

Quebec Heritage

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News



Learning Language

Anglo Parents and Early Explorers Cross Cultural Divides

A Walk Up The Main

The City's History Along One Boulevard

Academic Anglophilia

School Days at St. Helen's

Quebec Heritage News

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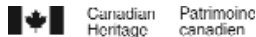
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Cover photo: QAHN members astride the border in Stanstead.
Photo: Matthew Farfan.

EDITOR'S DESK

Not so brief history

by Rod MacLeod

The Mariners' House is as appropriate a place as you can get to celebrate 478 years of history. True, the building is modern, and the entrance hall is immaculately lit thanks to the vast glass windows on two sides, but those windows look out onto the oldest point on Montreal's map. The St. Pierre River once ran right outside, joining the St. Lawrence just ahead, at Pointe-à-Callière. (They are both rivers in English, but there is more drama in French, when the slim and unobtrusive *rivière* empties into the loud and massive *fleuve*.) There was probably a settlement on this spot before Champlain arrived in 1611 to clear ground and build a walled enclosure, but his action set the area on its long course as the nation's great meeting place. No wonder they put the customs house here in the 1830s and put St. Anne's Market just upstream. You can't see the market – it was burned down in 1849 when it served as Canada's parliament during the five years Montreal had the privilege of being the capital – but you will soon be able to explore its foundations, just as you currently can those of the Royal Insurance Building, which stood right at the Point where the central tower of the city's Pointe-à-Callière archeology museum lours. The Mariners' House itself, recently incorporated into the museum, lies on the site of the former Montreal Sailors' Institute, which given the city's importance as a port is well-worth receiving this archeological treatment.

The occasion for the celebration I attended was the launch of the English version of Paul-André Linteau's tidy little city history originally published by Boréal over twenty years ago. Gathered in the entrance hall of the Maison des Marins was a cross-section of local history's academic glitterati – and there is such a beast: a book on the history of

Montreal will attract specialists in the full range of subjects concerning Quebec (from early settlement to the Rise of Capitalism to the Quiet Revolution) which played out prominently in Montreal, as well as those who research urban issues (crime, poverty, local politics, industry) of which Montreal provides countless examples. In other words, the crowd was diverse in interest but clear in focus – and largely familiar to me. The event proved a good chance to catch up



with former colleagues, teachers and fellow students.

The History of Montréal: The Story of a Great North American City, the English version of Linteau's 1992 *Brève histoire de Montréal*, is by the award-winning writer and translator Peter McCambridge. It comes at an interesting moment in Montreal's long life – and although Linteau has brought the narrative

nicely up to date, mentioning both the Charbonneau Commission and the student protests of 2012, one senses there are interesting times just around the corner which may require another edition soon. Indeed, an individual of a politically nervous disposition might argue that the appearance of an English version of a French history of Montreal is just another example of creeping bilingualism.

The launch was suitably, and effortlessly, bilingual – one expects nothing less these days. Robin Philpot, owner of Baraka Books which published *The History of Montréal*, waxed eloquently in both of Canada's official languages before turning the floor over to Linteau, who spoke mostly in English – in deference not so much to the audience, which had been switching back and forth easily as one does, but to the English text in his hands, copies of which he would spend the next half hour signing. Philpot himself raised the issue of why, in this bilingual town, an English version of the *Brève Histoire* was necessary, and joked that we now have something to give to our unilingual friends in the ROC who haven't had access to a really good history of Montreal (whence so many of them came, of course) until now. More seriously, Philpot emphasized not so much the need as the appropriateness of having an English version, opening the city's history, as it will do, to a wider world that will recognize Montreal for what it is rather than the capital of a particular culture.

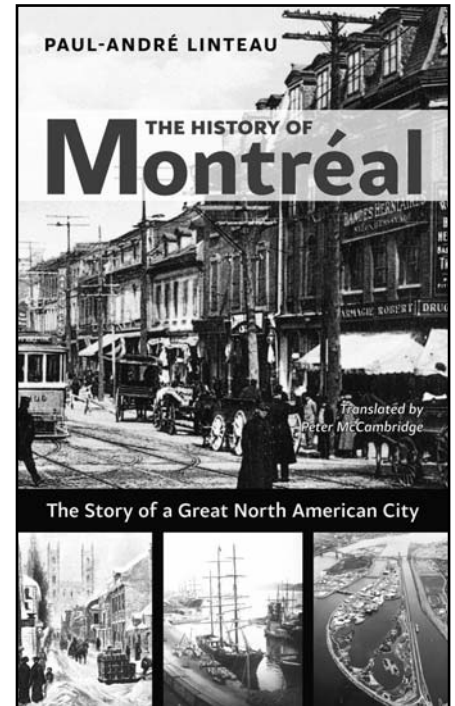
Linteau's book goes to some trouble to underscore this broad perspective, beginning with the subtitle: Montreal is a Great North American City. Leaning away from the spiritual gravitas that Nationalists often impose on it, and equally from the Ooh-la-la of sidewalk cafés and outdoor staircases that characterize Montreal's distinct (urban) society, Linteau opts for the unromantic con-

tinentalism of Gérard Bouchard, for whom both *la belle province* and *la nation québécoise* are most fundamentally *quelques arpents d'Amérique*. This is all very healthy, I think. The debates about culture that are probably going to be foisted on us in coming months are, quite apart from their inherent objectionableness, unnecessary. The simple reality is that this is the part of North America where one speaks French. Not exclusively, of course, but fundamentally: the French language is as much of a foundation to contemporary Quebec society as the stones below the Royal Insurance Building and the St. Anne's Market, or as the bricks now lining the bottom of the St. Pierre River.

The problem is that no reality is ever simple, and Quebec reality is deceptively complex. By that I mean that the history and culture of the province is considerably different – I could say “distinct” – from almost anywhere else

Lots of parts of North America are socially diverse (and when it comes to *race* relations there are plenty of areas with far more complex histories than Quebec) but rarely has the politics of identity played out in such a tangled manner as here.

Montreal is the most complex part of this complex history. (Even its name is complicated: it is given an accent in the title, suggesting that we should be pronouncing it “mon-ray-ahl,” but is spelled without one in the text, suggesting that the cover was to please those who don't recognize “mun-tree-all” as a legitimate pronunciation.) Linteau does a good job of presenting the diversity in the city's past, at least in general terms; to have done more would have made his history a good deal less brief. And certainly the “great” part of the story of this Great North American City comes across loud and clear. Still, I miss the nuance. At the end of the day, Montreal



rent at the Pointe-à-Callière was just that: a sewer. Which is an appropriate metaphor for the necessary mess that all great cities produce, and that in Montreal is particularly colourful, however much we might wish it otherwise.

Linteau's *The History of Montréal: The Story of a Great North American City* is a good read – and a nice gift. Just keep the Great part in your sights when the debates about culture and values start up again and your faith begins to wane a little.

Letter

Pleasure from the Fairbairn

Just received my copy of *Quebec Heritage News*, Spring 2013, and wish to extend thanks from Fairbairn for the grand article by Jessica Campbell. Considering this thorough piece of work comes mainly from an hour+bit phone chat, it is really impressive. Not only does she organize the story effectively, but includes a tone of optimism and enthusiasm for our project, which is greatly appreciated.

Thanks as always for an excellent publication. I always read cover to cover, then circulate. So carry on, mates!

Michael Cooper
Wakefield, Quebec



in North America (excluding Mexico, whose citizens don't consider themselves North Americans). One of the things that make Quebec different is the French language, of course, but a more significant factor in its complexity is the long and multifaceted relationship between Anglophones and Francophones, between Protestants and Catholics, and between those groups and everyone else that has darkened the province's door.

evades all the simple solutions and well-meant prescriptions for social harmony. In fact, that's what I really dislike about the culture debates in Quebec: they are reductionist, infinitely more so than the facile social harmony arguments. They approach the problem from one angle, and don't see beyond that prism. They see the street, but not the sewer – and for much of the past two centuries the rivière that emptied into the *Fleuve St-Lau-*



Mystery Object

QAHN has been dealing with a great many objects in recent months – the SOFTI project alone involved one hundred of them – but it is always a pleasure to be alerted to more. Susan Chirke of the Morin Heights Historical Association writes:

“At our Directors' Meeting this Monday, one of our directors brought in this object from a member. She found it as she was cleaning out her mother's place. She doesn't know what it is, and we don't either! Could this picture be placed in the next *Quebec Heritage News* so that someone might identify it?”

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GUIDED TOURS

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION, CHANGING TIMES

St. Helen's School, 1875–1972

by Sandra Stock

In the spring there were white trilliums, yellow and blue violets, lilac bushes and pink and white flowering apple trees in the fields and thin woodlands surrounding the school. The climate in the southern part of the Eastern Townships is milder than in most of Quebec. Dunham, an old but tiny agricultural town, would eventually develop a prosperous wine industry. For the students at St. Helen's School in the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, this quiet rural backwater of a village was unknown and forbidden territory.

St. Helen's was founded as Dunham Ladies' College in 1875 by the Reverend Ashton Oxenden, bishop of the Anglican diocese of Montreal, and opened to pupils in 1878. At first, the school was administered by a corporation of clergy and lay people. In spite of the growing support for enriched and institutional education for girls, and the existence by that time of an established wealthy middle class in the Townships, the school floundered during its first two decades and even closed for a few years. However, in 1913, the school was reorganized, and the governing corporation leased to the then principal (Head Mistress), Miss Wade, at her request. She must have been a gifted administrator, since with a new board of governors, the school finally became successful. It was at the time of this change that it was renamed St. Helen's.

St. Helen's was a boarding school; there were no day pupils. Dunham was quite isolated, the closest train station being in Cowansville, about six miles away. The students were predominately daughters of Eastern Townships families, especially in the early years, as well as many daughters of Anglican clergy from throughout Quebec. However, by the 1950s, the percentage of Montreal-area attendees had increased, along with an eclectic mixture of girls from remote

locations such as northern Quebec – and even from Canadian families working in South America.

By the late 50s and early 60s, more girls were encouraged to go to university or professional training programs after secondary school. It was no longer “the thing” to be just (or even) a frivolous



debutante if your family was socially prominent, nor (if you were middle class) to simply find a “filler-in” job until you married. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few good high schools in Montreal, the public school system in Quebec didn't offer adequate preparation for higher education and, sadly, most students were nudged towards semi-skilled labour right after graduating. Also, the drop-out rate was extremely high in both French and English school systems, especially in rural districts. The Quiet Revolution was still only a distant

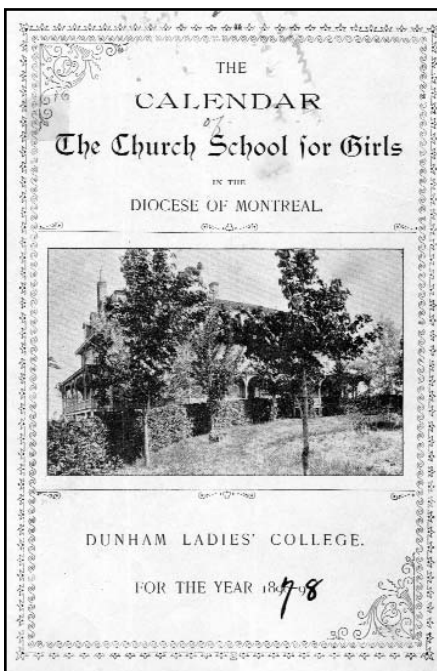
rumble.

