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Marking Minkins

Honouring a Remarkable Montrealer

Conspicuous Silences

What We Talk about When We Don't Talk about War

Creating a "Park for the People"

The Disarming Horatio Nelson

Quebec Heritage News

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Cover: The rotating floor of Alexander Walbridge's twelve-sided barn in Mystic, Quebec. Photo: Elena Cerrolaza

EDITOR'S DESK

Röslein

by Rod MacLeod

My parents never wildly disagreed, or at least not in front of me – but I do remember one time when they gave conflicting advice on a critical decision I faced. Each made compelling claims; each argument made sense on its own terms. But I could only choose one path. I've lived with the consequences of that choice ever since.

Spanish or German?

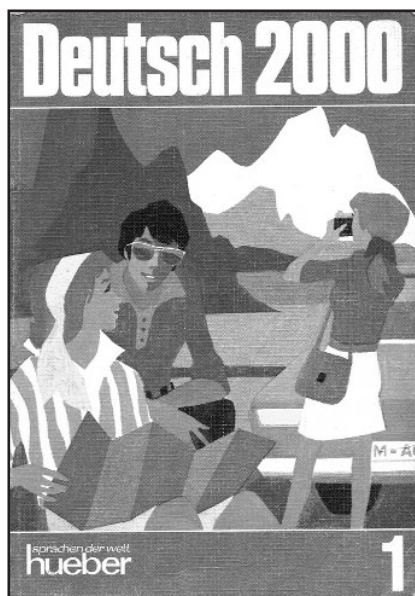
I was on my way to CEGEP, enrolled in the “Literature and Languages” program, which meant I would do some Art, some Philosophy, some History, the obligatory English and Humanities, and one language to concentrate on – other than French, which was fine with me since I was tired of French.

Don't get me wrong. I wasn't tired of speaking French. I certainly wasn't tired of reading French: I would go on to take literature courses and lap up gems from *Candide* to *Les Fleurs du mal* to our own *Poussière sur la ville*. What I was tired of was vocabulary sheets and dictées and trying to figure out why *imparfait* and *plus-que-parfait* couldn't meet each other half way and be perfect. (And even after memorizing endless conjugations, I discovered that the great French authors use the *passé antérieur*, which we never learned: “nous fûmes,” for crimony's sake.) I'd been at it for 11 years, one of them “Immersion” and several of them “Post Immersion.” It was getting old. There was a wider world out there.

Finally, however, the prospect of something new. The college offered both Spanish and German, and I could fit one into my schedule. Which one? That was where my parents' views differed.

My mother made the practical argument that Spanish was spoken by over half a billion people around the world and was therefore a ticket to numerous fascinating destinations and potential employment. Spanish would also be relatively easy to learn, given my knowledge of the Romance language that was

French. (I should point out with respect that my mother spoke no foreign languages, and was famous for greeting an Andalusian peasant going by on a burro with a loud “Guten Morgen!”) On the same trip, she went to the British military hospital in Madrid to have her



chronically upset stomach diagnosed as me. So there was some sentimentality as well as practicality in her championing of Spanish.)

My father's argument was more perceptive: if I wanted something new, German was the way to go. In terms of opportunities, it might not take me as far as Spanish would, but it could take me to Germany and Austria, with their explosive histories, which I had already shown some interest in. He himself had a tiny bit of German buried away somewhere, having spent a year and a half as a “guest” of the Third Reich (a POW camp) – an experience that, though horrible, had not soured him on the language. His older brother, moreover, had studied in Berlin during the last years of the Weimar Republic, having learned enough German ahead of time to follow classes in Gestalt psychology. My father's argument also had its degree of

sentimentality.

In the end I went with my father's advice and took four terms of German. The teacher was a wonderful lady called Helga, who began talking to us in German on the first day of class, animatedly but carefully, so we began to see connections between the sounds she was making and the things she was pointing to. It was not long before we were saying simple phrases in German and even answering questions and responding to conversational prompts. The process was greatly helped by regular sessions in the language “lab,” where we would play cassette tapes featuring patient voices instructing us to listen carefully but not to answer (“Hören Sie gut zu, aber sprechen Sie nicht nach” is a phrase forever implanted in my brain), and then, and only then, when a phrase was spoken, to repeat it (“Und jetzt, sprechen Sie” is another implanted phrase). It wasn't sexy, but it got results.

In fact, a weird thing happened. I found myself fascinated by German grammar and syntax. It was hard, bizarrely hard. Nouns had three genders (yes, one could be non-binary in German) and were subject to “declension” – that is, nouns had different suffixes depending on whether the word was the subject of a sentence, was doing something or having something done to it, or was being addressed. Verbs had to be conjugated, as in French. Weirdly, verbs usually came at the end of a sentence – and, since sentences could be very long, you often had to wait a while to learn what was going to happen. On top of that, words could be strung together, so that a whole lot of information was conveyed by turning lots of nouns into adjectives: my favourite example was the *Köln-Düsseldorferdampferschiffahrtskapitän*, which simply means the captain of the steamboat that runs between Cologne and Dusseldorf. Amusing, yes – but it made me understand language. For the first time I got what I'd been struggling over in French for so long, and the

mechanical logic of it all suddenly made sense. It had been a grind getting those verbs through my brain when I'd been six and ten and twelve, but at seventeen I gobbled it up, appreciating the subtlety of sound and order and idiom for its own sake. I came to love French despite having had to learn it. I came to love German *because* of the cassette tapes, the attractive text book, and Helga's patient coaching and mellifluous voice. (She ended every class with a cheery "Tschüss! – Bye!")

The summer I turned eighteen I planned the backpacking-through-Europe trip I'd been saving for, but decided it needed to be anchored in some practical activity. I was steered towards a family contact who hailed from the *Salzkamergut*, the mountainous Sound-of-Music-Land in western Austria. She was keen to promote a four week language program at the University of Salzburg for people from around the world. Before I knew it I had applied, was accepted, and was adding registration papers and my host family's contact information to my Eurail Pass and other gear.

Some weeks and many train adventures later, I found myself knocking on the door of a sprawling yellow villa, ancient but *gemütlich*, on the outskirts of Salzburg. The "host family" turned out to be a hard-working hausfrau who accommodated (bed & breakfast, and supper if you paid for it) a couple dozen international students whose common and working language was German. The rooms were uniformly dark, their colours faded, yet suggestive of former glamour. One otherwise spartan chamber, which we were allowed to peek into but not use, sported a solitary grand harpsichord, the property of a mysterious Chinese lady who reportedly appeared once a month to play it – and did so, one stormy evening when I was nearest the door and let her in. Christopher Isherwood, I thought, eat your heart out.

Every morning I would leave my sleeping Italian roommate, Paolo (who liked to party and, having conspicuously claimed the best bed in the room, took full advantage of its puffy bedroll), and walk to the university, about 20 minutes away, usually in the pouring rain. (It rained at least part of every day, for 30 days.) There, I would attend classes

taught by several engaging profs, each focusing on different aspects of language acquisition: grammar, text, conversation, etc. The program also took us on cultural excursions, including concerts at the Salzburg Festival – one of them in the same venue where Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer Edelweissed their way out of the Nazis' grasp in *The Sound of Music*. And several times a week the entire 150-strong student body would assemble in the university's main auditorium to sing. We were led by an elderly mustachioed gent who, four decades earlier, may well have



sung these songs wearing a brown shirt, kerchief and leather pants – but he got us belting out classic numbers such as "O du lieber Augustin" (the tune familiar as "The More We Get Together"), "Lustig ist das Zigeunerleben" (extolling the Gypsy life, with a rousing chorus of "Faria Faria Faria Faria Faria Faria Ho!" that always got the younger lads excited) and a lovely melody by Schubert based on a poem by Goethe called "Röslein."

*Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot,
Röslein auf der Heiden.*

(Little rose, little rose, little red
rose,

Little rose on the heath.)

This song, I eventually learned, concerns

a boy so enamored of a rose that he wants to, and eventually does, pluck it, even though that means it will wither and die. You always hurt the one you love. This is the sort of complexity that earned Goethe his *Institut*.

German was what we were there for, but many of my classmates lapsed into English out of convenience. Two Swedes, Gunnar and Ulf, spoke an elegant, if overly formal, English: learning I was Canadian, their first question was which ice hockey team I supported – I felt like polishing my cufflinks before replying.

Two Spanish ladies, Marisa and Mercedes, had a fair amount of English, having occasionally had to serve tourists in the bank where they worked. Among the few Americans in the program was Martha, an elderly lady from a farm in Wisconsin who told me she drank a quart of milk with every meal because she "got *sooo* thirsty." Another was Jennifer, a brass New Yorker, who entertained us with the spicy stories her Salzburg landlady told her. (Apparently in her salad days this woman entertained male guests while her husband Rudy was off playing tuba in an Oompah band. I so wanted to write a song that began "When Rudy Played the Tuba in an Oompah Band...") But I also spoke a lot of French, particularly with Jacques, a fellow my father's age who had fought in the trenches and kept trying to impress me by singing "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag" and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" in an Irish accent. There was also Emanuel, a svelte Parisian youth who would have reminded me of Timothée Chalamet had Timothée Chalamet been invented then, and whom Mercedes said she wanted to squeeze like a toothpaste tube. German, however, was the only conversational option when it came to an even younger kid from "Persia," whose family, I assume, soon lived under the Ayatollah. I also chatted with a middle-aged Venetian redhead who was learning German so she could get closer to her friend Hundertwasser, the eccentric Austrian architect and environmentalist. Language aside, meeting people from so many backgrounds was in itself an education.

