

QAHN'S HERITAGE ESSAY AND PHOTO CONTESTS DESPITE THE LOCKDOWN

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## News



**Covid's Metamorphoses**  
Exploring the Epidemics of History

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# Quebec Heritage News

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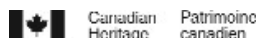
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MARION GREENLAY

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(Winner, 2020 QAHN Heritage Photo Contest)

## EDITOR'S DESK

# Old Normal

by Rod MacLeod

When George Orwell returned to England in the spring of 1937 after fighting in the Spanish Civil War, he was seriously taken aback by how normal everything was. He had been in combat in trenches and on mountains, gravely wounded, and then hunted by the secret police – and yet at home there were still cricket matches and royal weddings, and the milk arrived on the doorstep every morning. England was still “sleeping the deep, deep sleep” from which, he accurately predicted, “we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs.”

Orwell's experience has been echoed by many others who have escaped all kinds of horrors and then suddenly realized how conditioned they had been to lives of fear, deprivation, and pain. In Orwell's case, however, it seemed to him only a matter of time before the horrors he had escaped arrived on England's shores and woke the sleepy population up. The “normalcy” of promptly arriving milk was, he implied, really a dreamy bubble that would very soon become only a distant happy memory. Indeed, to Londoners in the midst of the Blitz only a couple of years later, the England that Orwell describes on the last page of *Homage to Catalonia* would have seemed a lifetime ago.

Eight decades after the Blitz, I sit on the floor in my hall wiping disinfectant over each item I pull out of my grocery bag before putting it away. When I finish, I wash my hands – again, since I have already washed my hands as soon as I came in the door. Before going into the store I had washed my hands in the sinks provided, and then followed the direction lines marked on the floor so as to minimize contact with other shoppers. While in the store, I'd worn a mask, which had been cunningly contrived by

my resident seamstress out of a pillowcase. Whenever I am outside, I avoid people, crossing the street if I see someone walking towards me. Occasionally I have awkward conversations with neighbours, shouting from street to porch or across fences. The main topic of conversation, equally true on email or over the phone, is Health.

This is life under the Covid-19 pandemic. Wiping down packages of pasta is the new normal. Washing your hands, wearing a mask, keeping your distance – all the new normal. It is astounding how easily we have adjusted to this bizarre routine, how readily we find not taking such precautions odd. Shopping without



washing has now joined the ranks of biking without a helmet, smoking in restaurants, and throwing paper and plastic out with the trash.

Then again, there is really nothing astounding about this easy adjustment, since it's the way humans have coped with dangerous crises for millennia. Hand washing and social distancing may seem absurdly fiddly, but they are really no weirder than the things people have had to do to survive wars or dictatorships or natural disasters. Queuing two metres apart to get into the pharmacy isn't that different from queuing at the butcher's with a ration card. For Orwell, the new normal was the lice in the

trenches and the crackle of flying bullets. Londoners during the Blitz got used to manoeuvring around bombed-out buildings and racing for shelters in the dead of night, just as they got used to having friends and family die. We learn to get by.

Of course, there is a war going on out there right now. Part of my self-isolation ritual is the nightly news reports, which show overloaded hospital wards with patients on ventilators and health workers wrapped in hazmat suits. In Italy and Spain the daily death count is always in the hundreds, occasionally over a thousand, and caskets are piled at cemetery gates. In New York City they have dug vast trenches in industrial wastelands to bury the bodies. In Ecuador the bodies just lie in the streets. Watching this grim narrative is for me a kind of penance: I am safe, but I must not keep my head in the sand, numbing though those statistics are. The people who do the work of caring, curing and burying must also find it numbing. No doubt they keep going by focusing on the job in front of them, convincing themselves that it is, however horrible, doable. They are, in effect, normalizing their tasks. When

the rate of admissions slows and the death rate declines (as we must hope it will), these front-line workers, like soldiers returning from war, will find it hard to adjust to what they used to think was normal.

Even for the rest of us, the old normal now seems a distant memory, even though it hasn't actually been all that long ago that we could go out for coffee and visit friends and watch movies in actual theatres – do anything, indeed, without fear of infection. Like countless people before us, we look back from our current distress to a time that seemed better, whatever its reality may actually have been. That's the way our minds

work. We hope for bright futures, but it's the past that we draw on when envisaging what we hope will happen. An uncertain future is scary; we want it to be like the good stuff we remember. During the Blitz, people dreamed of bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover but they were mostly inspired by memories of cricket matches and royal weddings and the milk arriving on the doorstep (hopefully intact) every morning.

Wanting the future to be like the past is not simply an exercise in nostalgia. The past is comforting, because it seems normal. It is a time that we have processed. We have filed away our experiences, pleasant or not. They can hold no further dangers for us. Whatever happened in the past, we survived. Even if it was pretty bad, we lived to tell the tale. The present, by contrast, is nebulous and unstable, and therefore worrying – especially worrying when there are dangers out there that we may well not survive. Anyone experiencing ill health thinks back on the time when they enjoyed good health; it is the point of reference when we anticipate a future state of recovery. We *remember* recovering in the past, and that gives us hope. And those who know they will never recover have only the past as an escape from a painful present and an unthinkable future.

As humans, we can get used to almost anything. We lose loved ones and think we cannot move on, but we do. Often the key to surviving loss is to seek comfort in the past. Sometimes looking at old photos makes us feel better, even as it reminds us of what we've lost. More than anything, photos capture a world of normalcy – partly because they tend to depict happy occasions, but also because photos fix people solidly in a world that we can readily grasp, regardless of what is being depicted: that person was there, then. But however comforting a snapshot of the past may be, it can only distract from the new reality that may be fundamentally different. The past may seem normal, but in fact its fixed, processed state marks it as foreign, inaccessible, abnormal. Present trauma only underscores how odd the past can seem. A photo of a person we have lost, and even more a photo that shows a person we have lost amid people who are still around, represents a glimpse into a world that is no longer

normal. That was a time, we realize, when X was alive. It has become a golden time, a lost time, an odd time – because the world we now live in is one in which X is not.

The old normal is there to be seen in endless photos, stock footage, and our own memories from not very long ago at all. The world we have left behind survives in these images of city streets mobbed with people, many of them gleefully interacting with no social distancing between them whatsoever. It wasn't so long ago that people were at political rallies, that Canada's highways and rail lines were shut down by demonstrators going out en masse to occupy space, that we mobbed our malls for Boxing Week specials, for pity's sake. Was it really just eight months ago that I, borderline agoraphobe that I am, bravely joined half a million other bodies crammed into the streets of Montreal to see a tiny girl, her real head seeming smaller than my fingernail in the distance but her face filling the huge screen over the stage, warning us of the insanity of not listening to science and not heeding the earth, but only looking to a "fairy tale" future of unlimited economic growth. We were proud (and still are) that we came out in such numbers to show our solidarity with the planet – but, boy, does that gathering feel like another lifetime.

I confess that in my darker moments, when I am not busily wiping pasta and washing my hands, I fear that we are in for a lot of new normal. Like Orwell, I worry that the cricket matches and royal weddings are soon to be something more remembered than experienced. I don't mean we won't defeat Covid-19, just that there may be something else around the next corner, and more of it. We've also had plenty of recent reminders of how much destruction fire and water can inflict. There are times when I think that Covid-19 is a nudge from Mother Earth, reminding us none too gently to listen to her, and to science, and to Greta.

Even when we conquer Covid, we cannot go back to the old normal. We may open our shops and patronize cafés and even travel, but we cannot just carry on as if nothing happened. The future will almost certainly be different from what we were used to – perhaps unimag-

inably so, if we let another disaster catch us completely unawares. We can certainly learn from the past when it comes to determining the things we value in our lives, but we also have to recognize what we've been doing wrong and strive to change it. If we think that we can go on living uncritically in the past, then we are truly sleeping that deep, deep sleep.

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## LETTERS

### Need to Act Responsibly

Thank you for your excellent article on John Abbott College (*QHN*, Spring 2020).

As a young girl, my mother Evelyn Lower (née Lapointe, born 1903, died 1994) attended then-Macdonald College for teacher training. Years later, in the early 1950s, she spent three summers at the College to obtain a specialist certificate for Kindergarten.

The following statement caught my attention ("John Abbott College: 50 Years of Success"): "The 'peace and love' attitude of the seventies has been replaced by an urgency to act responsibly to climate change concerns." This urgency is ably expressed by Nathalie Elgrably-Levy of the Institut économique de Montréal in her two columns "Oui, il y a urgence climatique!" and "Oui, il y a urgence climatique (2)!" (*Journal de Montréal*, November 1 and 8, 2019). Both articles are available online.

My friend James Brooks and I have added our voices to the environmental debates. The present virus pandemic and slowdown everywhere is a golden opportunity to evaluate/re-evaluate many notions and ideologies.

*QHN* is doing a great job. Thank you.

Norman Lower  
Quebec, Qc.

### Satisfied Customer

Please sign me up for another year. I'm so proud to be a member of QAHN. You guys are doing a great job!

Kevin O'Donnell  
Vancouver, B.C.

# EPIDEMIC: ONCE AGAIN

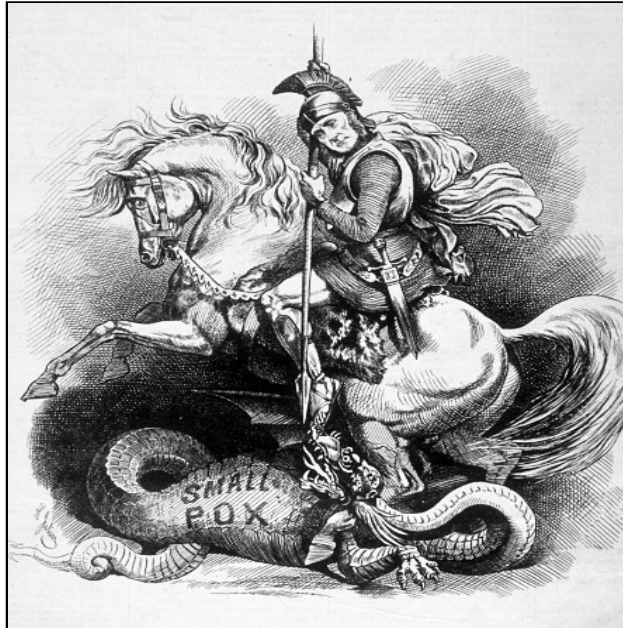
by Sandra Stock

As the whole world battles the Sars-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19, the present influenza-like pandemic, we should remember how often we have experienced this before.

These quickly-spreading pestilences are the products of agrarian civilizations, according to some sources, and have come down the ages with us since the dawn of farming. Infection rates have risen with the growth of permanent dwelling in towns, and especially as humans have engaged in far-ranging travel in confined conditions. Each disease has been different in terms of origin and symptoms, but all have had potentially high mortality rates and have been equally infectious (in theory) to all people. However, as immunity levels varied so much among historically isolated populations, some groups were, and probably still are, more apt to suffer serious consequences from a given disease. Social conditions and availability of medical care are also variables.

In tracing the history of epidemics in our home territory, the first and certainly one of the worst scourges to note was the near extinction of Indigenous peoples upon contact with diseases brought by Europeans to the Americas. For example, in 1535, Jacques Cartier's encounter with the Iroquoian people of Hochelaga (Montreal) noted a thriving community of prosperous fishers, hunters and agriculturalists with semi-permanent villages. When Samuel de Champlain visited the site of Hochelaga in 1611, this population appears to have vanished. Even during Cartier's first stay at Stadacona (Quebec City) in 1535-36, he noted that fifty Iroquoians had died. By his third visit in 1534, the Indigenous group reportedly showed fear and unease

towards the French. It is suggested that exposure to imported disease was the direct cause of the disappearance of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians.



This first of this long, sad local story of epidemics is recounted by Roland Viau:

*In placing responsibility for the disappearance of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians on the rivalries over the distribution of European goods and control over access to supply sources, archaeologists underestimate the impact of disease: from the moment of first contact between First Nations and Europeans, germs were being exchanged. Historians argue that the series of devastating epidemics that decimated the Indigenous populations of eastern Canada and bordering American regions began in the seventeenth century, reducing the population by 50 per cent between 1634 and 1650 alone; by 1702, the toll had climbed to 95 per cent.*

Of course, this decimation had begun long before and far away with the very first contact between Indigenous peoples and the Spanish in Central America and the Caribbean in the fifteenth century. Along with bringing (back) the horse (which became extinct here 10,000 years ago), Europeans brought measles and other formerly unknown illnesses.

