

FAREWELL TO A LEGEND: MARION PHELPS, 1908-2013

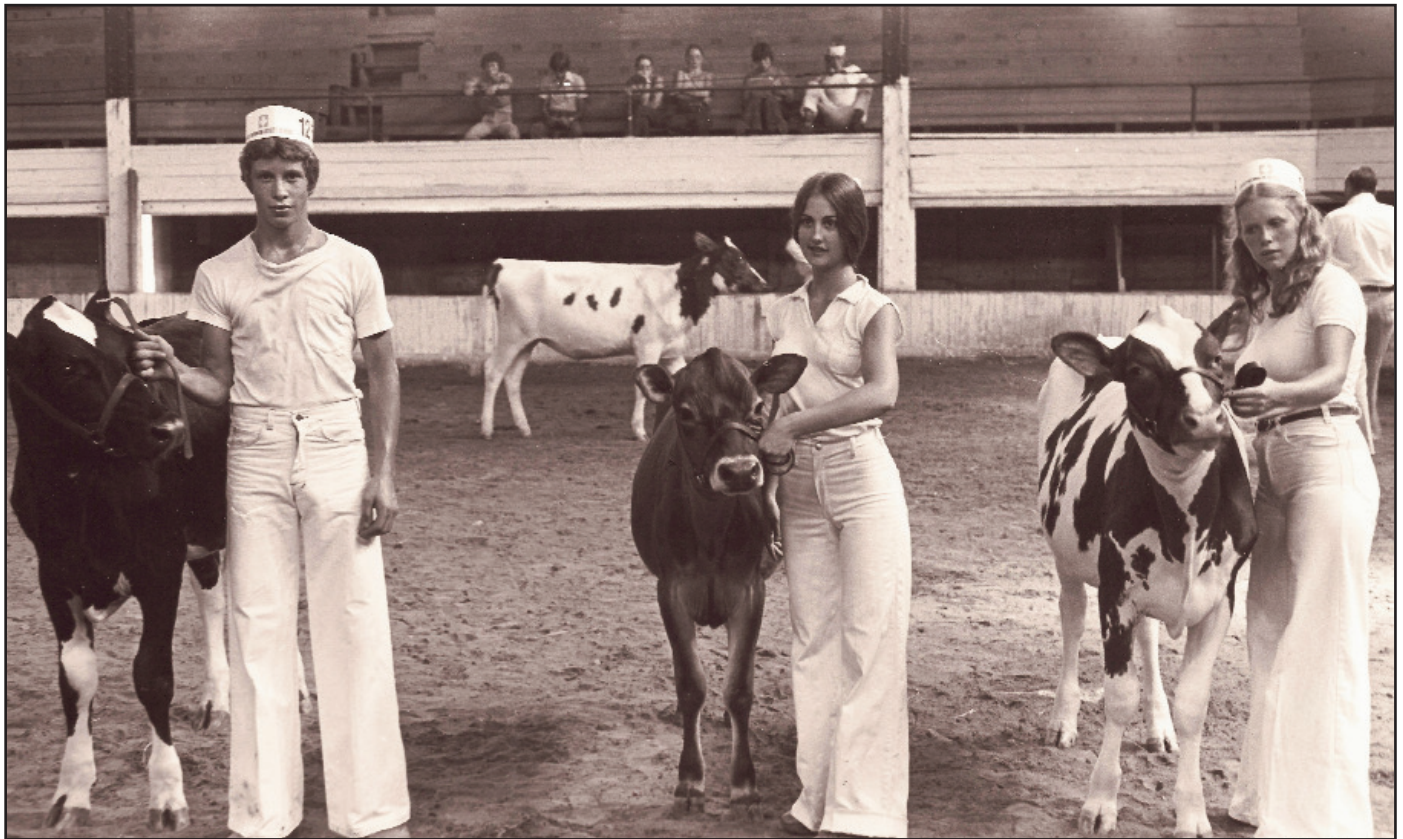
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News



Cow Shows and City Potatoes

Farming Heritage: 4-H Clubs and the Visionary J. N. Lamy

Heritage Successes East and West

The Gaspesian British Heritage Village and the Fairbairn House

Busking the Metro, Being Unilingual

Emerging Writers Reflect on the Urban Scene

Quebec Heritage News

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Cover photo: Winners at 1979 Calf Rally in Ormstown. Calf Rally is a Quebec 4-H annual event. Photo: courtesy of Quebec 4H.

EDITOR'S DESK

The Castle's many tenants

by Rod MacLeod

Like many great institutions, it all started with Scots. Well, people of Scottish descent anyway. They came from Midlothian, south of Edinburgh, in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century, fighting against England with French allies – and somehow ended up with significant landholdings and titles in France. One prominent Ramsay – or Ramezay, as they were now styled – came to New France as an army officer and rose through the ranks until his appointment as governor of Montreal in 1704. Claude promptly built himself a grand townhouse on Notre Dame Street with extensive gardens behind and a view from the upper windows of Mount Royal to the north and the St. Lawrence River to the south. Here he lived in lavish style, well beyond his means, until his death in 1724. His children grew up in the house, and his widow continued to live there for another two decades.

Contrary to popular wisdom, the Château de Ramezay was never the home of the governors of New France other than a brief period when Claude substituted for Governor General Vaudreuil during the latter's absence in the old country. In 1745, Claude's surviving children opted to sell the house – to the *Compagnie des Indes*, which was founded by another Scot, John Law, Louis XIV's chief banker. After two decades of operating out of rented rooms about town, the *Compagnie* finally had a home of its own in the old Ramezay place. The *Compagnie* substantially rebuilt the house, giving it the appearance it retains today.

After the conquest, the *Compagnie*

lost its royal privileges and was obliged to sell the property – to yet another Scot, William Grant, the enterprising fur trader who became, through marriage, the Baron of Longueuil. Grant may not have spent much time in the house, and was probably happy to find a good tenant in the form of the British govern-

Once it was back in their possession, the British formally bought the house from Grant. Successive British governors normally used the house whenever they needed to be in Montreal – including a very distant relation of the original owners: George Ramsay, the Earl of Dalhousie. One exception to this

trend was John Colborne, who had rented a house nearby when he came to Montreal in November 1837 to lead the armed forces against the rebels, and renewed his lease on that house three months later even though Governor Gosford's resignation had by then made him acting governor; Colborne knew that the new governor, Lord Durham, was due shortly and would need the Château de Ramezay. Colborne also presided over the abolition of the elected



ment, which was looking for a pied-à-terre in Montreal. Although not as grand as the Château Vaudreuil on St. Paul Street – occupied by the Collège de Montréal – Claude de Ramezay's old home would do.

Two years after making this purchase, in late 1775, British command pulled out of Montreal, retreating from the invading American troops. Upon his arrival, Richard Montgomery, leader of the invasion, moved into the house and established his headquarters there. After Montgomery left to attack Quebec (and die, on New Year's Eve), other American generals were based in the house – including Benedict Arnold, who welcomed such visitors as Benjamin Franklin (who slept elsewhere) and Fleury Mesplet (who reputedly kept his printing equipment in the Ramezay basement).

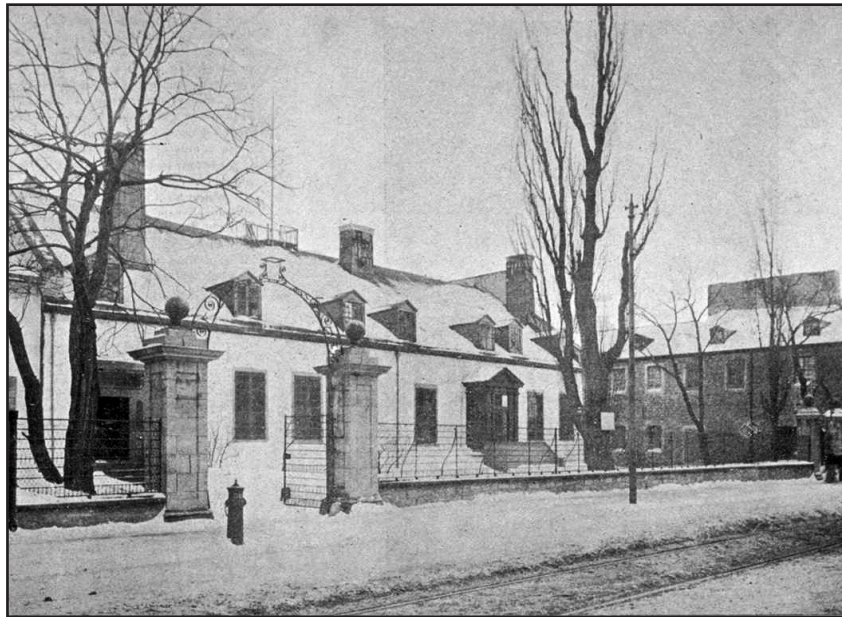
assembly; governors now ruled by decree, assisted by a hand-picked set of monarchy-friendly men who formed the Special Council. This body, formed in April 1838, would sit in the Ramezay house (save for the few months when Durham filled the colony's highest office and moved the council to Quebec) until it was dissolved in February 1841. The last of Lower Canada's governors, Charles Thomson, decided to spurn Quebec altogether and live year-round in Montreal, in the Ramezay house.

In 1841, the parliament of the new Province of Canada moved, along with Thomson (now Baron Sydenham), to Kingston. When Montreal became the capital in 1844, the governors took up residence in the elegant villa called Monklands at the western edge of what would later be known as West Mount. The Château de Ramezay was fitted up

as government offices, and a large four-storey brick annexe was built on the east side by local contractor Hector Munro. The new facilities were ready for occupation on May 1, 1849. Unfortunately, a week earlier a Tory mob had burned down the parliament building in Youville Square, and the government decided to leave this political hotbed and move its headquarters to Toronto. (This would not be the last time a Montreal-based corporation would make that exact decision.)

The expanded Château de Ramezay was now a building in search of a purpose. Fortunately, the city court was looking for a venue, its old quarters having burned down some years earlier and its replacement being barely started. By the time the new court house (known today as the “old court house,” not to be confused with the “new-old court house” across the street designed in the 1920s by Ernest Cormier) was finished, the legislation creating normal schools had just been passed. Montreal’s École normale Jacques-Cartier (the Catholic counterpart to the McGill Normal School on Belmont Street) took up residence in the Ramezay house’s Munro wing in 1857, while the Council of Public Instruction for Canada East, established by the same legislation as the normal schools, came to occupy the older part of the house. At Confederation, the Council fell under provincial jurisdiction in Quebec City, but the Normal School continued until 1879, when it moved to the Logan farm. The new Montreal branch of Laval University’s Faculty of Medicine, which had occupied the original part of the Ramezay house two years earlier, now took over the entire building, and did so until moving to St. Denis Street in 1895, where it would eventually become part of the University of Montreal. During these years, bits of the house were also occupied by *La Presse*, *La Minerve*, and various municipal departments whose em-

ployees presumably did not mind the noise from the presses or the smell from



the operating room.

By 1893, the Quebec government, the owner of the Ramezay house since Confederation, had lost interest in it as a property and decided to sell. Horrified at the prospect of a buyer tearing down this two-centuries-old structure, the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society of Montreal organized what was to be a de-

cisive moment in the history of architectural conservation: it petitioned the municipal government to purchase the Ramezay house as a place to house the Society’s collection of historic objects. The city did so, and immediately leased the house to the ANSM for a nominal annual rent of \$1. The museum opened on May 1, 1895. In time, the brick annex and other additions were demolished and the old house equipped with modern gas and light facilities, and up-to-date toilets.

Today, one can admire the expanded collections of this delightful museum and in good weather even sit in the garden outside, which recaptures the sights and smells of what Claude de Ramezay and his family would have enjoyed three centuries ago. Probably no building in Canada has gone through anything like as much in order to get back to, more or less, where it started.

Letters

The View from the Alcan floors

When I read Rod MacLeod’s piece about Place Ville Marie (“Fixing a Hole,” *QHN*, Fall 2012), I smiled at finding common ground and just knew I had to get around to writing this letter.

In early 1962, I became a very small participant within a large group of people given the task of organizing the move of close to 1,500 Alcan employees from four other Montreal buildings into eight complete floors and a huge chunk of basement space in the brand new Place Ville Marie over Labour Day week-end in 1962. The final months before the actual move were, to put it mildly, hectic. The hours were long, but the work itself was mostly tremendous fun, endlessly surprising, although at times exhausting – but I was young with lots of energy. I wish I had kept a diary, but I

did keep a file of some interesting papers and photographs, and, of course, remember some highlights of these times. I thought you might be interested in some of my memories of the hole itself, the filling thereof, and eventually the rise of a building that surprised us all.

Arriving in Montreal in 1959, I looked at this huge hole with amazement. What followed was even more startling. As a child of the blitz in England, rubble-strewn sites became familiar, as did the slow rebuilding projects that followed in post-war years. What bothered me in Montreal was the realization that all this rubble was generated by conscious decisions of local people to demolish many of their fine old buildings. And this was before I met my future husband, and learned more about the disappearance of Dorchester House and other fine homes.