In various groupings we would hit the beer gardens (especially the

Augustiner Bräu, where you basically rented a one-litre ceramic mug and filled it yourself from a tap), and Salzburg's elegant cafés (Austria invented thousands of ways to order coffee long before Starbucks made it trendy). These were splurges, however: picnics were easier on the money belt, providing the rain held up. If I was alone, I would go to a takeaway counter and order a *wurst mit senf* – a sausage, which came on a paper plate with a bun and a blob of hot mustard; it was a fast meal I could even eat standing up under an awning. For an occasional treat, I would get ice cream from a cart run by a fetching *fräulein* who always asked if I wanted one *kugel* or two (a *kugel* being a scoop, though the word literally translates as “ball”). She would illustrate the concept of an increasing number of *kugels* by holding up first one, and then two, fingers – or rather her thumb and then her index finger, as is done in that part of the world. (Those who have seen Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* will know how vitally important it is in German to begin counting with your thumb.) I probably fooled no one into thinking I was a local, but it felt great being able to communicate even on the level of *kugels*.

Given all the countries we represented, it was inevitable that the final evening's farewell party should involve musical performances from around the world. A couple of days earlier I linked up with the program's four other Canadians: two girls from Ontario who struck me as the dullest people I'd ever met, and two very dynamic Quebec Francophones who were clearly musical. The latter two selected the numbers, which we performed a capella as an asymmetrical quintet: “C'est l'Aviron,” “Jack Monoloy” (with percussion from one fellow tapping two spoons against a table), and as a grand finale “Mon Pays” – which since then brings a tear to my eye whenever I hear it because it takes me back to Salzburg. When we finished belting it out to of course glorious applause, the percussionist whispered to me: “You know the ‘pays’ in the song isn't Canada, right?” I thought a second, grinned wryly, and nodded. There, in the land of Edelweiss, I had made a different sort of connection, across what would have been a boundary in my own homeland.



At McGill, I began taking an advanced German class with a strict grammarian whose insistence on mastering declension and conjugation promised to keep my inner Prussian stimulated. Alas, he took sick after a few weeks and his replacement was so lackluster I dropped the class. But I did dive into German history in a big way, and found my knowledge of the language kept me from tripping over concepts like *Weltanschauung*, *Gleichschaltung*, and *Kulturkampf* – all proper English words. Later studies took me in different directions, however, and gradually my German withered, just like that little red rose on the heath.

When I finally returned to Salzburg 35 years after that scintillating summer, I did manage to apologize to a hotel clerk fairly articulately that my German was not so good; I also asked the server in a café if I could have a kitchen to eat (the words for “cake” and “kitchen” being very close). Errors aside, these efforts brought me considerable satisfaction. My visit was haunted by ghosts, of course, including the ghost of youthful aspiration. I ate some *wurst*, but no ice cream, not even one *kugel*. The university seemed dark and uninviting. The house where I'd stayed had become a psychiatric clinic. (Gestalt, I hope). I wonder what happened to the harpsichord.

Looking back on my time there as a student, I find it remarkable that so many people from different countries and a range of ages were keen to spend a

drizzly month in the mountains learning German. For Europeans, of course, studying two or three foreign languages was part of the ordinary school curriculum. Even so, German is hard, possibly more so for an Italian or a Spaniard than for someone steeped in Anglo-Saxon quirks. My older colleagues, moreover, would have had to overcome a degree of anti-German prejudice: Jacques had a personal history with *les boches*, and no doubt Martha had listened to frightening wartime broadcasts even as she thirstily milked her Wisconsin cows. But I tip my hat especially to the young North Americans I encountered, for whom learning German had little obvious practical application – above all, the Gilles Vigneault wannabe, who had torn himself away from Quebec's post-1976 road to Referendum in order to summer in Salzburg. I like to think the experience opened his eyes as widely as it did mine.

But it seems to me that, over the intervening decades, as far as language is concerned, our eyes have been steadily closing. Granted, for a great many Anglophone Canadians, French ceased to be seen as a foreign language during this period, and is no longer taught that way even in Saskatchewan and Alberta. At the same time, even as we embraced the idea of two official languages, our focus grew narrower. Learning the “other” language has become a strategic act, a ticket to success in government or (in some places) business; it is less and less about expanding horizons, exploring

a culture, and exercising our minds with different ways of constructing sentences. It is less about the pleasure of learning and more about acquiring a skill we can brag about on CVs, like Excel or Photoshop. In Quebec, having languages other than French spoken and written in public (or even in private) is increasingly seen as threatening, and the answer to this threat always seems to be to squeeze other languages out. German continued to be taught at my old college by Helga's successors right up until this past year; Quebec's latest language legislation now obliges students to take extra French courses, so there is no room in their schedules for anything else. The German department closed. Bureaucrats decided that students who were already skilled in French needed to take more of it, and if this meant that no one could benefit from the out-of-the-box experience of learning German, so be it.

I'm not saying that German should be privileged as a language for Quebecers to learn – far from it. That *dampferschiff* may well have sailed, with the rise of globally strategic languages such as Mandarin, Arabic, and, as always, Spanish. For me, in the long run, it was my



mother's argument that prevailed, since I went on to learn Spanish (a process greatly facilitated by having broken the mental ice with German) and proceeded to marry into a family that resolutely

spoke the language at home – which meant that I, and in time my children, had to master it in order to darken their door. My in-laws' model is one that second and third generation immigrants ought to embrace, rather than let the language their ancestors spoke wither on the vine. We should not be afraid of the linguistic diversity that is the mark of a cosmopolitan society. Let's keep our eyes open. There is a wider world out there.

Tschüss!

Letter

Special Treatment

I have been reading my Special Issue [2023] of the *Heritage News*. It demonstrates an exceptional work of research and writing of great interest. Many thanks to the staff and contributors of QAHN!

Tim Bagley
Sherbrooke, Qc.

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GREAT ESCAPER

Commemorative Plaque Unveiled at Mount Royal Cemetery

by Mark Gallop

Black community leaders, historians, cemetery representatives, and members of the public gathered at Mount Royal Cemetery in October 2023 to unveil a plaque honouring the life of Shadrach Minkins, an enslaved person from Virginia who self-emancipated and made his way to Montreal with the help of the Underground Railroad. He became a successful entrepreneur and raised a family here.

The driving force behind this plaque was Aly Ndiaye (a.k.a. “Webster”), a hip-hop artist, historian, and activist, who spoke at the event. In 2022, Webster produced an award-winning podcast series for Radio-Canada about Minkins. In 2023, he was appointed as the Quebec representative to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

The Minkins story is particularly compelling because of events in 1851, which made headlines



across the continent. After escaping, Minkins initially settled in Boston, but nine months later he became the first person in New England to be seized by slave catchers under the terms of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Following his arrest, a crowd of anti-slavery activists gathered at the court house. There, a group of twenty Black men overwhelmed the guards, freed Minkins, and spirited him out of the city and towards Montreal. His is therefore a tale of resistance, not just by his act of self-emancipation, but also on the part of the Black communities of New England and Quebec. Webster wants us to “remember that people resisted slavery, that people were not only passive victims of slavery, but they took their destiny into their own hands, and this is what Shadrach did.”

This is the forty-first plaque commemorating a historic person installed by the Friends of the Mount Royal Cemetery, the cemetery’s charitable arm. Shadrach’s “monument is very old and it is made of marble, so we can’t really read the information anymore,” says Myriam Cloutier, Director of Heritage Programs. “So by putting a plaque in front of it and by putting a short summary of his life, we give people the chance to discover that such a great person is buried here.”

Mark Gallop is a trustee of Mount Royal Cemetery

Direct quotations are from Luca Caruso-Moro, “New plaque honours former slave who fled U.S. in 1850 and found freedom in Montreal.” CTV News, Montreal, October 17, 2023.

NEWS FROM QAHN MEMBERS

The Clan MacKinnon Society

As a new member of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, we would like to give a sense of who we are and what we are doing. We hope that future articles will allow you to learn more and to reflect on your own history and ancestry.

To begin with, why “The Thistle and the Fleur de Lys,” and why the motto “Je me souviens”? The thistle, of course, is a symbol of Scotland and Scottish roots, and the Fleur de Lys represents the French and French Canadians. We were originally going to call our organization “Thistles in the Ground,” but felt that the name might have some political connotation. We wanted it to be more inclusive of the two cultures we originally set about to research here in Quebec. We are based in the community of Montmagny, which lies about 45 minutes east of Quebec City on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. “Je me souviens” is the motto for the province of Quebec and means “I remember.” In this case, we remember the Scots and the early French Canadians who helped build this amazing province and country together.