The best schools academically were the *collèges classiques* and convents of French-speaking Quebec and the private institutions of English-speaking Quebec. All of these were run by religious orders or denominations. The Anglicans in particular seemed to thrive in founding schools: one of the oldest and best known was (and is) Lower Canada College, originally called St. John's School, of St. John the Evangelist Church in Montreal. Then there was Bishop's College School (also Bishop's College, later University) in Lennoxville, also an Anglican establishment. Both of these schools were initially boys-only but have become co-ed. Interestingly, none of these Anglican schools, including St. Helen's, were ever restricted solely to Anglicans; the St. Helen's brochure from 1958 says, “We...welcome all denominations and all faiths.” In some ways, although essentially stodgy, these schools were, for their time, comparatively open to diversity.

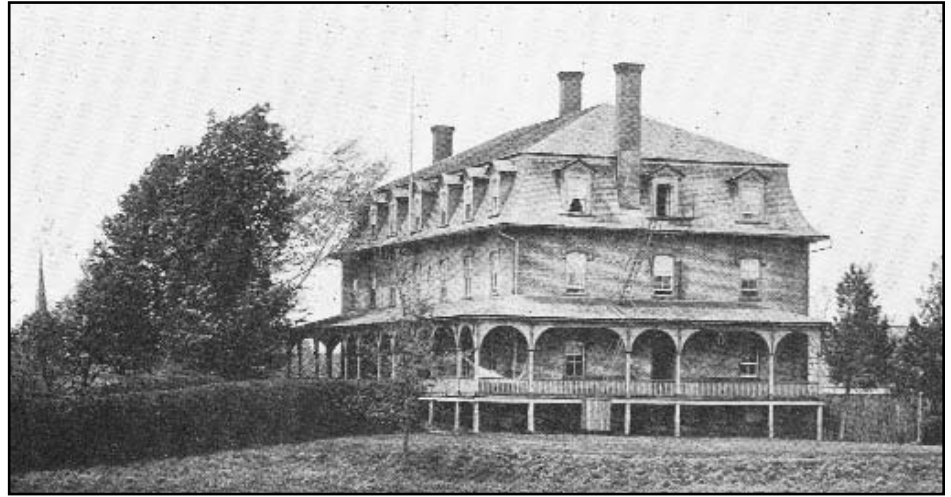
St. Helen's had about sixty pupils and offered secondary level classes. These were designated in the British style – for example, Lower Sixth (instead of Grade 10 or Secondary IV) and Upper Third (instead of Grade 7 or Secondary 1) – which seemed quirky and strange to the pupils. A lot of the superficial organization of the school was British, and of a time-warp variety, out of an Agatha Christie mystery or an Evelyn Waugh satire. This sort of transplanted management, a kind of mild Raj, was totally out of date by the early sixties, but probably harmless. This academic Anglophilia had some positive aspects, the best of which was an emphasis on music: sacred, classical and semi-modern. St. Helen's had an excellent choir for the better voices among the girls, and offered very good piano teaching as well as music appreciation activities.

The outstanding Harry Norris (1887-1979), the New Zealand-born conductor of London's D'Oyly Carte Opera Company from 1920 to 1929, was a volunteer teacher and mentor for various musical productions at St. Helen's for many years. Norris was attached to the McGill Faculty of Music upon his coming to Montreal in the 1930s and active with the Montreal West Operatic Society. His speciality was Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas and St. Helen's staged one every year at its June closing ceremonies. Doris Hemingway Norris (Harry's wife) assisted with the acting and dances. Both Norrises were born teachers and had even the most unpromising warblers and hoofers performing well. St. Helen's also had a yearly Carol Service, under Harry Norris' direction, at St. Matthias Church in Westmount. This offered a quite sophisticated repertoire, including medieval carols and Christmas songs in other languages, always finishing up with the *pièce de résistance* of *Adeste Fideles* (*O Come All Ye Faithful*) with all four verses, all in its original Latin.

On that note, regarding Latin: the basic curriculum for Upper Fourth (Grade 9/Secondary III) Latin was the



Gallic Wars by Julius Caesar – not exactly a thoughtful choice for a class of fourteen-year-old girls. However, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with all those naughty gods, would not have been considered in



those prissy days, although it might have kept more pupils continuing with Latin. In some ways, the academic program at St. Helen's was very good. The French instruction was probably superior to many other English schools of the time, although, again, Eurocentric. This writer was most surprised to find in her last year at St. Helen's that there existed an interesting Quebec French literature as well. There wasn't much of Canada, or even North America, in our curriculum. History was predominately Western Europe with the emphasis on Britain and France with tiny dips into Italy and Germany. Literature was also mostly British-based and the most modern writer we studied was Matthew Arnold. Yet, there was an excellent library and many of the students were aware of twentieth-century art and literature. This library was also the winter hang-out for the many school pet cats – much needed in an old building amongst fields.

The sciences were popular options (compared to Latin), and the attractive country setting of the school added to interest in the natural world. Mathematics were never strong, except for those who had some talent in that direction, and the actual school curriculum could have stood some improvements. Of course, there was Scripture, chapel every morning and night, church every Sunday, grace at all meals, and so on. The musically adept were encouraged to play the chapel harmonium for the hymns, and the occasional truly gifted musician was given opportunities to play the church organ. There was a line of music practice cells in the dining room: little rooms named after famous composers (Bach, Chopin, and so on).

There was the usual physical education, and sports teams. Daily walks outside were part of the school routine although they were somewhat restricted to short trots up the road and back, or just around and around the circular driveway in front of the school. Given the isolated location, there was nowhere to go even if a pupil had wanted to run away – very few ever did. When skiing caught on in the Townships in the early 1960s, there was an outing to Mount Sutton, and, for the first (and only) time during my stay at the school, we skiers were far away from adult supervision on top of the ski hill. This, combined with our obvious wearing of ski clothes rather than the school uniform, must have caused some concern. This was 1962, my graduating year, and things were changing.

Even though St. Helen's would build an addition, in expectation of growing numbers, the era of the otherworldly, remotely-located private girls' boarding school was ending. Like several others, St. Helen's closed, in 1972. A combination of increasing costs, some unfortunate administrative choices and the vast improvement of public education in Quebec ended the life of the school. Around this time, Bishop's College School went co-ed, and items like the plaques in the St. Helen's chapel were sent there.

The large school building, the main part of which dates from the 1870s, still remains. In 1976, the property was sold to Jeunesse en Mission/Youth with a Mission, which holds training sessions there. The village of Dunham is livelier now with vineyards as well as the old apple orchards. It's a very pretty place. Especially in the spring.

VIGNAU'S GAMBIT

by Joseph Graham

The Ottawa River in the year 1600 was a very busy place. It was called the Grand River, the Kiche (Grand) sipi (river) in the local language. Its tributaries, inhabited by groups of families, clans or small nations, all paid their respects when passing Morrison Island, or Isle aux Allumettes. There, the river narrowed around each side of the island and it was impossible to pass without stopping and acknowledging the Kichesipirinis, the Grand (Kiche) River (sipi) people (irinis). That was the custom. It was wise to bring some gifts for this purpose – everyone did.

Paying respects involved formalities that could take several days and could even include questions about why you wanted to paddle up or down past the island and where you were going. If they gave permission, they might insist that their guides accompany you.

In the early seventeenth century, the headman of Isle aux Allumettes was named Tessouat. Samuel de Champlain had met Tessouat at Tadousac and at the Grand Sault Saint-Louys (Lachine Rapids) in 1603 and 1611. They had made a treaty that the French would fight on his side against the Iroquois. At their second encounter, Champlain left an adolescent named Nicolas de Vignau with him to learn Tessouat's language. This was another custom that indicated trust and established alliances.

When Vignau came back to France in 1612, he described a trip he had taken with the headman's relative, past the island to Lake Nipissing, where they met Nipissing guides who escorted them to the shore of James Bay. There they had seen a wrecked English ship and had even taken an Englishman prisoner.

Champlain was very excited by this news. So was the king. There were stories about a lost English ship in the northern sea. Vignau reaffirmed his story

before two notaries and the king encouraged Champlain to make the same trip himself. This could be the much-sought-after passage to the Orient and the English were already exploring it. Champlain and Vignau left for New France.

Departing from Quebec City on May 13, 1613, it took them almost a month to reach Isle aux Allumettes, some 140 kilometres beyond modern Ottawa. Tessouat received them with the formality of his culture and, by the end

Allumettes. They always had.

Tessouat and his elders rightly saw that, thanks to the French presence, there would be a lot more people wishing to travel past their island in both directions. Tessouat's people saw themselves as middlemen in the trade that was developing. They worried that Champlain wanted to go to the Wendat to trade, and, if he did, then their position as middlemen would be compromised. They had to stop Champlain from going further. Tessouat explained that the trip – and the Nipissing – was just too dangerous. They were sorcerers and could kill at a distance. In his culture, he was saying 'no' and any reason he gave was just a courtesy. It would be bad manners to question his decision.

Petulantly, Champlain complained. He would settle for two canoes instead of four. What kind of a friend was Tessouat to treat him this way? You don't understand; there are dangerous sorcerers, Tessouat explained. Champlain responded that the headman hadn't stopped Vignau with these stories when they travelled up there together the previous year.

A silence fell over the discussion. People looked shocked. Tessouat began very slowly, addressing Vignau directly in Tessouat's own language. "Nicholas, is it true that you said you went up to the Nipissing?" Nicholas de Vignau was only 18 years old. After a long pause, he repeated what he had told Champlain of his adventures. The men around Tessouat responded with anger and aggression.

Champlain and the other French withdrew, moving a distance away and hoping these men would cool down. Champlain again asked Vignau if his story was true, and Vignau confirmed it again, repeating the details and how he had been promised the English prisoner. Champlain's interpreter warned that



of the second day, the time had come for Champlain to state his business.

When they had made their alliance two years earlier, Tessouat knew that Champlain had made a similar alliance with the Wendat, also against the Iroquois. The Wendat, or Huron, had much more trade to offer than Tessouat's people, but when it came to delivery of goods, even the Wendat would pay their respects to the Kichesipirinis, seeking permission to travel past Isle aux

something dangerous was happening. Men were headed off to warn the Nipissing, he said.

The Kichesipirinis were shocked to think that Champlain was not accepting Tessouat's word. A bloodless battle was raging over face. Tessouat could not give in. He could not say that Vignau was right and that he, the head of the Kichesipirinis, had just lied. It was very bad form for Champlain to insist.

Tessouat had expressed the Kichesipirinis' decision that Champlain could not travel further at this time. The reasons he gave were simply to allow Champlain to withdraw his request without losing face.

Champlain returned to the meeting saying that he had dreamed the night before that his hosts had sent a canoe to the Nipissing to warn them. They responded saying that they were confused that Champlain would trust a liar like Vignau instead of them, when they regarded him so highly. Champlain insisted that Vignau was not abandoning his story. The tensions ran high. To believe Vignau was to suggest that Tessouat was lying, but Champlain seemed to lack the intellectual subtlety of his hosts.

The Frenchmen had to withdraw

again, at which point Vignau broke down in tears and told Champlain that he had made the whole thing up. He just told Champlain the story so he could come back to Canada, he explained.

When their hosts heard this, they offered to keep Vignau so they could torture him for his lies, but Champlain, terribly discouraged by having lost face and having made the trip based on a lie, said he'd deal with Vignau himself. He reiterated his alliance with Tessouat against the Iroquois, saving what friendship he could, and took his leave, returning down the river he had so recently travelled up.

Upon arriving at the Lachine Rapids on their return voyage, Vignau asked to be left there and Champlain obliged, feeling that he was leaving the young man to an unhappy fate. Vignau may have had enough knowledge to join one of the Indian nations and to live a happy life, but he does not reappear in any historical account. Four hundred years later, many people believe that he did not lie; he just understood the gambit better than Champlain did. He realized that it was extreme bad manners to contradict Tessouat and that Champlain, insisting upon believing Vignau, had be-

come dangerously insulting to their host. It was tantamount to standing brazenly before the King of France and telling him that what he said was a lie because he had just heard the truth from the boy who mucks out the stable.