We also learn of the possibly intentional spread of disease, both to defeat Indigenous peoples in conflict and ultimately to clear their territories for European expansion. This appears to have happened throughout the British colonial regime, the best-known example being the suggestion of General Sir Jeffery Amherst to send smallpox-infected blankets to the Odawa (Ottawa nation), whose chief, Pontiac, was leading the resistance to British rule in 1763. Beyond this written suggestion by Amherst to an underling, there is no evidence that this action was ever actually carried out. However, the very presence of such an idea suggests that biological warfare was not unheard of. A *Canadian Encyclopedia* article on North American epidemics mentions a trader at Fort Pitt actually sending a handkerchief from the smallpox hospital to a First Nations group and being recorded as saying, "I hope it will have the desired effect."

Epidemics appeared throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the developing European settlements in Canada. The conditions of crowded ships that often took months to reach North America were wonderful breeding grounds for smallpox, typhus, cholera and influenza, to list just the major scourges. Poor food and limited medical care made things worse.

In New France there was an outbreak of typhus in 1659, and then again in 1746 when French warships arrived to retake Port Royal in Acadia (now New Brunswick and Nova Scotia). Of 3,150 soldiers, 1,270 died at sea and 1,130 more in Bedford Basin (Halifax harbour). Uncounted numbers of Mik'maq in the area also died.

In 1710, Yellow Fever arrived at Quebec City from the West Indies. At the time, it was called the Siamese Disease, probably as it had an Asiatic origin but no one seemed to be precise about exactly where it originated. Yellow Fever is tropical, passed along in the bite of the *Stegomyia fasciata* mosquito. These little beasts enjoyed the heat and humidity found upon ships and traveled north, feasting on the sailors. Many of these sailors, along with six nurses and twelve priests, died in Hôtel Dieu. Luckily, this disease stopped spreading as its mosquitoes (a tropical species) were killed off by our harsh Quebec winter.

In 1773, another disease of mysterious origins reached the Montreal area, causing ulcers, pains in the arms and legs and destruction of the nasal bones. It was called Baie Saint-Paul disease after the place it was first identified. Medical opinion at the time thought it was a form of syphilis, but it was more likely a form of plague or even leprosy.

One of the most devastating epidemics to hit Montreal was cholera in 1832. Cholera is another very virulent sickness that thrived among immigrants squashed into ships making the trans-Atlantic passage. Some notions of public health had developed by then, though they were not very humane or effective. The quarantine station at Grosse Île, in the St. Lawrence River just east of Quebec City, was established in an effort to contain infection. Edgar A. Collard describes these efforts in "The Island of the Dead" (Collard, 250-251):

*It was the spring of 1832 that the British authorities took possession of the island. A battery of two 12-pounders and one 18-pounder was set up at the centre of the island facing the river. Any ship trying to slip pass the quarantine station would have a warning shot fired over its bow. A flagstaff was set up beside the battery and from this point the*

*surgeons were rowed out to inspect the ships. Yet all the preparations made at Grosse Île struggled ineffectively with the shiploads of suffering that gathered at the quarantine station in the summer of the cholera year of 1832.*

This was the beginning of the tragic saga of Grosse Île. Starting with the 1832 cholera epidemic, and continuing onward with the typhus epidemic at the time of the Irish Great Famine, Grosse Île came to be viewed as a place of death to be avoided. During World War II, it was the place chosen as the location for experiments in biological warfare.

Despite these quarantine efforts and other advances in medicine, Montreal was not protected from cholera in 1832: 8,000 people died. Two years later there was another outbreak and then sporadic outbreaks throughout the nineteenth century. Various attempts were made to stop or at least slow down diseases such as cholera, but almost all were ineffective.



Even by the end of nineteenth century, sickness was associated with "bad air" and vapours arising from rotting organic matter, termed "miasma." This idea was correct to an extent, since lack of sanitation certainly contributed to poor health, but bad air was not the real cause of disease, just a good breeding ground for it. In 1832, to combat "bad air," cannons

were fired and smudge pots burned in Montreal's streets. Hopeful but useless medicines were marketed, such as "Dwight's Remedy for Cholera" (c.1850), a bottled example of which is in Montreal's McCord Museum: "The ravages caused by cholera prompted numerous people – some well-intentioned, some less so – to offer therapeutic concoctions for sale" (McCord Museum). It has been ever so; today, we still see many fraudulent, or at best useless, cures being hawked, mainly on social media, for COVID-19.

The lingering, recurring scourge of cholera was then matched by the 1847 typhus epidemic in which thousands of immigrants from the British Isles died, most of them Irish. Added to their numbers were local clergy, soldiers, medical personnel, and even the mayor of Montreal, John Easton Mills. Many private citizens perished in attempts to assist the sick and dying. These contagious epidemic diseases were associated with immigrants and caused fear and panic among the resident population. Not everyone was as sympathetic and altruistic as the nuns, clergy, medical professionals and citizens who nursed and comforted the sick and dying. As typhus was very contagious and had a high death rate (60%), the sufferers were kept in sheds near the river. Mayor Mills attempted to reassure the population by claiming "the sick were being kept at the waterfront and they had nothing to fear"(Leslie, 95).

However, when a young immigrant girl from the sheds was seen begging on Notre Dame Street, a mob marched on City Hall and threatened vigilante action. Consequently, a wall was built around the area of the sheds with guards posted to check anyone coming or going.

The total deaths recorded in Canada as a result of the Irish Great Famine immigration was 9,293, the bodies buried at Montreal, Kingston and Toronto. Another 10,000 died at Grosse Île. This appalling epidemic is remembered every May in Montreal with the Walk to the Stone. The "stone" is the Black Rock memorial sited on a traffic island on Bridge Street. This big black boulder was erected in 1859 by the workers on the Victoria Bridge – mainly Irish themselves – who had discovered one of the mass graves of the typhus victims during

construction. The stone is from the bottom of the St. Lawrence River, probably an erratic boulder dropped there during the melting of the glaciers of our last Ice Age. At present, the Irish Memorial Park Foundation is planning to eventually create a larger and more comprehensive memorial area nearby, including the Black Rock.

Between 1872 and 1885, Montreal experienced a series of smallpox outbreaks. The growing industrialization of Montreal led to a demand for labour that had created a rapid population growth. The quality of housing was poor and sanitation dismal, leading to ideal conditions for the spread of disease. Fortunately, the mayor in 1875-77 was Dr. William Hales Hingston, one of the best-known nineteenth-century surgeons in Canada, who received numerous awards including a knighthood. Hingston “played a leading role in caring for the victims. [He] sought to improve living conditions and thus the health of Montrealers. He reformed the city’s sanitation system in 1876, notably by making the health department a permanent organization” (McCord Museum).

In 1885, Montreal suffered a strong wave of smallpox which killed 3,164 people, 2,117 of whom were children. Even though there had been a vaccination against smallpox for some time, developed in England in 1796 by Edward Jenner and already widely used, medical opinion was still divided about vaccination and many people refused to receive this protection. “Anti-vaxxers” did not start just recently. In 1885, it became obligatory for Montrealers to be vaccinated, but” because at the time not all doctors had mastered the techniques of immunization, the smallpox vaccination sometimes actually spread the disease” (McCord Museum). A riot broke out. Dr. Hingston persisted in fighting for the acceptance of vaccination, and his efforts eventually succeeded.

Even though medical knowledge and awareness of public health issues improved in the twentieth century, serious epidemics did not cease. Most lethal was the Spanish flu, which ran rampant in Canada from 1918 to 1920. This was a global pandemic (much like COVID-19)

that killed about 55,000 people in Canada alone, most of them young. This number was compounded by the recent deaths of 60,000 Canadians in World War I. Inadequate quarantine measures and problems among health authorities resulted in chaos. “The Spanish flu was a significant event in the evolution of public health in Canada. It resulted in the creation of the federal Department of Health in 1919” (Library and Archives Canada).

This pandemic was called the Spanish flu, not because it originated in Spain, but because information about it



came to public notice first in Spain. As overly zealous censorship had suppressed information about this disease in the countries fighting in World War I, including Canada, it was in neutral Spain that news of the flu first surfaced. Unfortunately, there was no vaccine against this intense form of influenza, and the virus managed to mutate along the way. Between 2.5 and 5 per cent of the total population of the world died.

Here in Canada, the Spanish flu arrived with returning and / or reassigned troops at the ports of Halifax, Quebec City and Montreal, and then spread across the country. As with COVID-19, municipal and provincial authorities tried to combat it by “prohibiting public gatherings and isolating the sick, but these provisions had little effect” (Library and Archive Canada). The federal government was criticized for its poor response to the crisis and for not providing

adequate resources to fight the disease. In 1919, a federal department of health was created and public health became the responsibility of all levels of government.

It still isn’t known for sure whether the polio epidemic of 1949 to 1959 (peak year 1953) was spread directly from person to person, as with influenza-type diseases. In any case, polio, also called infant paralysis or poliomyelitis, is a frightening disease, especially since it usually affects children under the age of five, permanently damaging the nerve cells that control the muscles. Polio has been around for a very long time: cases were recorded in ancient Egypt and throughout European history. Yet it wasn’t until after the Second World War, that it appeared in such numbers here in North America. There was no known treatment until the development of the Salk vaccine in 1955. Quarantine did not prevent its spread, nor did closing schools and barring children from movie theatres or from traveling. Epidemics continued, usually in the summer and fall, and as time passed more older children and adolescents got sick. Treatments were attempted without much success, including a serum made from the blood of those who had survived an attack. A nasal spray intended to block the entry of the virus not only proved ineffective, but in some cases caused the child to lose the sense of smell. The iron lung, a truly terrifying device invented in the 1930s, kept a polio sufferer alive after the collapse of the respiratory system. Women even gave birth in these horrors.

In Canada, 11,000 people were left paralyzed by polio between 1949 and 1954. This was the worse epidemic since the Spanish flu of 1918. Fortunately, because of vaccines such as the Salk (1955) and Sabin oral (1962), Canada has been certified as polio-free since 1994. Unfortunately, a few polio survivors may have had a post-polio syndrome which can damage the nervous system and create progressive muscle weakness. Through global access to vaccination, polio might be one epidemic disease we can completely extinguish.

Epidemics appear to be part of our existence on this planet. They show no sign of disappearing, despite our

advanced medical knowledge and the many effective treatments of some old foes such as polio, tuberculosis, yellow fever, malaria, smallpox and measles. Influenza, in all its ongoing mutations, seems to be among the most difficult to fight. Attacks on the immune system (AIDS, notably) are difficult to cure, but we must keep on trying. For now, avoiding crowded conditions like cruise ships, airplanes and big gatherings can decrease the numbers of afflicted, but what is required is prevention – usually in the form of a vaccine. Until that happens, we must wash our hands often and learn to enjoy the benefits and upsides of solitude.

*Sandra Stock is a regular contributor to Quebec Heritage News, having caught the bug for writing many years ago. She enjoys passing the results of her knowledge and research on to readers.*

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# CHRONICLES OF DEATHS

*Epidemics in Bolton, 1867-1917*

by Serge Wagner

One might think that the rural life in the Eastern Townships was healthy and that people in the past were immune to epidemics. That would be to overlook, of course, the tragedy of the Abenaki people, whose numbers plunged from 40,000 to 1,000 in just a few generations because of diseases brought from Europe. The new settlers of the Townships also faced public health crises. Between 1867 and 1917, newspapers chronicled the many epidemics that hit Bolton: diphtheria, pneumonia, scarlet fever, smallpox, cholera, consumption (tuberculosis), typhoid, measles, mumps, chickenpox and whooping cough. The experience of the hamlets in this township appears representative of several other rural communities at this time.

Disease could strike at any time of year. Epidemic outbreaks occurred approximately every three years – a frequency unimaginable today. Whole families were often infected, the contagion leaving two or three dead. During the winter of 1880, measles affected 50 residents of Millington, meaning “nearly everyone.” Months later, thirty in East Bolton contracted diphtheria, which left seven dead, mostly children and the elderly. Sometimes, contagion failed to spread to neighbouring settlements, perhaps because of poor roads and the time-consuming nature of family farming. However, they too would likely soon be stricken by a new round of infection. The role of the township’s council was above all to protect the uninfected: quarantining the afflicted, placarding their homes and closing schools. The council once “authorized and ordered to open a By Road past the house” in order to avoid its miasma. The houses were then disinfected and fumigated – often by a paid doctor. Feeling limited, doctors often merely prescribed rest, laxatives or enemas. Bolton Centre felt privileged because a doctor lived there for 15 years. Later, doctors travelled from nearby small towns such as Magog.