As I watched PVM slowly rising in

1961, it seemed to be a good time to apply for a job at Alcan and get involved in the development of this building that was totally unlike anything I had ever imagined. After a few months, I landed the job described as secretary to the Office Services Manager. Secretary? That was a joke. I finished up mixing with literally hundreds of people and doing whatever needed to be done. The challenges were intriguing. Enjoying life as I immersed myself in this thoroughly modern Montreal, I still mourned the loss of all those heritage buildings. The Golden Square Mile was being hammered, and very few people seemed to care.

There are some lovely stories of happenings in those hectic months of 1962.

Someone peevishly asked why PVM was to be named the Royal Bank Building, since Alcan would be occupying eight floors and the Royal only six. The simplicity of the three-word answer ended all discussion: “they asked first.” And then there was the occasion when some wag in Engineering was overcome by a fit of facetiousness as he wrote up the specs for Alcan’s internal stairway. He specified gold as the material to be used for the handrails. And nobody noticed for positively ages.

As the months went by, we worked longer and longer hours, but on the weekend of the move itself, only men were working. Starting early on the morning of Tuesday, September 4, we coped with hundreds of questions from confused employees trying to find their way around. Many were quite awestruck if assigned a place near a window, be it from pleasure or fear.

One department had a totally brilliant man doing a totally brilliant job, even though he was alarmingly absent-minded with some strange habits. This was the 1960s, when everyone dressed formally for work, men in suits and women in dresses. This brilliant man took to wearing toe-post sandals, obviously with no socks, and his boss was at

a loss to know how best to handle this. As it happened, one very young and delightfully casual lassie in the department innocently took care of it by smiling at the young man and saying “let’s see you walk on water.” It was wonderful. Dilemma converted to laughter with no hard feelings.

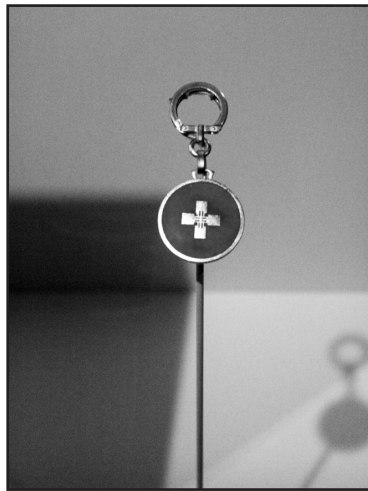
I stayed with Office Services until 1965, by which time things had settled down. In the early years, there were real trees on the plaza for Christmas. We enjoyed that, but many of us were not so impressed with the strung-up lights that replaced them. Before No. 5 Place Ville Marie was built, there were flower beds scattered throughout the plaza, and one spring day as we gazed down we noticed a beautiful

display of daffodils surrounded by white tulips in the midst of greenery. Quick like a bunny, someone said, “Oh look – poached egg on spinach!”

On that awful day in November 1963 when news of John Kennedy’s assassination became known at lunchtime, word was handed down that Alcan would immediately close. I spent the next few hours walking up and down Alcan’s internal stairway helping the receptionists get all visitors out of the building as well as urging employees to go home. Because so many people wanted to stay and talk, it took us ages to clear the premises.

All in all, I grew to enjoy PVM. But thinking back to my amazement when I first caught site of the huge hole, and connecting this with Rod’s comment that a trough with trains running through it can make for a pleasant urban environment, has prompted me to imagine that if something like this ever happens again, we can all play a variation of Poohsticks. Pooh and Piglet would be thrilled.

Anne Joseph
Montreal, QC



Potash from the north

I was very interested in Susan McGuire’s article on the making and marketing of potash in the Eastern Townships and Ottawa Valley (“The Potash Process,” *QHN*, Winter 2013”). In Rawdon, potash was also a source of revenue for the early settlers. The potash had to be transported a good fifty or sixty miles to Montreal by road. There was no ferry or scow for transport.

Much of the land in Rawdon was not ideal for farming, as the soil was sandy in many areas, and hilly and rocky in others. Usually it was enough to provide a roof over the family’s head, food for their bellies and clothes for their backs. Potash and forest products, rather than agriculture, provided the extra revenue required to survive.

In Rawdon, there were several potash works used to refine the ashes for the making of potash. One of the early families, the Coppings, who came to Rawdon about 1821, had their own potash works on the family farm. The Copping family sent a barrel of potash to Montreal once a month, year round! Quite an accomplishment, considering the inclement weather – rain, snow, unbearable heat and cold – and the black flies and mosquitoes, which were a real pestilence in the bush.

It is clear from George Copping’s diary that the whole family took part in this labour. George’s sons were constantly either chopping and drawing, or boiling for potash.

The trip to Montreal from Rawdon was an arduous two-day journey each way. If the roads and weather were good, they arrived home on the fourth day. If not, they might return in the wee hours of the fifth day.

The first twelve miles to the next town, St. Jacques, was over what were described as very poor roads. This lack of good roads was mostly due to the nature of the landscape: steep hills, rocky terrain and clay soil caused much grief to anyone trying to build roads. On several occasions the load had to be “helped out of the township,” as the road was in such bad condition – not from neglect so much as that Rawdon led down from a plateau that was mostly clay and rock. “Among other things, I find Rawdon very hilly and difficult of access,” Father

Cholette, a visiting Catholic priest, complained.

From St. Jacques, the roads were somewhat better: over a straight road and flat terrain to l'Assomption, where they would stable the horse and sleep at a farmer's along the way. The second day of travel was on to the St. Lawrence River, at the east end of the island of Montreal. In winter, they crossed the river on the ice; in open weather they hired a local farmer to take their wagon across. (It was not until the late nineteenth century that a bridge was built to link the north shore with the island.) The last 14 miles were across the island to the town.

On the way home, they would stop at the lime kiln in St. Jacques to pick up the lime needed to make the superior "pearl potash," which they always produced rather than the less profitable potash. Upon their return, George would make the rounds, paying off any accounts owed. Eventually, the sale of potash purchased a farm for four of George's sons as well as adding to his own holdings.

Beverly Prud'homme
Rawdon, QC

Naming South Shore communities

I write in reference to Kevin Erskine-Henry's excellent article on Montreal South ("Between St. Lambert and Longueuil," *QHN*, Fall 2012).

In 1966, I went to teach at South Shore Catholic High School in Longueuil. I arranged to take my lunch at the home of a French Canadian family that insisted that their community was properly called Ville Jacques Cartier.

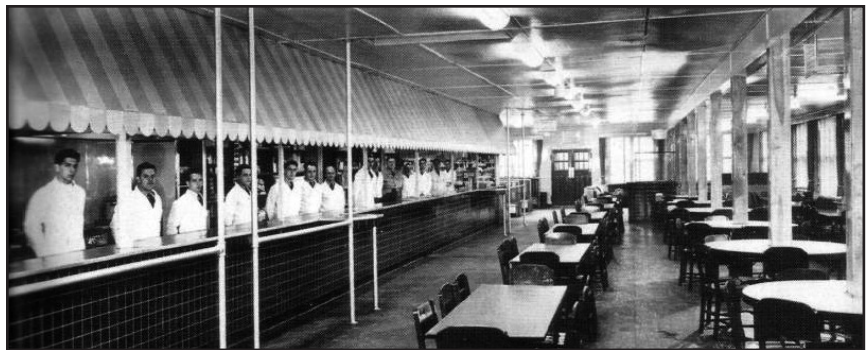
Interested as I was in the history, I was told that the whole area was orig-

nally called Montreal South.

Erskine-Henry brings that all back to currency. His meticulous research enables me to comprehend the transformation of the South Shore and to clarify many of the vignettes my French Canadian family related.

Great research and clear writing. Congratulations!

Gary Briand
Gaspé, QC



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The Gaspesian British Heritage Village

Keeping heritage alive and well on the Gaspé coast

by Jessica Campbell

Unbeknownst to many in Quebec, a veritable treasure trove of Gaspesian culture awaits discovery at the Gaspesian British Heritage Village in New Richmond, on the south coast of the Gaspé Peninsula. What began as a vision among the English-speaking residents of the area, inspired by the 1984 bicentennial celebrations surrounding the arrival of the Loyalists, opened to the public in 1989.

Today, the Gaspesian British Heritage Village comprises 33 hectares (82 acres) of land, and extends 1.6 km (1 mile) from Perron Boulevard to the Bay des Chaleurs. It features 20 historic buildings, most of them preserved turn-of-the-century houses, all but two of which were transported to the site to recreate a Victorian-era village.

The buildings include the Gendron store, a former general store which serves as a welcome centre, and Duthie Tavern, a pub that was frequented by sailors and shipbuilders in the nineteenth century. Unlike most museums or historic homes, the Village encourages interactivity: visitors are not only permitted to handle the artefacts, but some of the buildings are used for modern and

rather appropriate purposes.

The Willett House, for example, which was originally built for the manager of Lord Stanley's summer estate, and which later served as lodging for visiting fisherman, was renovated in 2011 and is now rented out during the summer months. This five-bedroom house includes a fully-equipped kitchen, and offers access to the bay and beach. Another building recently put to modern use is "School House No. 9," a former schoolhouse which was used during the summer of 2012 for a day camp.

New Richmond, a town of approximately 5,000 residents, boasts no less than three separate language groups – English, French and Mi'kmaq – each of which played a part in the founding of the Gaspé region. Yet, while each of these three groups has made significant economic and cultural contributions to the area, the Gaspesian British Heritage Village primarily seeks to honour those made by the English-speaking community. "One of our main missions is to make the public aware of the contribution the English-speaking community made to the development of the region," says Village director Kim Harrison.

Harrison proudly traces her family

roots back 200 years. Those roots include links to the Duthie brothers, early Scottish settlers who, while the Americans were fighting their Revolution, laid the foundations of the town with their shipyard at Duthie's Point. Interestingly, the Village's genealogy project was among the first undertaken by the organization. It is still a priority today, and the genealogy collection is continuously expanding with more local seniors interested in sharing and preserving their family histories.

It is no secret that the minority English-speaking community in the Gaspé is shrinking. In 1900, Anglophones made up 50% of the population, but the years of the Great Depression saw a mass exodus of those seeking work, and decades later another exodus followed the 1980 Quebec Referendum.

Today, the south coast of the Gaspé includes approximately 8,300 Anglophones, or 10% of the total population. While the town of New Richmond still enjoys a relatively large English community, its numbers are dropping. English-speakers are facing increasing challenges as a minority. Schools face the threat of closure, and it is getting more and more difficult for Anglophones to get access to English community programs. The Gaspesian British Heritage Village aims to increase this small but vibrant community's sense of pride, identity and appreciation of their roots.

The Village is working to reach out to more English-speaking tourists, who may have distant connections to New Richmond or the Gaspé region. Currently, 95% of summer tourists are Francophones.

The Village also seeks to "foster a mutual understanding among the three founding cultures of the Gaspé," by encouraging visitors, as well as volunteers from each cultural group, to participate in the various activities, programs and events at the site. While the French were the first Europeans to settle the area, they were not the first people in the region. The Mi'kmaq settled in the area



as early as the sixteenth century, and lived off the land for centuries. The Village pays tribute to that Aboriginal heritage and has included trapping and wildlife management and traditional Mi'kmaq medicines in its recent offering of traditional skills courses. The Aboriginal population is, in fact, the fastest growing group in the region, and the Village offers a perspective on the relationship between Aboriginals and settlers.

A number of upcoming projects are planned for the Village, including digitizing the genealogy collection and renovating the Gendron store to serve as a year-round centre for activities like "Building Bridges through Art," wherein participants will be paired up with people from different cultural and age groups and given the task of creating one another's portrait.

According to Kim Harrison, 40% of necessary funding has been confirmed in principal by Quebec's Ministry of Culture. The management of the Village is

hopeful that the remaining funds will come from Canada Economic Development and from fundraising activities. Unfortunately, a number of the buildings at the site require maintenance, and infrastructure funding is difficult to obtain. So generating new funds is a primary concern.

Increasing the number of tourists will help, and the Village has been successful in this respect. For example, during the summer of 2012, 3,200 visitors toured the Village (an increase of 32%), and roughly 9,200 came throughout the year. Beyond peak season (late June to September), the Village attracts thousands of visitors through events such as Halloween, Noël en Gaspésie, and the New Richmond Bluegrass Festival. Each year in December, the Village reenacts an old-fashioned Christmas and hosts various holiday festivities such as caroling, sleigh-riding, cooking, and touring the houses decked out in their finest nineteenth-century Christmas décor. At other times during the winter months,

the Village attracts cross-country skiers who use the site's forest trails. During the warmer months, Anglophone schools are offered private tours of the Village, which is another way that the Corporation is reaching out to the English-speaking community to remind them of the importance of their heritage.

Sources:

Interview with Kim Harrison, November 2012.

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The Fairbairn House Heritage Centre

Making Gatineau Valley history accessible to all

by Jessica Campbell

In the 1830s, Scottish immigrant and farmer William Fairbairn moved to the village of Wakefield in the Gatineau Valley. Besides settling his family and cultivating 100 acres of land, Fairbairn built a gristmill in the village. Fairbairn's mill would save local farmers the trouble of transporting their grain to distant gristmills. It also became the nucleus of an industrial complex around which villages and farming communities grew up. Known today as the Wakefield Mill, the mill has since been transformed into a country inn and is so pleasant a spot that it has attracted celebrities such as U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.