Sources:

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Commission de toponymie, Québec.

Joseph Graham (joseph@ballyhoo.ca) is writing a book on the history of the Ottawa Valley.



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READING THE WEATHER

by Nick Fonda

“Get all the news I need on the weather report...”

Thirty years ago, when Paul Simon wrote those lyrics, I listened to more than just the weather report on the car radio, yet there was something about his words that rang true.

These days, I still hear the weather report if I’m in the car or near the kitchen radio, but if I want to know the weather forecast, I go to my computer: today’s weather, the high and low temperatures for the week, expected precipitation. And—should I be travelling to, say, Timbuktu—I can just as quickly know what to expect there, or anywhere else in the world.

Not that the weather is really important to me. Like 97% of the general population, I am not a farmer. *Whether the weather be hot, or whether the weather be not*, as the ditty goes, I sit in front of my computer just the same. (Or, it more artfully concludes, *we’ll weather the weather whatever the weather; whether we like it or not.*)

If I had lived a century ago, when close to 90% of the population was on a farm, my weather-reading skills would have been honed quite differently. Spending most of the daylight hours, not in front of a computer screen, but out of doors, I would have learned to watch for different signs. My weather forecast would be delivered by stars in the sky, by cows in the field, by the leaves of the maple tree in the front yard.

I was reminded of this late last summer when I bumped into an old neighbour, a retired farmer who hasn’t yet left the old farmhouse but who no longer milks cows nor tills the land. We exchanged greetings, commented on the weather, and when I mentioned that I had already seen geese he replied, “Geese in the sky; in six weeks, snow’s going to fly.”

“I hope not!” I said.

“That what folks used to say,” he laughed.

It was early September; we were enjoying a bright, warm, mid-summer-like day. We didn’t know it then, but we wouldn’t be getting snow till just before

Christmas.

Still, there was a time, only a few decades ago, when southbound geese overhead would have been a fairly accurate indication of the arrival of winter.

I’m not a hunter, not an outdoorsman, yet I’m quite aware of geese because the back windows of our house overlook the St. Francis River and our stretch of river is on a flight path used by Canada geese. I’ve been in the same house, looking out the same back windows (only a few have been changed) for more than 30 years, and I’ve seen migration patterns alter. At one time we’d see the geese for a relatively short time in the fall. There were far fewer birds: the skeins overhead were smaller; less frequently did we see a flock floating at rest on the river. Now we see many more Canada geese, at least three or four times the numbers we used to see. We also see them for a much longer period of time. Southbound

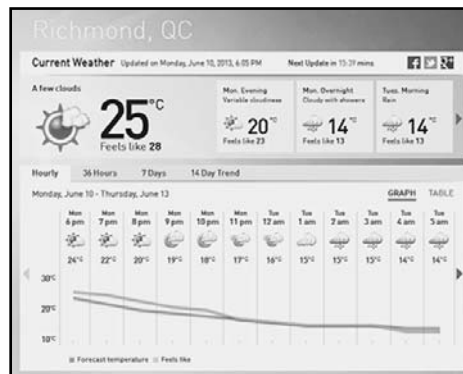
flocks start appearing as early as the end of August. The latest I ever saw a southbound flock was a day or two after New Year’s in 2007. (Winter came so late that year that dozens of golf courses were open for business the first several days in January.)

Starting some 15 or 20 years ago, by small increments, the geese stretched their migration season from a short six weeks to a full four months.

If geese are no longer warning us of the onset of winter, it is also true that our seasons no longer slide smoothly from one to the next. Our climate is now such that any given day can feel like it’s been plucked from the season before, or borrowed from the season to come.

And just as geese no longer tell us when winter is coming, wasps are no longer telling us how much snow we can expect. Country wisdom once had it that if bees and wasps built their nests high it was a sign of a snowy winter; if they built them close to the ground it would be an “open” winter with little snow. (The term “open” referred to the roads which otherwise would be blocked by snowdrifts and hence closed.) I have seen a nest built knee-high and another, a quarter-mile away, built in branches 15 feet off the ground.

There were a great many signs that alerted farmers



There were a great many signs that alerted farmers

to changes in the weather. Not surprisingly many of these had to do with rain. If a horse yawns, it's a sign of rain. If cows lay down in a group, it will probably rain. Herons flying downstream is a sign of rain; if they fly upstream, it won't rain. If spiders build their webs on the ground, it will be dry; if they weave their webs high, it's a sign of rain. A heavy dew is a sign of dry weather; no dew is a sign of rain. If swallows fly close to the ground, it's a sign of rain; if they fly high, it's a sign of good weather. If the leaves of the trees turn up, it's a sign of rain. Fog on a hill, an old expression claimed, will bring water to the mill.

Perhaps because there were so many signs that predicted rain, there was also a caveat: all signs fail in dry times.

Other signs provided long range forecasts. It was believed, for example, that the twelve days after Christmas forecast the weather for the next twelve months. The weather on December 26 was an indication of what January would be like, the weather on the 27th announced what February would be like, and so on. A heat wave in the summer will be matched with a corresponding cold snap, six months later. If a wind blew from the North on Good Friday, it would be cold for the next 40 days; hence it was a sign of a cold, late spring. Similarly, if it rained on St. Swithin's Day (July 15), it would rain for the next 40 days; that is, it would be a very rainy summer. A very old English verse put it this way:

St. Swithin's day if thou dost rain
For forty days it will remain
St. Swithin's day if thou be fair
For forty days 'twill rain nae mair

Just across the English Channel, the French say "Quand il pleut à la Saint-Gervais, il pleut quarante jours après." The feast of Saint-Gervais is July 19, just a few days after St. Swithin's. Modern-day meteorologists point out that by mid-July, the position of the jet stream will generally determine if the rest of the summer in Europe will be hot or cold, dry or wet. (The reliability of the St. Swithin's Day prediction here in the Townships, where we are not directly affected by the water currents of the North Atlantic and the air currents they generate, may be a moot point, although if the lore survived on this soil for 200 years there may be some truth to it.)

A halo around the moon is a sign of an impending storm, and if there are stars within the halo, the number of stars indicates the number of days to the storm. Smoke rises in cold weather but falls towards the ground in mild weather. In the winter, if the train goes by unheard it's a sign of cold weather, but if the train is loud, it will be mild. (Unlike St. Swithin's, this weather sign is local and must have come into use in the second half of the nineteenth century.)

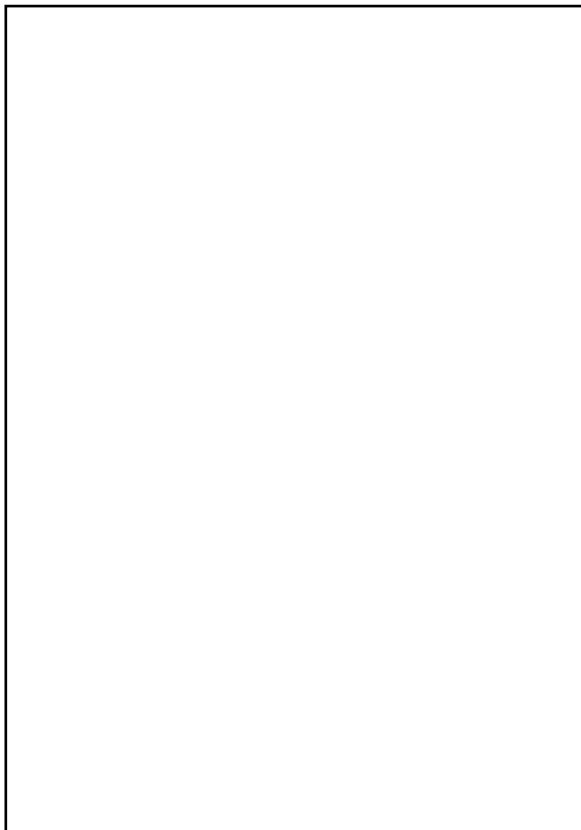
When the corn was harvested, the cobs were looked at to see if they had a light or heavy husk; a heavy husk

was a sign that it would be a cold, hard winter. When the family pig was butchered (late in the fall when it was cold enough to let meat hang outdoors), the spleen was closely examined. A long, thin spleen meant an easy winter; a short, thick spleen forecast a hard winter.

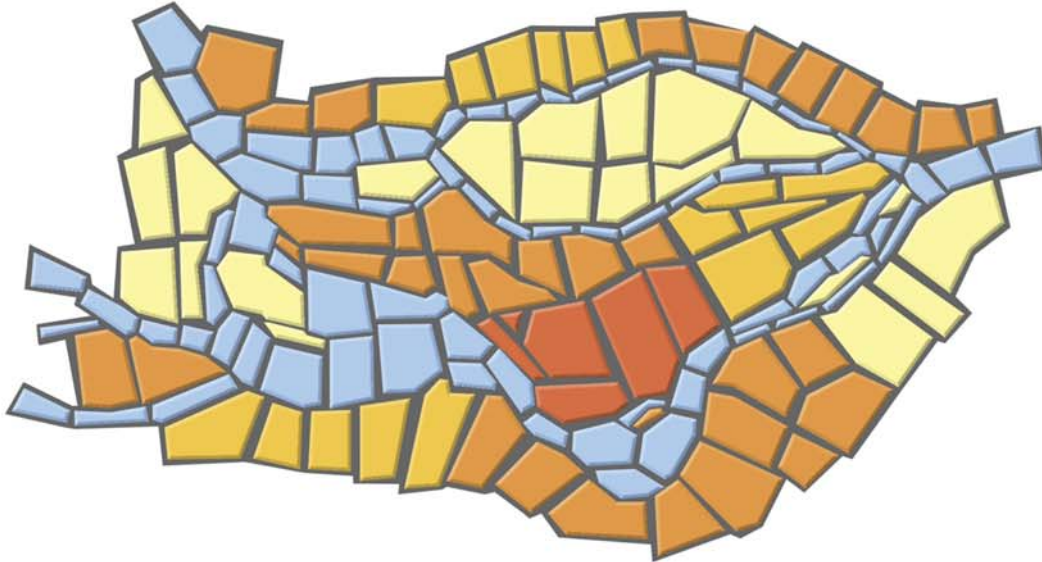
Very few of us work on the land or live out of doors, and even if we do, it's easier to turn on the computer in the morning than it is to find a flock of herons to see which way they are flying. Still, one or two of these bits of folklore have survived into the twenty-first century. I still occasionally hear someone say, "Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning," and even though no one celebrates Candlemas Day or St. Brigid's Day, Groundhog Day (which, like the other two, falls on February 2, the mid-point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox) has become a minor, annual, media event.

My twenty-first century lifestyle has rendered the weather little more than a minor inconvenience (when a storm might knock the power out for a few hours) or an added bonus (I do work a little more enthusiastically on sunny days). Still, I continue to find some truth in Paul Simon's lyric. I imagine the people who settled this corner of the world two centuries ago would not have disagreed even if they got their weather forecasts from other sources.

Nick Fonda is a past president of the Richmond County Historical Society and the author of Roads to Richmond, published by Baraka Books.



The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network wants your stories of English-speaking Montreal for



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Photo: The Museum of the Eastern Townships



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2013 QAHN CONVENTION IN STANSTEAD DRAWS RECORD NUMBERS

by Matthew Farfan

Over 60 delegates, members and guests attended the Annual General Meeting of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, held in Stanstead, Quebec, on June 1, 2013. The day-long event, which attracted both English- and French-speaking Quebecers, was QAHN's best-attended AGM to date.

The business portion of the convention took place at Golden Rule Lodge on historic Dufferin Street. Built in 1860, Golden Rule is the oldest continuously operating Masonic hall in Quebec.

