

The Demography of a Colonial Frontier Fortress:

Louisbourg,
1713-1758

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**In 1713, France built
Fortress Louisbourg on
Isle Royal (Cape Breton
Island, Nova Scotia) to
protect the approaches to
the St. Lawrence River.
Louisbourg and a number
of surrounding
communities became
important as centers of
trade and particularly
fishing.**

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At the height of settlement Ile Royal numbered several thousand, not counting the population of Fortress Louisbourg. In 1734, 2,263 people lived in 13 separate settlements outside of the fortress.

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The population of Louisbourg experienced some instability with the turnover in military personnel and the coming and going of fishermen and sailors. But the tendency was towards growth over the 45 years of its occupation.

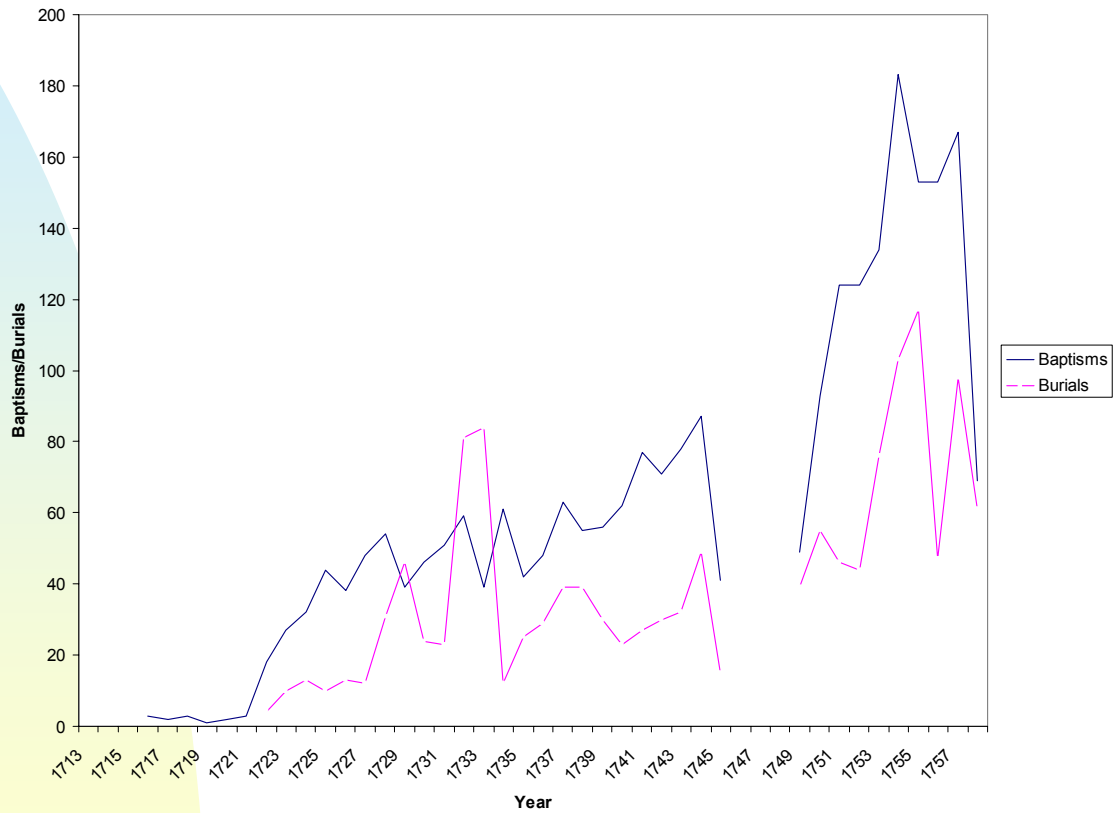
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Baptisms and Burials Recorded at Louisbourg