Most of the time, however, doctors and nurses treated the wealthy – who could afford hospitalization. The township sometimes covered the costs of doctors’ visits to the poorest, but a majority of the population used traditional medicine, such as infusions, camphor, and mustard flies. Miracle drugs or cures, some of which contained toxic ingredients like creosote, were brazenly advertised in newspapers. For infectious diseases, the front-line workers were not doctors, but women: mothers, daughters and sisters travelled to the bedside of sick parents.

This was the case not just in the Townships but across Canada and the United States. Women's associations also provided complementary support.

Unfortunately, chronicles, written by the elites, overlooked the role of known social conditions, including poverty, squalor, overcrowding, contaminated water and milk, and poor hygiene. There was no reference to the link between certain diseases and poverty – except for one death in Bolton in 1879, by tuberculosis (“disease of the poor”), and this was mentioned in an American newspaper, in Newport, Vermont. Paradoxically, certain medical information was presented in biased advertisements. Even disease victims themselves were blamed: a 1909 royal commission lamented the rate of tuberculosis in the countryside, but concluded that “those in rural areas do not know how to benefit from nature’s gifts, ignore health regulations and too often neglect proper hygiene.”

Sadly, pandemics added to the difficulties of the time in agriculture, high infant and maternal mortality, and frequent accidents on farms and in the forest. Resigned, many accepted the misfortunes resulting from divine will. Others, discouraged, decided to leave. During the East Bolton epidemic of 1881, for example, thirty-one people went into exile in the United States. And, the column announced: “Others will leave soon.”

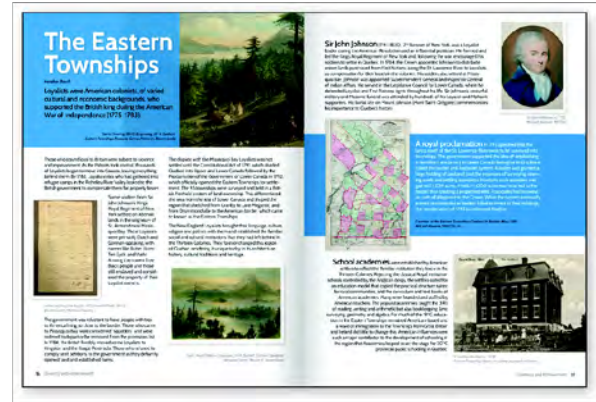
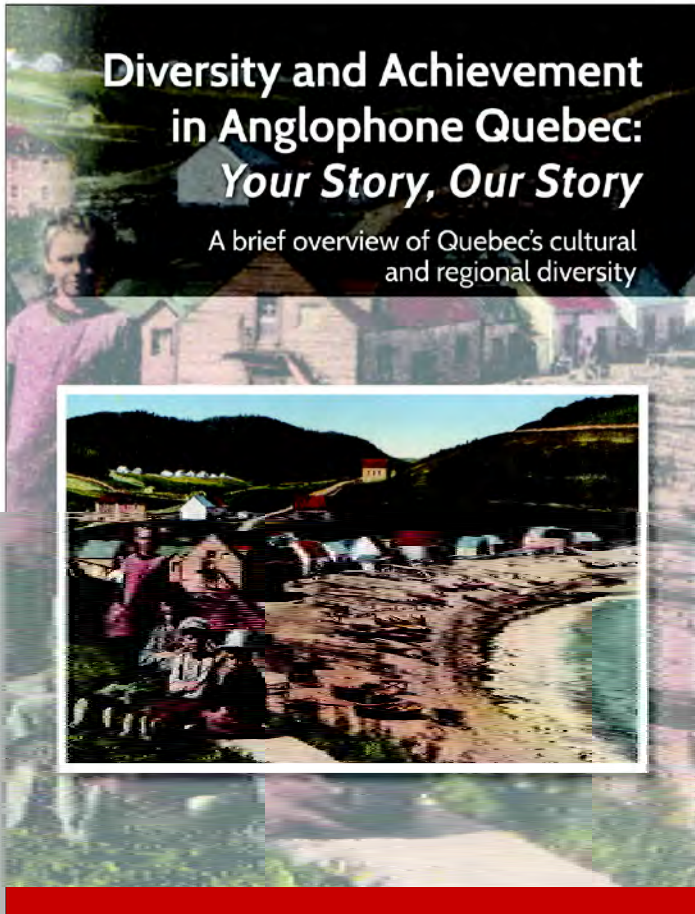
*Serge Wagner, a resident of Austin, is a retired UQAM professor. A member of the Bolton Historical Society, he has been researching life in the Eastern Townships for several years.*

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Thanks are extended to Dr. Maurice Langlois and Dr. Marie-Soleil Wagner.



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# “A VERY SINGULAR AND MORTAL DISEASE”

*Epidemic Meningococcal Disease in Early Nineteenth-Century*

*New England and Quebec*

by Grant Myers

The Rose Cemetery in Stanstead County, Quebec, stands witness to a personal and almost unimaginable tragedy. In late December 1814, Timothy and Sarah Rose (née Albee) lost five children to an illness that would come to be known as “the Spotted Fever.” Death was quick. Edward, the first to pass, succumbed on December 22 after an illness of only eight hours. Henry, the oldest, on December 26, within 32 hours of the onset of symptoms.

The Rose family was not alone in their loss. By the winter of 1810-1811, spotted fever was present in many of the newly established settlements in Quebec’s Eastern Townships (Wilson, 74) and “swept off many promising young men and women” (Hubbard, 74).<sup>\*</sup> News of this mysterious disease would have reached the region well before the first person fell ill. For several years prior, an epidemic spotted fever had ravaged New

England, leaving thousands dead in its wake.<sup>\*\*</sup>

In March 1806, this mysterious and virulent disease claimed the lives of nine

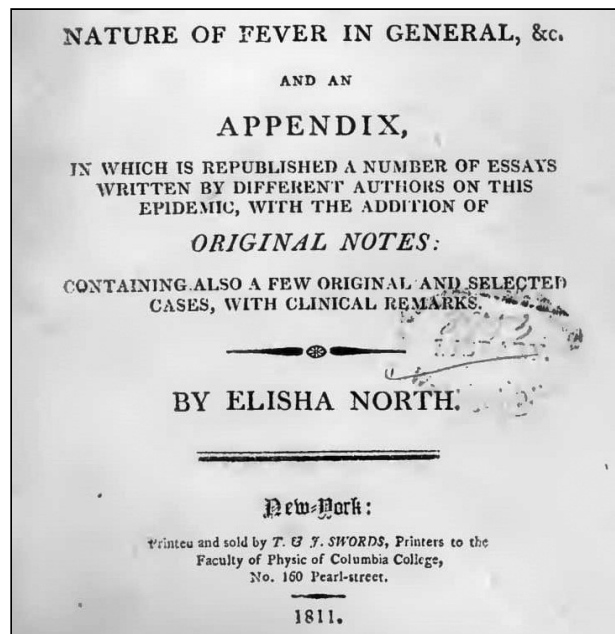
ister for the Town of Acworth, New Hampshire “was greatly disturbed by the ravages of the ‘spotted fever’ in the town during the last year of his ministry, so that he hardly dared to attend funerals, much less visit the sick” (Merrill, 147).

The situation must have been particularly distressful in more rural and remote communities where doctors were rare or non-existent, leaving people to deal with a disease about which they had no knowledge or experience. In places that had doctors, the sick and dying were so numerous that they could not attend to all cases.

*The distress of this part of the country is beyond any thing you can conceive. Seven men and women, and one child, were buried in Barre [Massachusetts] this afternoon. Sixty are now sick. Dr. Holmes told me this day that twenty physicians would not be too many for that town alone. (Letter to the editor, *The Repository*, March 19, 1810).*

As evidenced by the Rose family, the rapidity of progression from illness to death was one of the most alarming aspects of spotted fever. The disease often proved fatal in less than 48 hours and, in some cases, as little as six hours after the arrival of symptoms.

*[Jennie Grier, a] healthy girl of nineteen prepared dinner for a party of young men who had come to provide the family with their winter’s wood. After placing the food upon the table, she was taken by a violent headache. Dr. Carleton was called and immediately pronounced the case “spotted*



residents of Medfield, Massachusetts. As the sickness spread to other towns and states in the following months and years, so too did panic and confusion. Adding to the fear associated with the illness was the fact that spotted fever appeared to be very selective. Some towns and villages would see extraordinary levels of sickness and death, while others would see very little. Sometimes the disease would kill all members of a single family leaving their neighbours unscathed. In other instances, all the children and young adults in a household would fall ill, while parents and grandparents had no apparent symptoms.

Anxiety associated with the epidemic was so great that some simply abandoned their public responsibilities. It is reported that John Kimball, Congregationalist min-

<sup>\*</sup> This observation is based on the testimony of Mary Taylor (née Lovejoy) of Hatley, Quebec. Mary was 18 years old in 1811 and would have certainly witnessed the illness and death associated with “the Spotted Fever” firsthand.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Early nineteenth-century outbreaks of spotted fever appear to have been recorded in other parts of the eastern United States and Canada but are outside the scope of this study.

*fever”, medicine made no impression, and before midnight she was a corpse* (Cited in Merrill, 130).

“Spotted fever” took hold as the name for the disease because the first recorded instances of the sickness were accompanied by acute subcutaneous haemorrhaging that left the appearance of dark spots or petechiae on the surface of the skin. But these spots were not always present, leading to furious debate within the medical community about the correct nomenclature for the illness.\*

*So frequent indeed was this species of haemorrhage during the first season in which the disease prevailed, that it was considered as one of its most striking characteristics [sic], and gave rise to the name petechial, or spotted fever, which has been very generally, though very improperly, applied to the disease. These spots commonly appeared on the face, neck, and extremities, frequently over the whole body. They were generally observed in the early stages of the disease. In size they were various, commonly the head of a pin and a six-cent bit would mark the two extremes. These spots were evidently formed by extravasated blood; they did not rise above the surface and would not recede upon pressure. In colour, they varied from a common to a very dark purple, and the darker the shade, the more fatal the prognosis* (North, 12-13).

Other symptoms of spotted fever included severe headache, muscle and neck stiffness, high fever, photosensitivity, nausea, vomiting, irritability, and confusion. In the most severe cases, convulsions, coma and death followed. Some doctors, observing the symptoms of the disease, argued that it must be some form of typhus, typhoid, or influenza (Wilson, 139).\*\* Most were not convinced. The majority consensus rested with doctors like Enoch Hale of Gardiner, Maine, who argued that spotted fever was not only “a new disease, but as a disease requiring new principles to guide the physician in its treatment” (Hale, 245).

Whatever this sickness was, it was killing many people very quickly, and doctors scrambled to find an effective re-

sponse under the critical scrutiny of a public that felt that the medical profession was not doing enough to stop the epidemic. According to Elisha Babcock, editor of the *American Mercury*, Hartford, Connecticut:

*It is difficult, indeed, to conceive how a disorder; frequently in the rapidity and fatality of its attack equalling all the horrors of the plague, and destined, perhaps, like the depopulating scourge of Russia, to leave at no distant period, whole districts of our country without an inhabitant, should, in the estimation of the medical faculty, have been esteemed deserving so little of their attention* (North, 141).

In their efforts to find a cure for spotted fever, doctors and laypeople alike employed a variety of treatments. Medical science in the early nineteenth century was unable to understand and address effectively the underlying causes of infectious disease, so care focused on the alleviation of observable symptoms was the only option. Some of the therapeutic procedures employed to treat spotted fever, such the drinking of hot tea, alcohol, vinegar, or placing feet in warm water, were relatively benign. Other treatments, involving substances like mercury, arsenic, opium, and diluted sulphuric acid, were objectively dangerous. Blistering and bleeding were also used and, like the other treatments, probably had little effect on the progression of the disease. A folk remedy purported to cure spotted fever is preserved in the personal papers of Captain Charles Church of Winchester, Vermont:

*To one quart of lime, add one gallon of water. To one quart of tar, add two quarts of water. Let these stand in separate vessels until they froth, skim the froth, pour them together. To this mixture add eight ounces of saltpeter, four ounces of opium. Take a glass when going to bed and repeat the same in four or five hours* (Hayes, 410).