The first floor, normally used for social functions, was arranged with displays by historical groups, including a collection of unusual artefacts from Heritage Gaspé. The upper floor, with its formal lodge room, was the scene of the business meeting.

Before the meeting, QAHN director Grant Myers, himself a member of Golden Rule, provided a brief history of the lodge, which he described as "one of continuity and tradition," and an explanation of the symbolism used in Masonic ritual. Many delegates had never been in a lodge and were impressed with the richness and beauty of Golden Rule.

Among the important items on the agenda was a proposal to adopt new, streamlined bylaws. Bylaw Committee chair Derek Hopkins gave a brief overview of the proposed new set of bylaws, which were then adopted unanimously.

A financial report was provided by treasurer Dick Evans, followed by reports from outgoing president Kevin O'Donnell, executive director Matthew Farfan, and project managers Heather Darch (SOFTI) and Dwane Wilkin (StoryNet).

Then came the election of directors, all of whose mandates were renewed, with the exception of Kevin O'Donnell's whose vacated seat was filled by Jim

Caputo of Heritage Gaspé.

Also up for discussion was Quebec's new Cultural Heritage Act. A resolution, adopted unanimously, along with a petition signed by all the delegates, made the following requests: that the government of Quebec make the local heritage councils provided for in the act distinct from existing town planning committees; that it make funds available for training members of these heritage councils; and that it ensure that the deliberations of these councils are transparent.



Following the business meeting, participants visited the Anglican Church, next door to the Lodge. The church, built of local fieldstone in 1859, is famous for its splendid stained glass.

The group then crossed the street to the Colby-Curtis Museum where they received a guided tour. Built in 1858, the museum was once the home of Charles Carroll Colby, a cabinet minister under Canadian Prime Minister Sir John

A. Macdonald.

"Carrollcroft," as the elegant granite house was known, is furnished with its original nineteenth-century contents, supplemented by artefacts donated to the Stanstead Historical Society by generations of local families. A number of rooms in the museum are devoted to exhibitions on local history.

Following their tour, visitors congregated at the Vieille Douane Restaurant, which is housed in a converted 1920s-era customs house. Here, they were served a four-course meal while they listened to presentations by several speakers, including Stanstead Mayor Philippe Dutil (the town was a sponsor of the event) and local humourist Ross Murray, who spoke about life on the border, and whose book *Don't Everyone Jump at Once* was published in 2013 by Blue Ice Books.

As it always does, the convention featured an awards ceremony. This year, four awards were presented.

The Marion Phelps Award, which goes each year to an outstanding volunteer in the heritage field, was presented by Kevin O'Donnell and Audrey Wall (of the Greenwood Centre for Living History in Hudson, Quebec) to William (Bill) Young. As founding executive director of Greenwood, Young originated many of the initiatives that have made Greenwood the success it is today.

Young, who remains an active volunteer at Greenwood, thanked QAHN for the honour: "I will remember this moment for a long time," he said. "My links to QAHN go back to the beginning. I have always been a fan. This is especially true these days, what with QAHN's realization of several first-rate projects designed both to make Anglo heritage more visible within the province and to help the Anglo community become better aware of its collec-

tive heritage – particularly now, in the face of overt efforts to remove all traces. I am familiar with the names of previous recipients of the Marion Phelps Award. To find myself grouped in that cohort is both humbling and gratifying. But I am also aware that in granting me this



award you are actually honouring the collective that is Greenwood much more than any individual. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time when the Greenwood Centre was about to get off the ground -- but nothing would have been achieved had it not been for the tireless efforts of a core of dedicated volunteers, all committed to the notion that Greenwood represented something special, a patrimony that deserved to be respected.”

The Richard Evans Award, which goes each year to a group of volunteers who, collectively, have contributed to preserving their community history, including some aspect of Quebec’s Anglophone heritage, was presented by QAHN director Ann Montgomery.

This year’s Evans Award went to the Richmond County Historical Society which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with the creation of a time vault.

RGHS president Bev Taber Smith, who accepted the award on behalf of the historical society, said that the time vault had been “a community effort involving members of both the English and the French communities.” She said that “we were pleased that there had been so many young people involved, people who will still be here in 50 years when the vault is opened.”

Two special awards were also pre-

sented.

The first went to QAHN’s own Marion Greenlay “in recognition of her steadfast dedication to the financial wellbeing of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network as volunteer bookkeeper.”

Presenter Dick Evans highlighted Greenlay’s years of work for QAHN and her contributions to Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre, the Lennoxville-Ascot Historical and Museum Society, and other organizations.

Matthew Farfan called Marion Greenlay

an indispensable factor in the success of the heritage network. “She’s always there – always working hard behind the scenes; she rarely gets the glory,” he said. “Well, I’m just delighted that this bookkeeper is getting a bit of glory. She deserves it.”

Greenlay, who received a standing ovation, said she was shocked to receive an award. “When I heard Dick speaking though, I realized, oh my gosh, he’s talking about me!”

The second special award went to Kevin O’Donnell whom Matthew Farfan called “an impassioned spokesman for QAHN and a dedicated volunteer in countless ways.”

Featuring a bronze sculpture by Townships artist George Foster, the award honoured O’Donnell’s five years as president of QAHN and his outstanding leadership of the organization.

Simon Jacobs, QAHN’s new president, presented the award, highlighting his predecessor’s years of advocacy on the part of heritage, in particular his efforts to promote the heritage of English-speaking Quebec. “Kevin, it has been an honour serving with you on the QAHN board,” Jacobs said, “but it will be very difficult to fill your shoes.”

O’Donnell said that the award “will remind me of my happy years with QAHN, and of all the good people I have been able to work with, and the wonderful projects and events we have undertaken over the years.”

At the close of the awards ceremony, participants crossed the footbridge over the Tomifobia River to the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, where they were treated to a tour of the famous international historic site, and where they posed for photos on the Canada-U.S. border that divides the Haskell in two.

Feedback from participants at this year’s convention has been excellent. Or as Serge Wagner, a delegate from Heritage Bolton, summed up, “it was stimulating and so well organized, and it allowed many of us to meet and exchange... an impressive, effective and *communautaire* meeting.”



2013 QAHN AGM



Golden Rule Lodge.



Stained glass, Christ Church.



L to R: Heather Darch, Susan Chirke and Simon Jacobs.



Colby-Curtis Museum.



Colby-Curtis Museum.



Lunch time.



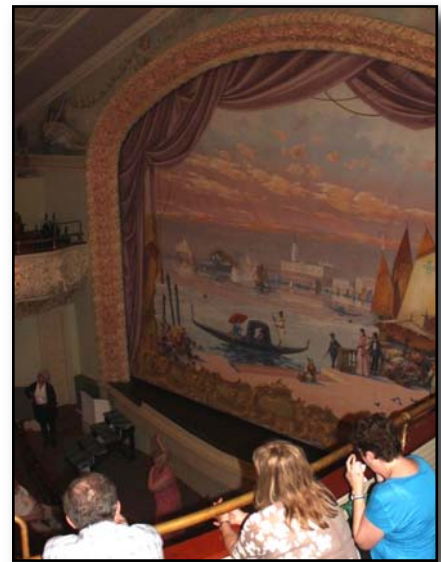
Awards ceremony.



Haskell Free Library.



L to R: Executive Director Matthew Farfan; Bookkeeper Marion Greenlay; Marion Phelps Award winner Bill Young; outgoing QAHN President Kevin O'Donnell; RCHS President Bev Taber Smith; QAHN President Simon Jacobs; and Stanstead Mayor Philippe Dutil.



Haskell Opera House.



Outgoing president Kevin O'Donnell.



Crossing the Tomifobia.

**PHOTOS BY
MATTHEW FARFAN**

PLOUGHS, FENCES, OXEN AND LIME

J. E. Burton's views on agriculture in early Canada

by Beverly Blaggrave

Much of the information for this article was taken from an essay written by J. E. Burton A.B.T.C.D., a missionary for the Anglican church. He was sent over from Ireland to minister to the militia and farmers in the newly opened Rawdon area. The essay, A Brief Examination into the State of Agriculture as it Now Exists in Great Britain and Canada, was written in 1828 in reply to a plea from a newly-established agricultural society in Quebec City (created by the Literary and Historical Society) for a treatise on the best method of regenerating the Canadian farming system. Additional details have been taken from government statistics and various journals written by early settlers, or visitors to the colony.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, four out of every five people in the colony lived on a farm. Farms were not usually a source of income or great profit, but were more likely to provide only the basic necessities for a family – a roof overhead, clothing and food. Off the seigneuries, where farms were run independently, extra produce such as meat, eggs, butter and milk were bartered at local stores or mills. Secondary income was derived from owning a mill, a potash factory, a tanning factory, lumbering, or other personal occupations such as making shingles, tailoring or cobbling.

Farm implements used on seigneuries in New France were rare and, according to Burton, “rude and clumsy” when compared to those brought over by the British settlers. Rudimentary ploughs, some on wheels, and a wooden harrow pulled by four oxen were the only machinery on the

seigneuries. British settlers brought steel ploughs of various designs to accommodate particular tasks and conditions for ploughing. There were designs for heavy soil or light soil. Ploughs that could be adjusted for depth, and ploughs of dif-



ferent widths. The harrow was used to remove weeds that had been ploughed out and to cover seed that had been scattered. Canadian harrows were constructed entirely of wood. Despite being of hardwood, these teeth wore down very quickly. Replacing teeth as they wore out was a time-consuming occupation and caused untimely delays into the usually short planting season. The new British colonists introduced much more serviceable steel-toothed harrows.

The British colonists also introduced very different farming methods to the new colony. The very basis of settlement by these two nations was distinct.

France allotted large tracts of land to members of the French elite and gave

them virtual power over the settlers they introduced to their properties. The French colonists were not property owners but tenants subject to the seigneur who imposed tariffs on them. Many of these newly arrived “farmers” were from urban areas and totally lacking in knowledge of agricultural practice. They had to learn by experience.

The British government discouraged the traditional European tenant system and distributed property by granting a ticket of location for a particular piece of land. Once the basic requirements of clearing and building had been met, the colonist could then, with a monetary supplement, apply to Quebec City for the letters patent for his piece of land.

Under the French regime, farms on the seigneuries were divided into long, narrow strips facing onto a “range road.” Some areas were settled on one side of a road only, a so-called single range. Others had farms facing along both sides of the road and were known as double ranges. The resulting proximity of the houses allowed the settlers the comfort of close neighbours relieving the often-felt isolation experienced by many of the newcomers.

British land grants were usually 100 square acres with the buildings in a central location on the lot. This latter arrangement led to winding roads and greater distances between neighbours. Burton saw it as having the advantage of not encouraging casual visitation and interruption of work, as well as providing a better overview of the farm.

According to Burton’s observations, on the seigneuries, fertilizing and dressing of fields was unknown. Manure from the stables was considered an encumbrance. It was left in a pile until it was thrown into a nearby river or stream. This

latter practice continued well into the next century until finally outlawed by the government.

British colonists introduced crop rotation, fertilization and dressing. They spread manure as well as lime on their fields. In the Rawdon area, lime was easily available as there was a quarry in nearby St. Jacques. Ashes from the many local potash plants were also utilized as dressing on various soils. Seaweed, where available, was considered desirable as a fertilizer. Clay soil could be lightened with sand, another plentiful commodity in many areas. Salt, if available, was also used as dressing. It was thought not only to enrich the soil but gave the resulting crop a particular taste that appealed to the animals.