Today, there is cause to celebrate the restoration of another edifice handed down to us by William Fairbairn, a building equally important to the heritage of Wakefield because of its connection to the founder of the community: the Fairbairn House Heritage Centre.

Built in 1861, when Fairbairn was in

his sixty-ninth year, this simple farmhouse originally stood on the north side of Wakefield. Within the past two decades, it has been moved twice to escape demolition.

"It's a lucky house!" Michael Cooper, President of the Fairbairn House's board of directors, told *Quebec Heritage News* in a recent interview. Having belonged to the Fairbairn family until the early twentieth century, the house remained in local hands until 1990, when the Ministry of Transport purchased it with the intention of demolishing it to make room for a new road. It was then bought and moved a quarter of a mile away, just across Route 105, where it was used as a railroad station, and later a marina, until it was again threatened with demolition to create space for condos.

At the urging of the Gatineau Valley Historical Society (GVHS), the Municipality of La Pêche bought the house and relocated it to Wakefield's Hendrick Park. There could not be a more appropriate location for Fairbairn's home, surrounded by seven acres of parkland, including a heritage log cabin, a

picnic area, and a kitchen garden. It is also directly across from Wakefield's covered bridge, another landmark that the local community rebuilt in order to preserve its heritage, and about a kilometre from Wakefield's famous Black Sheep Inn. Given its access to the Trans-Canada Trail, the Fairbairn House Heritage Centre will also have the status of a trailhead station. Touring the grounds is just one of the many activities visitors to the Centre can enjoy.

Situated on the northeastern fringe of Wakefield, on the east bank of the Gatineau River, the Fairbairn House is officially the property of the municipality. In 2005, the GVHS initiated the formation of a separate group of volunteers to create the Musée Fairbairn Museum Steering Committee, a non-profit organization, in order to take charge of transforming the house into a bilingual heritage centre dedicated to transmitting local and regional history. Today, the committee is known as the Fairbairn House Cooperative.

According to Michael Cooper, the Fair-

bairn House is not officially a “historic site,” according to Quebec’s Cultural Law, since it was moved from its original location. This, of course, does not mean that the house is any less worthy of preservation.

It is also not a “museum,” per se. “Running a museum,” Cooper said, “involves a lot of rules. For example, you have to follow rigid requirements, such as maintaining climate and humidity control to look after and protect your artefacts – all of which is very expensive.” Establishing a heritage centre, Cooper explained, was more economical.

That said, the cost of renovating a house has inevitable costs, and municipal regulations required that the Cooperative hire union labourers. Volunteers were only permitted to work on landscaping. Consequently, by the time the work was completed in 2012, the cost of restoring the building’s interior and exterior was nearly \$400,000.

Once completed, however, the renovations were exceptional. The two-storey house now resembles the original sturdy home that Fairbairn had intended to “stand the test of time.” The house was repainted to match the colours that it would most likely have had in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

The house, which includes 3,200 square feet of public space, features distinctive diamond and roundel motifs on the exterior and interior. The Cooperative prides itself on its modern addition of a summer kitchen at the back which is used as the entrance. This gives visitors the sensation of being welcomed into a nineteenth-century country kitchen, with wooden tables and an antique-looking cooking stove donated by a local business. The summer kitchen also features an information desk and boutique. The rest of the first floor is used as exhibition space, with displays of photos and heirlooms relating to the Fairbairn family.

On September 1, 2012, the over 150 people who attended the Fairbairn Centre’s grand opening were the first to view the renovations and artefacts, and to hear about upcoming plans for the site. Some of the Centre’s first visitors were Fairbairn descendants. Throughout the weekends in September and the first half of October, over 625 visitors signed the Centre’s guestbook. Their comments attested to their excitement about the newly opened site.

The Centre is now developing projects to be ready for its first full season, which will begin in May, 2013. These projects do

not involve merely filling rooms with old furniture, since stagnant displays tend to cause people to lose interest very quickly. Rather, the Cooperative aims to enrich visitors’ knowledge of the past through modern means, such as vinyl banner displays, posters and computers. For the month of December, five students from the Algonquin College museum program joined the Fairbairn Centre’s team to explore innovative ways to showcase their exhibits.

The ground floor of the Centre will feature permanent exhibitions focusing on the daily activities of average citizens in the past and their efforts to develop the Gatineau Valley. The second floor will feature displays which will change from season to season. Exhibitions will be borrowed from other museums. The Missisquoi Museum in Stanbridge East has already offered to lend an exhibition, created as part of QAHN’s 2011 Spoken Heritage Online Multimedia Initiative. Once the Fairbairn Centre has acquired more funds, Cooper said, it will begin lending exhibits of its own to other institutions.

Fairbairn’s most unique feature is arguably its outreach and community programs. As the president put it, “the basement will become an autonomous, year-round community resource, providing a well-equipped meeting room and workshop area [which] will be available to the public for rent on a year-round basis.” Adult-workshops will focus on heritage-building research, such as restoring old photographs, genealogical work, playing nineteenth century games and studying historical artefacts.

Space at the Centre will also be reserved for exhibits produced by elementary

schools in the Gatineau Valley. Students from eight schools will be encouraged to re-search local and regional history. The Fairbairn Centre’s joint projects with the schools will be year-round and will include the Centre’s “suitcase kit program” in the winter months. This project will involve the creation of an educational suitcase filled with historical items representative of life in the Gatineau Valley, such as lumber or agricultural artefacts. Students will be able to handle and examine these items, as they will not be sharp or breakable.

Finally, the Centre expects to hold daily seasonal demonstrations, such as heritage gardening, wool-felting and herb drying, and to host birthday parties for children for which it will organize indoor and outdoor activities.

“Our mission is simple,” Michael Cooper said, summing up the Fairbairn House and all that it stands for. “To inform visitors, whether they are students, local residents, or from all over the world, about past stories of the Gatineau River Valley, so that they can know them, understand them and appreciate them. The Fairbairn House Heritage Centre has been created to make the social and political history of the area accessible and enjoyable in a refreshing way!”

Sources:

<http://www.fairbairn.ca>.

Interview with Michael Cooper, President of the Fairbairn House Heritage Centre, November 2012.



The Westmount Glen Arch

Commemorating a vital bridge 120 years on

by Barbara Covington

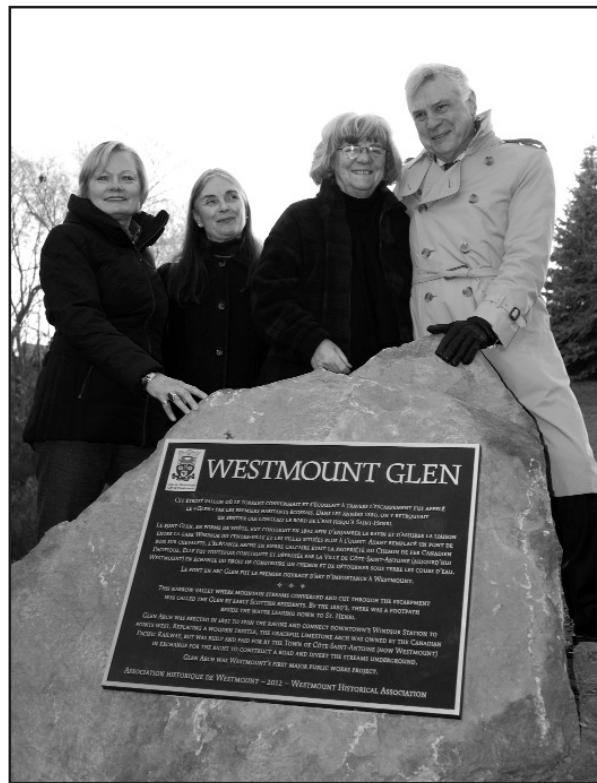
The sun was beginning to set on a cold November day as a group of people gathered on the slope leading down to the Glen Arch at the corner of St. Catherine Street and Lansdowne Avenue in Westmount. They were there to attend the unveiling of an historic plaque commemorating the building of the 120-year-old Glen Arch in 1892. The plaque gives a history of the Glen and surrounding area, and is attached to a large boulder acquired from what used to be a limestone quarry near the Beaconsfield Golf Club. It is the same quarry that supplied the stone used in the original construction of the Glen Arch. Westmount Mayor Peter Trent unveiled the plaque with Westmount Historical Association President Doreen Lindsay, along with Jane Martin and Caroline Breslaw, committee members who have been working on the Glen plaque project for some time.

What is a glen?

In Gaelic, a narrow valley, long and deep, often with a stream running through it.

The Glen in Westmount is just such a narrow valley, where numerous streams flowing down the west slope of Westmount's "little mountain" gathered and escaped through the escarpment to the St. Pierre River below in St. Henri.

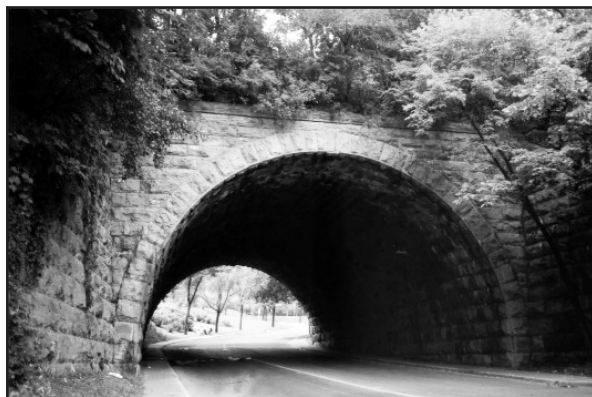
The area known as Westmount Park today was, at the turn of the century, densely wooded and broken up by deep ravines which collected the water run-off from the mountain. This water then continued down what is today known as Lansdowne Avenue, through the cut in the escarpment, which the early Scottish settlers of Côte Saint-Antoine (now Westmount) called the Glen. Before the settlers, the cut was used by Native peoples to access the St. Pierre River, which was their major mode of transportation. The settlers of Côte Saint-Antoine would also walk down the footpath beside the rushing stream to reach the area south of the escarp-



ment where they could access the Grand Trunk Railway station and the city proper (now Old Montreal).

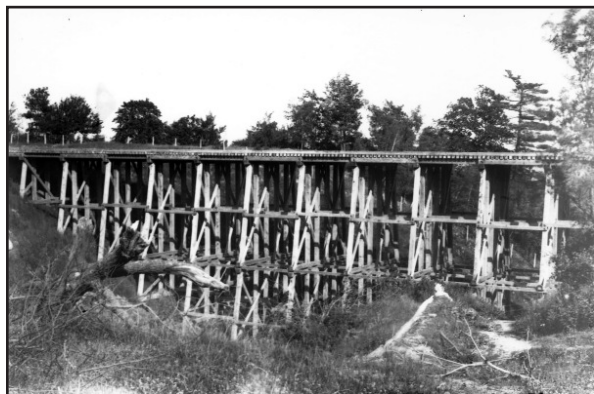
In 1882, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) acquired a Montreal east-end station, but it was not until 1889 that they were able to acquire the right-of-way from what is now Montreal West to their new Windsor Street Station. Topographically, this route was level and straightforward until the sudden drop from Côte Saint-Antoine and the valley of the Glen stream. To lay the access track to Windsor Station meant that a bridge had to be built over the 400-foot-wide Glen stream. Trestle bridges were, by far, the cheapest short-term solution for bridging such a gap, and were also the quickest. The CPR had used trestle bridges in many rural areas, but never before in a semi-urban setting. There were, however, several disadvantages to trestle bridges, although they appeared to be very solid structures. First, they were subjected to huge vibrations from the trains passing over them and could be shaken loose. Second, with the harsh winter weather they were prone to deterioration, especially the untreated wooden beams. They required regular inspections and had a life expectancy of 8-10 years. Despite the disadvantages, a wooden trestle bridge was built over the Glen stream and the new line to Windsor Station was opened in 1889.

However, the trestle bridge was replaced in 1892, after just three years of life. This was the result of the



Top: Jane Martin, Caroline Breslaw, Doreen Lindsay and Peter Trent unveil the Glen plaque. Photo: Gabor Szilasi.

Bottom: The Glen arch. Photo: Doreen Lindsay.



Côte Saint-Antoine town councillors’ ambitious plans to upgrade the southwest corner of the municipality with a new water drainage system. They wished to direct the water from the Glen stream underground and then build a road over it. As all the waterways fed into the Glen stream and it in turn emptied into the St. Pierre River in St. Henri, it was obvious that the drainage system would have to go under the trestle bridge. Putting the Glen stream underground would also encourage the Montreal tramcar company to extend their services from the current terminus at Greene Avenue into the southwest corner of the municipality. Building a road under the Glen trestle bridge would also connect the two towns of St. Henri and Côte Saint-Antoine.