We started off researching the descendants of the 78th Regiment of Foot (the “Fraser Highlanders”). The regiment was raised in 1757, and disbanded in 1763, at the end of the Seven Years’ War; its members subsequently settled in North America. Kathleen McKen is the local commissioner for the Clan MacKinnon Society; she is descended from Donald McKinnon, one of these Scottish soldiers who stayed in North America and married French Canadians, and who are the ancestors of most of the McKinnons now in Canada. Ewen Booth, who is part of the Fraser Highlanders Descendants’ Project, is an amateur historian, volunteer researcher, and genealogist. Having processed over 100 family trees, he has created a public database (Ancestry.ca) that continues to grow with more individual searches.



Some of these searches have involved Scots who were not part of the Fraser Highlanders, so the database is now expanded to include them as well. Eventually, this umbrella project will even include the first French colonists to North America.

These articles will cover individual stories, genealogy hints and discoveries, migration, music, geography, and many other anecdotes found along the way. The information is not political, but simply “what is found,” and may be open to interpretation. Some of the information will

change what you have been taught, and we encourage you to open your mind to your own thoughts and research, and to share it with us and others.



We call this a “journey,” since it started many years ago and became more significant when Kathleen purchased a 1767 family home, which brought her and Ewen to relocate into the heart of “French” Canada. When not working full time or researching, Ewen and Kathleen are restoring the house. Ewen continues to research the history of the house and its former owners, research that has turned the house into a magnet for others interested in local history. We encourage anyone to reach out to us, if there is something you wish us to investigate or something we can assist you with. We are always working to partner with others who share the same goals.

Our intention is to have a fully bilingual web site that will include 20-minute vignettes on YouTube. Having the site in French and English is important so that the many descendants of the early Scots in North America who only speak French, can learn what they have never known, and feel part of this great international community.

Our website, which is still under construction, is: scotscanada.ca/en/thethistleandthefleurdeleys.



2023 QAHN HERITAGE ESSAY CONTEST

Quebec Heritage News would like to extend its apologies to Jayke Chrétien for our oversight in not including his essay "Shawicon, a Special Tradition" (awarded Honourable Mention in the 2023 QAHN Heritage Essay contest) in our last issue. We include it here with our best wishes.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Shawicon, a Special Tradition

by Jayke Chrétien
Grade 5B, Shawinigan High School
Shawinigan, Qc.

Imagine a place where you could play video games or see famous people. If you want that, then you would like Shawicon.

Shawicon is a special tradition in Shawinigan which is in Canada. It is from February 25 to 26. It started in 2019 February 2nd at 11:00 to 12:00 which is not long ago actually.

Now you may ask, "Why does Shawicon exist in this universe?" Shawicon is like Comiccon because it's meant to

entertain people. It's an awesome tradition and there is retro gaming, getting autographs from unfamous celebrities, virtual reality, video game tournaments, card tournaments etc.

And it's a cool place to visit. It could either give you a HUGE wave of nostalgia or it could be all new to you because most of the stuff there is retro, mostly late 80s early 90s, or now.

Shawicon has four main characters that I do not know the names of, but they look super cool. Also, in my opinion the logo looks flipping AWESOME and looks like the flash. I really recommend Shawicon for families in Shawinigan because it is awesome, you can do anything, there is also merch that you can buy so that's cool.

Shawicon isn't just your normal con, it's what makes Shawinigan come alive. Me and a lot of people think that

Shawicon doesn't have cons.



THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBEC IS FASCINATING!

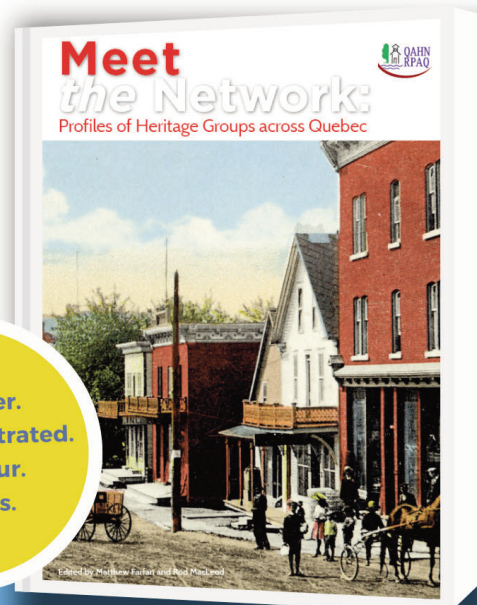
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TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

Montreal's Emigrant Stone

by Sam Allison & Jon Bradley

The Montreal Irish Community and Hydro Quebec are to be congratulated on their decision to shine a spotlight on the Irish Famine Stone. In recent years, Hydro Quebec has sponsored archeological digs and offered land near Montreal's Victoria Bridge for the improvement of the Black Rock site.

The stone is, in fact, not just the oldest memorial of the Irish Famine in the world, but it is also a unique tribute to the "Workers of the World." This is a memory site like no other in North America.

This marker commemorates one of the greatest tragedies of the nineteenth century: the Potato Famine that swept Western Europe in general, and Ireland in particular. Famine in the late 1840s hit Ireland more devastatingly than anywhere else in Europe with the Great Famine running from 1845 to 1851. English economist Thomas Robert Malthus warned that populations expanding much faster than food supplies made the possibility of famine inevitable. The huge population explosion in Ireland was fuelled by the potato as a new food source. This dependence on the potato led to catastrophe when *phytophthora infestans*, an air-borne fungus carried from Mexico to the United States then Europe, doomed the potato crops.

The Famine resulted in two million people leaving Ireland with hundreds of thousands in "coffin ships" that saw approximately 20,000 die crossing the Atlantic or succumbing on shore. Interestingly, the Irish-owned ship, the *Jeanie Johnston*, built by a Scotsman in Quebec, did not lose a single passenger on its many transatlantic voyages. Tragically, thousands more died as they made their way up the St. Lawrence River on barges towed by steam tugs from the quarantine station on Grosse Isle where they had been housed in "fever sheds." Overall, only about 75% of those who left Ireland for a new life in Canada managed to survive the Atlantic and Grosse Isle.

The next stop for the migrants was Montreal, where fever hospitals had been established for the sick. Some 6,000 per-

ished. Why such a staggering death toll in Montreal? It was a triple threat: famine, coffin ships, and the blazing heat of a voyage up the St. Lawrence on open barges. Just as many immigrants died going up the St. Lawrence and into the Great Lakes as did crossing the Atlantic.

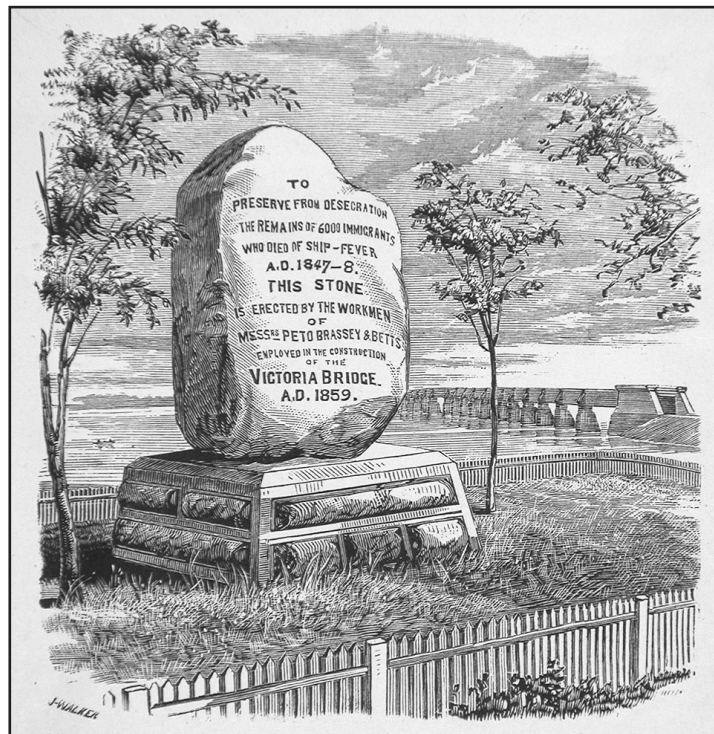
Over the succeeding years, various groups placed memorial crosses and stones to honour their ancestors. But how did Montreal's Black Rock become the first in the world to be erected as a memorial to this global tragedy?