Speculation as to the cause of spotted fever was rife within the medical community. Despite the observation that many people in close proximity to the sick and dying were also falling ill, the idea that contagion could be an important factor in the spread of the disease was rejected by

all professional observers in favour of a number of other theories.\*\*\*

*Errors in diet, exposure to sudden changes of temperature, or to damp air, fatigue, watching, anxiety of mind, and in short any cause, which in a line of health will produce a slight derangement in the system, will, during the existence of an epidemic which is not contagious, operate as an exciting cause* (Massachusetts Medical Society, 175).

The idea that weather was somehow associated causally with the spotted fever epidemic was a commonly held theory. It had been noted that cases of the illness increased with the arrival of winter, peaking late in the season, and only abating with the arrival of warmer weather in the spring (Hale, 34-35). Physician Job Wilson of Boston argued that “great changes of temperature have had an important effect in producing the present epidemic, if not the principal cause” (Wilson, 126). However erroneous, the bias toward identifying a weather-related cause for the spotted fever epidemic was predictable given that the association of disease with changes in weather and temperature had been rooted in western medical theory since the at least the time of Hippocrates (Falagas et al.).

Of the small number of recorded spotted fever deaths in the Eastern Townships settlements that could be verified conclu-

\* Modern readers should not confuse this disease with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii* and transmitted by infected ticks.

\*\* In the early nineteenth century terms like typhus and typhoid were used interchangeably. They are now understood as distinct diseases caused by different pathogens.

\*\*\* Ironically, at that time the notion that some diseases were contagious and could be spread through human contact appears to have been more prevalent outside the medical establishment and was often dismissed by doctors as superstition.

sively by this author, the last was Osgood Nelson, aged three years and seven months, who died on the December 16, 1815. Most of the deaths related to the epidemic, particularly in rural New England and Lower Canada, were most likely left unreported and unrecorded. But the records that do exist suggest that cases of spotted fever abated after the winter of 1815-1816. Recorded deaths from the disease were evident in 1817 and 1818 but were a rare occurrence.

As the nineteenth century progressed, spotted fever became endemic in many parts of North America and Europe, with occasional outbreaks on a larger scale (Stillé, 10-17). By the 1840s, the name "spotted fever" had been replaced by Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis (Sargent, 35). This change reflected the recognition that all observable cases of the disease were characterized by inflammation of the meninges, the membranes that encase the brain and spinal cord. However, while these symptoms were evident and well documented, the cause of the disease remained a mystery, and the medical community continued to insist that it was not contagious.

*In the present instance it may be affirmed that epidemic meningitis has been pronounced non-contagious by almost the unanimous verdict of competent judges. The few dissentients only prove the rule (Stillé, 99).*

Advances in germ theory and the practice of microbiology in the second half of the nineteenth century led to the discovery of a number of disease-causing pathogens. In 1887, Austrian pathologist Anton Weichselbaum was able to extract a bacterium he named *Diplokokkus intracellularis meningitidis* from the spinal fluid of living patients (Weichselbaum). By the turn of the twentieth century, this organism would be identified conclusively as an important pathogen, placed in the same genus as bacterium responsible for gonorrhea, and reclassified as *Neisseria meningitidis* (Gradwohl).

*Neisseria meningitidis* is recognized today as the micro-organism responsible for meningococcal disease, a collective term referring to infection that can cause meningitis, septicemia (blood poisoning), and pneumonia. Despite advances in the development of antibiotic drugs, vaccines,

and epidemic management practices, meningococcal disease remains a major health threat worldwide. To date, six known serogroups or major strains of the bacterium demonstrate the potential to trigger large-scale outbreaks (World Health Organization). Twenty-five countries within the so-called "meningitis belt" of sub-Saharan Africa, experience small-scale seasonal outbreaks of the disease on an annual basis, punctuated by larger epidemics (Jafri et al.). Much of what is known about the meningococcal disease, both endemically and epidemically, derives from studies of this region.



In 1805, more than 30 deaths in and around Geneva, Switzerland, were attributed to a previously unknown ailment described as *Fièvre cérébrale maligne non contagieuse* (Viessieux, 62). This event is accepted as the first clinically documented outbreak of meningococcal disease.

The biological mechanisms of *Neisseria meningitidis* infection, carriage and transmission are incompletely understood and too complex to be discussed in detail here (Trotter & Maiden). Humans are the only known host of *N. meningitidis*, which is known to colonize the nasopharynx of up to 10% of the global population. This may rise to up to 25% in specific populations, or in certain situations (World Health Organization; Stollenwerk et al.). For most people, colonization and carriage of one or more strains of *N. meningitidis* is a harmless event. However, in a minority of cases, the pathogen evades the body's natural defences, enters the bloodstream, and causes invasive disease.

Exposure to respiratory secretions of

individuals carrying *N. meningitidis* is an important mode of transmission and enables the bacterium to spread from person to person. Under the right conditions, if a strain of *N. meningitidis* is virulent, transmitted widely, and leads to large rates of morbidity and mortality, an epidemic ensues.

It is possible, although uncertain, that the outbreak of meningococcal disease in Medfield, Massachusetts in March 1806 was a result of single carrier arriving recently from Europe through Boston or another nearby port. Outbreaks in 1807 proximate to other New England port cities such as Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and New Haven, Connecticut, suggest the arrival of other carriers in the following year, bringing with them one or more strains of invasive *Neisseria meningitidis*.\*

By 1809-1810, the disease began to spread rapidly throughout New England, and by the following winter it had crossed the border into Canada. Important routes of trade and migration such as the Merrimack, Pemigewasset, Saco and Connecticut river valleys created human pathways for the northward expansion of spotted fever, eventually reaching the fledgling settlements of Quebec's Eastern Townships. Many in these settlements, like Timothy and Sarah Rose, retained close familial and commercial ties to the New England states, ensuring a steady flow of people, goods, and disease across the international boundary.

Asymptomatic carriage plays a key role in the interpersonal transmission of *Neisseria meningitidis* and its role in the spread of meningococcal disease cannot be overstated (Caugant et al.). Unquestionably, the unchecked expansion of the spotted fever epidemic was a largely a product of asymptomatic carriage. Without an understanding of microbial infection or the mechanisms associated with the communication of pathogens, invasive *Neisseria meningitidis* would have spread unhindered and unknowingly by persons that had no outward signs of disease. Potential

\* The author has mapped the geographical and chronological expansion of the epidemic using a number of primary and secondary sources, including medical reports, newspapers, and local histories.

exposure to infection would have been facilitated by any number of behaviours including intimate and close casual contact, sharing contaminated eating and drinking utensils, and the use of unsterilized medical equipment.

The peak of the spotted fever epidemic (1809-1814) corresponds with the beginning of a climate anomaly known as the “cold decade.” Between 1809 and 1819, average global temperatures declined, possibly reaching at their lowest point in 500 years (Cole-Dai et al., 1). This period of cooling has been associated scientifically with the fallout of volcanic eruptions in early 1809 (late 1808?) and again in 1815. The “cold decade” found its apex in the infamous “year without a summer” of 1816. Beginning in 1809, wet summers and unusually erratic winters were the norm throughout the northern hemisphere for several years. In many areas of New England, snow and killing frosts were recorded even in the height of the growing season, severely disrupting agricultural production. In Vermont, the summers of both 1809 and 1810 “were so cold that corn did not ripen as usual” (Gallup, 56). Records kept by the Reverend Ebenezer Fitch, President of William’s College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, recorded an average daily temperature for the summers of 1809 and 1810 that was close to three degrees Fahrenheit colder than the five preceding years (North, 29).

In a society that was largely rural and agrarian, the erratic weather of the 1810s would have been disastrous. Most people lived primarily on what they were able to grow, and failed crops meant economic hardship and, for many, poverty and starvation. This situation was exacerbated by the War of 1812, which proved economically challenging for communities and families on both sides of the border (Bolcevic, 73-77).

It is well understood that famine and associated malnutrition lead to increased susceptibility to infectious disease (Alsan et al.). Almost certainly hunger, and its impact on the human immune response, fueled the expansion of the spotted fever epidemic. The first cases of this disease recorded in Franklin County, Massachusetts, in 1807, were associated with a family that was described as “dirty and poor,” leading some to suggest that material deprivation itself was the genesis of the illness

(Williams, 15-16). A few years later, Dr. Joseph Gallup of Woodstock, Vermont, observed that “in families more destitute, not only the liability to have the disease excited, is greater, but also, when attacked, the means necessary for opposing its rapid and fatal tendency, are not usually at hand” (Gallup, 67).

Joseph Gallup provides what is possibly the only contemporary estimate of the large-scale mortality associated with the spotted fever epidemic. Describing what he identifies as a pneumonic and highly fatal form of the disease that ravaged Vermont in the winter of 1813, Gallup reasoned that 226 organized towns in that



state lost an average of 25 people.\* Using that logic, he estimated that deaths in 1813 attributed to the disease numbered approximately 6,400 or just under 3% of the state’s population (Gallup, 75). At 2,937 deaths per 100,000 people, Gallup’s estimate appears to be exaggerated and exceeds all modern assessments of mortality associated with epidemic meningococcal disease. However, because the medical professionals of the time could offer little in the way of prophylactic or therapeutic management of the disease, rates of mor-

\* Although Gallup appeared certain that the outbreak of epidemic lung infection in Vermont and in neighbouring New York State in 1813 was a form of “spotted fever”, and while there is evidence to support this conclusion, it must be taken with some degree of caution.

bidity and mortality would have been much higher than they are today. How much higher is a matter of speculation. The World Health Organization estimates that, if left untreated, 50% of all cases of meningococcal disease result in death and up to 20% of survivors experience some form of impairment such as hearing loss and brain damage. So perhaps it is possible that, if some 13,000 of Vermont’s 217,875 citizens (1810 census) fell ill in the winter of 1813, half of those might have perished.

Apart from the total mortality rate, many questions remain unanswered about the spotted fever epidemic of 1806-1816. Was the sickness described by Gaspar Visseux in Switzerland in 1805 a truly new disease? If it was, why did the first widespread epidemic of invasive *Neisseria meningitidis* occur in North America instead of Europe? Was there a single strain of the pathogen responsible for the epidemic or were there multiple strains causing multiple forms of meningococcal disease? Is it even correct to understand the epidemic as single event, or is it better understood as a series of distinct outbreaks occurring over period of several years? Additional research may answer these questions. But further analysis of the historical record also presents the opportunity to better understand the social, political and economic implications of this early nineteenth-century medical crisis and its impact on the lives of families and communities in New England and southern Quebec.

*Grant Myers received his academic training in Anthropology and Archaeology at Carleton University and the University of British Columbia. He now serves as the President of QAHN and is a manager with CEDEC (Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation). His interests include social history, ethno-history, folklore, photography, writing, wilderness canoeing and mountaineering.*

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# “WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW”

## Memoirs

*Editor’s note: these Memoirs were produced as part of the memoir-writing project “Write here, write now,” led by Townshippers’ Association in partnership with QAHN.*



# GRANNY, MILIA AND I

by Phyllis Sise

**N**otre-Dame-du-Portage although a skip and throw away, was always an outing. They had the most wonderful salt water pool, which for someone who sank was a marvel. It was also frequented by French kids, boys, I mean locals. So, it felt exotic, a way to get dirty with the regulars. Oh yes, I was raised as the English snob up the road. Coming early in the season to summer with my eternally elderly Grandmother.

She would bring Milia, her Polish maid, and we would hovel ourselves in the damp cold of a large house overlooking the lower St. Lawrence. Milia worked tirelessly keeping the large L’Islet wood cook stove warm out of which she could remarkably produce my favorite roast chicken and pies. The Carrs Water Crackers and Digestive sat in the upper compartment. They were just slightly warm and always crisp.

Kitchens are usually the comfort zone of a house and this one was no different. I would sit to make my toast in the morning, and if I arrived late the two-slice toaster with the huge plug would have already warmed for toast delivered to my Grandmother in her bed, where she lay like a grand princess with a bag of corks at the end for arthritis. I would flip/flop the doors on that toaster a million times with anticipation. It took a long time but produced some of the best toast ever, soft inside, crusty exterior, a perfect description of my grandmother. She would insist on me coming to her bedside to sing “He promised to buy me some blue velvet ribbons, to tie up my bonny brown hair.” Then before bed I had to pray on my knees that someone would take care of my soul if I died in the night. That was after having

been read to, snuggled on the couch in the corner of a large living room next to the space heater spewing gusts of kerosene. Unfortunately, the stories were always grim, literally Grimm, and because I loved to dance the little girl with the red slippers was particularly haunting. She couldn’t stop dancing and couldn’t take off her red shoes.