There was, however, an obstacle to these plans. The CPR owned the land under and around the Glen trestle bridge, and the train tracks had a right-of-way. It would require an agreement with CPR to build the proposed drainage conduit and the road over it. Between 1890 and 1892, a series of negotiations between the CPR and the town council took place, which ended in an extraordinary agreement between them. The

Town of Côte Saint-Antoine would be given permission to build a new masonry bridge and to give it to the CPR, which would own it and maintain it “forever.” In return, the Town of Côte Saint-Antoine would be given the right of way to put in their underground drainage system and build a road over it; they would be responsible for maintaining the road and the drainage system. The masonry bridge or arch was completed in one year, using Trenton limestone quarried in Point Claire for its construction. The Town paid for the materials and funded the construction costs. It was Westmount’s first public works project and has lasted for 120 years, despite heavy train traffic over it and large volumes of vehicular traffic under it.

Sources:

Aline Gubbay and Sally Hoof, *Montreal’s Little Mountain: A Portrait of Westmount*, 1979.

Documents relating to the construction of Glen bridge, 1890-1892. Collated and supplied to the Westmount Historical Association by David Hammond. 2003.

Michael Leduc, *The Glen*, self-published, 2005.

Helene Saly, *Old Westmount: the Story of Westmount in Pictures and Words – An Historical Album from Indian Times to 1920*, 1967.

Barbara Covington is the former archivist for the Westmount Historical Association.



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A bank of art

The Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke

by Jessica Campbell



Sherbrooke’s Musée des beaux-arts (the MBAS) opens its doors to visitors every Tuesday through Sunday, from noon to 5 p.m. Located downtown on historic Dufferin Street in old Sherbrooke, near the Magog River Falls, and surrounded by an array of other cultural institutions, the museum is a pillar of Sherbrooke’s heritage. The museum’s tall stone exterior, classical interior and wide spaces are sleek and filled with grandeur. Dating back to 1876, the building originally served as the head office of the Eastern Townships Bank, which was later absorbed by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. An authentic bank vault, which is in the process of becoming its own exhibition, and a mosaic on the floor (featuring the letters E-T-B), are testament to the building’s past.

The agreement relating to the donation of the bank building by its former owner (the CIBC) to the museum mentions that the museum must follow a policy of integrating art and historical architecture. In any case, says Curator Sarah Boucher, “the museum promises to be a bank in some respect: a bank of art.”

Although it occupied a smaller building before moving to its current location in 1996, the museum has been “promoting the fine arts, and the appreciation of their universal and regional flavor” for the past thirty years. It has paid particular attention to supporting and

conserving works by Eastern Township artists and visual art depicting the Eastern Townships.

Every year, the MBAS houses ten exhibitions featuring selections from both its permanent and rotating collections. It also borrows works from other Canadian museums, such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

On the museum’s ground floor, visitors will find the rotating collection, a display which changes approximately every eight weeks. The rotation is ideal as the museum no longer has space to house new works. Discarding or selling any items, however, is out of the question: “We do not buy or sell from our permanent collection. We do not accept everything, but what we do accept stays,” says Boucher. With a permanent collection of 4,600 works, it is no wonder the museum’s three storage spaces are full. Boucher hopes that by 2016 the MBAS will acquire another building in Sherbrooke which it can use for storage space.

The museum prides itself on its permanent collection, which is exhibited on its second and third floors. The third floor displays thematic shows every five years. The exhibition “Spaces and Landscapes” has occupied this space since 2010, and showcases Canadian, Quebec, and Eastern Townships landscapes. Walking on to the third floor literally gives one the chills – for the sake of the artwork, staff are required to keep the space at a certain temperature.

Arranged into three sections – traditional, modern and contemporary – the art covers an array of media, such as painting, pencil drawings, etchings and photography. These works are valued not merely by lovers of art, but are appreciated by historians and other scholars, as well.

The “traditional” style includes mid- to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century works, and portrays nature “in a grandiose and idealized manner.” One painting in this group, by Eastern Township artist Aaron Allen Edson, depicts what the painting’s donor speculated to be a view of Orford Mountain (1867).



Another work, by British artist William H. Bartlett, depicts a scene on the St. Francis River (1840).

In the “modern” section of the exhibit, “pictorial conventions have been subtly put aside to make room for a freer touch.” Here, the works generally depict the artists’ impressions of their scenes rather than reality. This stage in art history bloomed at the turn of the century, and while the shift away in this country from strict academic aesthetic style was not identical to what it was in Europe, it saw artists in Quebec blend the traditional aestheticism with innovative style. The social context at the time provided Quebec artists with different inspirations. The works on display here convey their perspectives of the industrial and scientific development at the time. In one work by Quebec artist Marc-Aurèle Fortin (1888-1970), a tractor is juxtaposed with a vibrantly coloured tree and pasture.

A small nook at the back of the museum, situated mid-way between “modern” and “contemporary,” is devoted entirely to the works of Frederick Simpson Coburn (1871-1960), one of the Townships’ most renowned artists. Born in Upper Melbourne, Quebec, Coburn received his artistic training at the Academy of Berlin and the École des beaux-arts in Paris, before returning home to escape the outbreak of the First World War. The museum proudly presents a large selection of works from “this highly esteemed exemplar of Canadian artistic heritage,” whose inspiration stems from the landscapes of the Eastern Townships. Donated by the Coburn family in 1996 and 2001, the museum’s Coburn collection includes sketches, drawings and paintings, many of which depict the winter rural landscapes of the artist’s birthplace.

The third component of the exhibition, “contemporary” art, often attracts the most attention. The works in this section were clearly intended to go beyond conventionalism, and reveal current artistic styles and an attempt to stretch the boundaries by introducing new media,

which, in our fragmented post-modern age, “reflects the world in which we now live!” This section also includes local artists who have been influenced by the trend to go up and out of conservatism and into the mind-frame that

says, “anything is art!” It is a trend founded on the experiments of mid-twentieth century art. It is constantly “in progress,” or evolving to “reflect the interests of society,” and stands as “a means of interpreting current values.”

The museum’s second floor houses additional pieces from the permanent collection, works that are rotated more often. In a recent show, works were selected for their significance in terms of the

history of the museum. Named “Three*Times*Ten,” this show was divided into sections corresponding to the museum’s three decades -- 1982-1992, 1993-2002 and 2003-2012 -- and portrayed how the efforts of Sherbrooke residents and “lovers of art and the Eastern Townships,” succeeded in coordinating art exhibitions for locals and tourists. Also included in this show were portraits of community members who had spearheaded the museum project. Some of the artworks featured were among the institution’s earliest pieces. The first decade of the exhibition featured the modest introduction of a few paintings in Wellington Street store showcases. The Museum Foundation finally established an art space on Wellington in 1982. In 1988, the museum moved to a building formerly occupied by the law faculty at the Université de Sherbrooke. By 1990, it was officially recognized by Quebec’s Ministry of Culture. The second decade in the exhibition highlighted the museum’s move to the bank building in 1996. And the third decade featured recent projects at the museum, such as fundraisers and recent shows.

Now the museum is entering its fourth decade. As “a major agent for conservation and exhibition of visual arts in the Eastern Townships,” it is helping to bring culture and innovation to Sherbrooke and its surrounding areas.

Sources:

Interview with Sarah Boucher and Lisa Boyer of the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke.

<http://www.mbas.qc.ca/qui-sommes-nous.php?lang=en>.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/aaron-allan-edson>.

<http://www.eastertownships.org/pressRelease/1105/fred-erick-simpson-coburn>.

4-H

Quebec's young farmers celebrate 100 years

by Alyssa Fournoux

Country music fills the air of the empty building at McGill's Macdonald College, in St. Anne-de-Bellevue. The music is coming from inside the normally popular student bar, the Ceilidh. Tonight, chairs sit on tables and the bar is empty, with the exception of a group of students working out a new square dancing routine for an upcoming competition with tips from coach Angela Neal. The students are members of MAC/JAC, a 4-H club for CEGEP and university students. The group meets every week to socialize and square dance.

4-H is a grassroots organization aimed at rural youth. There are 4-H clubs across the world, teaching young people about agriculture, and building their leadership and life skills. The organization in Canada has expanded beyond agricultural activities to include urban youth and to offer more opportunities. The popular project in Quebec 4-H is dairy cattle, as almost 40 per cent of dairy cows in Canada are in Quebec, according to the 2011 Census of Agriculture.

In 2013, 4-H celebrates its centennial in Canada. One hundred years after the organization's founding, the lifestyle of Canadians has changed drastically. The concentration of the population no longer lives on the family farm, but in big cities, detached from agriculture. The majority of Canadians don't have the opportunity to see a cow every day; they only see pieces of cow, wrapped in cellophane at the local grocery store.

The 2011 Federal Agricultural Census revealed 88 per cent of Quebec farms are still family-owned. That number is constantly decreasing while the average age of farmers is increasing. Quebec only makes up 14 per cent of Canadian farms. The shift presents a struggle for Quebec 4-H, as it attempts to balance its commitment to rural youth

but also to define itself in the twenty-first century.

Angela Neal joined 4-H when she was nine years old, at the encouragement of her relative Carolyn Cameron, who was one of the five founding members of the Quebec Young Farmers organization, which later became Quebec 4-H. Cameron's own children had outgrown 4-H, but she saw the opportuni-



ties the organization would have for Neal, who had low self-esteem. The girl resisted joining, but Cameron insisted, and she eventually gave in. Neal became very involved: she showed cattle, square danced and later sat as the Quebec 4-H president. She is spending the next year and a half working as the Quebec 4-H 100th anniversary Project Coordinator, researching and recording the history of 4-H in Quebec.

The organization began in the United States in the early 1900s, and remains popular there today. 4-H crossed the border into Canada in 1913, when the federal Department of Agriculture gave a group of youth in Roland, Manitoba, a

starter kit of poultry eggs, seeds and potatoes to care for. A representative from the department would visit the group periodically and offer guidance. The goal was to get the young people to "learn to do by doing," which is the motto 4-H adopted in the 1950s. The project was successful and other clubs, initially called the Boys and Girls Clubs, were created across the country, with farmers donating resources and advice in order to teach youth about the importance of agriculture.

Neal says that, although there were young farmer clubs scattered across the province, the 4-H movement didn't reach Quebec until much later, although there were young farmer clubs around the province that originated in the 1920s and 30s. An exchange with Albertan young farmers really ignited the movement. Colleen Younie acted as the first president of Quebec 4-H in 1970, then known as Quebec Young Farmers. Although she didn't travel to Alberta, she remembers when the young Albertans visited Quebec. They compared and contrasted agriculture in the two provinces. But Younie remembers clearly that the Quebec teenage girls were astonished that the Albertans were allowed to wear jeans to school, as

they still had to wear skirts. The Quebecers who travelled to Alberta discovered a strong 4-H organization that connected and supported young farmer clubs. The group vowed to create their own provincial office.

Neal says the Quebec Provincial Association held its first meeting in 1969. According to *A History of Quebec Young Farmers*, membership was initially 50 cents. Its mandate, as it is today, was to serve Anglophone rural youth, provide resources for projects and connect clubs provincially, nationally, and later on, internationally.

Younie remembers that at first the Quebec Young Farmers primary goal

Members of MAC / JAC 4-H square dance.
Photo: courtesy of Quebec 4-H.

was to develop leadership skills and offer opportunities to older members, such as exchanges. Quebec 4-H later became a way to connect clubs across the province.

Younie grew up on a farm in the Eastern Townships. She says her 40-year career in 4-H as a member, a leader, and a parent provided her with many opportunities and skills, but more importantly, a pride in agriculture. She says 4-H also helped guide her into her career: she currently works in the Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture, where every day she uses skills she learned in 4-H. "Mostly it is my people skills and leadership abilities that I attribute to 4-H, as well as a love for and understanding of farming and rural life," she says.

A unique aspect of Quebec 4-H is that the board of directors is made up entirely of 4-H members. Neal says this is a source of pride for many members, as it gives them an outlet to develop their own voice.

"It's important for young people to be in an organization where people actually listen to them," says Neal. "Where they can make their own decisions. Where they can learn parliamentary procedure without someone forcefully shoving it down their throats. They can learn it, they can practice it and it's so useful to them later on in life."

The opportunity for 4-H to connect youth from non-agricultural backgrounds dates back to when Younie was a young member of the Lennoxville 4-H clubs. She says her cousin from Montreal would stay at their farm every summer. Her cousin would join her at fairs and would even show a calf in 4-H.

Younie passed down the 4-H tradition to her own six children, who were all members of 4-H in Prince Edward Island. Neal hopes to one day have that opportunity for her future children. It's what motivates her continued involvement in the organization.