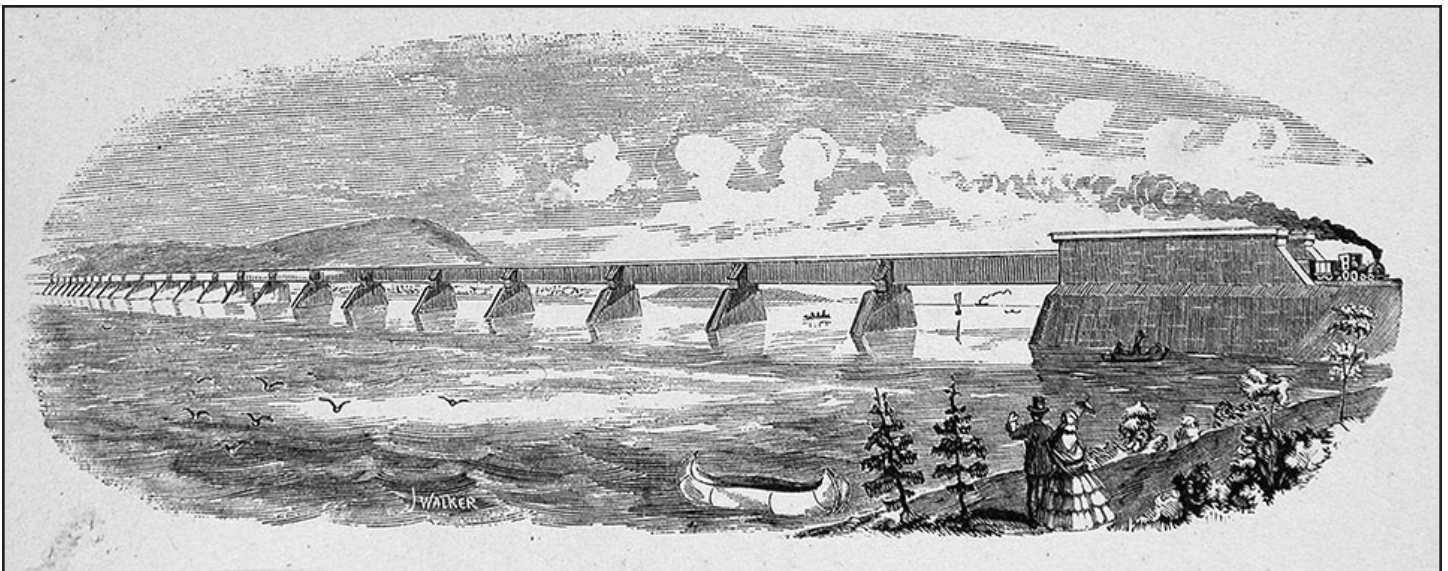
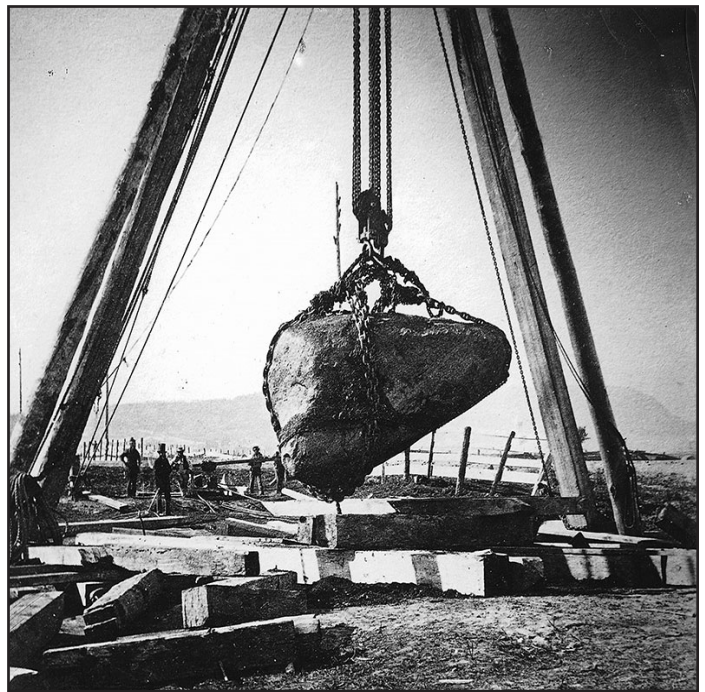
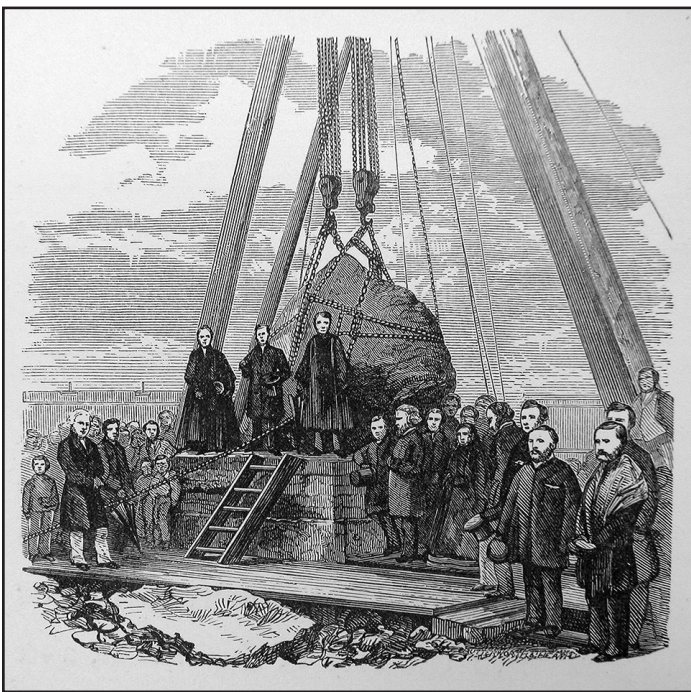
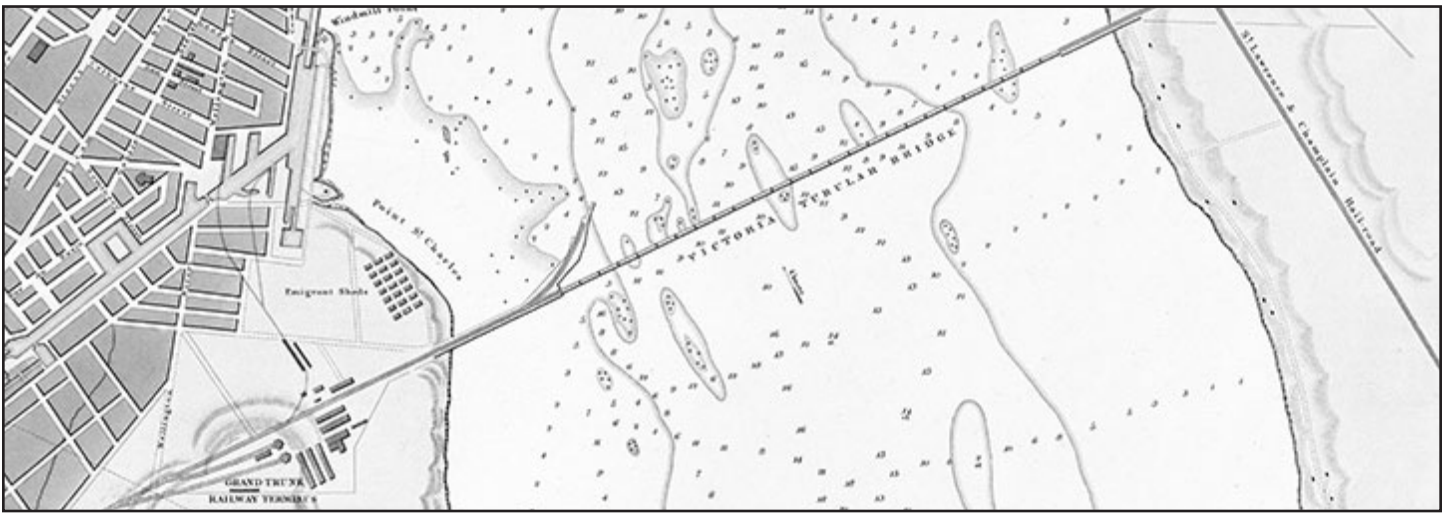
The Potato Famine victims and the Victoria Bridge are intimately connected in time and place. The bridge was built from 1854 to 1860, and was internationally renowned because it was, at the time, the longest bridge in the world. It was officially opened in August 1860 by Queen Victoria's son Albert Edward, a "media star," especially in the United States. The bridge was lauded as the "Eighth Wonder of the World" because its huge piers

contained more stone than the Egyptian pyramids.

The biggest stone from the river was hauled out by steam shovels and set aside by the workers who were well aware of the famine tragedy. The workforce was 60% Irish (Catholic and Protestant), 20% Scots and English, 2% French Canadian; the rest were English Canadians, First Nations, and Europeans. We know these figures today because the engineering firm of Peto, Brassey and Betts, the English company that built the bridge, kept accurate statistics. They also paid for the transport of the stone to its site and donated the land to the Anglican Church. Peto, Brassey and Betts do not fit the typical stereotype of Victorian companies portrayed in modern history books. They funded a hospital and school for workers' children and sent workers to Montreal's Mechanics Institute (now the Atwater Library & Computer Centre) to improve literary and mechanical skills.