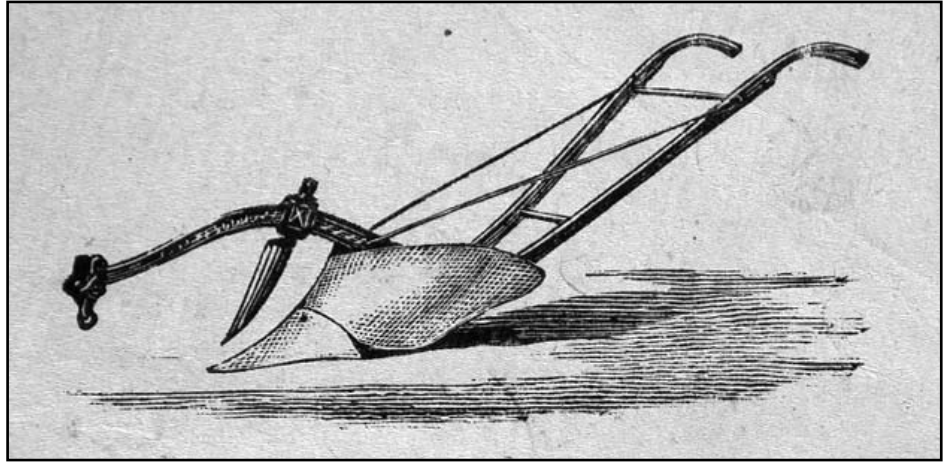
Fields required good fencing to prevent damage by roaming cattle. Cedar was the usual choice. It was a soft wood, readily available, durable as well as light and easy to work with. The pickets and posts were assembled using cedar pins. The pickets were removed in the autumn and laid on the ground to prevent damage by snow or ice. Such fences had a life expectancy of 70 or 80 years.

Stagnant water in marshy fields was drained away by digging a system of ditches running into the nearest stream. These ditches were very effective and, with regular maintenance, lasted forever. I have seen fields effectively drained by ditches dug more than a hundred years earlier.

Fall ploughing was considered ideal as “turning the soil up to the air” was believed to be beneficial to new growth. The weeds rooted out by the plough had time to dry before being picked up in the spring. An added incentive for this practice was it assured the farmer more time to plant in the often short planting season.

Come spring, as soon as the farmer was able to work in the field, the ploughed land was harrowed, and the weeds removed and set aside to burn. Stones were picked up and planting was begun.

Much seeding was done broadcast (scattered by hand) and harrowed in, but drills were not uncommon (ploughs were used to “drill up the rows”). Potatoes, corn and various types of seedlings were hand-planted in drills spaced approximately three feet apart. This distance allowed a plough to pass between the rows



during growing season to remove weeds. Weeds between the plants were removed by hand. Burton recommended this last task be done by the children, and suggested it was preferable to their “parading the roads as they are wont to do. The gentle exercise would promote their health and train them to habits of industry.”

Thistles were common and difficult to remove. “Stout gloves” and iron pinners were required to rid the fields of these aggressive weeds. Wild raspberry plants were cut with a hook and goldenrod and other weeds pulled by hand.

Once the buildings were erected and the fields cleared, the farm could be divided into various sectors. Ten acres of land, well managed, could provide an adequate supply of wood and lumber. Approximately two acres were allotted for a house, access roads and outbuildings. Nine or ten acres were designated to supply the winter’s need of hay. Thirty acres were reserved for pasture. Ten acre sections were fenced off to allow for rotation. The remaining acreage was dedicated to cultivation. Grain, hemp, flax, carrots, pumpkins, corn, cabbage, onions, turnips, potatoes, beans and peas, as well as tobacco, were usual crops. Canadian farmers did not plant potatoes as they did not consider them fit for human consumption and were not particularly desirable as animal feed. They did plant copious onion fields as these were a mainstay of their diet.

Crops requiring longer time to mature or sensitive to frost were planted in hotbeds and removed to fields “after the last frost had passed.” This was usually in late May or early June, depending on the yearly conditions. Cabbage, pumpkins, onions, and tobacco were some such crops transferred to the fields by hand.

Women and children from a very early age participated in this exercise.

Tobacco, while still very young, was susceptible to black fly infestation. Burton suggested sprinkling fine sand on the plants early every morning while still wet with dew until the third leaf appeared. Again, this activity was cited as a good occupation for the children. Tobacco, with the exception of seed plants, also needed regular pruning during the growing season. Despite being labour-intensive, tobacco growing was very profitable and so encouraged.

Harvesting was done with very little or no machinery. Hay and grain was cut with a scythe, raked by hand, then drawn into the barn by oxen or horse and wagon. Grains were later spread on the threshing floor area of the barn and flailed. The resulting grains were swept up and sifted to remove any contamination before being fed to the animals or taken to the mill. Besides being used for animal feed, wheat, oats, rye and corn were milled for human consumption.

The conversion of the flax and hemp was usually the women’s task. The stalks were cut and laid out in a damp or swampy area to rot. If a swamp was not convenient, a large vat filled with water was used. The smell of rotting stalks was odious. Once the stalks were well-rotted, the stalks were stripped of their fibre. This process was very hard on the hands causing severe chafing as well as cutting. The resulting fibre was spun into thread and then woven into material for sheets or clothing.

A kitchen garden was planted on the protected side of the house. This garden would have herbs, greens, rhubarb, beans, peas, onions, leeks, turnips, beets, parsnips, even a few potatoes for summer



consumption. Flowers were planted near the doorsteps to brighten the décor. Roses, lilacs and lilies welcomed visitors.

Farms had a variety of livestock. Cattle, pigs, sheep, and several types of fowl were found on farms. Burton considered the French cattle, sheep and pigs to be of inferior quality and poorly fed. With little exception, he favoured the British varieties. Importation of British stock was just beginning as the ban on exporting British animals (King Charles II had forbidden the exportation of stock from Great Britain) had recently been lifted and various British breeds were being introduced to the colony.

Burton, with reservation, admitted that the Canadian horse was well suited to the climate and conditions of the colony. Somewhat smaller than the European workhorse, the Canadian's strength and stamina was greater in ratio to its larger counterparts. This was a valuable asset in a newly developing area where feed and housing was at a premium.

Preferably, a farm would have at least two oxen. Their slow, steady plod was more suitable to the working conditions in heavy forested areas and newly-cleared land than the quicker step of a horse. Horses were a luxury, as they required more maintenance. As an added advantage, oxen could be used for meat and their hide when they were no longer useful in the field.

Cows were mostly of Canadian breed: a hardy, dual-purpose animal that provided a good quantity of milk as well as beef. Pigs, often left to forage in newly cleared land, were poor in quality due to this diet.

Already there were gentlemen farm-

ers striving to improve the quality of livestock. Burton cites Judge Burton in the Quebec City area and Mr. Lancelot Robinson of the Seigneurie of Lachenaie as having particularly admirable stocks of pigs fed on peas and oats and easily fattened on pumpkins or bran.

I have found no reference to making maple sugar early on in the nineteenth century, but twenty years later this was a spring occupation on most farms. If the "sugary" was distant from the house, family members involved would move to the sugar camp for the duration of the run – usually a week or ten days. The trees were tapped with wooden spiles and the sap gathered in wooden troughs or buckets. This sap was then gathered and brought near the camp where it was boiled in a large pot until it reached the sugar point. The heavy liquid was then poured into wooden moulds to cool. Each mould contained approximately a pound of sugar.

Lumber and potash were other activities on a farm. Farms in the process of being "opened" had an abundance of wood, both soft and hard. Soft wood was less valuable but was used as a building material and could be marketed. Hardwood was often made into potash and sold in Montreal, usually for export to Europe.

After the harvest was in and the ploughing done, there was time to cut logs, erect new buildings or clear more land. The winter was also a time for more socializing among neighbours. The snow covering made travelling easier, and the horses could be spared for pulling the sleighs.

In areas where the farms had been cleared and buildings erected, many men left their farms for the winter and hired on to a logging camp to earn a few precious dollars. The women were left to care for the children and the animals. While there was no field work involved, the animals still had to be fed, stables cleaned, snow shovelled, water drawn, wood split and brought into the house, and any problems arising were taken care of by these women.

Farming in early Canada was labour-intensive and time-consuming, but this was not exceptional. These same qualities were demanded of tenant farmers in Europe with the added threat of being evicted at the owner's will. Unless there was an unusually bad year when all crops failed or the farmer was extremely incompetent, farms in Canada provided a hedge against being homeless and starving, a not uncommon reality in the Old World at this time.



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THE NEW DOOR

by Eve Krakow

This and the following two articles were produced as part of QAHN's "StoryNet" project, administered in partnership with the Quebec Writers' Federation and with funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Emerging authors were matched with established writers who served as mentors through the process of producing original non-fiction articles. Quebec Heritage News is pleased to publish these articles as an ongoing feature.

This is the year we get a new front door. It has needed replacing since we moved in six years ago, but this summer the old wood warped in the relentless heat and now it requires a full-body shove to open and close. Every winter snow blows in through the cracks.

At some point while we were looking at catalogues and discussing frames and hinges and handles, the question struck me: when we have the new door, will we put up a mezuzah?

A mezuzah is that little rectangular box you see affixed at an angle on Jewish people's doorposts. For many people it's mostly symbolic. A tradition they don't even think about. Nearly every Jewish home has one.

Nearly.

There was none on our door when I was growing up. I associated mezuzahs with religious Jews, or at least those who were more practicing than me. Like my friend Sandra, who didn't keep kosher and didn't observe Shabbat, but who stayed clear of bread on Passover and who fasted on Yom Kippur.

When my husband and I moved into this house, there was already a mezuzah on the door from the previous owner. We left it there. "I wouldn't put one up, but I'm not going to take it down if it's

there," my husband said. I felt the same way.

But now, since we will be taking it down to replace the doorframe, will we put it back?

Ten years ago I wouldn't even have considered the question. Now, it's a dilemma. Why?

I know why. Because of my in-laws. Because of my kids. Maybe even because of my own past.



* * *

I did not grow up in a religious home. It's true that we lit candles on Chanukah, attended Passover Seders led by my grandfather or aunt, and stayed home from school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but the only time I ever set foot in a synagogue was to attend a wedding. We ate shellfish and pork. Matzah and bread sat side by side on the kitchen counter during the eight days of Passover.

I attended public schools, English Protestant and French Catholic (back in the days of denominational school boards in

Quebec). My friends were Greek, Chinese, Indian, Hungarian. As a young adult, I celebrated Christmases with my French boyfriend.

Yet I now live in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, within walking distance of three synagogues. My kids went to a Jewish pre-school and go to summer camp at the Jewish "Y" down the street; in winter we attend Sunday storytime at the Jewish Public Library. On Friday mornings I stop in at the kosher bakery to get a challah, and on Friday evenings we enjoy Shabbat dinners at my in-laws'.

How did all this happen?

I blame my son. The year was 2005, and my husband and I were living in a small rented apartment on de Gaspé Avenue, in Montreal's Little Italy. It was a Friday morning, and I was about to call our real estate agent to place a bid on a duplex we'd seen in the mostly Francophone district of Villeray. But at 34 weeks pregnant I was tired and decided to lie down for a bit first. When I got up, a trickle of clear liquid was running down my leg. My water had broken.

My son was in the neonatal intensive care unit for ten days. He turned out fine, but we dropped the whole house-hunting business for several months. Then, with the new perspective of freshly minted parents, we accepted the proposal of my husband's parents to buy and live in a duplex together.

* * *

Or maybe it began before that. When, lying on our backs in bed during our first night together, the man who would later become my husband asked me, "What religion are you, anyway?"

I turned my head to look at him, surprised. "Jewish, of course. I thought you knew."

He started laughing.

I had known he was Jewish – how

could I not, with that hair, that nose, and a name like “Levine.” I had assumed it obvious in my case too.