Our house was one of seven built by a financier for his seven sons. “At the end of the nineteenth century, St. Patrick’s became a popular resort community, frequented by businessmen, senior government officials, and politicians including Governors General Lord Monck and Lord Dufferin, former Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent, and Lord Shaughnessy.” It was a place to breathe healing salt air and swim in the frigid water, another reason the heated pool of my generation was heaven. The houses of St.

Patrick’s only ten kilometres from Portage stood along a rock cliff that overlooked the river. The rich loam fields below were reserved for local farmers, allowing access to the rocky shores and tidal pools. The Anglo wealth of Montreal and Quebec City melded with the local French, a perfect blend. Sir John A. Macdonald, our first Prime Minister, also had a summer house in St. Patrick’s. It was from this house the railroad was hammered out, and in 1885 the Louis Riel affair was discussed at a cabinet meeting held at his house.

As to why his carriage was left in Notre-Dame-du-Portage at the Wickhams’ house is a mystery. It has been said that Sir John A. Macdonald imbibed liberally, maybe that day he had too many.

*Sir John A. Macdonald’s carriage, Notre-Dame-du-Portage, c.1930s. Photo: Matthew Farfan collection.*



# CALL ME “MAXIME” OF CYBOR ELEMENTARY

by Bernice Sorge

Nobody knows why but all the children in the village of Cybor spoke both French and English in colloquial mixes of the two languages. One explanation could be that parents were mixed-language couples; if the father was English-speaking then the mother was French and vice versa. These couples were called “duets” by the locals, who seemed to be very concerned with finding a possible scientific explanation for the phenomenon. The question being: why didn't people marry partners who had the same mother-tongue as they? One hunch was that it was due to unexpected changes in weather. The region was known for rapid changes in atmospheric pressure – “la pression atmo,” to use the colloquial. Apparently high and low pressure systems in fast sequence do affect the mood of human beings and duet couples were believed to be more sensitive than usual.

There was also a theory that duet couples were more prone to accidents, probably due to miscommunication caused by their partners dropping an English word or two into a French sentence and pronouncing it in French or vice versa. This observation of accident prone “duets” often got mixed up to mean that the children of duets were accidents! I never ever agreed with that hypothesis! The one thing teachers did notice was that the children of 'duets' had lots of accidents, which came to be known as language accidents; in other words, swearing, in the common parlance of the teachers.

Cybor Elementary could be considered a perfect field trial, a perfect in-life petri dish, a mixture of “la pression atmo,” duet marriages and language accidents of the offspring. One flaw in the research was that there was no control group in the school, no group of children who didn't come from duet marriages. Of course, you cannot use teachers as the control group, but there were a few teachers who had language accidents and one or two who had duet parents. There was a lot of evidence of changes in teachers' behaviour over the years at the school.

I was head teacher of Cybor Elementary, kindergarten teacher and principal all at the same time. And I know I would definitely not fit into the Cybor petri dish! My first language was Arabic but it was forgotten over the years in elementary school. I did remember a few words often repeated by my mother, such as “Yulla” (get going, let's get going, or move it fast!) which I did put to use in Cybor Elementary. I spoke a passable French as taught to me by a Polish university teacher with a thick accent. I would consider my mother tongue to be English and there was no duet as my mother was a single parent.

I was in charge of discipline along with everything else in the school! When the kids swore in French I hardly noticed until the French teacher informed me time and again that the child was not reciting some religious ritual. She said: “il sacrait, tabernac!” I was never jolted when I heard “tabernac, hosti, calice, ciboire,” but if I heard the English “F” word the child was sent to the office: “Yulla! Office tout de suite!” I would say. Of

course it was me in the office! I always asked the child to write the word down, repeat it and talk about it.

My experience in Cybor Elementary brought me to believe that there probably was something in the air, that “pression atmo” that they talked about, because I did notice a change in my behaviour. I did eventually have language accidents! Before this realization, I thought secretly that saying swear words in the other language of the rest of the sentence maybe didn't sound as bad or that they thought the victim would be left translating, thus giving time for a getaway.

Maxime was a perfect example of the phenomenon of duet parents and language accidents. He was sent to the office every day, usually after recess. He could never bring himself to repeat an English swear word to me. “I can't say it in front of you miss.” He would sit there looking sad and embarrassed, and eventually he was just sent back to class. Except one day, which happened to be a very bad day for me and I think there was a low pressure system, Maxime came into my office and I exploded.



“Asti tabarnak! Maxime – you again!”

“Mais, fuck miss, Thomas called me maxipad and now you just swore at me.”

“What-did-you-just-say?” I yelled.

“Maxipad!”

“No, that other word, in the first part of your sentence.”

He looked at me like a trapped animal. “You mean the one that starts with F, miss?”

“That's it, the one that starts with F!”

“Really miss, you want me to say it again?”

“Tout de suite,” I said. “Yulla!”

“Could I write it down first, miss?”

“Show me how to spell it please.” I started to write it on a scrap of paper, then stopped and crumpled it up.

“Write in any way you want to!” He wrote down f-u-k. Then f-u-o-k, then f-u-c-k and then he said “fuck” in a soft voice with his head down. As he parted, he looked back with an uncertain slight smile and said: “Miss, today you made me swear, but I won't tell my parents.”

Not long after that, Maxime stopped swearing in English. It had lost its punch. But he did come to the office once in a while; swearing in French still had that je ne sais quoi. And he came by to say “Hi miss” sometimes.

*Bernice Sorge is a visual artist and poet. Her botanical prints and paintings have been exhibited in Paris, New York, and many other cities. She is currently putting together a book of poetry extracted from her sketchbooks (1970-2019), a children's book of poetry and drawings, and is writing haiku for which she has a passion. In 2018-2019, her handmade book, "Beauty, fragility, Survival" was exhibited in a travelling show in Brooklyn, Atlanta, Chicago and Toronto.*

# LANDMARK OF LEARNING

## *Renovating the “Mother House” for Dawson College*

by Gary Evans

*This article is adapted from the author’s Landmark of Learning: A Chronicle of Dawson College Building and Site, originally published by Dawson College in 1992. Although established half a century ago, Dawson’s relocation to the Congregation of Notre Dame’s former Mother House in the 1980s marked a turning point in the college’s history.*

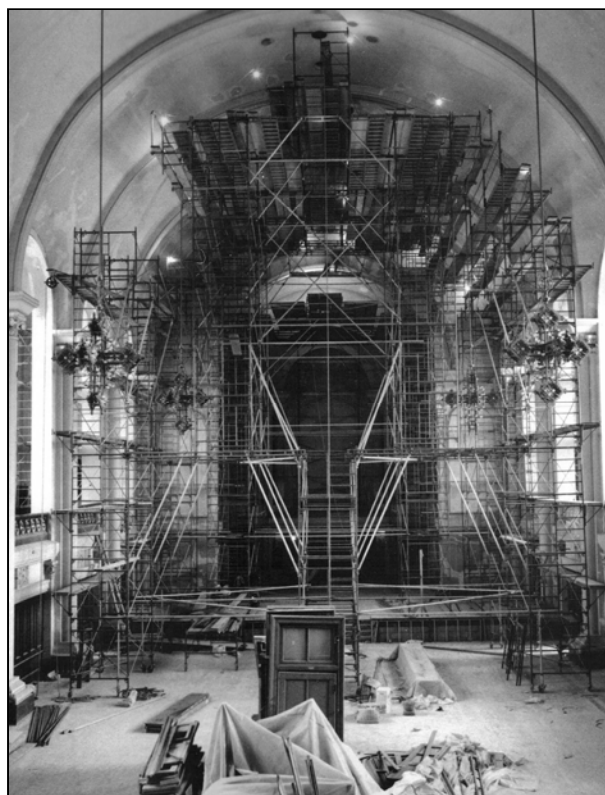
As Dawson College celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, former students and colleagues look back and wonder almost in disbelief at how quickly the time has passed. Since *Landmark of Learning* first appeared, the college has gone through changes and physical renovations that keep it a state-of-the-art institution. Hundreds of faculty have passed through its doors. Thousands of students have also come and gone and are now fulfilling the dreams they had as they negotiated their way through Dawson’s halls.

The story of how Dawson College came to occupy the stunningly beautiful building and grounds it now calls home goes back to the founding of the Congregation of Notre Dame (CND) by Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1658. A religious order devoted to the ideals of teaching, particularly of women, the CND established its headquarters (the “Mother House”) in Montreal’s old town until the mid-nineteenth century, when the nuns opted for a rural setting. A new Mother House opened in 1880 in an impressive Gothic-inspired edifice near today’s Villa Maria metro station, but after only thirteen years it burned to the ground, the fire accidentally set by workmen on the roof. The flames were left to burn out of control by a confused fire department, which rushed to the old town site instead of the new location. For a decade, makeshift quarters had to suffice, but in 1904, the Sulpicians offered the CND land from their mountain estate on the south-west corner of Sherbrooke Street and Atwater Avenue for the bargain price of \$150,000. When the nuns acquired the property, the area was a patchwork of small farms, grand mansions, and workers’ row housing, punctuated by schools, shops and churches. To the

south of the new Mother House site was the former Shamrock Lacrosse Ground, now a baseball field where the Montreal Royals had won the Eastern League pennant in 1898. To the north of Sherbrooke Street lay an orchard, a remnant of the “Priests’ Farm” attached to the Sulpician seminary.

The nuns of the CND had no intention of letting fire drive them from their new home. They wanted a building of concrete and stone right to the roof. The architectural firm of Jean Omer

Marchand and Samuel Stevens Haskell won the contract in July 1904, and contractors Martineau and Prénouveau began work in October. Four years later, the CND moved into the splendid new Mother House. The Paris-trained Marchand designed a grand Beaux-Arts style building with a roof held up by reinforced concrete. Its attractive yellow brick facing and foundation stone avoided the dark quality of local greystone that characterized the city’s religious buildings. With 700 rooms, each filled with natural light from large windows, it was the longest building in Montreal. The imposing chapel, which contained the mortal remains of Marguerite Bourgeoys, became the centre point of the interior, its ceiling suspended from a hidden maze of steel cables. The chapel’s striking copper dome rose 125 feet above street level, and upon it perched the figure of Notre Dame



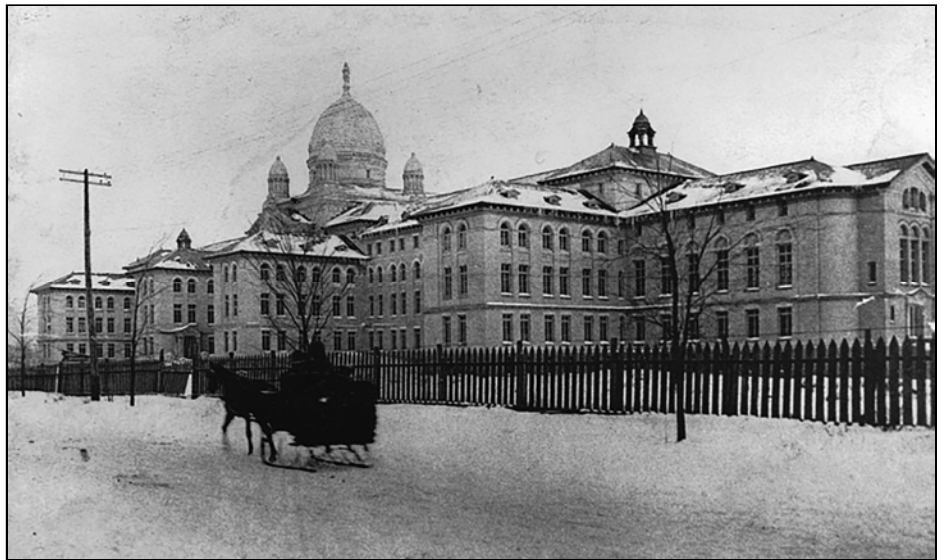
de la Garde, a replica of the one atop the church of the same name in Marseille, France. As a final touch, the nuns installed a \$3,000 organ from the world-renowned Quebec firm of Casavant Freres.

The edifice had cost \$638,780 and was built to endure. Besides serving as the administrative centre and novitiate of the CND, it fulfilled an educational function for the next seven decades. From 1908 until 1926, Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys (later Marianopolis College) occupied part of the building. In another wing, Note Dame Secretarial College held classes until 1972, when it moved to the other side of Atwater Avenue. By that time, unfortunately, the building had become primarily a retirement home for the nuns, and more stringent city regulations

*Dawson College: Transformation of the chapel into a library. Photo: Keith Marshall, courtesy of Gary Evans.*

placed an increasingly difficult maintenance burden on the aging residents. Given its prime downtown location, it seemed only a matter of time before a land-hungry developer would come along with a wrecker's ball and build high-rise housing. Two happy events prevented this fate: in 1978, a heritage-minded Quebec government classed the site as a historic monument, and in July 1981, Sarah Paltiel became Director General of Dawson College. Paltiel, formerly Academic Dean of Vanier College and head of the Association of Jewish Day Schools of Montreal, set out to achieve what had been discussed for over a decade: the consolidation of the fourteen separate Dawson campuses into a single central location under one roof. The college set its heart on the Mother House, believing it could be rehabilitated as a modern CEGEP.