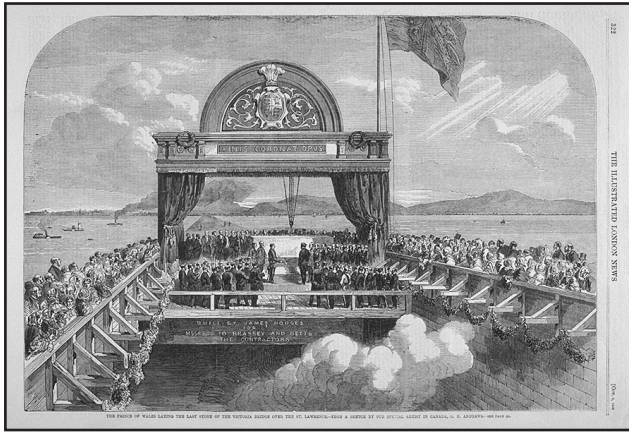
Unfortunately, the victims of the famine who had died in Montreal were buried near the river at the narrowest point





Top: Victoria Tubular Bridge, Montreal Harbour, by Capt. H.W. Bayfield, 1858.
Middle left: Laying the Monumental stone, 1860. McCord Museum, M15934.45

Middle right: Wm Notman, "Raising boulder," 1859. McCord Museum, Vw-7575.o.
Bottom: J. H. Walker, Victoria Bridge, c.1860. McCord Museum, M930.51.1.441




memorial that a contemporary public needs to understand and appreciate.

Sam Allison is the author of Driv'n by Fortune: The Scots' March to Modernity in America, 1745-1812 (Dundurn Press, 2015), as well as several high school history and economics books. Now retired from the Faculty of Education at McGill, Sam is Guest Editor of the London Journal of Canadian Studies.

Jon Bradley is a retired McGill University Faculty of Education professor, co-author of the second edition of Making Sense: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing in Education (Oxford University Press, 2017) and Guest Editor of the London Journal of Canadian Studies.

where the bridge had to cross. The engineers decided to move the remains, which had been buried in lime, thus complicating an already delicate task. This new resting place was marked with the stone. After the bridge was finished, the workers pooled their funds and paid an artist to inscribe the Rock. Additionally, many of the workers stayed in Montreal, some starting businesses along the Lachine Canal; others bought land and farmed. These workers were definitely not the irresponsible and inebriated labourers depicted in many Victorian songs and newspapers.

The Black Rock continues the ancient Irish and Highland Scottish tradition of placing a cairn to help remember important events and people. Here is a site of great triumph (the building of the Victoria Bridge) and of great tragedy (the many who died seeking a better life). This unique combination of triumph and tragedy will finally be recognized among the hustle and bustle of road and rail traffic. This is a remarkable



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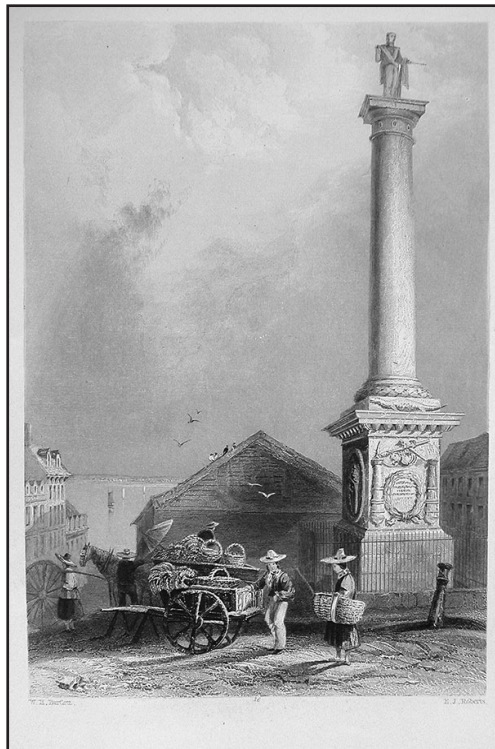
by Rod MacLeod

Horatio Nelson went to New York City in the third week of October 1874 to twist the arm of the world's leading landscape architect.

The response to the telegram he had sent a week earlier had been discouraging: the great man had declared that his time was entirely taken up with a job in Buffalo, and in any case his basic consultation fee would be \$500 above and beyond travel expenses. But such a sum did not frighten Nelson, not when Montreal had a budget of \$1 million to develop the summit of Mount Royal into a public park. Nelson, moreover, was not only president of the Park Commission but also chair of the city's finance committee, which enabled him effectively to rubber stamp his own commission's funding requests. Nelson felt confident turning down other people who had offered to design the park. He believed that a project such as this, which would put Montreal on the map culturally and bring the city countless economic dividends, demanded that he go to the top – which meant going to New York. After hearing Nelson's pitch in his office, Frederick Law Olmsted reluctantly agreed to visit Montreal and check out its mountain. This was the start of a long and acrimonious relationship that brought Olmsted much grief and Nelson exactly what he wanted.

Nelson had been an effective business and social leader in Montreal since his arrival in 1841, after working as a travelling salesman throughout New England. Born in Richmond, New Hampshire, in 1816, he was given his inspiring name (“Horatio Admiral”) by parents who were clearly enamoured of the famous British naval hero and not bothered by the fact that the United States had been at war with Britain only a year before. One of the first things Nelson would have seen after landing in the Montreal harbour was a statue commemorating his namesake standing on a column in the central marketplace. Curiously,

the statue did not face the ships in port but rather gazed inland, towards Mount Royal, as if indicating to the new arrival that his own future would be bound up with the mountain. Not only would Nelson become the veritable mas-



ter of the summit for nearly a decade, but he would make his home on Mount Royal's slopes: in 1862, after considerable success as a fancy goods merchant, Nelson moved his family into a fine mansion on (appropriately) Mountain Street in the elegant Square Mile. A member of Montreal's American Presbyterian congregation, Nelson spearheaded the relocation of its church from St. James Street in the old town to Dorchester Street, just around the corner from his house. Many members, including the minister, objected to the move, but Nelson was head of the congregation's building committee and took charge of the business arrangements personally, purchasing the site and issuing contracts for the new church in his own name. He

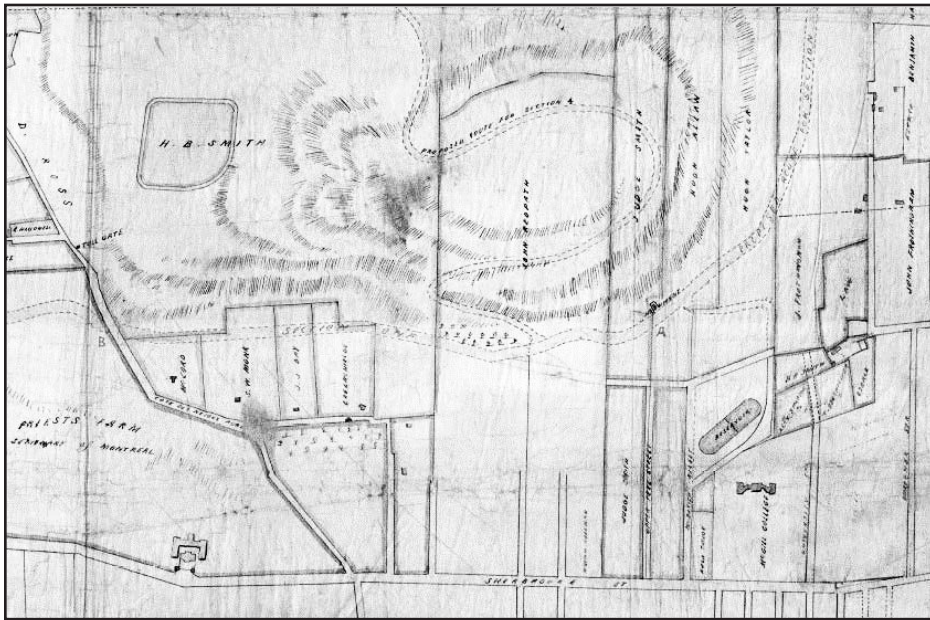
would apply this proactive, uncompromising tactic to the creation of Mount Royal Park.

When Horatio Nelson joined Montreal city council in 1867, the idea of turning the top of the mountain into a public park had been actively debated for decades, both at city hall and in the press. Despite widespread enthusiasm for the project in principle, many feared it would prove too difficult, not to mention too expensive.

The first hurdle would be acquiring the necessary land. Although the summit was a forested rocky wilderness, every inch of it belonged to someone. In keeping with seigneurial practice going back to New France, mountain estates were narrow but long, most of them extending right up the southern slopes and down the northern side. Major mountain landowners were supportive of the park project, knowing that landscaped grounds just above their own homes would raise property values and provide their families with a beautiful handy space to stroll and take carriage rides. Even so, they expected to be compensated for the loss of property.

In 1858, sensing city council's hesitancy, many of these landowners formed the Mountain Boulevard Company, whose objective was to lay out carriageways and create “ornamental grounds” across the summit. Its plan shows a looping road running from the gates of Mount Royal Cemetery to the McTavish monument (the burial spot of the legendary fur trader) at the top of Peel Street and westward beyond Cote des Neiges Road. Despite much fanfare, the company failed to make headway.