He was laughing because neither of us had ever imagined we would end up dating a Jew.

* * *

When searching for a duplex together, my in-laws wanted to be within walking distance of a synagogue; we wanted to be near a metro station. We ended up in Snowdon, a residential yet central neighbourhood of tree-lined streets and parks. We live downstairs, they live upstairs. Our children, now old enough to climb up and down the connecting spiral kitchen stairwell on their own, consider the entire duplex their home, and say “Mommy-Daddy-Bubby-Zaida” (Grandma and Grandpa) in the same breath.

My in-laws keep a kosher home, attend synagogue on religious holidays, bless the wine and the bread on the Sabbath, use different dishes on Passover. They would never be without a mezuzah on their door.

So far they have tolerated our non-religious ways.

Yet it seems, by unspoken mutual consent, they have taken on the role of educating our kids about Jewish religion and culture. They involve them in the blessings and rituals, bring them to synagogue on major holidays, gave them menorah and dreidel-shaped cookie-cutters for our “holiday” baking.

Part of me is grateful and appreciative. For I wonder: if we had ended up on our own in Villeray, our kids at the local public school, visiting their grandparents once every week or two, what would we have done to pass on their Jewish heritage? Would we have celebrated the Jewish holidays? Would I have felt a need to counter-balance the Christianity around us? Really, my in-laws are making it easy for me.

But sometimes, discomfort nags at my consciousness. Part of me resents the subtle nudges, even though they are made with love and good intent. Part of me would rather just use our traditional cookie cutters, the heart and crescent moon and animal shapes, and so what if there’s a Christmas tree too?

* * *

I ask my husband what he thinks

about the mezuzah.

“When we change the door, are we going to put one back up?”

“I wasn’t planning to,” he says.

“Do you think your parents will say anything?”

He frowns and nods his head vigorously. “Oh yeah.”

We have our own mezuzah somewhere, a wedding gift. Perhaps I should look for it.

* * *

On the day before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, I was explaining to my son that he’d go to shul (synagogue) with Bubby and Zaida on the first day of the holiday, but that on the second he’d go to school as usual. I added that Daddy and I would be working both days.

“But not Bubby and Zaida,” he said.

“That’s right.”

“Because Bubby and Zaida are more Jewish than we are,” he stated.

I debated explaining the concepts of “observant” or “religious” or “practicing,” but as usual, it is the 6-year-old child who sums it up best.

* * *

What is the meaning of the mezuzah? I peruse the Internet, clicking on MyJewishLearning.com, Judaism 101 (jewfaq.com), the Jewish Virtual Library—sites intended for clueless Jews like me.

But the ambivalent Jew in me wants to have a genuine conversation. I take a deep breath and, for the first time since my wedding, set up a meeting with a rabbi. (We had wanted a secular wedding at city hall, but in the face of my in-laws’ desolation, agreed to an intimate ceremony led by a rabbi.)

Up until a few years ago, I never realized that the mezuzah is really all about the scroll inside; the box is just a case. The scroll contains specific passages from the Torah (Old Testament) and from the Shema, one of the basic Jewish prayers.

“The Shema is more of a credo than a prayer,” says Rabbi Ron Aigen, as we sit together in his study at the Reconstructionist Synagogue in Hampstead. Two walls are lined with books; a third is covered in diplomas and posters for cultural events. He opens a book and goes over each phrase (“You shall love the Lord your God

with all your soul . . . repeat these words to your children . . . speak of them at home and when you go out . . . so that your days and the days of your children may be many upon the land . . .”), explaining in detail how these words embody the greater, underlying notions of love, continuity, passing on the Jewish tradition to our children, living these values in all aspects of our lives, and aspiring to be a free people.

“The words in the casement, the words of mezuzah, are far-reaching,” he concludes. “They refer to the Jewish heritage as a whole.”

“Do you think most Montreal Jews today are aware of what the mezuzah really means?” I ask.

“I think for the vast majority of people, mezuzah simply means it’s a Jewish home,” he says. Not even necessarily a religious home, he adds.

And to Rabbi Aigen, that is perfectly fine: rituals and traditions still have meaning even if you’re not religious. “It is still has cultural significance,” he says.

* * *

When I was little, my strongest link to my Jewish heritage was my grandfather, my mother’s father.

I remember him as very old-fashioned, always in a grey three-piece suit. In winter he wore some kind of Russian wool hat, and he spoke with a thick Russian (or perhaps Yiddish) accent, even though he’d lived in Canada since the age of ten.

I loved my grandfather; I was his little girl. I remember sitting on his lap, his knees bony under his wool pants. I remember making him play “house” with me, and pushing him onto the sofa to make him sit. He responded with a bemused little laugh, as if to say, “Anything for my little girl,” or perhaps (as I’ve often thought of my own children), “What nature of creature is before me?” I must have been about three.

He was devoutly Jewish, kept kosher, attended synagogue. He had very traditional and firm beliefs and opinions. He vehemently disapproved of my elder sister’s non-Jewish boyfriend, and threatened to disown her if they got married. But he was kind and generous. When my sisters were in high school and their orchestra was planning a trip to Europe, he helped pay so that they could go.

Rituals and traditions: I remember as a small child, squirming impatiently in my

seat during the interminable Passover Seders he led at our house, the whole story in Hebrew first and then again in English so that my sisters and I would understand. Later, we would hunt for the afikoman, the piece of matzah that is hidden for children to find at the end of the meal and exchange for a prize.

I remember my mother chopping prunes to make hamantashen, the triangular fruit-filled cookies you eat on Purim. I remember her lighting the Chanukah candles with us, singing the blessing, each of the eight nights.

These memories are part of who I am.

I did attend one year of Jewish school: kindergarten. Recently, I asked my father why. He couldn't remember. Possibly because it offered longer hours than the public school and a daycare service. "Or," he said, "maybe we woke up one morning and decided it might be a good idea if you got some Jewish education under your belt."

If so, it worked: remnants of Hebrew songs remain embedded in my mind. It's where I met Sandra, my best friend and only Jewish friend for years. It lay some sort of foundation, adding to the layers built by my grandfather and my mother, somewhere deep in my consciousness.

It also influenced my decision to send my own kids to a Jewish pre-school. Although I could, once again, blame my son.

He was almost five and ready for more than daycare. But his birthday would be after the cut-off date for kindergarten, and there was no pre-k at the school we wanted. Then I discovered a program at the same Jewish school I had attended, just down the street – a good balance of formal instruction, free play and physical activities; an excellent reputation. Plus it would be refreshing not to be bombarded with Christmas songs and Easter crafts.

My in-laws were ecstatic. "It's just for this year," we warned them. "He's not staying there."

The thing is this: I want my children to be exposed to other cultures and backgrounds from an early age. In my mind, that is the key to being comfortable with others, to understanding them, to having

a broad world view. To personal harmony as well, to feel like you can go anywhere and do anything, be able to communicate and fit in.

And yet: one could argue that if you do not have a strong sense of your own roots, you will never fit in anywhere. There is a large, vibrant Jewish community in Montreal, which acts as a social, professional and assistance network. It has tradition and pride. Yet when I enter one of its institutions, I feel as if I do not quite belong.

I find our mezuzah in a box of miscellaneous items still unwrapped from our move. It is in two tones of dark brown and reddish wood, separated by a thin curvy gold line, with the W-shaped Hebrew letter Shin near the top. I run my fingers over the smooth surface, then turn it over and try to decipher the artist's signature carved into the wood.

A mezuzah on your door also announces that you're Jewish. "What's wrong with that?" my father-in-law might say, although he'd be the first to point out that a certain amount of prejudice is still ingrained in our society. Perhaps it comes down to how you define yourself. I consider myself foremost a writer, a singer, a mom, a Montrealer, a Québécoise. Jewish, yes, but that is just one aspect of who I am.

My meeting with the rabbi has given me a greater understanding of and appreciation for what my in-laws believe in. But these are still not my beliefs.

Is my house a Jewish home? Yes, insofar as it is not a Christian one. But I would like to hope that the values we try to live by—love, understanding, freedom, education, helping those less fortunate—extend beyond our religious culture or heritage.

We still have a few weeks before the new door arrives. For now, I place the mezuzah back in its box.

Eve Krakow is a Montreal writer and translator. Her stories have appeared in Cahoots Magazine, Smithsonian Magazine, lichen literary journal, and soon in the upcoming anthology Shy (University of Alberta Press). As a freelance journalist, she has also written articles for various newspapers and magazines.

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“WE NEVER WORRIED ABOUT THEIR ENGLISH”

Parents talk about sending their kids to French-language schools

by Jessica Grosman

In 1967 when Jim Ring heard about a conflict brewing in St. Leonard about language in schools, he remembers thinking the parents were lucky. Parents could send their children to learn French.

The conflict erupted when the school board decided to end the bilingual curriculum and replace it with instruction in French only. Over the course of a year the parents protested the board's decision. A large Italian immigrant population lived in the east-end suburb, and while they traditionally had sent their children to French Catholic school, more recently they had begun to opt for English-language instruction. The sometimes violent conflict became a symbol of the anglicization of immigrants in the province.

Jim was living in Halifax and could not understand all the fuss: “I was thinking, well if I were there I would send my kid to French school, that would be such an opportunity. It had nothing to do with politics, it just had to do with my kids...if they learned a language early on that would be just wonderful.”

In the aftermath of the St. Leonard conflict, Quebec Premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand passed Bill 85 that gave all parents the right to choose their children's language of instruction. Since then, politicians have made different attempts to address who can learn in which language at what school. Language and education has remained a contentious issue and a central theme for Quebec culture and politics. In 1977, the province passed Bill 101, which altered the positions of French and English in the province; the bill protected English-language schools but also limited access to them.

Over the past thirty-five years, most English-speaking Quebecers have sent their children to learn in English so they can preserve their language and heritage. But some chose differently; a significant minority chose to enroll their children to learn, *en*

français. How do parents make that decision? How do they decide to try something different, to experiment?

Oral history revives individual choices from the past, from obscurity. It also allows historians to enter into the emotional side of choices because our decisions speak to what we wanted and believed. To the three families I interviewed, their decisions were sometimes part of larger social issues but above all were attempts to fix something they considered lacking in their own childhood.

In 1969, the Rings moved from Halifax to Montreal and had the opportunity to send the children to school in French. Jim and his wife didn't sit down and talk the idea through; it just seemed to be the right decision. The Rings had not planned to settle in Quebec either; the family refused to sign a lease on an apartment because it locked them in for three years.

When Andy, the oldest daughter, started kindergarten in French, Jim hoped for one thing: The kids “are not going to learn much in school anyways...so at least my kids will learn French. They will get out of there and they will have gotten that and that's a big deal.”

Jim was always interested in languages; he had learned French and Latin at school in British Columbia. He still remembers the first time he read French easily: “I had this sensation of a boat planing, when it gets up on the water, of going across the words. I was just reading French instead of doing the translating and I just sat up in bed and thought my life had changed.”

The Rings spoke only English at home until Genevieve, the third child, started school. “When she started going to French kindergarten, she sat at the dinner table and would start speaking French and they [Andy and Robert] would answer her.”

By the time Sarah, the youngest, was a

toddler, the sounds of the French language spun through home and yard. The eldest were already fluent in French and even though Sarah could not yet speak the language she seemed to sense it was an important language to learn. Once a group of neighbourhood kids chased Sarah through the alley behind the Ring's home. Sarah crouched behind the backyard hedge and started to scream at them: “Sarah had never been to French school...she was babbling French sounds, the day I heard that I was stunned.”

Balancing the two languages at home and school proved easy. Jim had first learned about kids learning French at school and speaking English at home when he was sixteen years old on a trip to Edmonton. At the time he thought it was an incredible opportunity, now he had five children living a similar way of life.