Paltiel pursued her objective with determination. She showed photographs of some of Dawson's decrepit corners to a number of civil servants from the Ministry of Education, and even conducted visits of these buildings. As the civil servants gazed at crumbling ceilings and dingy nooks and crannies, Paltiel told them that, after thirteen years of waiting while other colleges acquired new facilities, Dawson felt like someone in a cafeteria line who had to keep watching others cut in ahead. The civil servants admitted that Paltiel had a good argument. They could recommend, but the government had the final say. Paltiel then arranged an audience with Minister of Education, Camille Laurin, who listened to her talk nonstop for an hour before stating: "Madame, je vous promets une solution juste et équitable." This seemed promising, but other politicians still had to be convinced. Following an extensive lobbying campaign, Paltiel stationed herself outside the main chamber of the National Assembly in Quebec City and button-holed the most powerful ministers, making a strong pitch for the one site Dawson coveted: the now depopulated Mother House.



At last, on April 28, 1982, Dawson College received ministerial approval for the project and proceeded to purchase the site. This cost \$12.2 million, and it was estimated that an additional \$32 million would be needed to complete the renovations required so the building could accommodate up to 4,000 students. Before taking possession of the site, the college had to convince the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which maintained authority over any changes to the building's exterior and grounds, that the plan was viable. Architect David Wigglesworth of Dimokopoulos and Associates was hired to redesign the building so that the exterior would remain intact while the interior could be modernized. It was estimated that 95% of the existing interior space would have to be demolished. Matters were further complicated because the building straddled two municipalities, Montreal and Westmount, presenting Wigglesworth and the college with the headache of trying to meet some 50 different building code standards.

When the Mother House had been built in 1908, poured reinforced concrete had been used instead of wooden beams, but the main weight of the building was carried by the outside walls. As these walls could not stand the stress of interior humidification, a new heating and ventilation system would have to compensate, which meant that all windows needed to be replaced and sealed. The staircases were a major source of light for the building, especially on the north end of the chapel, but they could not be saved, because the fire code demanded enclosed fire exits. The creaky maple floors would have to be torn up, because the space beneath them could have spread fire in a conflagration. The planners hoped that, wherever possible, the extensive oak moulding and panelling could be refurbished, but unfortunately most of it proved too brittle to save; only a silhouette of the original interior remains. Sacrificing the trim, the college avoided astronomical costs, but it was forced to sell most of the elegant hardwood for a pittance at public sale.

Wigglesworth worked with the college's Facilities Planning Committee to work through



practical questions. Should each faculty member have an office measuring sixty square feet (the government norm) or should teachers prepare to share a larger space? Would it be better to keep departments separate, or to mix faculty? And, most important of all, should the magnificent chapel, which dominated the building's interior, be converted into a theatre, a cafeteria, a student meeting place, or a library? Most approved of the final decision to build a library, but the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which also had jurisdiction over this heritage space, did not approve the architect's plan to open its walls to more light. The ministry permitted only a series of doors, enclosed by burnished wood panelling, to highlight the reading room walls. It was an approach that succeeded in providing fire exits without spoiling the integrity of the vast interior space. The CND removed two ornately carved maple confessionals, along with all religious paintings and artefacts, including the remains of Marguerite Bourgeoys. The intricately latticed iron chandeliers stayed, as did the Casavant organ pipes, a mute monument. The chapel transformed into a grand reading room and circulation area, visually more reminiscent of a nineteenth-century library than a late twentieth-century one.

There were plenty of surprises when it came to the demolition. Virtually all the mechanical and electrical facilities, most originating from 1908, had to be replaced, adding to costs. The



future reception hall and board room needed special reinforcing, and the concrete roof and copper flashing required major restorative work. The planners agreed that the new interior walls would not be built using concrete and cinderblocks. The planners gambled correctly that students would respect gyproc walls once they realized theirs was a building of unique character and historic proportions.

By September 1988 the job was almost done and Dawson's students and faculty learned to thread their way through a building still filled with workmen. The final stage was the new \$13 million "G" wing on Maisonneuve Boulevard, completed in 1990-91. The final cost was \$45 million, but the result justified every dollar. Today, Dawson College is one of the most beautifully designed institutional buildings in the province and is considered a world-class architectural achievement. Heritage Montreal named it one of the nineteen sites of historical and architectural import on Sherbrooke Street. The landmark that Dawson so fortunately inherited has transformed into a trim and efficient modern complex, situated on resplendent landscaped grounds among original specimen trees.

Looking back from the second decade of the twenty-first century, we can see a connection between today's college and the educational ideals of that seventeenth-century idealist, Marguerite Bourgeoys. In the 1960s, many Québécois criticized the Church for its conservative mien and reluctance to change, but recent years have revealed a Quebec that has gone far beyond the rest of North America in realizing that free and universally accessible higher education for young women and men is how we survive and prosper in a contemporary world of constant challenges.

*Gary Evans taught History at Dawson College from 1971 to 1997, and more recently at Bishop's University and in the Department of Communications at the University of Ottawa.*

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# 2020 QAHN HERITAGE ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

*Editor's note: Given that schools have been closed since March 16, 2020, the students who participated in QAHN's Heritage Essay and Heritage Photo contests did so on their own time. QHN salutes their initiative!*

## FIRST PRIZE

**"Annie L. Jack: Canada's First Professional Horticultural Writer"**

by Rosalie Paquin  
Grade 5, Harmony Elementary School  
Châteauguay, Quebec

Once upon a time, in 1839, was born a girl named Annie. She liked to walk outside, admiring the beauty of plants and flowers. She was curious to learn about them. Growing up, Annie was still passionate by nature and the world surrounding her. At 19 years old, she arrived in Châteauguay and met Robert Jack, a fruit grower. They got married on June 13, 1860. They moved together on a big land her husband's dad bought for



them. They called it "Hillside" and Robert generously offered his wife a piece of it so she could do gardening and plant whatever she wanted! She could sell what she harvested and keep the

money. Annie was a happy wife. Mother of 12 children, she kept working on her gardens! They were among the nicest and most original in North America at the time. In 1876, over 1,000 apple trees were planted on the Jack family's land! Harvests were so abundant that apples were exported to England. Annie L. Jack wrote a lot about her gardening experiences. It brought her to write *The Canadian Garden: A Pocket Help for the Amateur*. Published in 1903, this was the very first guide about gardening in Canada. Quickly, she became known by many amateur and professional gardeners. She died in 1912. Still today, we can see her gravestone at St. Andrews cemetery and her beautiful house standing at 36 Smith's street in Châteauguay.

## SECOND PRIZE

**"Carlton Ayer"**

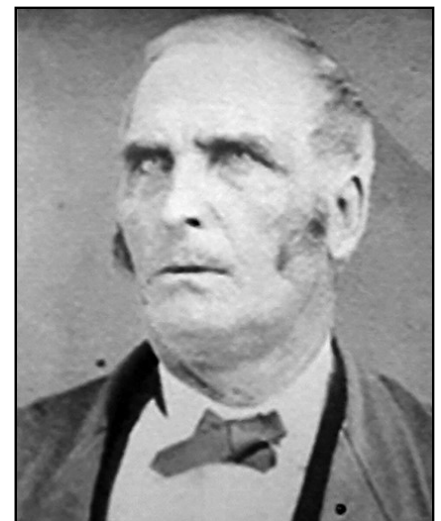
by Lily-Raeven Karyna Barter  
Grade 5, Ayer's Cliff Elementary School  
Ayer's Cliff, Quebec

Carlton Ayer was born in 1911. He was the son of Thomas Ayer. Thomas Ayer was one of the first settlers in Langmaids Flat. After Thomas Ayer's death in 1842, Carlton took charge of his father's Inn called Ayer's Inn.

Carlton Ayer was one of the founding fathers of the Stanstead County Agricultural Society which he ran for its first thirty years. In 1845 the first Stanstead County Agricultural Fair was held in Ayer's Flat. I'm guessing Ayer's Flat was chosen because Carlton was in charge.

In 1864, Carlton was given permission to build Ayer's Flat's first post office. It was a safer place to have the mail delivered.

Then in 1870, Carlton gave the railroad company twenty acres of land to make sure the railway came through Ayer's Flat. At the time, I think this was probably the biggest thing that had ever happened to Ayer's Flat. Why? This made travel, food and mail delivery a lot quicker. It also brought a lot more



tourism and money to the town and to Mr. Ayer. The train also would allow people to see how beautiful Ayer's Flat was with the lake and great farm land.

Now we come to 1872. This is the year the Stanstead County Agricultural Fair found its permanent home in Ayer's Flat.

If it wasn't for Carlton Ayer's vision, Ayer's Cliff wouldn't be what it is today. Carlton Ayer passed away in 1877, and is buried behind the United Church on Main Street in Ayer's Cliff.

### THIRD PRIZE

"Carrick's Shipwreck"

by Emma Eden

Grade 6, Gaspé Elementary School

Gaspé, Quebec

In 1847 a boat left Ireland with 180 passengers fleeing the Potato Famine which is also known as the Great Hunger. The ship left Ireland. When the ship reached the gulf of the St. Lawrence it struck a



bad storm then later wrecked about four miles from Cap-des-Rosiers. Only 48 made it to the shore in time, about 120

to 150 died. Many years later in 2019 in Quebec's National park they found a few bones of mostly people ages seven to twelve. In 2011 in Cap-des-Rosiers they found over 12 bones from the shipwreck. At the University of Montreal they tested the bones and they were confirmed that they were from the shipwreck. When they were testing the bones they had a strange diet. They would mostly eat potatoes but in the nineteenth century it was actually quite common for eating potatoes. Their protein was also pretty low. Most of the passengers were suffering from diseases caused from malnutrition. George Kavanagh (73) who is one of the survivors' ancestors he took part in the ceremony in Cap-des-Rosiers for the bones they had found on the beach. George Kavanagh said "I want to bid them a final adieu." In 1847 the time of the great hunger in Ireland millions died but millions also survived and went to live a better life they mostly went to Canada.

## 2020 QAHN HERITAGE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

### FIRST PRIZE

Brooke Sitcoff

Grade 10, West Island College

Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Quebec

Title: "Some Traditions Never Change"

*(Note: see the magazine cover for the First Prize photo.)*

April eighth, this would typically be the day where I would have been reunited with my family from all over the world, whom I only see about once a year. The day where my family comes together to celebrate our past, to celebrate the holiday of Passover. However, in these strange circumstances due to Covid-19, this was the first year of my life where I had to spend this holiday without my extended family.

I remember being a little girl, sitting by the table and hearing all of my family talk about what Passover truly means. How it represents how the Jews escaped their slavery and gained their freedom.

As well as how despite the difficult times that they were going through, the Jews still managed to come together as a community and be there for one another.

My favourite part of the dinner has always been when it was time to drink the wine, or in my case, grape juice. The oldest person always got to drink out of this wine glass, which has sat at the centre of the table ever since my great-grandparents had just started their family.

This year, while I looked around my practically empty table, I found comfort in the fact that this wine glass is still at the centre of my table. When I look at it, I can imagine my family all together, just like the way it used to be.

Even though I can't physically be with my family this year, I know that some traditions will never change. Although this situation is not ideal, just like how the Jews overcame their problems and gained their freedom many years ago, my family will overcome this

and in the end, I am certain that this will bring us closer together.

### SECOND PRIZE

Keira Gagliardi

Grade 11, West Island College

Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Quebec

Title: "To Walk in His Shoes"

Everybody has their different cultures that they grow up with. Mine were Italian and English but there is more to my story than just those two. My grandfather was born and raised in India, although, his parents weren't Indian due to the fact that they had only been stationed in New Delhi by the British government, for their work.

I am proud to say I consider my Grandfather as one of my best friends since he has impacted my life in numerous ways by teaching me so much and always being there for me. Forever engraved in my memory are the countless

times he'd tell us the stories about his 18 years in India he'd experienced before going to University in England. Geoffrey Byrne attended a school of 2,000 boys where the minority of only 3 European students included him. My Grandfather loved teaching us Hindi and I will never forget the feeling of serenity and peace of mind I would get as he sang us to sleep with beautiful Indian lullabies. He also loved to give us gifts when he came back from his trips to India, like the gorgeous colorful shoes in the photo.