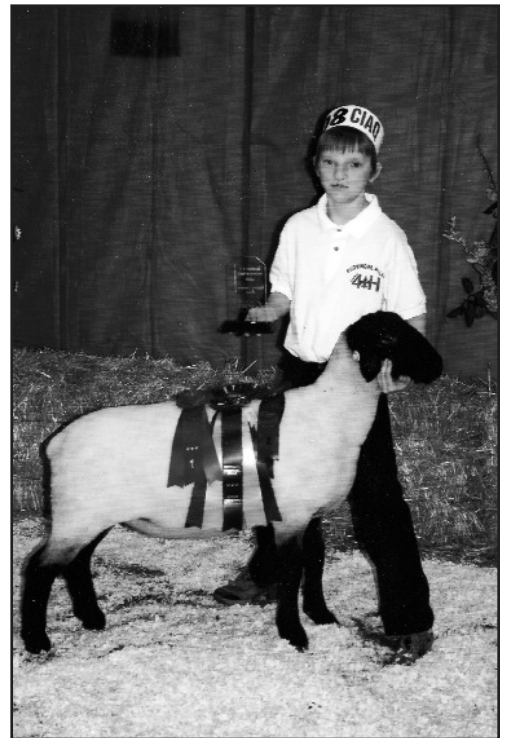
"I really want my kids to have that opportunity when they're growing up, and I don't want it to just fizzle out," says Neal. "For me this is a way I can contribute to make sure it's a sustainable organization."

Neal notes that the majority of youth join 4-H because a relative encouraged them to, as Cameron had with her. Neal suggests that promoting the organization in schools may be the recipe for Quebec 4-H's long-term survival.

"There's a lot more projects than actually showing livestock," says Neal. She says these projects could be great opportunities for urban youth. She points to their public speaking program, which could lend skills to both urban and rural youth and the program would be a great way to promote 4-H in schools.

"We don't really have the funding to actively go out and promote 4-H all the time, at the provincial level," Neal continues. "We could go into schools and say: 'Here is all this information that you should have.' And then constantly bombard them. 'If you want to have a public speaking project, have a 4-H in your school.'"

Neal says it's a model that works well in Jamaica. Her sister, Julie Neal, recently travelled to that country on a



4-H exchange. Julie said 4-H was promoted in all the schools as a way of learning about agriculture and farming techniques. In some cases the students grew the produce that is served in their cafeteria.

Younie believes that even 100 years later 4-H is still relevant to today's youth. She says that, although rural youth now have access to the same opportunities as urban youth, 4-H still provides skills that are unavailable in rural areas, such as building leadership skills, learning how to care for animals, practicing public speaking, and running meetings. She notes that involving urban youth may be a challenge, but believes that because there is an increased interest in where our food comes from and how to produce it, 4-H will remain a relevant opportunity to expose youth to agriculture.

Alyssa Fourneaux is the Public Relations assistant at the Quebec 4H Association in St. Anne-de-Bellevue.



Top: 4-H'er Joshua Lockwood is the 2009 winner of 12-15 sheep showmanship. Photo: courtesy of Quebec 4H.

Bottom: Members of the Howick 4-H club. All are children of 4-H alumni. Photo: Michel Presseau.

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GUIDED TOURS

WHY I DON'T KNOW FRENCH YET

by Elizabeth Dent

“If you want to learn French, you need to get a French boyfriend.”

The first person to say this to me was a Montreal taxi driver. I was making small talk with him, hoping I would come across as a local. I learned the hard way that tourists can end up on “long rides” with taxi drivers who somehow get lost taking you to your destination. English gives you away.

I moved to *La Belle Province* from *Beautiful British Columbia* in 2004. I was fired here in Montreal, from my job as a fine-dining server on a “pri-

on a small island in Desolation Sound, got a job at a hotel, got fired, overstayed my welcome, and got kicked out. I then moved to Vancouver, where it was so hard to find any real employment that I moved to the Alberta Rockies to be a waitress in Lake Louise. Upon my return, I lived in friends’ spare rooms, moved back in with my mother, protested the Iraq war, and crashed my car. Getting fired in Montreal, at this point, was par for the course.

The train I was working on did

artist by producing bilingual theatre. I will have my finger on the pulse of the Montreal arts community. There’s no point in staying in B.C. with Gordon Campbell as Premier in this economy.

It wasn’t like I didn’t know anything about the Quebec experience, either. I had studied French in high school, and had even been to Quebec City as a child. Growing up, my British-born, Saskatchewan-raised mother made tourtière from scratch every Christmas Eve to pay homage to French Canada. I had even acted in



vate luxury train.” I was caught stealing a bottle of the free-pour, dining room wine. Fortunately, I was used to getting fired, so I handled it pretty well.

At 28, I was shaping up to be quite a disappointment. You know the person that people see at their high school reunion and whisper to one another: “*But she had so much potential...?*”

I never went to my high school reunion. I had a theatre degree from the University of Victoria but it was becoming apparent I wasn’t going to use it. In Vancouver – my home base for the last couple of years – there was no apartment to go back to, no job, and no boyfriend.

In 2000, I moved in with my aunt

trips between Vancouver and Montreal during the summer. I had also spent the spring working the *Copper Canyon* tour in Mexico, and that fateful October night we had just finished the *Fall in New England and Quebec* tour. We were about to do a trip down to Savannah, Georgia, where we would weave through the Southern U.S., and return up the Pacific Coast. Until they found the bottle of wine in my linen bag. They kicked me off immediately.

I decided to stay in Montreal so I wouldn’t have to come home a bigger failure than I already was. I did PR on my story when I told it to my friends and family in Vancouver. *I’ve decided to stay in Montreal and learn French. I am going to become a truly Canadian*

scenes from Michel Tremblay’s *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*. It wasn’t the same as speaking French, but it was something.

Incidentally, a few weeks after getting fired in Montreal, I went on a first date with a Québécois man – I forget his name now. He took me to Mont Tremblant for the weekend, my first Quebec winter and our first date. He didn’t speak English, I didn’t speak French. On the drive up, we sat there in his car, hacking away at conversation, to an alternating soundtrack of Céline Dion and Shania Twain. On Saturday afternoon he accidentally drove through the front window of a resto-bar. The date never got better. By Sunday we were both just talking to

each other in our native tongues, neither making an attempt to understand or translate for the other. The only French I learned from that date was “Tabernac-colis!”

My savings were almost gone by December. I needed to get a job, which was intimidating. Conventional wisdom says that unilingual Anglophones in Montreal are relegated to work in telemarketing. So without questioning it, I started applying and easily got a job. I made English-speaking friends, many of whom were from the suburbs of English Canada. Some came to Montreal to start rock-bands; others came for the cheap tuition. All of us were convinced that we could live the bohemian ideal. As if the *je ne sais quoi* we were lacking from our lives could be found with a simple change of area code.

For three years I lived in my narrow, Anglo world, cut off from the art and culture I was supposedly pursuing, and from jobs that paid well enough to afford French lessons. I lacked as much direction in French Canada as I did in English Canada. I was a unilingual, uncultural failure. And then I lost my telemarketing job.

Fortunately, this allowed me to claim EI by January of 2008, and because I was getting *chomage*, I became eligible to take Francization classes.

Francization classes are offered free-of-charge by the Quebec government to immigrants who have a weak command of French. They are intended to establish French as the primary language of business and expose the student to the cultural experience of living in Quebec. The majority of the students of Francization are immigrants.

They put me in the beginner class, despite my years of French in school. The class was full of adults from places like Mexico, Bangladesh, Columbia, Iran, Syria, China, Sri Lanka, Bulgaria, and Russia. Many of my classmates were learning their third, fourth, or fifth language. *What do you call someone who knows multiple languages? A Polyglot. What do you call someone who only knows one language? An Anglophone.*

During the morning class, our teacher went over the curriculum, which was comprised of modules that

detailed the everyday life of an “average” Quebecer. We learned the weather, salutations, how to buy groceries. The basics. The kind of stuff you should know if you are planning to stay. The kind of stuff I should have known by then.

In the afternoon, those of us on income assistance were mandated to practice conversational French. Our teacher for this class was Paul, a Philipino who knew seven languages. His topics included: gay adoption, and why it’s bad for children; China, and how everything made there is crap; why men and women are not equal, and shouldn’t be treated as such; and how the ideal age for marriage is 50 for men and 25 for women because women prefer older men. The refugees and immigrants participated in the conversations with more grace than I did. I was rendered speechless with too many opinions and too little vocabulary.

After a couple of months, I had managed to befriend all the Anglophones in conversation class. Dennis was in the same *bateau* as I was; he was an Anglo-Quebecer. Rosalie was a McGill grad from Vermont. Carlos, from Argentina, was not an Anglophone; however, he was fluent in English. We sat together in the cafeteria of the converted St. Henri high school at lunch time. We were bound by the promise of stimulating conversation, which went beyond discussing the weather. Sometimes Red would join us. Red had orange hair and was actually named Robin, but changed her name to Red in the middle of level two.

Red preferred to communicate in English in class despite our teachers’ best efforts, and the school’s mandated “French only” policy. She was twenty-three years old and from Cape Breton, taking French now “to please her boyfriend.” She perfectly reflected the stereotype of an “arrogant” Anglo, the type that gives the rest of us a bad rap. Over months of watching her brow furrow in anger over the prospect of having to communicate, *en francais*, we grew accustomed to her disruptions, seeing her through the eyes of immigrant classmates and French teachers. While we were united as Anglophones,

we didn’t want the stigma of being compared to Red.

As I passed level after level, I gained a false sense of myself becoming bilingual. Each day I was conversing in French, thinking in French, and drinking beer in French. I went North with our school in the spring to my first *cabane à sucre* to learn about the maple syrup industry firsthand. Our class did walking tours in Old Montreal to learn about the city’s colonial history. When Paul went on sabbatical from teaching (he was also a translator in the courts), our next teacher had us sing Leclerc’s “*Mes Souliers*” repeatedly every day. We watched many French and Québécois movies, but none were as educational as the *Quebec 400-Year Anniversary* DVD. Carlos and I were in stitches over Céline Dion’s ostentatious performance, only to be reprimanded by a furious teacher. I was an arrogant Anglo, after all.

After eight months of intensive Francization, my EI ran out. I eagerly applied for work at a job fair, thinking of myself as “practically bilingual.” I proudly walked in with my CV and my savvy repartee. They immediately laughed at me, switching to English. Outside of French class, I couldn’t distinguish the Québécois accent, even when I was at the grocery and being asked if I needed a bag. Despite eight months of daily practice, I was right back where I started. The dream of bilingual theatre was, at this point, dead.

I was beginning to see English as a bad friend, the kind who tries to sabotage your diet. There was no choice; I had to go back to work. I got a full time job, in English. I made some more English-speaking friends, and worked in an English part of the city. I tried to take French courses after work, but at age 33, I was starting to have other things I wanted to do in my spare time. I was thinking about going back to school. I wanted to get in shape. I had also begun to write. I was living in English, meeting more Anglophones, developing my English communications skills.

I also needed a place to live. I answered several Craigslist ads and found one for a place near the Jean Talon market, advertised as *le petit*

palais. It was a communal house looking for their sixth roommate, so I went for a visit. I was greeted by Pascale, a bubbly Québécoise with dyed red hair, glasses, and a warm smile. I liked her immediately. She was a feminist doing her degree at UQAM. She told me about Leslie, another roommate, who, I was told, was working in Verdun as a “street worker.” Before I met her, I thought I might end up living with an escort. It turned out that she worked with at-risk kids.

The other roomies were a couple – Miriam and Matthew – and a French guy named Sven. They were everything I could dream of in *colocs*; they dumpster-dived, were politically active, musical and artistic, and were all, save one, Francophone. While I was waiting for the French boyfriend, I would be immersed in French at home! I moved in on August 1.

Pascale threw frequent dinner parties, at least three times a week. They usually had a heavily Québécois guest-list of activists and artists. I didn’t understand most of the conversations but mingled anyway; this was the elusive scene I had wanted to penetrate since moving to Quebec. I had an activist history in B.C. that I had lost touch with over the years since moving here. I attended several demonstrations, only to realize that I didn’t know enough French to feel comfortable. In the hotbed of political dissent, I didn’t want to find out I had just spent an hour fighting for the wrong cause. Now, exposed to this other world – *East of Saint-Laurent* – bilingual art and activism was starting to seem possible again.

I was going to school at McGill at the time, studying public relations, on top of my full-time job. Pascale and Matthew were still full time students, while Leslie and Sven worked part-time hours. Miriam was unemployed. I was realizing that we had lifestyle differences, age differences. Our meetings and general daily discourse was always *en français* and I was starting to get frustrated. The dinner parties became more frequent, and the kitchen was often full of dishes, cooks, and food and decisions were being made when I could only half-understand what was going on. I wasn’t getting

my phone messages; Sven spoke no English at all. Within two months I realized that it wasn’t going to work out. As uncomfortable as it had been to go on a date with someone who I couldn’t communicate with, it was impossible for me to live with people I couldn’t communicate with. My need to communicate trumped my plan to learn French.

I moved to Verdun November 1, 2009, with a new, fully bilingual roommate and his beautiful dog, Sandy. It marked a turning point for my tenure here. I finally accepted my Anglophone self. I stopped desperately trying to answer questions in French during simple interactions and started converting to English, or *Français*, when required. Now, when someone approaches me with “Bonjour,” I just say “Hi” back. I feel like a real Montrealer, someone who doesn’t get taken on “long rides” in a taxi. Life has gotten easier.