Tom and Lyna Boushel met in Montreal in 1967. They shared a commitment to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's ideas of bilingualism and multiculturalism. When Trudeau visited Montreal, Tom and Lyna went out to meet him; they waved, screamed and hoped that Trudeau could “save” Canada.

Lyna, from Timmins, Ontario, is Franco-Ontarian but she identifies more as an Anglophone. Her parents used French as a private language between adults, hoping to shield their daughter from “the English-French problem in Northern Ontario.” But once they realized that Lyna had picked up French anyway, they enrolled her in French-language school. Tom's parents immigrated from Ireland and settled around Lafontaine Park. His father spoke French fluently, learning it on the streets and in the boxing ring, but he sent Tom to learn in English. Today, Tom describes that decision as “unfortunate.”

After living and working in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the Boushel family settled in Boucherville in 1986. When the family arrived, Katherine, the youngest daughter, was only three years old but she was adamant that she would not learn French; she told the neighbour so. But Tom and Lyna had already decided to send their daughter to learn in French; they described the decision as a “foregone conclusion.” The two eldest girls, Mary (9) and Patricia (7), started at the local elementary school. Katherine later followed in her sisters’ footsteps; twenty years later, she became the Francophone representative for the Canadian Federation of Students.

When the Boushels enrolled their daughters at the elementary school, the principal told them that they should be prepared for their daughters to fail, because a previous family also had tried and failed. Tom warned the principal that she was “never to mention failure or the possibility of failure to my children or to their teachers.”

Tom and Lyna diligently planned their daughter’s schooling. They enforced a no-English television rule, had their children tutored through the “francization” program and promised a trip to Disney World for January after Mary and Patricia successfully completed the first sixth months at the new school.

Two years later, Mary graduated from elementary school first in the class. At the awards ceremony, the principal raced over to congratulate Tom and Lyna; she called their daughter a “genius.” Tom bristled at the idea that her daughter was a genius. Learning a language, learning about a different culture and raising a child were not individual activities. He interrupted the principal and said, “Non, pas de tout. Vous avez fait votre part et nous avons fait notre part. On les a donné les ‘challenges’ puis on a réussi en gang.”

John Commins teaches Quebec history at an English-language high school, but his daughters are enrolled in French-language schools. He laughs when he considers that he is “actually helping in the demise of [his] own institutional context... But we are in this neighborhood, we are in this time and place,

we understand the value of this language and it is a language that is tougher to learn.” John’s two daughters are still in school, Marianne at Dawson College and Maeve at l’Académie de Roberval, so his story is more recent.

Over the years John has watched many of his friends move away from Quebec. He hopes his children will not have to move away to find a good job and that they will stay close to him. He describes the decision to send the kids to French-language schools as selfish.

John spent his childhood in Toronto and California and then attended Loyola High School in NDG in Montreal; by graduation he had “no French communication skills whatsoever.” During university, John was involved in student politics and with the NDP and encountered situation after situation where the “fact that I didn’t speak French was ridiculous.”

To try and fix the situation, John registered in the Faculté des sciences de l’éducation at the Université de Montréal. His spoken French improved, but it was not enough. Students must write a French test in order to get their teaching license; John failed it three times. The faculty exceptionally awarded him a license to teach in English.

When it came time to send his children to school, John walked his daughters to the closest school in Villeray. There was no hesitation: “The struggle to learn French was real and I don’t want my kids to live through that as a 25 or 26 year old. [I am] not reproducing that mistake.”

Marianne and Maeve now correct their father’s mistakes in French. When he wants to fire back a reply on a blog, he calls over to one of his daughters to correct his French. “They help me with my writing all the time,” he said, laughing. “They have to... it’s their job!”

French-language schools offered an accessible opportunity and perhaps the only real opportunity to learn French and fulfill long unspoken needs: “Being 51 years old and growing up in NDG it leaves some significant traces and it’s hard to get away from that, at least for me...it’s a marker. My daughters don’t feel that.” He believes his children have greater freedom; they can live beyond the categories of Francophone and Anglophone.

Politicians and journalists periodically grumble about language in schools but for the past thirty-five years it has been an uneasy truce. With the election of the Parti Québécois in 2012 and proposed amendments to La charte de la langue française, media reports about language conflict have resurfaced and for the most part – the daunting and maddening part – the stories we hear haven’t evolved.

As Lyna looked back over her daughters’ school years, she concluded that her daughters’ education shaped their perspectives: “When you are bilingual and you were raised in both cultures, you understand the angst between each one. You learn to look at the other’s point of view more easily.”

Most immigrant youth attend French-language schools, so many of John’s daughters’ friends are from Pakistan and Algeria. The girls have learned to “understand cultural cues” from a young age. John and his children watched the recent Bouchard-Taylor commission on “reasonable accommodation” and his daughters were stunned by what they saw. They were shocked by the limited definition of Québécois and the heavy-handed approach to dealing with different cultures. The girls asked John who everyone was so afraid of?

John eventually spoke at the commission on their behalf. In the allotted six minutes, he explained that youth – like his daughters – must “get in front of the problems with immigration and say this is an *atout*, this is a plus, [immigration] makes Quebec a more interesting, dynamic place to be.” Of course, the girls agreed, because the people everyone was talking about were their friends.

Jessica Grosman is completing an MA in History at Concordia University. She studies labour and media in twentieth-century Quebec.

CROSS-SECTIONING A CITY

The Main and its people
by Nisha Coleman

You can smell it when you lean against the wooden railing at the old port and face the waves: a whisper of salt and fish and hope, a tonic breeze that speaks of centuries and ocean skies. You can imagine how they might have looked, staggering on shore. The first ships from France, the explorers warding off scurvy with erroneous dreams of Asian spice and gold. The Irish, weak and feverish for a new life. Or from central and eastern Europe, Yiddish-speaking and armed with a reservoir of culture and ambition. Explosions of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians settled up the spine of the city, *Boulevard Saint-Laurent*, and nestled into the vertebral grooves and joints. Anglos veered left, Francos veered right, but in the middle the sinew was soft, flexible and fluid. Layers of language let tongues bend and twist as they wished. The Main united newcomers, allied by otherness.

As you head up the hill, in the store windows of Old Montreal you see feathers and dream catchers and arrowheads, a nod to the natives who once cultivated corn here, before the Europeans touched their land, gave them diseases or adorned them with crosses. You may hear the dissonant clangs from the Notre-Dame Basilica bells, pounding, strong and off time like staggered heartbeats. A Starbucks is the current conqueror of the Cuvillier-Ostell house on your right, the heavy stone shell that once housed a shoemaker, a hatter, a hair salon, a tailor. Only the coveted exterior remains after flames devoured its insides; the Queen of Coffee appears quite comfortable here.

A few blocks further you discover

Montreal's perpetual population of outsiders: the itinerants of the Old Brewery Mission. They lean against the building and watch as you near. You can see the depths of loss in their sunken eyes and their sallow skin suggests a repertoire of misfortunes. You may even give them a cigarette and some change if they ask.

You soon approach the lion-guarded paifang arches. Hebrew inscriptions and stars of David were replaced by Chinese characters when the Jews shifted north a



century ago. Kreplach made way for wontons, synagogues for secular affairs. Outdoor fruit stands offer spiked durians, pink-tentacled rambutans, pudgy mongosteens, and unassuming star fruit. Dried fish lend their scent to the breeze joined by sweet saucy steam from nearby barbecues. Liver-spotted men in thick socks and sandals doze on lawn chairs. In store windows, white porcelain cats raise a paw and knock perpetually beside bamboo printed plates and boxes of ginseng tea. Young girls in miniskirts saunter, giggling and sucking multi-coloured bubble teas. French flows naturally from their perfect pink mouths.

As you continue, your head turns to the Monument National. It was made to dazzle. The swooping arched windows and textured facade was a cultural labo-

ratory as the century turned. It housed the first Yiddish play, hosted teeth-clenching suffragette meetings, was the pulpit for Zionist lectures, and a place where buttocks and breasts swung to the hearty whistles of Burlesque show-goers. Creativity is a renewable resource and The National Theatre School is the current caretaker.

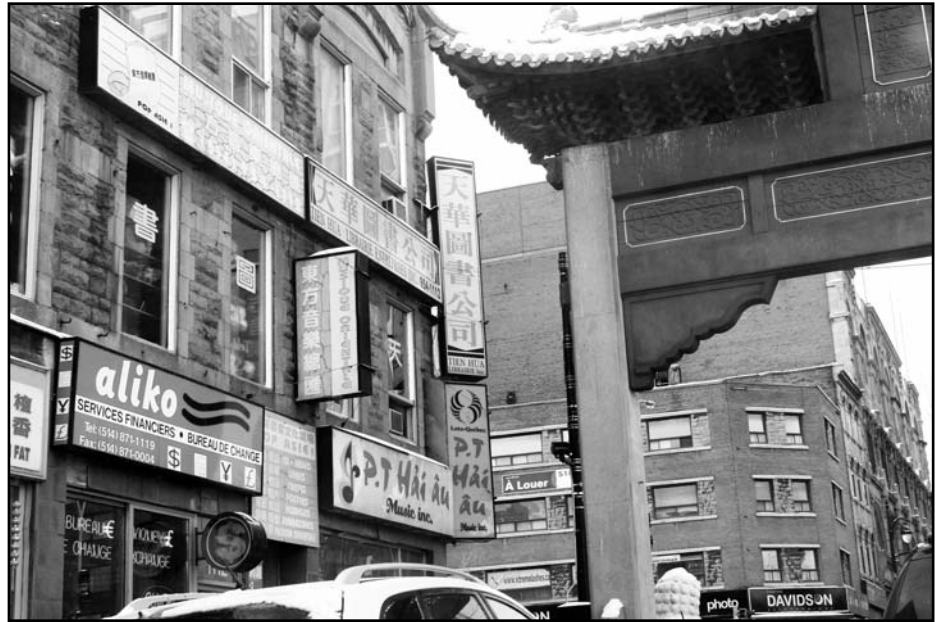
Nearing St. Catherine Street, yellow signs boast Peepshows. You notice a woman standing in *that way* before a building marked CASINO in extinguished bulbs. Later, the lights will ignite and more women will stand along the sidewalk like this, in high heels with bare legs and forward-thrusted hips. People will swarm, to clubs, to theatres, to sex shows. Sweat will drip under hot lights. Booze will fill bellies and voids. Music will vibrate the vestibule hair cells of the inner ear. Naked women will snake around poles before unblinking eyes. Humans are consistent in their needs; whether tungsten or LED, the lights continue to burn along this stretch of The Main.

Your thighs protest as you scale the steep incline to Sherbrooke Street, where rich Anglo-Protestants had their country villas at the edge of town. Ship owners, entrepreneurs, brewers, and bank managers could sip tea in their turrets and gaze out over the river that often made their wealth a possibility.

You're on the plateau now, a flat bed of clay on which the immigrant working class thrived. Scissors and sewing machines whirred in factories and workshops all along here, The Main's thumping heart. The ethnicities are evident. There's a Hungarian Social Club on your left. A heavy cloud of fleshy steam escapes from Schwartz's

The Cuvillier-Ostell House. Photo: Elena Cerrolaza.