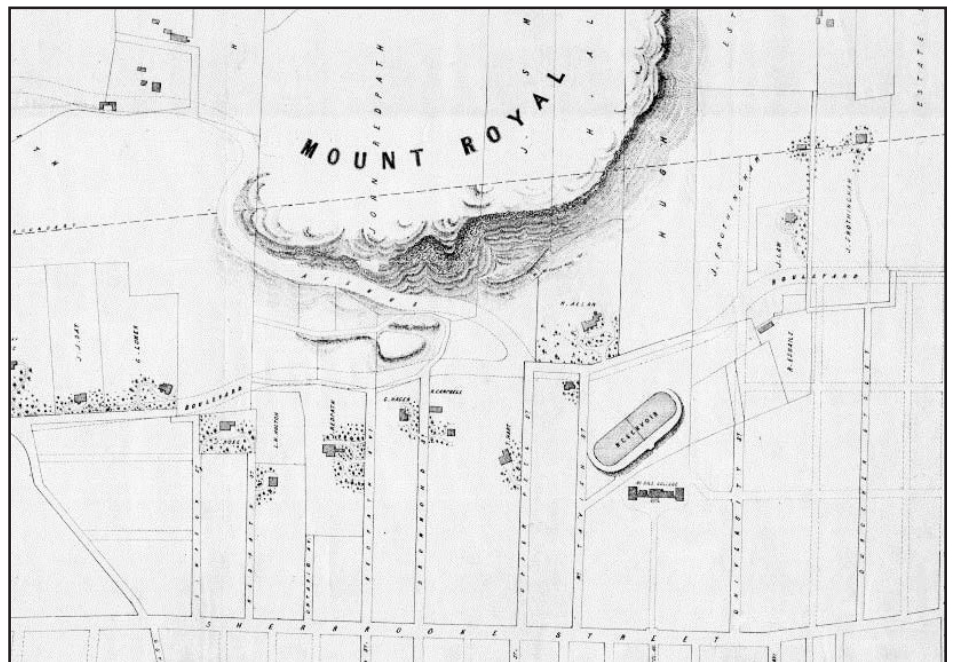
Two years later, one impatient mountain landowner, John Redpath, offered to sell the city his portion of the summit at a low price provided it be turned into a park. Leading newspapers endorsed this proposal, but many city councillors balked. A widespread concern was that it would be difficult for ordinary people to reach the summit. In



November 1862, Major Alexander Stevenson and his soldiers strove to prove otherwise by dragging several cannons up the mountainside and firing a volley in honour of the Prince of Wales. Their route took them up Mountain Street, right in front of Nelson's house, and then up through Redpath's estate, clearly with the owner's endorsement.

Stevenson, who was also a municipal councillor, continued to promote the mountain park project, eventually getting the city to authorize Patrick Macquisten, the city surveyor, to draw up a plan showing the properties that would have to be acquired. But the park's most effective advocate was lawyer and city councillor Bernard Devlin, who called for the creation of a "Park for the People." Devlin's enthusiasm engaged Montrealers of all classes – though a few councillors representing the east end remained opposed. Newspaper editorials glowed about the park's potential to attract tourists and provide an antidote to the evils of industrial life. Devlin also addressed the question of cost by suggesting the city take out a substantial loan. After stepping down from council in 1870, Devlin became one of the city's attorneys and negotiated what became a \$1 million loan to fund the park.

Councillor Nelson had remained aloof from these discussions, but once the "Park Loan" was secure he quickly positioned himself at the heart of the project. City council had given the job



of negotiating buyouts from mountain landowners to a special committee, but Nelson did his own research, chatting up the heirs of Hosea Ballou Smith, proprietor of 187 acres of summit land. Smith had died in 1868, leaving the large stone house he had built on the summit (the only substantial dwelling on the mountain top), which his heirs were not interested in maintaining. They did prove agreeable to Nelson's offer for the entire property, an offer he presented to the special committee in March 1872 and used as leverage to get himself elected committee chair. In this capacity, Nelson became the chief negotiator for the public acquisition of mountain land. After this amicable agreement with Smith's heirs, negotiations proved tougher: Nelson found himself butting heads with Hugh Allan, Stanley Bagg, the heirs of John Redpath, and even Etienne Picault and Guillaume Lamothe, who had earned the scorn of the entire city by clearcutting over 40 acres of forest on the summit and then complaining that they were not offered more for their property. Nelson stood his ground, however, and by early 1875 all the land needed for the park had been acquired, with nearly a quarter of the Park Loan still in the kitty.

With the end to these negotiations in sight, the city decided to act on another of Bernard Devlin's recommendations: to entrust the management of Mount Royal Park to a set of three com-

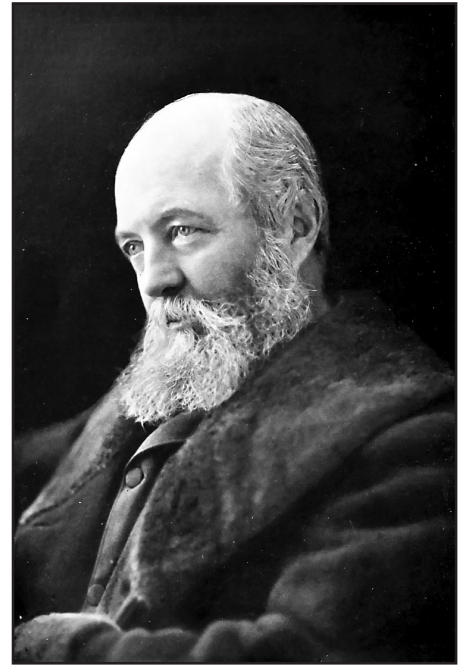


missioners, who would operate at arm's length from the council. Although some councillors felt that the work of the park commission should be handed over to outsiders, the majority opted to select three of their colleagues: building contractor Ferdinand David, sawmill owner John Wait McGauvran, and Nelson – who became the commission's president. The park commission's autonomy was limited chiefly by having to seek approval for expenses from the city's finance committee – which Nelson, conveniently, chaired.

Nelson hired several gardeners to begin clearing brush and pruning trees, and had the old Smith house fitted up as a home and office for a permanent “park ranger.” For this job, he looked for a man with status as well as experience. He found William McGibbon, a lieutenant colonel in the militia with a reputation as a skilled organizer, who was also familiar with the summit through his involvement with the Montreal Snow Shoe Club, whose members indulged in regular nighttime “tramps” across the mountain. In March 1874, McGibbon and his family moved into the Smith house, which stood surrounded by a barn, greenhouse, and garden on the mountain's gentler northern slope. From this spot, McGibbon supervised the opening of roads across the summit.

Although there was as yet no master plan for the park, the consensus reached over years of discussion was that mountain roads should converge on the popular McTavish monument, and from there connect to the Square Mile via Peel Street. As far as Nelson was concerned, there were many givens when it came to the park's layout. Even so, it was clearly time to hire a landscape architect – hence the appeal to the man who had won international fame as the designer of New York's Central Park, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, and Chicago's Lake Park.

Frederick Law Olmsted came to Montreal in mid-November, a time of year when the summit hardly looked its best, although with trees bare and next to no runoff from streams the circumstances were ideal for assessing the mountain landscape. McGibbon and city surveyor Patrick Macquisten took him



up the mountain's steep south side so he could get a sense of the challenge facing them. Olmsted initially found the grade quite alarming, and feared that there was no way to prevent “the bolting of horses and the slipping of heedless persons over the steep declivities.” However, on reflection he grew convinced that careful landscaping could make the summit accessible to urban dwellers keen to appreciate its stupendous views. When he met with Nelson and the other commissioners, he announced his willingness to design the park for a \$5,000 fee. Details would be worked out later, but he insisted that Macquisten furnish him as soon as possible with a topographical map of the mountain, showing elevation in five-foot increments. Although the city surveyor already had a full workload, and knew that this task would be difficult in winter, he agreed to provide the map by February. Nelson presented Olmsted's proposals at city council to great enthusiasm and had them published in the *Witness* to entice the public.

The first setback was the topographical map. Despite working diligently with one assistant and considerable help from the park ranger, Macquisten was unable to meet his deadline and was forced to abandon the job until weather improved in the spring. He did send a copy of his work so far, but



Olmsted was adamant that he could do nothing without a complete map. Olmsted also cautioned strongly against any work being done before his design was ready, even though Nelson was keen to continue earlier efforts to make the park accessible via the top of Peel Street. Olmsted then declared that this approach was simply unfeasible, and called for an entirely different road running east of McGill University. But this plan required the purchase of additional land, something Nelson was not willing to do after three years of stressful negotiations with landowners. Besides, Nelson wanted a park entrance that would be convenient to residents of the Square Mile. Ignoring Olmsted, he authorized McGibbon's team to build a rudimentary staircase at the top of Peel Street and then begin laying out a switchback road suitable for carriages leading up to the mountaintop. On July 1, 1875, citizens were able to climb to the summit to attend the "Park Commissioners' Pic-Nic," which involved "dancing on the green, a luncheon at the Smith House, and speeches."