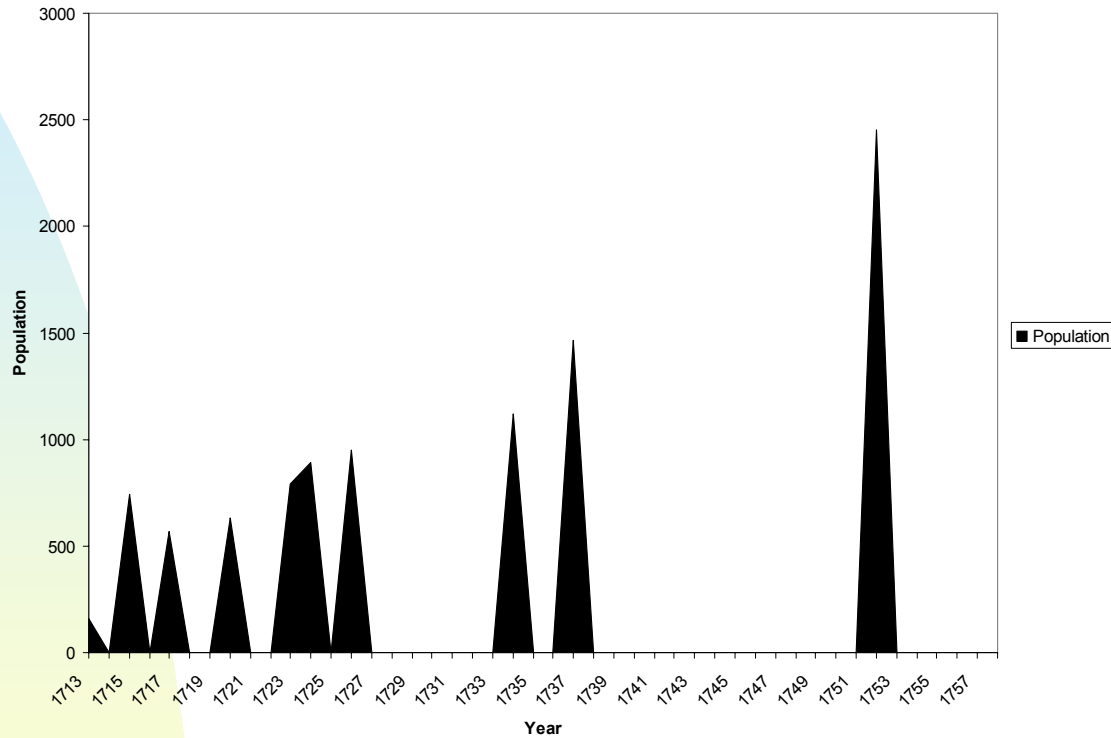
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Population of Fortress Louisbourg in Selected Years



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Louisbourg had what is called a high fertility and high mortality population. Women had children, but many children died at a young age. As a result, the population grew at slow to moderate rates.

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Burials by Age and Gender at Louisbourg

Age Group	Males	Percentage	Females	Percentage
Less than Age 1	116	14.8	108	27.8
1-5 years	72	9.2	65	16.7
6-12 years	18	2.3	17	4.4
13-24 years	94	11.9	41	10.5
25-44 years	157	2.0	67	17.2
45-64 years	121	15.4	31	7.9
65+	29	3.7	13	3.3
Adult-Age Not Given	178	22.7	47	12.1
Total	785		389	

Source: A.J.B. Johnston, *Religion in Life at Louisbourg, 1713-1758* (Toronto,, 1984), Table 10, p. 143.

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Life expectancy at Louisbourg was low by modern standards, and on average children born there lived 29 to 39 years. Children died from a variety of infectious diseases, including smallpox and measles. Periodic epidemics claimed the lives of both children and adults. There was also a well established pattern of seasonal mortality. Many died during the colder months of the year when people spent more time indoors, and bacteria and viruses spread more easily.

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Burials by Month at Louisbourg

Month	Total Burials
January	122
February	92
March	84
April	67
May	108
June	91
July	94
August	101
September	113
October	130
November	129
December	124

Source: Louisbourg Burial Register, Internet file.

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In the early and mid-eighteenth century Louisbourg evidenced demographic patterns similar to other European populations in the Americas, and in Europe as well. However, because Louisbourg was also a busy port, ships brought epidemics with them. The fortress was vulnerable to ship-born disease. In 1758, during the Seven Years War (1755-1763), English and Colonial troops occupied Louisbourg. The English demolished the fortress, ending a brief 40 year history.

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