Before moving here, I never thought of myself as an Anglophone, or a WASP, or even a B.C. girl. Now I identify as all three. In Vancouver, I had always felt like an outsider, but in Montreal I really am one. Maybe I wouldn’t have stayed if I ever felt at home, or if I ever managed to learn how to communicate in French. Perhaps I, too, have a distinct culture.

The experience of language, I’ve learned, goes beyond words and sentences. Being a B.C. Anglophone in Montreal is my frame of reference for what I write. This is why I’m tabling the bilingual theatre idea for good. Just as the Québécois experience is defined (in part) by being the minority in Canada; my experience as a non-Quebecer in an Anglophone minority here, has defined me. It’s like a microcosmic joke. I moved to Montreal as a B.C. reject only to find my cultural and artistic identity as one. This is probably why, when I finally did get a boyfriend a couple of years ago, he ended up being an Anglophone.

This is a story from QAHN’s “StoryNet” project, which matched emerging writers with established mentors to produce innovative works of non-fiction with a heritage theme.

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FARMVILLE

“Charging to the Potato” in Maisonneuve
by Jessica Grosman

When I moved to Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, a neighbourhood in Montreal’s east end, my family tried to scare me back to Montreal West. They listed a string of negative stereotypes: high unemployment, grimy taverns, biker gangs, and prostitution – problems that had only multiplied as the factories closed. Promenades Ontario, the main shopping street, is a jumble of pawnshops, *casse-croûtes*, hair salons and empty storefronts. Over the past five years, boarded-up buildings have been transformed into *terroir* food shops, showcasing Quebec products. Neighbours have worked together and turned four garbage-strewn alleys green; they covered apartment buildings with plants and lined fences with zucchinis and green beans.

I grew up on a farm but hate the smell, dirt and endless hard work; I prefer the city’s bright lights, entertainment, and convenience. I do keep one link to the country. Every week I wait in a parking lot, just off St. Catherine Street East, with seventy families, and collect my box of organic vegetables, picked fresh that morning in the Eastern Townships. Elsewhere, Sarah takes urban agriculture a step further: she has a chicken coop. She moves the bottomless cage everyday so Rainbow Sparkle (Sarah’s daughters named the hen) can peck and scratch at a different patch of the lawn. Keeping chickens in Montreal is illegal so Sarah risks a fine in return for five or six eggs a week. But it’s not about warm fresh eggs or money saved at the grocery store. Sarah wants to teach the kids where food comes from. Rainbow Sparkle is an accessible, pet-sized way to reconnect to the food chain.

When the town of Hochelaga was annexed to Montreal in 1883, the area to the east was developed as a model industrial city called Maisonneuve. Since then, progress could be measured by counting billowing smokestacks. Yet under the area’s industrial exterior, it has always teemed with farm life. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Viau farm still stood on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Poorer residents worked leftover plots of land and kept a few animals so they’d have products to sell at the market. Farmers baled hay in



parcs and piled manure in back alleys.

In 1917, during a recession, urban agriculture came out of the shadows. The Montreal Cultivation Committee lobbied the city of Maisonneuve for formal urban agricultural programs. Maisonneuve transformed a public park into a gigantic vegetable garden in order to feed the poor. But planting crops required investment and the city had not approved a budget. In order to do his job, the garden’s superintendent, J. N. Lamy, gambled; he bet the harvest could cover the costs of starting the garden as well as feed the city’s poor.

We don’t know much about J. N.

Lamy; even his full name is a mystery. Like most ordinary men, he left few traces in the archives. But when he was the garden superintendent he kept meticulous records. Most of his notes are in one yellow covered ledger, now in the City of Montreal archives, entitled *Cultures intensives de Parc Maisonneuve*. He called it “intensive agriculture” because he knew it was a huge venture. Every week, Lamy recorded the jobs completed and the hours his team of five worked. He calculated how much tending the garden cost; the tally carries forward for over twenty

pages. Each detail was recorded in a steady, neat cursive. There is one exception: the recurring notation “chargés aux patates” is slightly askew. It crawls up the margins. The three words accompany smaller expenses Lamy couldn’t afford to pay. The note became more common as the season progressed.

The city of Maisonneuve was crisscrossed by three train lines, had a busy port in the south and the Angus Shops rail yard in the north, and a sugar refinery, clothing manufacturers and other factories in between. It was a working-class town of 36,000 residents who sweated in factories and small shops, lived in rented apartments and had little input on city development. While a smaller group of factory owners lived in the area and led local politics. Charles-Theodore Viau, of Biscuiterie Viau, and Oscar Dufresne, city councillor and owner of a shoe factory, were not only interested in profits, they also aimed to build a grand, world-class city. Inspired by the City Beautiful movement in the United States, the middle class

pushed for a series of beautification projects and new parks to match their vision.

From 1910 to 1917, Maisonneuve was given a makeover. The city planted thousands of trees, hired unemployed workers to landscape boulevards, and built Art Nouveau style buildings, such as the market on the northern end of Morgan Avenue. In front of the market, families and vendors relaxed around the fountain and listened to the rhythm of water drops. "La Fermière," sculpted by Alfred Laliberté, depicts everyday scenes from the market: a woman carrying a wicker basket, a boy bringing a lamb, and turtles spraying rainbows of water.

In 1917, Mr. P. Leduc stood on the steps of his home and thought about his large hungry family and his ailing parents. He wondered how he could continue to feed everyone. The price of potatoes had tripled in the past two years – and the Leduc family ate a lot of potatoes, because they were filling and used to be cheap. As food prices increased, residents thought about growing their own food and began to look at the city in new ways. Leduc surveyed the land around his home on Pie-IX Boulevard; he didn't see empty lots waiting for urban development, but "unproductive fields." If only Maisonneuve's politicians let men like him work the city's land.

Leduc wrote letters to the mayor and the newspaper that outlined a simple way to feed the city: grow potatoes in Maisonneuve Park. The park was supposed to be Maisonneuve's green jewel, the prized centre of the garden city, and gardens were meant to be pleasant scenery, not small-scale agriculture. Yet the Parks Commission could not refuse the people's request. Previous plans for the park had floundered because the ambitious project cost more than Maisonneuve could afford.

In March 1917, the city of Maisonneuve

approved a resolution that authorized farming in the park. In May, Lamy started his job as superintendent. He uprooted the flowers, ploughed the lawns, and churned the earth. Then his team worked slowly across the brown, rutted landscape. They spent over a month sowing seeds.

A new venture meant everything had to be bought or borrowed, but Lamy had few resources. On May 29, Lamy bought \$241.75 worth of seeds on credit. He then bartered part of the harvest to rent a harrow, and to buy burlap sacks and hardware to build fences. The note "chargés aux patates" preceded each purchase. The humble potato became currency, like salt during the Holy Ro-



man Empire.

If it had been a meager harvest, it is unclear how Lamy would have covered the expenses or what he would have said to hungry families who were promised potatoes. City council did not know what Lamy was doing. The superintendent's reports contained concrete numbers and no mention of the charge-to-the-potato system. By June, the potato seeds had cost \$771.65 and another \$955.80 was spent in wages, yet not one green stem poked above the ground.

Then two weeks of heavy rain flooded the fields. Potato seeds floated into the sewers and a fifth of the crop rotted in the ground. Lamy refused to let the garden fail. He ploughed and har-

rowed more land, taking over part of Mont-de-La-Salle, a school that was owned by the Church. Replacement seeds were charged-to-the-potatoes too.

The rest of the summer was spent weeding, watering, and waiting. Finally, beans appeared, then the leafy tops of carrots and beets, heads of cabbages, onions, corn, and turnips sprouted... followed by the potato plants. Ordinary people and ordinary vegetables had changed the park; it buzzed green with all its crops.

Success brought new worries and more expenses. During the day, workers struggled with insects that munched on the plants, while at night trespassers stole the first vegetables. Lamy hired a guardsman, at nine dollars a week – charged-to-the-potatoes.

In September, Lamy and his men leaned on their shovels and dug into the ground. Whiffs of sweat and loam must have made Lamy suck in his breath, hopeful. Their shovels tilted the earth up and revealed mounds of Prince Edward Potatoes like gold nuggets. The team pulled potatoes out of the ground until the end of October, filling 1,050 eighty-pound sacks. The heavy sacks may have eased Lamy's mind; the wait was over, the gamble won. He managed to feed several hundred families and cover his costs.

Lamy checked off all but one of the charged-to-the-potatoes marginalia. It was an end of season bonus that he had asked the city to approve. As superintendent, Lamy earned eighteen dollars a week – the same as the labourers, but he had more experience and responsibilities. The man who invented the charge-to-the-potato system tested it one last time. He asked for ten sacks of potatoes. Joseph Écrement, Maisonneuve Secretary-Treasurer, refused and the next day ended Lamy's contract. Lamy helped feed the city, but the harvest must have been bittersweet.

The vegetable gardens in Maisonneuve Park were never replanted. The

rush to make the city beautiful had put Maisonneuve in so much debt the province annexed the city to Montreal in 1918. Maisonneuve Park eventually turned into what the city councilors and the middle class had envisaged; it just took longer than expected. A private golf course was built on the site but the space was eventually reconverted into a public park.

Today, at the neighbouring Biodome, a fancy zoo, animals are caged in five elaborate diorama-style ecosystems. The tower of the Olympic Stadium bulges into every single view of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve.

Despite the changes, there's still space for ambitious horticulture and humble vegetable gardens. The Botanical Gardens occupy the southwestern corner of the former park and to the north are 172 plots in a community garden. On one of my regular visits to the Botanical Gardens, I admired the magnolia trees, but also remembered Lamy's feat, muttering under my breath: good potatoes grew here.

Recently, Sarah's family moved. The new backyard wasn't set-up for a coop so they returned the hen to the farm. The farmer says Rainbow Sparkle is the only hen that doesn't run away when he enters the coop. The hen changed the family's backyard, but they also changed the hen.

Along the sidewalks of my street, residents have adopted, tidied, and tended to the tiny rectangles of ground that border the trees. Their actions mirror past residents who gardened vacant lots. And in this way, urban agriculture persists. There's a long history of experimenting, of trying to make agriculture work in a city.

This is a story from QAHN's "StoryNet" project, which matched emerging writers with established mentors to produce innovative works of non-fiction with a heritage theme.

A DAY UNDERGROUND

by Nisha Coleman

At Berri-UQAM, riders on their way to work spill out of the metro and take off at a brisk pace. At eight in the morning, the shuffle of boots, shoes and high heels blends into a busy drone. Old Spice and apple orchards mingle as deodorants fight to contend with the tropical climate. Bodies become vessels as they slide up escalators and slip through the turnstiles, their gestures so familiar they've become automatic.

At the Berri exit, a man is playing Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" on the recorder. The piece is sweeping and lively, the eighth notes driving the piece forward. Footsteps lighten. A man carrying a briefcase whistles the tune under his breath as he heads to catch his train. An older woman stops and hums along as she fishes her wallet from her purse. The notes lingering in the corridor provide a soundtrack for the daily underground hustle. It's a gift that even those who ignore him can't refuse.

The flutist, a 40-something in khaki pants and a loose fitting button-up shirt, sits cross-legged with a mountain bike propped behind him. His strawberry blond hair is pulled back in a ponytail and his clear blue eyes peer out at his near-indifferent audience. He's from the States, has played in the Boston and New York subways. This mindless rush doesn't faze him. He has a solid sense of self to withstand the unconcerned crowds and enough physical resistance to play for hours in a sunless space with stale air. He also has genuine love for his music. Without it, he'd become a robot churning out empty tunes. He'd never last.

Above him is a blue sign with a lyre symbol, one of 52 playing spots in the Montreal metro system. The sign-in sheet is a scrap of paper that pokes out from behind. Unlike most of the other musicians, he hasn't bothered to write his name here. Or anywhere. He plays when he feels like it. He'll stay here for a while, until he gets too tired or another musician arrives. Then maybe he'll bike to another spot. Maybe he'll find it vacant. Maybe he'll play for a bit. He takes comfort in the maybes, conveniently unconstrained.

At Guy-Concordia, amidst a collective upward thrust to the office towers, the sound of an Erhu sifts down onto the platform. The timbre is strikingly human and the pentatonic melody rises and falls with weepy glissandos and wide vibrato. A Chinese man sways to the music; his face is serene as he searches the passing crowd for connection. The anonymity of vast numbers allows hundreds to pass with barely a glance. Like every day, he'll put in long hours, even longer if people respond to his playing. He was a factory worker when he came to Canada 12 years ago. Then he lost his job. Now he works to touch people in rush hour metro traffic, a place where most have their hearts tucked safely away. Off limits. His right hand guides his bow across the two vertical strings as he searches for the next open heart.

At Peel station, a 30-something reaches behind the lyre for the sign-in sheet, which today is a torn coffee cup. He pencils himself in for 5:30 p.m. Next he'll do the same at Place des Arts for 7:30 if there's a spot left. It'd be nice to catch the theatre crowd. For 9:30 he'll try for Berri-UQAM or Papineau. Once his evening is reserved, he'll head home to bed. His finger-picking blues will take over later tonight when he returns armed with his guitar and dressed in a smart red cowboy shirt.

