New France was what historians call a **hierarchical society**. A hierarchy is an organization in which there are distinct levels that remain fairly separate. The education system is a good example of a hierarchy. There are the minister of education, the school board, superintendents, principals, teachers, and students.

In New France, there were two hierarchies: the civil hierarchy and the religious hierarchy. You will read about the religious hierarchy in a later section. The civil hierarchy is illustrated in the chart below. Civil hierarchy is the hierarchy of general citizens, rather than a specific group, such as a religion or the military. The people highlighted in light blue were in France, and the people highlighted in yellow were in New France.

The king, the **viceroy**, and the minister of the navy did not live in New France, but they made important decisions about it. The sovereign council made rules and laws about day-to-day affairs in the colony. The governor appointed members to the council, and the intendant saw that its rules and laws were obeyed. There were no elections. The people at the top controlled the government.
The Governor

You read in the previous section about the structure of the government. Now you will examine some of the key positions in it, and the responsibilities of the people who held them.

The governor was the top official in New France. He was responsible for seeing that the king's orders were carried out. He appointed members to the sovereign council, which made laws and decided what taxes the people should pay. He was also responsible for relationships between New France and any other European groups in North America.

The governor was a symbol of the king, and was expected to act a bit like a king. He held lavish dances at his residence, inviting the top people to attend. With his family, he travelled around the colony each summer.

The most famous governor of New France was Louis de Buade, Count Frontenac. He held the position from 1672 until his death in 1698. He was a French noble and had been an officer in the armies of France and Venice. But he was heavily in debt, and wanted to make his fortune in the colony.

Frontenac was sent to New France with orders from the king to keep the settled area to a few places close to trade routes with France. He was also ordered to develop the seigneuries and not to expand the fur trade. The king felt that this could stir up disputes with the Dutch and the English, who were involved in the fur trade farther south. Frontenac ignored the king's instructions. He saw the fur trade as the source of greater wealth, especially if he could get some of it for himself. He sent military parties out to explore farther inland and to find ways of keeping the Dutch and the English out. He built a series of forts to serve as a first line of defence. Perhaps the most famous of these was Fort Frontenac, in what is now Kingston, Ontario. In 1982, part of the original fort was uncovered by archeologists.
The French efforts in the interior encouraged the First Nations peoples to compete among themselves for furs to supply their European partners. The Iroquois supplied the Dutch and launched a series of wars against the Huron, the Illinois, and the Abenaki peoples. In 1680, the Iroquois ejected the French from Illinois territory.

The king, Louis XIV, was angry that Frontenac had ignored his orders, and recalled him to France in 1682. Frontenac persuaded the king to reappoint him to New France in 1689, by which time the Iroquois Confederacy nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca peoples) were attacking New France. This time, Frontenac’s orders were to seize the New York area, where the Dutch were supplying the Iroquois with firearms. Again he ignored his orders, and launched an attack on the English settlements in New England. Frontenac continued to profit personally from the fur trade. By the late 1690s, he had exasperated the king. He would probably have been recalled a second time to France, but he died suddenly in 1698.

The Intendant of New France

The intendant did the day-to-day work of government, being responsible for finance and justice and seeing that the rules and laws of the council were obeyed. The governor was usually of noble birth, and the intendant was usually a commoner (of lower status). It was the intendant who oversaw activity in the colony. He made sure that the people paid their taxes and that lawbreakers were punished.
Profile of an Intendant: Jean Talon

From 1665 to 1668, Jean Talon was intendant of France’s northern territories, including New France, Acadia (what is now Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) and Newfoundland. He returned to France, and was later appointed for a second term, from 1670–1672. In 1666, he conducted a census of the population. Here are some of his other achievements:

- He carried out a survey to find out what resources New France could supply besides fur.
- He organized the building of sawmills, shipbuilding docks, the fishery, and a brewery.
- He increased New France’s trade with the French colonies in the Caribbean.
- He increased immigration from France and was responsible for setting up the filles du roi program.

All these developments increased New France’s wealth.

After Talon’s term as Intendant ended in 1672, he returned to France, where Louis XIV named him Count d’Orsainville.

Hard times for New France were ahead. Trade with the Caribbean failed, the new industries declined, and even New France’s agriculture experienced a slowdown. Talon had set up an efficient administration in New France, but Louis XIV was involved in a series of expensive wars with England and the Netherlands. He did not want to invest more money in New France, so some of Talon’s efforts did not produce the results they could have.

Some of New France’s potential was lost because the king did not want to spend much on its development. For this reason, it continued to be vulnerable to attack from its enemies, especially the English.

THINKING It Over

1. Based on the profiles you have read here, what were the main duties and responsibilities of the governor and the intendant? Which of the two appointments would you have preferred? Why?

2. Which person, Count Frontenac or Jean Talon, had the greatest effect on New France during the 1600s? First, make a two-column list of each man’s contributions to the colony. Then, write an extended paragraph to support your choice.