He always had an extreme feeling of pride in his roots from his time in India, which he loves to spread to my sisters and me by taking us to attend an Indian celebration at the Beaconsfield Library. At these public parties, there was a great deal of beautiful Indian food and clothes. My Grandpa's big sense of humor and love for meeting new people leads him, still to this day, to talk to an Indian person in Hindi. The look of shock on their faces, when a white man spoke their language is one of his favorite things in the world. He still loves to do it to this day anywhere we go.



Even though I am not Indian, it is a huge part of my upbringing that I am so proud of. Indian culture is a huge piece of my life and childhood stories. The shoes in the picture have a special place in my heart. Not only are they a lovely gift from my Grandpa, but they symbolize my childhood and curiosity to travel. My dream is to travel to India and live the stories of my youth since I wouldn't be who I am today without them.

### THIRD PRIZE

Keira Morcos  
Grade 10, West Island College  
Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Quebec  
Title: "Reflection"

At a quick glance, one may see an ancient battered door. But, if you look closer you can see my reflection from when I took this photograph. Although this was not done intentionally I'm happy about this accident. Because upon seeing my reflection it made me wonder about the many reflections that have been seen through this old door.

This door belongs to the oldest windmill on the island of Montreal and one of the 18 remaining windmills in the province of Quebec. I learnt that this particular windmill dates back to 1710. I can only imagine how many nameless faces have been captured by this door's windowpane over the past three hundred years. Some of these faces are young, some are old and are from many different countries, reflecting on the diversity that is Quebec. But the reflection that grabs my heart the most is the reflection of the indigenous people who had the opportunity to glance at themselves through these window panes. For it is important for us to remember the first people to walk those shores, even before the windmill existed, were indigenous. This is important to me because in those faces I see my own. I am proud to see my indigenous ancestors looking back at me as my heart swells with pride as I look at them.



NEW USES FOR OLD BUILDINGS:  
REPURPOSING HERITAGE IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

FROM ANGLICAN CHURCH TO COMMUNITY HUB

*Historic Canterbury Church*

by Bethany Rothney

When Edward Pederson went door to door in his community to ask if people would support a project to restore and preserve historic Canterbury Anglican Church near Bury, he did not expect the response that he received. “Without the support of the community,” he says, “this project would have been a no go.” Pederson visited his neighbours in 2015 after the church had been put up for sale. The Bury Historical and Heritage Society took an immediate interest. Some members of the society had been patrons of the church for much of their lives.

Pedersen was put in charge of the project by Sylvia Aulis, a long-time member of both the Bury Historical and Heritage Society and the church congregation. “What do you do with a church that’s up for sale? It’s a loaded question,” Pedersen says. There had been murmurs around the community about what to do with it. Some people wanted to purchase it privately and use it for their own purposes; others hoped to buy it and turn it into a party centre for the community. Aulis and the Bury Historical and Heritage Society met and agreed that they would pursue the purchase of the church if the price were reasonable. According to Pedersen, the Anglican Diocese of Quebec had received offers of up to \$50,000. Following a meeting to visit the church, and some deliberation, the decision to offer to buy the building for \$1 was made.

The purchase offer, along with a promise to restore and preserve the church, was made to the Diocese and ac-

cepted with the understanding that if the pledge were ever not upheld, ownership would revert to the Diocese. On December 15, 2015, the sale and agreement were notarized, and the Canterbury



Church became the property of the Bury Historical and Heritage Society.

Back in 1836, the parish in Canterbury began meeting in a local schoolhouse. It was sixty years before the Gothic Revival-style church was built, officially opening in December 1896. Despite the church’s small size, over one hundred people attended the inaugural service. Canterbury Church served the community until 2015, by which time the congregation had dwindled to the

point that services were only held during the summer months.

In the 1980s, the Quebec government rated churches across the province based on their architectural significance.

The church received a C, denoting a medium-level importance as a rural Anglican church.

Renovations began well before the 2015 purchase. In 2004, the spire needed repairs as the wood was rotting. After the purchase, work on restoring the building began in earnest. The buttresses were patched, the doors replaced, and the pews removed to reconfigure the interior. Volunteers were imperative for the renovations to succeed. And except for larger jobs that required contractors, volunteers have carried the project forward from the beginning. The most significant renovation undertaken was lifting the church and putting it on a new foundation. When the building was originally constructed, it was supported on flat stones that needed to be adjusted each year; it was built in such a way as to enable workers to climb underneath to make the adjustments.

Fundraising began before any of the actual renovations did, and once again the community turned out to support the effort. Fundraising for the foundation started in 2017.

By the following year, \$70,000 had been raised, more than double what was needed. The church committee appealed not only to their community but also to history buffs and Anglicans across Canada and the United States.

The overwhelming support from the community in and around Bury is what has kept this project going. “We thought it would take ten years just to get the foundation done,” Pedersen said. Fundraising efforts by the committee





hold with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Edward Pedersen is still optimistic. “We’re not worried about the project failing,” he says. “But it is disappointing that we won’t be able to hold our annual events this summer.” The church was supposed to be painted this spring, with a grand opening for August 2020. Pedersen says that the church committee is playing things by ear, trying to stay optimistic that the grand opening may still happen at the end of the summer. The fear, though, is that future generations might not care for the historic site as it is being cared for now. This fear is a common one among heritage organizations in the area. But Pedersen is confident that the project will have lasting effects in the community. “History is like a garden,” he says. “You need to work at it, or people will forget it.”

have consistently been successful. One event, a concert of Celtic Québécois music held every year on the Fête nationale du Québec, has raised at least \$1,000 each year for three years in a row. Farm-

ers' markets have also garnered support from citizens, many regularly coming for a cup of coffee and a chat while buying their local produce.

All events, of course, were put on

*Bishop's University History student Bethany Rothney interned with QAHN in 2020.*

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## SETTLING CHERRY RIVER

*Internal migration in the Eastern Townships in the nineteenth century*

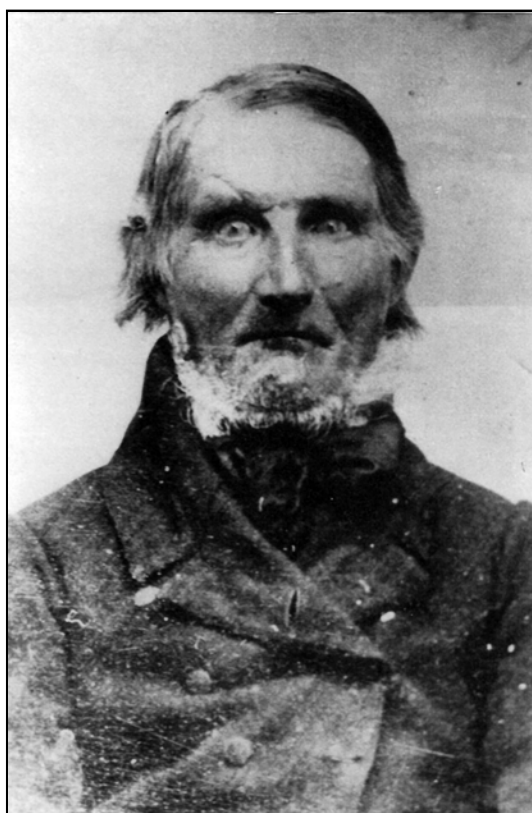
by Jane Jenson and Juanita McKelvey

We know that crossing borders to a new country is a major life event, undertaken at personal risk and cost. The Eastern Townships, one of the main locations of Anglophone settlement in Quebec, provides several narratives of inward migration. The story of American Loyalists is familiar as is that of English, Scottish and Irish immigrants drawn by the promises of the British American Land Company (BALC) or of English gentry hoping to establish a “Little England” countryside of yeoman farmers alongside large landholders. We also recognize the magnetic pull on the Eastern Townships exercised both by urban centres and by the more auspicious agricultural and environmental conditions of Ontario and the American Midwest once transportation links opened those territories to settlement.

We know much less about migration patterns of Anglophones *within* the Townships, however. If, by the mid-nineteenth century, population growth and limited prospects encouraged Anglophones either to leave the Townships for points west, above or below the U.S.-Canada border, or to move to cities, not everyone made that choice. Some chose to migrate in search of economic opportunity by leaving behind family and settled villages to cross local borders into new territory in the Townships themselves.

The village of Cherry River, on the line between the townships of Orford and Magog, illustrates this internal migration. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, settlers flowed into the townships of what would be Missisquoi, Stanstead and Shefford counties. In each, the Crown granted land under the “leader and associates” system and immigrants arrived from the United States and Europe. In contrast, the Crown ced-

ed a vast share of Orford Township in Sherbrooke County to the BALC in the 1830s. In exchange, the land company promised economic development, but its struggle to achieve viability limited the settlement of the township for decades.



By the 1850s, however, the BALC had finally resolved its disputes with the Crown and received letters patent allowing it officially to open lots for settlement on both the northern side of Orford Mountain, along the road between Sherbrooke and Granby, and the southern side, including the area that became Cherry River.

Some settlers had already cleared and taken up land on the village site. Surveying in 1835-37, Frederick Weiss mapped a *Squattersville* there. Official settlement only took off, however, in the late 1850s and 1860s, with newcomers

migrating from more populated townships in search of land to clear and farm.

For the settlers, it was a move to the frontier. Historian Catherine Day counted 2,250 souls in the municipality of Bolton in the late 1860s but only 900 in all of Orford Township, with most of them living on the Sherbrooke side of the township, distant from Cherry River. For one settler, John Buzzell, who was a child at the time, they were “moving to the woods” (McKelvey, vol. 1, 139).

The Buzzell family exemplifies a pattern of internal migration, that of Anglophones born in Canada but with American origins several generations back. John’s father was Daniel Taylor Buzzell, whose great-grandfather Joseph Buzzell arrived from New Hampshire as one of the associates of Nicolas Austin, recipient of a land grant in Bolton in 1797. Joseph’s descendants operated several sawmills, including a major one in Bolton Centre. His grandson Robert (b. 1789) married Hannah Taylor of the lineage of Daniel Taylor, another associate of Austin (Day, 26). Daniel Taylor Buzzell (b. 1810) was the first child of this union. For more than forty years, he too lived in Bolton, continuing the family tradition of running a mill and manufacturing basic furniture and tubs. His establishment was at the entrance to Bolton Pass, just above Knowlton village. (Taylor, vol. 1, 281 and vol. 2, 154-55. Note that this area is in Brome County, which was created in 1855; prior to that date, the Buzzells lived in Stanstead County.)

Several of Daniel’s 13 children, including the youngest, John (quoted above), were born at Sally’s Pond, in West Bolton. Children stayed nearby even after setting up their own households. This was the case, for example, of the second daughter, Philena (b. 1833),



was on the move (Taylor, vol. 2, 155). In contrast, however, to many already seeking land and opportunity further west, Daniel Taylor and Mary Fuller Buzzell’s growing family, including married sons and daughters with their children, chose migration within the Townships. The oldest son, Abel (b. 1829), was living in Missisquoi County. Two sons worked in Magog town. In 1856, daughter Anna (b. 1841) married Simeon Powers of Magog Township, whose father Joel had immigrated from Vermont and became a manufacturer of furniture. A first move by Daniel Taylor, Mary and the four younger children placed them next to these two generations of Powers at Castle Brook in Magog Township. A strong pull factor was the stream coming from Orford Mountain and emptying into Lake Memphremagog, providing significantly greater waterpower than what was available at Bolton Pass. The under-exploited BALC lands also provided a good supply of timber.

The Buzzell’s first move out of the township in which five generations of their families had lived for decades was only a first chapter, however, in their story of internal migration. Two daughters were living in Cherry River with their young families. They were the two oldest girls, Aurora (b. 1831), married to William H. Baird, and Philena, married to Adam Sager. The

who married Adam Sager (Taylor, vol. 2, 155). He was from the family of the Adam Sager who had relocated from up-state New York to St. Armand West in 1791, launching a settlement known as Sagersfield, later called Pigeon Hill (Day, 113-114). Numerous Sagers remained in the village but others, like this younger Adam, moved further afield.