When Olmsted made his second visit to Montreal in August 1875, he found crews hard at work on the Peel access, a road he had not approved. Nelson distracted Olmsted by showing him a petition from several people living near "Upper Bleury Street" (Park Avenue) who wanted the city to open a road from there to the summit for the convenience of the wider population. Olmsted disliked working piecemeal,

but he agreed to design a plan for this road on the condition that a civil engineer be hired to inspect the work, and also take over the job of drawing the topographical map, which Macquisten had still not finished. Olmsted carefully coached the engineer, William James Picton, before heading back to New York, demanding that he send regular reports, particularly regarding what Nelson and McGibbon were up to.

Olmsted's plan for the eastern access road, delivered in October 1875, featured a wide, curved avenue forking off Upper Bleury Street and meandering upwards to a point just above the McTavish monument, where it met the road that McGibbon had been working on. Even so, Olmsted strongly advised against beginning construction before the topographical map was finished, arguing that "precipitate work" would lead to mistakes that could not be corrected. But Nelson was in a hurry, not least because building the road was an excellent way to relieve the high levels of unemployment caused by the 1870s' economic depression. Under McGibbon's supervision, a work crew toiled throughout the winter with shovels and pickaxes, carving a road out of the stone cliffs. Hearing of this progress from Picton, Olmsted cautioned Nelson that it would be better to pay the men to do nothing than to run the risk of deviating from the plan. In fact, the men proceeded so efficiently that in early February 1876 Nelson was able to invite a large number of guests to ride their sleighs up the new

road and tour the summit. Although work was far from finished, the city decided that the park could now be officially opened, and scheduled May 24, the Queen's Birthday, for the festivities. Olmsted was, of course, invited.

It was always Nelson's tactic to deflect Olmsted's irritation by appearing to see his point of view but claiming that his hands were tied by strict budgets or division at council, even though neither was actually the case. The need for the make-work project was genuine, but it also served as an excuse for having deviated from Olmsted's instructions. In April, Nelson extended the park designer an olive branch by seeking his advice on the topic of building a kiosk for refreshments on the summit – and received plans for a huge structure featuring a belvedere and a refectory capable of seating 300 people. Nelson thanked Olmsted for the proposal, but a year later the pavilion plan was quietly scrapped. Indeed, Victorian sensibilities dictated that within the park visitors were prohibited from consuming alcohol, and peddlers could not hawk their wares. Dogs were also prohibited – except for McGibbon's own hounds

In addition to drawing up regulations and fretting over delays finishing the road, Nelson was preoccupied by the disappearance of Patrick Macquisten. The city surveyor had not reacted well to Picton's taking over the topographical map, even though it was work he struggled to complete. In February 1876, Macquisten mysteriously disappeared, and it was only in late April that council received news that he had gone to England to recover from an unspecified illness. Doubtful of his prompt return, the city opted to dismiss him – but held off making the announcement until after the May 24 park celebrations, to avoid embarrassment. Macquisten was in large part a casualty of Olmsted's demanding personality and domineering style.

The inauguration was a great success. A procession that eventually numbered nearly 5,000 people started in Place d'Armes, moved up Bleury Street, and climbed the new road, accompanied by three militia regiments – one commanded yet again by Alexander Stevenson, who recreated his earlier escapade of dragging cannons up to the summit to fire a volley in honour of the Queen. The

artist for *Canadian Illustrated News* depicted well-dressed crowds lolling about on the mountain's rolling knolls, the ladies sporting parasols and fans, their vast hoop skirts claiming a perch on the inclined ground. Nelson presided over the opening ceremonies – although he was upstaged by the flamboyant mayor, William Hingston, who was called upon simply to unfurl a flag but proceeded to work the crowd for a good half hour, extolling the virtues of Montreal's new public green space. His speech was suddenly cut off by the boom of guns from Stevenson's well-armed regiment. When Nelson regained the podium he echoed Hingston's statement that the park was intended for use by all Montrealers, the poor as well as the rich. He added that New Yorkers, who had spent much more money on Central Park than Montrealers had on theirs, would no doubt happily spend even more if they could move Mount Royal to Manhattan. He then introduced Olmsted, who would speak about his design – except that he did not: Olmsted merely said that New Yorkers would obviously not bring Mount Royal to Manhattan but would certainly come in large numbers to Montreal to visit Mount Royal.

Olmsted's public restraint was in contrast to his comments made two days later to the mayor, the park commissioners, and several councillors. He lectured them against "any lessening of the natural beauty of the mountain" by allowing "the tawdry elements so common in parks" to have free reign – an obvious reference to the emphasis Hingston and Nelson had placed on working-class use of Mount Royal. Even more cutting was a letter Olmsted sent after returning to New York in which he tore into the commissioners for having disregarded all his instructions for building the access road and instead cobbling together a road that "any boy who had been a year with a surveying party might have laid out, and any intelligent farmer might have constructed." Nelson promptly went into conciliation mode. Picton would complete the topographical map, and Olmsted would use it to finish his grand design for Mount Royal Park. In the meantime, McGibbon and his crew continued to clear ground and trim trees – no controversial projects, nothing likely to in-



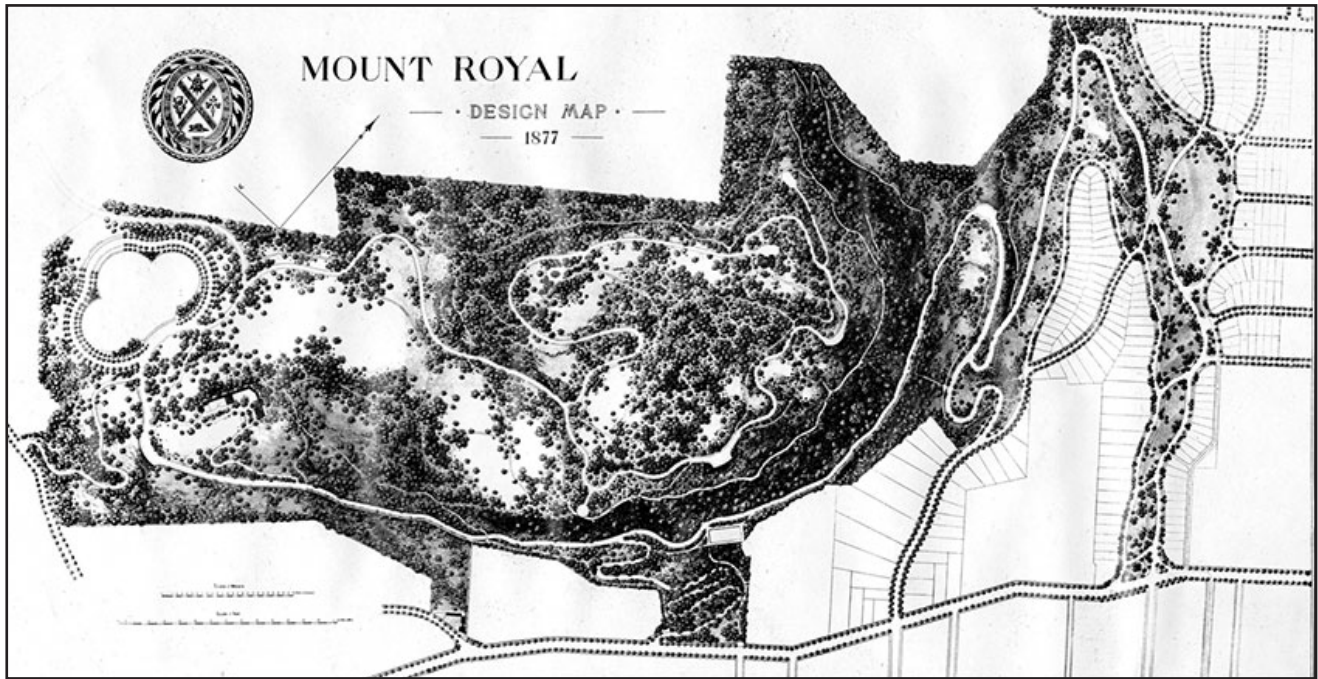
cur Olmsted's wrath. Nelson wanted the grand design finished, and an end to the tedious quarrels.

But when the news came in June 1877 that the plan was ready, there was a catch. Olmsted announced that he would be visiting Montreal soon to present his design, and to explain his views on the moral and spiritual importance of parks to the city's leading citizens. Olmsted would later argue that it had been the commissioners who had wanted him to come and talk, although correspondence at the time shows they were reluctant. Did Montrealers really need the park explained? People were already visiting Mount Royal in such numbers that the commissioners had to contract a regular team of omnibus drivers to convey passengers from Place d'Armes to the summit. Nelson put Olmsted off as long as possible, but in the end agreed to have him make two public presentations: "Parks, their Use and Abuse" on Friday, September 28, and a formal unveiling of the park design the following afternoon. Nelson booked the Mechanics' Institute's very large auditorium – an indication that he expected a good turnout, or at least wished to appear as if he did. Olmsted also claimed that the commissioners had promised him a large and well-educated crowd, something Nelson could hardly have guaranteed even if he had been keen on welcoming the landscape architect, which he was not.