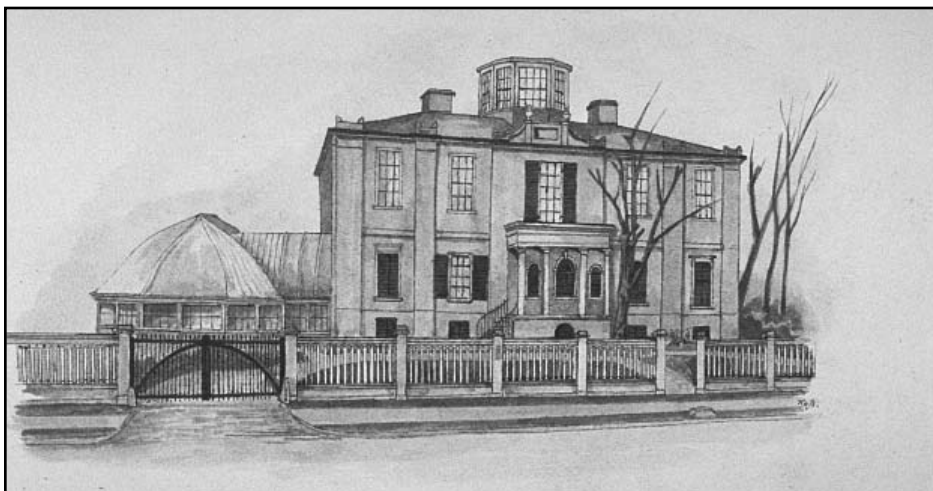
smoked meats. Moishes' red and crystal interior catches the eyes of fine diners. Up dusty, uninviting stairs, a dozen white-haired Spanish men are sprawled around tables, soccer on TV and tapas on the menu. Thick-ankled Portuguese women pull cloth shopping carts into boutiques with rainbow roosters in the window. Fatty smoke spews out of nearby rotisseries that from afar look like raging fires. New establishments have emerged. Wine glasses sit in waiting beside folded napkins and polished silverware. At night, bars and clubs pound to DJ beats and the street fills with miniskirts, high heels, and vomit piles. Bands blast into the night while feet tap and slide and leap. Innovation has not dwindled here. Sweatshop shells now house dance studios, architect offices,



and new media companies. Flowery formless dresses and heavy antique tables persist aside new organic, fair-trade threads and moulded plywood chairs. Beef juice drips down chins and gravy soaks French fries while vegan restaurants offer soy extravaganzas. Brains continue to churn here, hands still flutter over creations and the foundations still shift over their shaky clay strata. Horses clopped along the country road of Mount Royal a century ago, when Mile End was a northern suburb without water or electricity. Once the railroad sliced its way through, prosperity reared taverns and banks, department stores and cinemas. On the east, rows of working class brick dwellings. On the west, white collar grey stone and gardens. Now hipsters meander to cafés in their tapered jeans and tuques. Hasidic Jews in black scurry light-footed to seemingly secret

destinations. Restaurants with wine lists have replaced dark taverns. And when the sun surrenders to streetlights, toned bodies bounce to blaring speakers in what used to be the Bank of Montreal. They swap bills for sparkling cocktails and flaunt the flesh that spills from tight textiles.

You may feel afraid as you approach the tracks and the storefronts slump and a man stumbles from the shadows and gives you a hard, whisky grin. The spray-painted words on cement walls may spell angry messages, but if you turn back now, you won't enter the portal to the land of espressos and green-thumbed grannies. The Italians fled their gasping homeland for the open fields along this stretch. Now tomatoes swell to ripeness in gardens and vines tumble from canopies, linking backyards with their curling tentacles. In Café Italia, old timers linger over dark, jet-fuel coffees and gaze at TV screens while visitors swivel on stools, order cappuccinos and smile shyly at the robust barista. Men strut along sidewalks in striped suits, their dark hair slicked, their stubble expertly contained. The double tailpipe of a yellow Ferrari blares up the boulevard. In grocery store windows, pyramids of panettone balance beside canned tomatoes and vats of olive oil. Haitian, Salvadorean and Vietnamese businesses have scattered their seeds here. Women in hijabs prowl for deals. Creole and Arabic and Spanish enter the air as Little Italy cedes to Villeray and the edges of Park Extension.



Top: Chinatown. Photo: Rod MacLeod. Middle: The Monument National. Photo: Bibliothèque et archives Nationales: Albums Masicotte, 7-34-b.

Bottom: John Hugh Ross, "Molson's House, Sherbrooke and St. Lawrence Streets," 1892. Photo: McCord Museum M980.184.1.62.



At Jean-Talon, the boulevard splits open and you can feel its pulse weaken. Cars dominate on five wide lanes and the people retreat. The looming deaf-mute's institute on your left, with its sturdy pillars and thick stone walls made from nearby quarries, is now destined for condo land. Jarry Park sprawls its greenery, attracting jocks and dogs. After a fractured blur of highways and overpasses, the massive textile cubes

take over. They cast thick shadows over entire blocks and leave little room for the recent splashes of immigrants to instill their culture and community. The sidewalks are barren. There is no one for you to lock eyes with. Vehicles rush to clothing warehouses, tile stores and kitchenware outlets. Smashed-up cars sit in mechanic parking lots, awaiting dissection. Failed businesses paper their windows.

Through Ahuntsic-Cartierville, you see that orange "À LOUER" signs decorate almost every decaying apartment complex with handwritten promises of complimentary furniture and heating. Flower boxes do not hang from the slanted balconies. There are no steamy cafes offering hot meals, discussion and belonging.

Language is confined to dwellings. But the rent is cheap, so people come. One in three were born in a foreign land. The arms of the boulevard remain open, but there is no hope of claiming this stretch. This is not a place to flourish and share and express. This is not a place to settle. This is a place to pass through, a last resort, and when people move on, they leave no trace behind. This is history at a standstill.

Keep going, past these rows of cheap bricks beckoning to the destitute, and one block from the water, something miraculous. Mansions. Manicured lawns with cedars and stones. Pools and Jacuzzis. Porches and bay windows and Mercedes in driveways. Birds trill. Squirrels scamper up mighty trunked trees. A green park stretches to the shore like a dreamt-about pasture. Lovers stroll. Roller-bladers glide along a paved path and dogs and children frolic.

Step off the boulevard and let your soles sink into the forgiving grass. Make your way to the water, the Rivière des Prairies. The shore is so close you could dip your toe in. You could even launch a boat into those ripples. The river would carry you, gently, back to the St. Lawrence and eventually, of course, to the wide ocean waves.



Nisha Coleman lives in Montreal and is currently working on a compilation of busking tales based on her years playing music in the streets of Paris. She also writes fiction and enjoys the art of blogging at: www.nishacoleman.com.

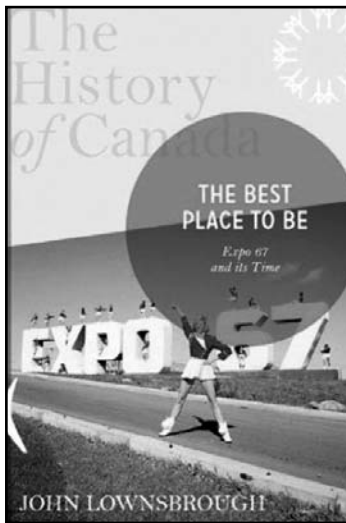
REVIEW

Highlight of “The Last Good Year”

The Best Place to Be: Expo '67 and Its Time

By John Lownsbrough

Penguin Canada, History of Canada Series, 2013



Toronto journalist John Lownsbrough has written a history of Expo '67 that is completely engaging and accessible to all readers, yet also shows a thoughtful depth of research and scholarship of the subject. *The Best Place to Be: Expo '67 and Its Time* is part of the excellent Penguin Canada History of Canada Series, edited by Margaret MacMillan and Robert Bothwell, and in soft cover runs to 293 pages.

Montreal's Expo was officially named the Universal and International World Exposition – and had the theme of “Terre des Hommes” (or “Man and His World”), its title borrowed from the 1939 classic by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, whose philosophy had also inspired the humanitarian organization of the same name. (Saint-Exupéry's equally famous *Le Petit Prince* (*The Little Prince*), the children's story that isn't just for children, also deals with aviation as well as an abstract humanist philosophy.) “Terre des Hommes” was an appropriate name for

the fair that showed that Canadians, especially the Quebec variety, are not always dull pragmatists, but can be remarkably imaginative, creative and often eccentric people when called upon to perform.

Montreal had the right mayor for the event: the project-driven Jean Drapeau. In *The Best Place To Be*, Lownsbrough relates a wonderfully telling anecdote about one of Drapeau's ideas – a tower for Expo – that became a personal obsession. Of course the mayor wanted nothing but the best, and promoted a plan to disassemble the Eiffel Tower in Paris and have it reassembled at Expo. This plan, “unsurprisingly, met resistance in Paris,” Lownsbrough writes. “Drapeau then suggested building a replica. With that grandiose vision in mind, a determined Drapeau decided he would hire a French architect to design a new tower to stand at the tip of La Ronde amusement park.” We all know where this mania for a tower eventually led! Our ill-fated Olympic Stadium was hovering in Drapeau's thoughts even in 1967.

However, the location of Expo in the middle of the St. Lawrence River was its greatest act of genius: St. Helen's Island was expanded and Île Notre-Dame created, partly from the landfill excavated for the Montreal metro system inaugurated the previous year, and the site was served by metro and by monorail. The participation of sixty-one countries, as well as the thematic, Canadian, and provincial pavilions, was an enormous achievement. Political leaders and celebrities from around the world all came to Expo. Mayor Drapeau, and the group set up by the Canadian Centennial Commission to build, promote and operate Expo, were a unique and highly successful team. Lownsbrough researched the governing and organizational history of Expo in depth and we

meet many, many interesting characters who helped shape this event. Furthermore, Lownsbrough's general history of the period is excellent; the social and cultural changes of the 1960s – the Quiet Revolution, the separatist agitation, the rise of feminism and the changing roles of women – are explored as they relate to Quebec.

One aspect of the book that becomes clear is how our perceptions of well-known people can alter over time. For example, Buckminster Fuller, the designer of the domed American Pavilion, and Marshall McLuhan, the popular media analyst (“the media is the message”), had ideas that arguably do not maintain the influence they might have hoped for, nor hold the cultural clout that might have been built upon by followers. However, Moshe Safdie, the architect of Habitat '67 (still extant in the midst of the river) did proceed with an important career and body of work. “Habitat” would perhaps have been better located on the shores of the sunny Mediterranean than in the middle of the cold, windy St. Lawrence River, but at least it hasn't met the grim fate of most of the Expo structures.

Lownsbrough has extensive notes on every chapter, a vast bibliography of print, film and websites and even a useful “Who's Who” list of the more visible people involved with Expo. There are also two sections of period photos. If the reader wants to know about Montreal in the mid- to late sixties, this is the book to read. It's about a lot more than the fair. It was Pierre Burton who called 1967 “the last good year.” Perhaps it was the high-water point for Canadian, and Montreal, optimism, and the last year of a kind of innocence.

Reviewed by Sandra Stock

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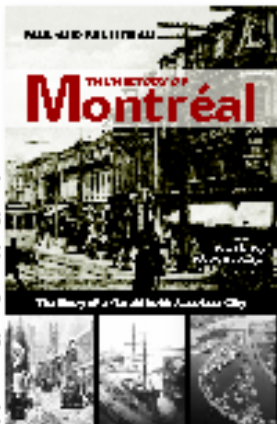
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An exhibition developed and circulated by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec



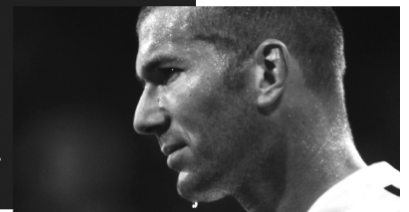
Marc-Aurèle Fortin, L'Église à Pointe-à-la-Croix, 1928 (or before), oil on canvas, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec © Fondation Marc-Aurèle Fortin / Société 2013

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Zinedine Zidane by Philippe Paternò, Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait, 2006, a mirrored digital video installation, 90 minutes, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa © Anni Lena Film / Palomar Pictures

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