By the 1850s, economic pressures in the settled counties were mounting. A major driver of change was population growth, as adult children sought land or work. There were also significant alterations in the situation of sawmills in these counties. Between 1831 and 1851

a boom in demand for lumber, used among other things for constructing the frame houses that replaced early settlers’ log structures, propelled the number of sawmills from 32 to 67 in the area of Brome County. This boom did not last, however. By 1861 only 50 sawmills were still in operation in the county (Booth, 51). If the industry still had growth potential, it was also concentrating, moving to population centres and towns. In Bolton Pass, which was not a town at all, such restructuring compounded the ongoing problem of limited waterpower.

By the 1850s, the Buzzell family

Baird and Sager families had lots next to each other on the 1863 Putnam and Gray map, as did Abel, who had just arrived from St. Armand.

Also on that map were the parents, who moved to Cherry River in 1862, drawn by the hydraulic potential for a sawmill and by the expanding village that would take its construction lumber and other wood products. Indeed, almost the whole family gathered around this mill. Son Robert (b. 1835), a carpenter in the town of Magog, arrived with his own wife and children. Another son, Joseph (b. 1830), settled there as an un-

married man. (The exceptions to this pattern were Daniel Evans, who emigrated from Magog to Illinois in the 1860s, and Hannah (b. 1840), who married Patrick Browley, who became a hotelkeeper in Georgeville and captain of Sir Hugh Allen's yacht.) In the 1871 census, five sons described themselves as carpenters and their father was a machinist. The new enterprise was a going concern, keeping several sons occupied over the next decades.

This migration out of the original township, which several generations of the family had founded and built, was a break with the past and a choice for the future. It meant the family could regroup and re-establish itself in an area with significant economic potential, next to the rapidly developing Town of Magog and in a growing farming village. In addition to taking up land, the new arrivals would provide lumber for frame houses and barns and would manufacture wooden tubs for settlers and their farms. Indeed, the mill's role was so central to the village that Cherry River earned the informal name of Tubville.

*Jane Jenson and Juanita McKelvey are members of the Société d'histoire du Canton d'Orford.*

**Sources:**

Unless otherwise indicated, most of the family details in this article are from Juanita McKelvey, *History of Cherry River (The Village)*, 2009, available as a CD or PDF from the Société d'histoire du Canton d'Orford (SHCO).

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## LET'S TALK OF GRAVES REMEMBER ME AS YOU PASS BY

by Heather Darch

*Editor's note: this is the first in a new series on interesting people buried in Eastern Townships cemeteries.*

*Let's talk of graves, of worms,  
of epitaphs;  
Make dust our paper, and with  
rainy eyes  
Write sorrow on the bosom of  
the earth.  
-Shakespeare, Richard II*

Standing at Alice Jane Johnson's gravesite, passersby will see a stone with just the facts: her name and the dates when she lived and died, 1857-1903. There is no clue to indicate that they are looking at the stone of the saddest woman in all of Missisquoi. In her life of quiet desperation, she called herself "Alice the Hermit."

Alice was one of those rare people

who wrote a diary. It was a personal journal to record her memories and yet, at the same time, she used her notebook to give herself a voice and a small sense of control in her life. Her whole lifetime was spent in Stanbridge Township, in the hamlet of Guthrie's Corner, and in the house where she was born in 1857 to George Johnson and Dinah Yates. It was here that she lived her narrow existence and begged for "death's relief."

The Johnson family came to Missisquoi County as Loyalists. Peleg Johnson and his wife Abigail Parker received a grant of 210 acres in 1796 on lot 87 near present day Pigeon Hill. Their son Freeborn Johnson, one of six children, was born in 1800. In 1829, he married Margaret Stone of Caldwell's Manor and together they built a small home, also on lot 87. Their son George, born in 1832, married Dinah Yates of Mystic in 1855 and they moved into Freeborn and Margaret's house. It is interesting to note that by this time the original acreage had been so divided among family members



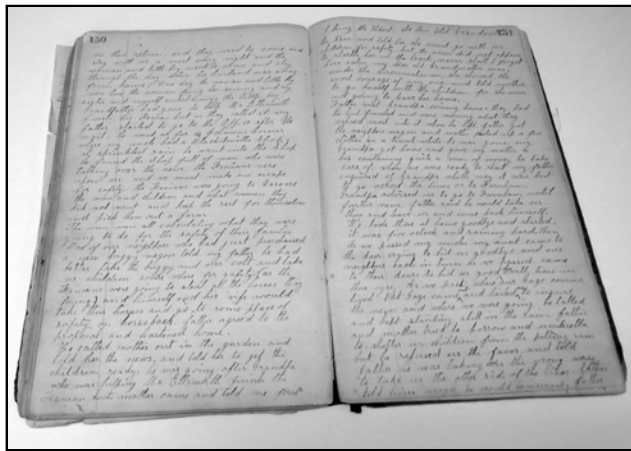
*Alice Johnson, her father George, and the space between (Alvah). Photo: Heather Darch.*

that George and Margaret only had 14 acres valued at \$300. It was a tight existence for Alice Jane right from the start.

Her schooling lasted from 1866 to 1871, age 9 to 14. Her father's increasingly poor health meant she was needed at home to work with her mother, her younger sister Lucy Annis and her grandparents. In her diary, she writes about the few occasions when she went to Bedford to see travelling circuses and to Mystic for picnics. She attended several Baptist camp revival meetings, and once she climbed the Pinnacle in Frelighsburg and "saw more of the world that day than I ever have since."

Her grandmother died in 1873 and her grandfather in 1879. In August 1889, her mother died from a lengthy illness. In 1892, her sister and dearest friend died at the age of 28. Alice Jane was now 37 years old and was left to care for her strict and "always ailing" father as well as the farm. George Johnson seemed to become more unreasonable as he got older and leaving the farm became more difficult for Alice. She wrote: "Poor me I am not allowed one holiday only to go to Farnham once a year on a visit. I am ashamed of my bringing up. I have proved the old proverb that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Around 1892, Alvah Harrison, a local farmhand, came to the Johnson farm to work. Alice is tight-lipped on the details about her courtship with Alvah, but in 1896, at the age of 39, she married him. It was a happy occasion for her and she listed her wedding presents from her husband including a "tea basket, a ladies watch, a ring and cloth for a fancy waist." Her joy was short lived, however, as they remained with her father and cowered under his authority. Of Alvah she said, "He don't like to take me out to see anything nor father would not allow us to go if he did." In 1897, Alice had planned to go to a Dominion Day picnic at Missisquoi Bay and, while she stood in her travelling clothes with her basket packed, Alvah declared at the last minute that "he had been there twice himself and he would not go there again for any woman." Her disappointment in



her husband was profound.

Alice's mental and emotional health deteriorated and she also suffered from rheumatism which added to her misery. To make matters worse, Alvah's health also declined. Married only two years, he was confined to bed. In 1898, Alice began to refer to herself as "Alice the Hermit." "I am now forty one years old," she wrote, "but I must continue to live a Hermit's life... Oh how I wish I could live like other folk, how ashamed I am, buried alive as it were, just as secluded as a cloistered nun."

When she made notes in her diary, Alice provided details about her daily routine and also on the news she heard from the community, but she started to pay less attention to her writing after 1899. No doubt her loneliness and depression and the burden of her labours left her exhausted. "Oh how the tears roll day after day here in my prison house... I wish myself dead and free from bondage... I long for my time to come to depart this life of tears and sorrow and captivity."

In 1903, poor Alice Jane died at the age of 46. Her father George, "the tyrant" who "brakes my bones and beats me sore," died the following year on April 15, and Alvah died five days later on April 20, 1904. All three are all buried beside one another; only Alvah has no stone. Curiously, Alice does not have her married name inscribed on her gravestone. The grave is located in the Stanbridge Ridge Cemetery, once part of the hamlet of Stanbridge Ridge and now part of Stanbridge East, Quebec.

Her diary is remarkable for its description of the community of Guthrie's Corner, for the details into the lives and deaths of neighbours and for

the description of the two Fenian raids into Missisquoi County in 1866 and 1870. Even more importantly, the diary reveals the life of a woman in nineteenth-century rural Quebec. Her despondent voice is heard in every line and makes a powerful connection to the reader.

*Heather Darch is the curator of the Missisquoi Museum and a heritage consultant. She has co-managed various projects for QAHN, most recently "Diversifying Resources to Ensure the Advancement of Mission" (DREAM) and "Diversity and Achievement in Anglophone Quebec."*

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# THE STORY BEHIND ST. MARGUERITE DU LAC MASSON

by Joseph Graham

Joseph Masson was born in St. Eustache in 1791. His father was an illiterate carpenter, but his family conceived a more ambitious future for Joseph. At 16 years of age he was apprenticed to Duncan McGillis at his store in nearby St. Benoit. Learning all aspects of the trade, he also taught himself English, opening up opportunities in Montreal at the end of his apprenticeship.

Masson was competitive and ambitious. He landed a job with a Scot named Hugh Robertson and worked to make himself indispensable. Robertson and his brother William were partners in a firm that had offices in both Montreal and Glasgow, Scotland. Their business plan involved exchanging Scottish woollens for potash, wheat and lumber, products that Masson knew well from his life in St. Benoit and St. Eustache. Hugh, the Montreal side of the business, hated the weather and looked forward to the day he could return to Glasgow, but to do so he had to make sure the local business was well managed. He felt that Masson was his man, and promoted him to manager. It was unusual for someone to become a partner in a firm without putting up cash, but Masson refused the managerial position unless it included shares. He had judged correctly that he had won his employer's confidence and that Robertson was highly motivated to get out of Montreal. They struck a deal in which Masson became a junior partner in the Montreal side of their operations. Masson was 24 years old in May 1815 when the deal was formalized, and, unknown to the partners, his share would grow to 50% when William Robertson died four years later.

As senior partner, Hugh found himself in the unenviable position of trying to restrain his young partner's ambitious nature, even though he had argued to his brother, "I am quite confident that with his experience of local market needs his expenditures will be warranted by the good selection he will make." Masson, for his part, felt that Robertson was timid. "You ought to have known that all my ambition and feelings (sic) [were] for the interest and honor of my *Firms*, as I have all along determined to beat every house around me and bring *them down* which is all in the way of trade, and in which I have not failed." Over the period of their partnership, Masson expanded the operations to Quebec and took on junior partners himself, making their firm one of the most important import-export houses in the colony.

The firm had always depended upon others to ship its products across the Atlantic but Masson saw that the costs of this would be better spent on their own boat, and by 1825 he acquired the firm's first ship, the *Sophie*, named after Masson's young wife, Sophie Raymond. Over the next few years he would acquire more ships and show himself to be an innovator in all means of transport. He was involved in creating a canal company in 1821, and by 1831, his name appeared at the top of

the list with John Molson and Peter McGill to build a railroad that would run on wooden rails down to Lake Champlain. An early backer of the Montreal Gas and Light Company, he was an instigator of both the Quebec and Toronto gas and light utilities.

In 1832, Masson bought the Seigneurie of Terrebonne, moving him indisputably into the elite of local society. That same year, he declined an invitation to join in a new partnership. Called "The Great Concern," its goal was to out-compete foreign business interests. Having taken an active interest in the Glasgow division of the company, Masson had become one of the businessmen that the firm targeted. As Lower Canada boiled over into rebellion and the market collapsed under the weight of unforeseen events, Masson limited his political involvement to a carefully considered sympathy, but kept a firm hand on the rudder of his business interests. The Great Concern failed in 1837.

Joseph Masson passed away in 1847, the same year as he took over the firm in Glasgow, renaming it Masson and Sons. He was survived by his wife and eight children. His son Wilfrid rose to fame

and fortune in the British Isles, Louis became one of the most important politicians in Canada, and Edouard, who set up the Collège Masson in Terrebonne the year his father died, took an active interest in the Laurentians. Less is known about the other children, but they married well and became a part of the French and English elite.

Edouard did not share his father's ruthless business ambition, but dedicated himself to the vision of a community. In 1864, he acquired property in the township of Wexford at La Renouche, surrounding the lake that bears the Masson family name. He donated land for a Catholic mission, built a saw and flour mill and helped hundreds of settlers relocate. While many sources say the lake's name evokes his memory, Jean Cournoyer, author of *Le petit Jean*, suggests it was named for his father. The year of Edouard's acquisition, the name La Renouche gave way to Ste. Marguerite du lac Masson, dedicated to St. Marguerite of Antioch, a fourth century Christian martyr whose existence is considered mythological but who was a favourite of Bishop Bourget.

*Joseph Graham, author of Naming the Laurentians, is writing a book that re-examines much of our early history, the elements that drove European society, and the extraordinary damage these ideas inflicted on North America.*

*References include articles in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography for both the Massons and the Robertsons.*



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