Tourists arriving at the Gare centrale make their way to the Bonaventure metro. They have suitcases and tired, confused gazes. They may not be aware of the man strumming in the hallway leading to the Exhibition Hall. His guitar is bulbous next to his thin arms that sweep across the strings as he croons one folk song after another. The way his spine curves around his instrument suggests he's been doing this for a while. A long while. The passers-by are scarce but the acoustics infuse his voice with flattering warmth.

By lunchtime, recycling bins overflow with the daily paper. Readily accepted this morning, they now spill onto the floor, folded and forlorn. A young man stands at the St. Catherine entrance, a guitar strapped on his shoulder and a pig mask over his head. The strings buzz as he slaps and pulls them. He skips from one song to the next,

bouncing with energy as he belts out popular rock songs through his rubber snout. Oinks between verses garner chuckles. People smile and stand taller as they pass.

At Jean-Talon, a mournful air soars up the stairway. He left the Congo when he was seven, over 40 years ago now, but when he lost his job and couldn't find work elsewhere, he turned to his roots. Creole blues. His intonation is clear and crisp and his guitar is dwarfed by his lung power. As his voice rises up into the higher register, the edge of sorrow is balanced by the joy in his unwavering smile.

By the early afternoon, metro riders have tapered off and the playing spots are all but vacant. George Vanier, however, is occupied. It's among the worst places to play as pedestrian traffic is minimal and the noise from the trains drowns out even this heavily amplified electric guitar. But there is a breeze here and this young up-and-comer isn't looking to make money. He's down here to practice. He calls himself Freezer Beat when b-boying and Spy Nation when making music. His right and left hands unite on the fingerboard of his v-shaped guitar as he taps the same sequence over and over, faster each time. The notes resonate into the dark tunnel and fade. Later he'll go back outside and play on the streets, late into the night. His only stipulation: stay free, make music.

A lullaby captures the attention of a three-year old in Snowdon. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," her favourite. And the nice grey-haired man with the guitar is smiling at her as her mummy hurries her along. The musician's strong jowls and blue eyes give him a Russian air, but he's of Italian heritage. After 30 years of busking, his calloused fingers ache, but he can't afford to stop, especially on a slow day like today. He focuses on the kids, on their wonder-struck faces as they pass, the way their eyes gleam and they stop in their tracks, mesmerized. If he can stay focused on the kids, he can keep it going another day.

Deodorants begin to lose their battle by early evening. Body odours meld into an irksome combination as homebound

workers pour into the metro. At Berri-UQAM, an Ecuadorian man greets them with frenzied strums and a chirping pan flute. His spirited Andean rhythms are an ideal soundtrack for the festive Friday afternoon vibe. He's been playing the metro since he moved here four years ago. The underground is his world.

In the near-empty Westmount Square hallway a 20-something turns on his amp, straps on his guitar and adjusts his harmonica to mouth level. He won't make much money here, but he slept in this morning. His name isn't on any of the sign-in sheets. With few listeners, he's free to improvise and work on new lyrics.



He only moved here from B.C. a few months ago. Everything is still new. Anything could happen. The metro could be a means of income, a gateway to elsewhere, or an underground pitfall. He stands between two mirrors that line the walls on either side and plays to his endless reflection.

Freshly showered, people are migrating to the metro on their way to dinner or a movie or a show. The city hums with possibilities. A pepper-haired man scans the passing crowd as he bows a minor tune at the Berri-UQAM's Maisonneuve exit. His violin is mellow and the tempo is relaxed, as if urging passengers to take their time. Will the evening rush bring more coins due to the density or less because of the added anonymity? It could go either way tonight.

The young woman singing folk tunes at the St. Catherine exit is impossible to ignore. She's tall with tight curls that fall over her expressive face. She aims her deep rootsy voice into the microphone and

beams at passers-by, pulling them under her charm. The mood is light with the prospects of a promising evening, and the coins clinking in her case add percussion to her groove.

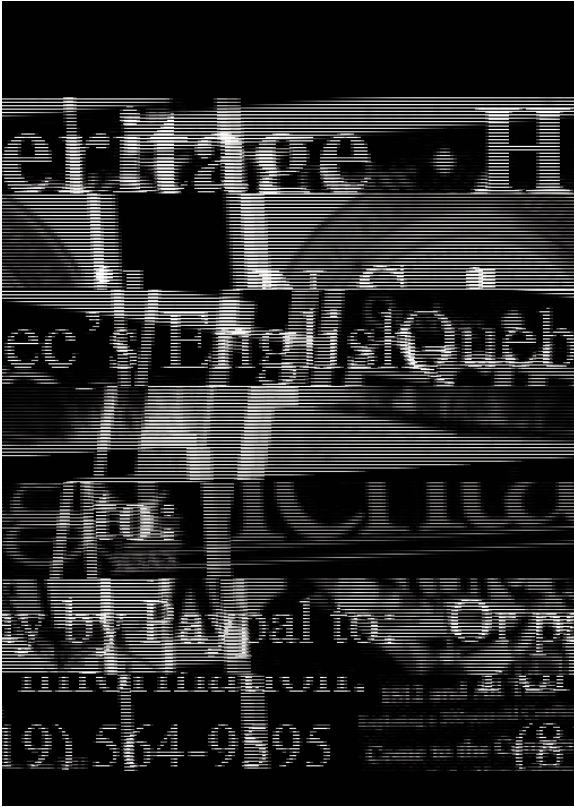
People are getting boozy. Strides are sloppy, the laughter louder and occasionally obnoxious. The sweet aura of alcohol hovers on the breath of passers-by. Loose change is looser when under the influence.

The 30-something has returned to claim his slot. Cowboy shirt on, guitar plugged in, he's bluesing it up at Papineau. He has to be strategic. The dense crowds heading to the fireworks could thwart his success if he doesn't pierce through the monotony. He keeps the rhythm hopping and when women glance at him he catches their eye, gives a nod with a hint of a smile. It's taken him a while to master this, the balance between his instrument and his audience. The music inhabits his whole body, from his tapping toes to his spidery hands that contort into diminished and minor sevenths. He's in the zone today. More than usual. Some days are like that.

Only a handful show up for the nightly draw to determine who will get the busiest and most lucrative spots at Berri-UQAM tomorrow. They toss their names into a hat and when theirs is chosen, they select a time slot. Once their names are secured they can go home and get some sleep before tomorrow. When it all starts again.

The corridors are silent and empty save for a few clubbers on their way to the next establishment. Their laughter rises up and ricochets off the tiled walls. All that remains of the musicians once their notes have vanished into the heavy, humid air are tiny slips of paper tucked behind blue signs. They will be tossed away tomorrow morning when the first buskers arrive with new lists, sign their names, and open their cases. Then there will be no trace at all.

This is a story from QAHN's "StoryNet" project, which matched emerging writers with established mentors to produce innovative works of non-fiction with a heritage theme.



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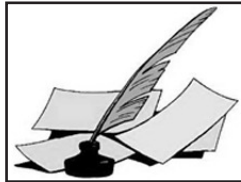
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MARION PHELPS

(February 9, 1908 – January 22, 2013)
by Frank Nixon

Marion Louise Phelps, distinguished Townships teacher, archivist and historian and widely acknowledged as “the” authority on Brome County history, died in January in Knowlton.

“It is with sadness that we inform you of the death of Marion Phelps, former Archivist and longtime volunteer of the Brome County Historical Society,” said Arlene Royea, managing director of the BCHS. “Miss Phelps passed away on January 22 at the age of 104, just a few days short of her 105th birthday.”

Royea, who knew Phelps since 1977, called her “remarkable.” Royea also visited Phelps on a daily basis at Manoir Lac Brome, a retirement residence in Knowlton.

Phelps was the daughter of William W. and Maude (McDougall) Phelps of South Stukely. She attended the Blake School, the Stukely Village School and Waterloo High School before graduating from the School for Teachers at Macdonald College.

She went on to teach at St. Agathe and Waterloo High School before going on to Heroes’ Memorial High School in Cowansville. An outstanding teacher, she was awarded the Order of Scholastic Merit by the Department of Education in 1960.

Always interested in history, Phelps was a leader in organizing and giving classes in local history and genealogy for the Missisquoi Community School during the 1950s. From those classes a renewed interest in the Missisquoi County Historical Society was kindled. Although still teaching, she spent many hours organizing the books and docu-

ments that helped to get Missisquoi Historical Society back on its feet.

In 1959, Phelps was appointed Curator of the BCHS. From that time on her interest and contribution was outstanding. She contributed articles to the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, wrote articles for newspapers and magazines, and books such as *The Loyalists of the Eastern Townships*. She was the



editor, and wrote numerous articles for the *Yesterdays of Brome County* series published by the BCHS, and assisted countless researchers.

With time, she became the undisputed authority on Brome County history and could be found working in the BCHS archives at the Old Courthouse well into her nineties.

Phelps was the recipient of several awards.

In 1969, she was made Honorary Member of the Sir John Johnson Centennial Branch of the United Empire

Loyalists Association of Canada. Over the years, genealogists benefited from her invaluable assistance in the documentation of Loyalist lineage.

In 1981, Phelps was awarded the Heritage Canada Award. In 1992, she was the recipient of a Commemorative Medal for the 125th Anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

In 2001, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network established the Marion Phelps Award for outstanding long-term contribution to the protection and preservation of Anglophone heritage in Quebec. She was the first recipient.

The BCHS named one of its buildings “The Marion L. Phelps” building in her honour. It also started a scholarship at Massey-Vanier High School in honour of her 100th birthday and which is awarded each year to a student in the field of history.

People who knew Phelps well were quick to respond to news of her death, such as Dr. Jim Manson, historian, author and educator. Over the last 12 years Manson has given a series of lectures at the BCHS and cred-

its Phelps as being a mentor and nurturing his love for Townships history.

“I knew Marion Phelps since I was eleven years old – she was my teacher in Grade 6,” said Manson. “There really wasn’t anybody – professional historian or non-historian – who had a greater love for or knowledge of Eastern Townships’ history than she did. It was something that impressed me as long as I knew her and it was something that was very important to her.”

Manson added: “She was very conscientious and took her job seriously.

Marion Phelps.

Photo: courtesy of the Brome County Historical Society.

THE GREAT WEALTH OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY

by Joseph Graham

She threw herself completely into everything she got involved with, whether it was teaching or working as an archivist. It certainly took first place in her life.”

“Miss Phelps became interested in the Brome County Historical Society as a young lady, and devoted much of her life to the museum and county,” said Diana Timmins, president of the BCHS. “We owe her recognition for her accomplishments and knowledge. We say goodbye to her as matriarch of the museum with a great deal of thanks.”

“Brome Lake has lost one of its most esteemed residents with the passing of Miss Marion Phelps – a remarkable and inspiring woman,” said Sharon McCully, publisher of *The Record*.

“She showed me the way around Brome County, its folk history, its secrets, its real and imagined heroes,” said Marc Clerk of East Hill, in part. “Marion’s archival skills and writings were unsurpassed, her devotion to our history constant, her persistence unending – a great lady.”

“I have fond memories of conversations with Marion over endless pots of coffee (mid-morning) or pots of tea (mid-afternoon) – sitting in the picture window of her little house on Benoit,” said JoAnn Oberg-Müller, former BCHS volunteer and board member. “She lived there until she was 100 years, plus.”

Oberg-Müller added: “When she was 101, I drove her to Bedford to attend the 100th birthday party of a grade school friend from South Stukely. All the way there and back I got a history lecture on that part of the Townships – nothing wrong with her memory!”

“She worked tirelessly to bring the history of the area to all citizens and into the schools and did it for more years than we can imagine – and always with a smile and words of encouragement,” said Judith Duncanson, Knowlton resident and BCHS member. “There was never a time when I asked her for assistance on a project that she was not right there with all the support and research that was needed.”

Duncanson added: “They don’t make them like Miss Phelps anymore.”

This article is reprinted from the Brome County News, with permission.

When Thomas Mears leased two islands in the Ottawa River from the Algonquin and Nipissing in 1805 in order to build his sawmill, he was respecting British law as set down in the proclamation of 1763. The land belonged to the Indians by virtue of the European concept of ownership, but the Indians, the stewards of the Ottawa who had developed and maintained its natural resources throughout the ages, were still grappling with this strange new concept of ownership. In their worldview, the land did not belong to the people, but rather, the people belonged to the land, just as the moose, the deer, the trees and the rivers did. The Algonquin and Nipissing formed part of a community that had farmed, traded and hunted from before the time of the Greek and Roman Empires without any need of European-style laws.

We have a tendency to think that Ottawa Valley history started with the arrival of European settlers, and that there were some people living there in a primitive sort of way, people of no consequence. In the early days of the 1800s, Philomen Wright received a visit from a delegation of Algonquin who brought him gifts of maple syrup to show their respect. Why, they asked Wright, was he cutting down these wonderful trees that provided this gift of maple syrup? In order for their question to be understood, they had to call for one of their clan who spoke English. This man, whose name was George Brown, was of British descent but had married an Indian and was welcomed as a brother into the Algonquin, or Anishinabe, as they call themselves. Brown repeated the question to Wright and received the answer that the wise father, the king of England, had decided this was what Wright should do. A puzzling answer, no doubt, but the Algonquin had accepted to lease their land, which meant to let the tenants use it exclusively for a fixed period of time – basically it meant that they would not impede the settlers’ use of the land. But

watching the forest being laid to waste was incomprehensible to them.

