But Duquesne rejected it with contempt.

In the spring of 1754, Dinwiddie sent another group of Virginians to build a fort where the Monongahela and Allegheny join to form the Ohio River. He also appointed Washington as lieutenant colonel of the Virginia militia and ordered him to lead a force of 150 soldiers to protect the new post against a possible French attack.

Before Washington could reach the Ohio, the French drove off the construction party and completed the post on their own, naming it Fort Duquesne. They occupied it with a force of about 600 men. Washington should have turned back at this point or at least called for reinforcements. But he was young, ambitious, and head-

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