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# Louis Herbert

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## The Apothecary



**Painting of Louis Hebert getting native plants.**

Louis Hebert was born in Paris in 1575, the son of Nicolas Hebert and Jacqueline Pajot. Nicolas was the royal apothecary of Queen Catherine de Medicis of France. In the tradition of the day, Louis followed in his Father's profession. Louis was trained in medical arts and science, becoming a specialist in pharmacology. It was from this that developed what was to become a life-long interest in plants and gardening. By 1600, Louis was established in Paris as an apothecary and spice merchant. In 1601, he married Marie Rollet.

In 1604, Louis' cousin, Pierre de Gue, Sieur de Monts, led an expedition to L'Isle Sainte-Croix in Acadia in hopes of making a fortune in the fur trade. The expedition's first winter was very hard. There was a shortage of fresh water and firewood, and 36 to the 80

expedition members died of scurvy. The following summer 1605, the expedition relocated across the bay at Port-Royal (Today known as Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia).

In 1606, Louis joined the expedition, now located at Port-Royal. As a pharmacist he was interested in plants and enjoyed horticulture, seeming to possess a "green thumb". He was highly regarded, and particular note was made of his knowledge and pleasure in cultivating the land. He participated in the construction of a grist-mill on the Allain River near present-day Annapolis Royal. Experimental farming activities were conducted, with various grains being seeded in the local fields. He looked after the health of the pioneers, and cultivated native drug plants introduced to him by the Micmac Indians. He returned to France in 1607, after the trade concession that had been granted to the de Monts expedition had expired.

In 1610, Louis Hebert returned to Port Royal with Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt. A few months later, his wife joined him and became one of the first French women to come to New France. Louis continued his agricultural interests, sowing wheat and planting vines. The colony at Port Royal seemed to take root, but in 1613 it was destroyed by the English coming up from Virginia. The French colonists returned to France, and Louis established a medical practice and apothecary (pharmacy) shop in Paris.

At this time, Quebec was a settlement of some fifty white men who were all transient soldiers, fur trappers, or missionaries. The economy of the settlement was dependent on some 20,000 beaver pelts that were annually returned to French merchants in exchange for supplies. The "Compagnie de Canada", made up of merchants from Rouen, St. Malo, and La Rochelle, had a trading monopoly that controlled the fur trade in Quebec.

Champlain, who founded Quebec in 1608, saw a desperate need for medical service and agricultural self-sufficiency for Quebec. Champlain had met Louis Hebert during the earlier expedition to Port Royal, and had recognized Louis' outstanding qualities. Champlain approached Louis with an offer from the "Compagnie de Canada". He had met Louis when they were both in Acadie. They mutually respected each other.

Champlain is spending the winter of 1616-1617 in Paris searching for support for his colony of Quebec. Hébert is allured. He believes there is a good chance for him in the St. Lawrence Valley. If Hebert would take his family to Quebec for three years and practice medicine in the settlement and establish farming, the company would pay him an annual salary of 600 livres (pounds) and grant him ten acres of land at the settlement on which to build his house and farm. Louis agreed to the terms and signed the contract. Louis sold his practice and his home, and proceeded with his wife, son, and two daughters to the port of Honfleur, France. When he arrived, Louis was told by the ship's master that instructions from the Compagnie de Canada were that they could only board if Louis agreed to sign a new contract with the company. The new provision reduced his annual salary to 300 livres per year, required him to serve as the physician and surgeon at the settlement, and required him to farm ten acres of land and give the company exclusive right to buy all of his agricultural products at the prevailing price in France. Having already sold his house and left his practice, Louis reluctantly accepted and signed the new contract.

On April 11 1617, they left Honfluer aboard the Saint-Etienne (captain Normand Morin) and arrived in Quebec on 15 July. Only five other French families were to follow them on similar voyages to New France in the next 10 years.

In the spring of 1617 Louis became the first private individual to receive a grant of land in the New World from the French Government.

Upon his arrival in Quebec, Louis selected ten acres on a site that is today located in the city of Quebec between Ste. Famille and Couillard Streets on the grounds of the Seminary of Quebec and Basilica of Notre Dame. Soon afterwards, Louis started clearing out some old-growth forest so he could plant crops. This put him in conflict with the fur trading company, who was strongly opposed to deforestation for farming because of its adverse effect on the fur business. Louis had to work very hard, doing all the work by hand. The fur trading company wouldn't even let him import a plough from France. On this land, Louis, his son Guillaume, and an unnamed servant with the help of only an ace, a pick and a spade, broke the soil and raised corn, winter wheat, beans, peas, and livestock including cattle, swine, and fowl. He also established an apple orchard and a vineyard. He overcame the hardships and became the first Canadian to support his family from the soil. He imported from France the first ox to pull a plough in Canada, but unfortunately, the first plough did not arrive until a year after his death.

By 1620, Louis' hard work was finally recognized as having been of great service to the colony: for being the physician and surgeon; for being its principal provider of food; and, for having fostered good relationships with the natives. He was appointed Procurator to the King, which allowed him to personally intervene in matters in the name of the King.

In 1621, his daughter Guillemette married Guillaume Couillard who joined the family business.

In 1623, Louis became the first "Seigneur" of New France when he was granted the noble fief of "Sault-au-Matelot". In 1626 he was further granted "le fief de la riviere, St Charles" in recognition of his meritorious service.

Louis died on January 25 1627 from injuries suffered after slipping on ice. The colony holds a funeral for the first colonist. Louis is respected by the Indians as the other Frenchmen. He is first buried in the cemetery of the Recollets. In 1678 his remains inside his cedar coffin were transported to the newly build vault of the Recollets with the remains of Peaceful brother Duplessis. They were the first to be laid to rest in this new structure.

Jacques Lacoursiere noted he had many firsts. He was the first colonist of Quebec, first colonist to live off the land, his daughter Anne's marriage to Etienne Jonquet in 1617 is the first in New France, and he is the first lord of New France.

When English corsairs, the Kirke brothers, take possession of Quebec his family doesn't leave. They wait out the three years until it is returned to France.

Louis Hebert did not leave any direct descendants bearing his name. His son Guillaume had a son Jacques who married Marie Despoitiers but was tortured to death by the Iroquois on the Island of Orleans before there were any children.

Marie Rollet quietly remarries Guillaume Hubou two years after Louis' death. After the three year occupation by the English, Champlain asks her to move to Quebec and Louis' house became an Indian youth hostel entrusted to the Jesuits for their education.

There is a monument to Samuel de Champlain in Montmorency Park. In seeing it you will understand the importance of Louis Hebert and his family in the beginnings of Quebec. On one side is Louis Hebert holding a sheaf of corn in one hand and a sickle in the other. On part of the base, Marie Rollet clasps her three children in her arms. On the other, son-in-law Guillaume Couillard has a plough in hand. The first plough was not imported to New France until one year after the death of Louis Hebert.



Louis Hébert Monument, 1992

Harry Palmer © 1996

This is the monument in Quebec City to Louis Herbert, Marie Rollet, and Guillaume Couillard. This monument includes a statue of Louis offering his first sheaf of wheat to God. It was carved by Alfred Laliberté and erected in 1918 to mark the 300th anniversary of the arrival of the Hébert family. There is also a memorial plaque on the house in Paris where Louis was born (129 rue S.-Honoré).



## Another view

Marie Rollet

When the English occupied Quebec Marie Rollet Hebert stayed and taught religious studies to the French children. The following is a picture of the statue erected in her honour on the base of the Hebert statue above.