Pre-European America was a wealthy environment in which the human species played the keystone role. Large sections of it, such as huge areas of the Amazon rain forests, are now understood to be human-created artefacts. The Iroquois cultivated the white pine forests using controlled fire to clean down the forest floors and in their early days the Dutch settlers at New Amsterdam (New York today) watched like round-eyed children. The Algonquin and Huron controlled deer runs. The different nations respected ritualized meeting ceremonies and made – and respected – complex agreements among themselves, documented in the form of wampum.

The horticultural achievements of the Americas changed what the rest of the world ate, giving manioc to Africa, potatoes to Europe, tomatoes to Italy as well as hot spices, sweet potatoes, corn, chocolate – the list adds up to about half of the vegetables we eat today. The Huron, who call themselves the Wendat, and the Algonquin formed part of a trade network that extended to Central America. The robust horticultural civilization had one great flaw; they did not co-habit with livestock.

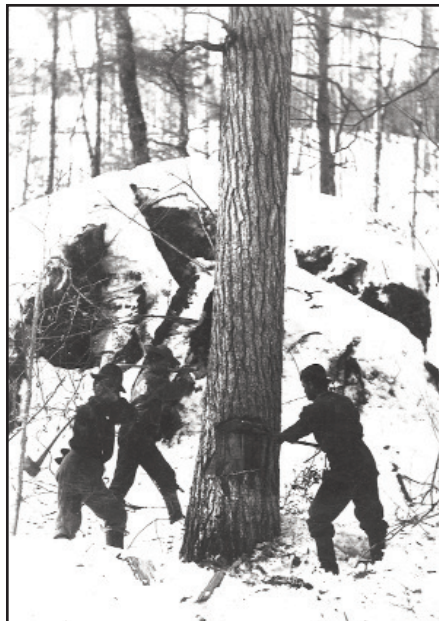
The Eurasian peoples were herders who lived with their domestic animals and, over many generations, they exchanged bacteria and viruses with these animals that often resulted in plagues. The survivors were resistant to these diseases, but they were carriers, and when they came to the Americas, they unintentionally brought their germs with them. Georges Sioui, an Indian philosopher and historian, describes the arrival of Europeans in the Americas as a great accident. This “accident” caused a massive die-off that saw losses of 50 to 90% within a half-generation and sometimes within a few years. I am unable to imagine what that really means. Quebec has a population of around 8 million people. How could it possibly recover from a sudden disaster that cut its population to

four million, or to 800,000? The great trading culture that existed in the Americas simply collapsed. The survivors, refugees of a crippled civilization, struggled to make sense of the apocalyptic event, the greatest tragedy in human history. Simultaneously, a new people had arrived on their lands with no comprehension of the systems they encountered, and no interest in learning. They simply brought their herding animals with them.

In the Ottawa Valley, the newcomers began by asking the Indians for their clothing, quite literally, and then moved on to the source of the clothing, the furs of the animals. When those ran out or were no longer produced quickly enough, they rented the land and began to take down the forests. Next, they refused to pay their rent because they voted in an assembly that gave them title to the Algonquin lands. When the forests began to run out, they found the minerals in the ground and took them.

The property laws that say an individual can own some part of nature are driving this appetite. The Indians no longer have the power to stop them and look on in horror. Next, they will take

the water. These newcomers have not yet become stewards of nature, but are



driven to consume its wealth as though they themselves had somehow created it. The First Nations, on the other hand, are slowly rebuilding the philosophy of their ancient civilization and are pleading with us today to realize that they were right when they said that we belong to

the land and not the other way around.

Thomas Mears knew none of this when he built his mill to saw the majestic trees of the Algonquin. When George Hamilton successfully negotiated a new financing package to save his mill in the 1820s, he was unaware that the Algonquin were facing starvation in their devastated forest home.

Sources:

Frank Mackey, *Steamboat Connections: Montreal to Upper Canada 1816-1843*, 2000.

Cyrus Thomas, *History of the Counties of Argenteuil and Prescott*, 1896.

Arthur R. M. Lower, *Great Britain's Woodyard*, 1973.

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

EDWARDIAN ESCAPADES

Recreating the Richmond Nicholsons

by Dorothy Nixon

If television is any indication, we're still obsessed with the Edwardian Era 100 years after it ended. A few years ago, in the U.K., the costume drama *Downton Abbey* was such a huge hit that they went on to make a second and then a third series. To me, *Downton Abbey* is merely a more stylish rehash of the excellent 1972-75 series *Upstairs Downstairs* – which, as it happens, was also recently brought back to life, to less critical acclaim.

As it further happens, I recently watched all four seasons of *Upstairs Downstairs* on DVD for the first time. I had missed the show the first time around. My university years, you see.

I decided to finally take the show in because, for a rather long time now, I've been engrossed in my own personal Edwardian-era Saga. I've been researching background to a stash of family letters

from the 1910 era that I discovered in an old trunk, letters belonging to the Nicholsons of Richmond, Quebec. That would be Norman and Margaret Nicholson and their grown children, Edith, Herbert, Marion and Flora.

These family letters number over 300, and they are full of ghosts and gossip, and gossip about ghosts.

Like *Upstairs Downstairs* (and *Downton Abbey*), these letters cover the exciting era of the suffragettes, Model-T Fords, the New (or Restless) Woman. Fun stuff. But from a decidedly middle class (and oh-so-Canadian) point of view.

The Nicholsons were prominent Eastern Townships citizens (cash-poor and house-rich, as it happens) and they knew all the other leading citizens, and they filled their letters with news about said citizens and all the goings-on of

their town – “the Local News,” as they slyly called it.

In 1910, Richmond was at a tipping point: it was bleeding citizens to the big city and the wild job-rich West. So, the letters are doubly significant.

In the back of my mind, these past five years, I had an idea to convert these family letters into a quasi-fiction of some sort, to re-imagine them for a young female audience. But it wasn't until last year, when I stumbled on the 1911 Canadian Census online, that all the pieces for this story suddenly fell into place. There before my eyes, in rather faded gray pencil strokes, under Richmond-Wolfe, Quebec, was ‘the official’ statistical story of the Nicholson family – and their entire community.

Margaret actually mentions being enumerated, in a June 1911 letter to her husband, who was away in Ontario

working on the Transcontinental Railway.

“The Census man was around,” she writes. “I gave him your age as 60. Is that right? I always save five for myself. How was that? He did not take Herb’s or Marion’s. So that is over.”

Yes, Margaret lied on the Census. She lied about her age, about her husband’s salary, about her daughter’s salary.

Much worse though, her daughter Marion, my husband’s grandmother, was left off the Census entirely. She is not listed in her family residence on Dufferin Street in Richmond, and not at her Montreal rooming house on Tower Street. I did find prodigal son Herb at a rooming house in *Qu’Appelle*, Saskatchewan. He is one of six boarders there. One other is a bartender and one other – yikes! – a woman working as a stenographer. Had Margaret known she would have caught the first train out West and dragged him back by his ear!

With this wonderful online resource, I was able to travel back one hundred years to Richmond, Quebec, in June 1911, and snap another complementary mental picture of that interesting community from another, less anecdotal angle.

And one new census fact surprised me: French-Canadian families lived all around them! You wouldn’t know it from the letters. Call it the Two Solitudes Syndrome.

Right then and there, I decided to include a two solitudes-style theme in my quasi-fiction based on the letters, which I have called *Threshold Girl* and put online at www.tighsolas.ca/page10.pdf.pdf.

Threshold Girl tells the story of Flora Nicholson, the youngest Nicholson child, who graduates from St. Francis

College in 1911 and is accepted at Macdonald Teachers College in beautiful Ste. Anne de Bellevue – despite failing French. So, I decided to create a pivotal fictional French Canadian character, for context.

But which French Canadian would young Flora Nicholson, over-protected youngest daughter of (literally) straight-laced Presbyterians, meet up with?

The Milliner! This was the age of big hats, after all. And in 1910, women of all persuasions, all classes, loved their hats. According to the 1911 census, the

ing in the posh College Street area of Richmond had a live-in servant. By 1911 almost nobody did. Something serious changed over the decade. It wasn’t only the cash-poor Nicholson women who had to sew and wash and press their own shirtwaists and mince their own beef for the cottage pie and beat their own carpets twice a year in front of all the nosy neighbours. Clearly, most middle-class women in Richmond, in that era, lived an “in-between stairs” kind of existence. They aspired to the genteel life, giving teas for the local ladies, go-

ing to the opera house, but they still scraped their knuckles raw in the scullery after the fact.

Why was that? Well, likely because the working class women were choosing to work in factories rather than as domestics. (So I further made Miss Gouin from Magog where the Dominion Textile Factory was located.) Yes, in 1910, there was a Servant Problem in Canada and if you believe the press reports, it was the very rich who were truly suffering.

Flora’s school, Macdonald College, was founded to teach the agricultural sciences to young men and the domestic sciences to young women. In this way,

young women destined to marry would become better homemakers and solve all the problems of industrialization (dirty houses, dirty habits, dirty thoughts) while poor women would be trained as domestics.

A sexist and ill-conceived policy, it has been argued over the century – and I certainly agree. And just one other good reason to study the Edwardian era 100 years after the fact, not only in the U.K., but here in Canada.

That is, over and above the costumes.



Edith, Margaret, Flora and Marion Nicholson in the summer of 1910. Marion and Edith bought their hats at Ogilvy’s. Edith’s has pink rosettes and Marion’s blue flowers. Edith’s cost \$7.50 and she earned only \$175 a year as a teacher without diploma at Westmount Methodist Institute. Marion’s hat cost \$6.50 out of her \$600 a year salary. She had a McGill Normal School diploma and taught with the Montreal board. Margaret’s hat was purchased from Eugenie Hudon in Richmond. She thought it much too big and was embarrassed to wear it to church. If Edith looks sad, it is because her ‘fiancé’ has just been killed in the infamous Rossmore fire in Cornwall, Ontario.

milliners in Richmond were Miss Vitoline Goyette and Miss Eugenie Hudon. So, I created a milliner’s apprentice, a Miss Gouin, who is lively and outgoing, a little too much for rather repressed Flora. Millinery was the ‘glam’ job for women in 1910, but apprentices were largely unpaid, and this sad fact also figures in my story.

The online Canadian censuses serve up many treasures for the aspiring writer of period pieces. For instance, I can see from the 1901 census that, at the turn of the last century, almost every family liv-

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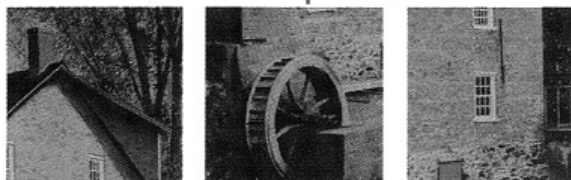


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Émile Fondeau. Le cabane perchée (détail), 2012, digital images, wood, Plexiglass, mirrors, synthetic grass and various objects.

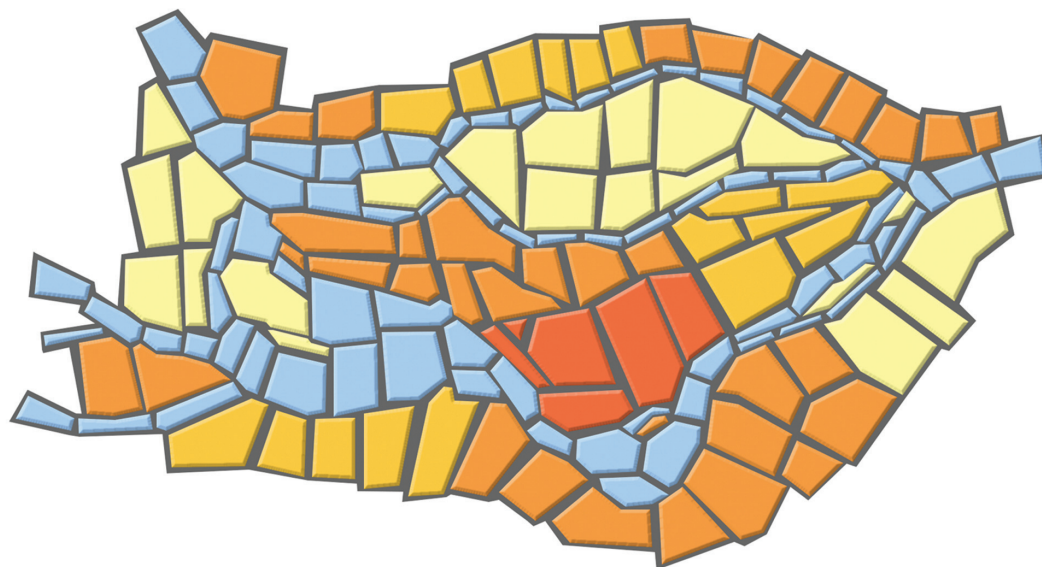
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