Alas, only a handful of people turned up on the Friday to hear Olmsted pronounce on "general principles of design" and "the puerile, extravagant, and wasteful character of much that had

been proposed in contravention of these principles." Those who did attend were not inclined to encourage their friends to come the following day: fewer than 30 people, including women and children, assembled "in a hall for a thousand." The Saturday crowd was treated to the display of a "large chart" showing the territory owned by the city for the park, and then to the spectacle of one of the park commissioners, who had been roped in as Olmsted's assistant, fumbling to pull away the chart to reveal the new design map. Olmsted proceeded to outline the map's details, and did not shy away from mentioning what he would have liked to have included in the design but had been prevented by the commissioners. The audience was appreciative enough, but their small number, and the failure of teachers, doctors and clergymen (the people Olmsted wanted to impress) to show interest was humiliating. Olmsted beat a hasty retreat from the city.

This time, the commissioners received no harsh criticism after the fact; Olmsted gave illness as an excuse for his silence throughout October 1877. He was soon back in form, however, sending a series of letters with suggestions regarding how and when to complete the work on the park. By this time he had gained an outspoken enemy in the commissioner who had helped him reveal the plan: George Washington Stephens (who, like Nelson, was an American whose parents were not above saddling him with a famous name). Olmsted's increasing micromanagement irritated Stephens to the point where he lost his



temper at a meeting and declared that the famous landscape designer had “made mistakes” that had cost the city time and money; furthermore, if they “had allowed Mr Macquisten to make the plan, they would have got one equally as good.” When the press reported the outburst, Stephens quickly retracted it, claiming he had been misquoted – but before long he resigned from both council and commission. If Olmsted was aware of this slight to his reputation he made no mention of it. In January 1878, the *Witness* reported that the landscape architect, “who has lately been employed by the Park Commissioners laying out the Mountain Park, has started on a European tour.”

When Olmsted returned home, he began work on *Mount Royal, Montreal*, his final report on the project, including the plan. Published in New York in 1881, it outlines his vision for the mountain, and also contains a dose of finger wagging directed at “the owners of the park” – meaning Nelson and his fellow commissioners. The volume features prominently in all the literature and publicity regarding Mount Royal Park – although the fact that Olmsted’s plan bears only a passing resemblance to the park we know today is downplayed. Sometimes the economic troubles of the 1870s are cited to explain why only parts of the plan were implemented. Sometimes city council is blamed. In any case, we have tended to assume that

the explanation cannot lie with the plan itself. Because of our fascination with genius, we are always inclined to focus on intention rather than on what was actually built: an artist cannot be wrong, merely misunderstood. Consequently, we discuss at length Olmsted’s proposal to have different sections of the mountain landscaped, forested and floriated in specific ways, and we note that he gave these sections romantic names such as “the Crag,” “Upperfell” and “Underfell,” and “the Glades.” Yet, outside the discipline of Olmsted Studies, these labels and instructions have little meaning. When hiking on Mount Royal today one is not thinking: “This is the Upperfell.” The same would have been true for Montrealers of the 1870s and 1880s. Olmsted must surely have been aware

that his plan was largely hypothetical, given that he included elements that he knew had already been rejected as unfeasible: for instance, the fanciful curving roads on the eastern side of his plan that would have required the commissioners to purchase additional land from unwilling property owners.

This is not to say, of course, that Olmsted’s plan was defective or in any way inappropriate for Mount Royal – quite the opposite. A grand design by the age’s greatest landscape architect was exactly what Nelson had sought. It certainly proved a useful document, but it was less a blueprint than a user’s guide: a point of reference when carrying out all the final touches, completing the network of mountain boulevards, planting the appropriate foliage, and maintaining



Top: Olmsted’s final design, from *Mount Royal, Montreal*, New York, 1881.

Bottom: Plaque to Frederick Law Olmsted, Mount Royal. ville.montreal.qc.ca/siteofficieldumontroyal

the vision. Respecting the letter of Olmsted's law was less important than simply being able to claim that Frederick Law Olmsted was the designer of Mount Royal Park. Although the commissioners (whom Olmsted never mentions by name) do not come across favourably in *Mount Royal, Montreal*, that would not have troubled Nelson greatly. Indeed, by describing his vision so articulately, and so publicly, Olmsted reinforced the idea that he was the designer of Mount Royal Park, even though the outcome only slightly reflects his plan. We continue to acknowledge, and be proud of, our mountain's association with Olmsted – while rarely mentioning names like Macquisten, McGibbon, Devlin, and Nelson.

What also stands out in the disputes over the park design is Olmsted's elitism. In both his correspondence and *Mount Royal, Montreal*, Olmsted warns against letting the rank and file of urban society use the park, lest they leave their garbage everywhere and generally fail to appreciate the glories of nature. His attitude is not surprising, since environmentalism in the nineteenth century was largely the purview of the elite. His statements did clash, however, with those of the park promoters, who consistently spoke of Mount Royal as a "park for the people." Nelson and his associates were, of course, no less elitist than Olmsted, and were hardly keen to see "the people" tramping over the mountain. But Nelson was nothing if not strategic. Mount Royal had to be marketed as a popular destination, particularly given perpetual fears that it would be used almost exclusively by residents of the Square Mile. Such fears were well-founded: despite the regular omnibuses, and despite the funicular whisking people up from Bleury Street as of 1886 (a feature Olmsted virulently opposed), the park was most easily accessed by those who owned carriages and sleighs, or who lived within walking distance.

Nelson was one of these – although he did not get to spend much time enjoying what was effectively his creation. After supervising the principal landscaping of Mount Royal Park he stepped down from the commission and council in 1881, and died late the following year.

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A LITTLE OFF THE TOP

Hair Wreaths, Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre, Lennoxville

by Emma McCully

The Lennoxville-Ascot Historical and Museum Society (LAHMS), located at Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre in Lennoxville, has a collection that reflects both the Victorian era in which the house was built (1862), and the local community. Artefacts for the most part date from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century and originate in the Eastern Townships, giving visitors a glimpse of what life in the region would have been like at that time.

Among the most interesting objects in the LAHMS collection are the hair wreaths in the “Salon” exhibition room on the second floor of the house. Two hair wreaths are on display, one slightly larger than the other. Dating from between 1850 and 1900, both were restored in 2001. While the specific origins of the wreaths are unknown, they are oddities that are bound to spur questions from visitors.

The hair wreaths are made of real human hair, wrapped around wire to give them their desired shape. The reason real hair was used has to do with the connection that hair had to commemorative practice in Victorian England, which considered human remains as a “relic” that was crucial to the act of remembrance and mourning the dead (Lutz, 131).

Losing a loved one is tragic. But what is important to remember about a hair wreath is that it “allows the mourner to communicate with the deceased, to resurrect, to reify, and to remember the dead, while it offers the decedent the material means to demonstrate, one last time, love for the mourner, and to insist upon the mourner’s continued remembrance” (Wildgoose, 84). This statement implies that there is a connection between who a person was and what is left of them when they pass away. Keeping hair and making it into a decorative piece, something beautiful requiring time and craftsmanship to create, allows mourners to process their loss.

Why is it that hair is specifically at the root of such a practice? Hair has more permanence than other parts of the body.

Even when it falls out or is cut off, hair remains as it was when it was on a person’s head; it does not decay or change over time once it is disconnected from the body (Stephens, 51). This inherent quality made hair the perfect vehicle for commemoration through human remains, since it left those who were mourning with a physical reminder that there was a life that had been

lived and that would be remembered (Stephens, 51). The intimacy and love exemplified in the creation of hair wreaths is indicative of how important it was to ensure that loved ones not be forgotten after their death, and that a part of them remain among the living.

The hair wreaths at Uplands show the craftsmanship and skill required to make them as well as the meaning behind them. They are as lovely as they are significant, since they demonstrate an act of commemoration that has long since fallen out of fashion. The wreaths exemplify the importance of keeping our lost loved ones close to us and making sure that they are remembered by those who remain.

Bishop’s University student Emma McCully interned for QAHN in 2023.

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Two Hair Wreaths, 1870s. Exhibition Room, Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre, Lennoxville. Photo by Emma McCully. Restored in 2001. Gift of Lennoxville Family.

THE WHISTLING CHAUTAUQUA GIRL

by Heather Darch

“Step right up folks! Don’t miss your chance to hear the warbling songster!”

Lena Walbridge (1870-1933) came from an impressive family. Her father and grandfather were both notable citizens of Missisquoi County, Quebec.

Solomon Walbridge (1795-1854) established a farm and tavern in the community of Clapperton, which was later called Mystic and is now part of St. Ignace-de-Stanbridge. He held several leadership roles including overseer of roads, justice of the peace, and a militia captain. He is best remembered as the tough guy who busted down the door of the Hiram Moore house in St. Armand and captured a room full of Patriotes in December 1837.

His son Alexander Solomon Walbridge (1828-1897) was a brilliant inventor and entrepreneur. He held a number of patents with *Scientific American* and operated a brickworks, a shingle mill, and an iron foundry that serviced the Champlain & St. Lawrence Railway. He also built a red-bricked mansion with heated floors and a conservatory that housed banana trees and alligators. Moreover, he erected a remarkable 12-sided barn with a water-powered rotating floor.

It would be hard to stand out in a family with two luminaries leading the way. Lena Walbridge did, though. She was a Chautauqua Girl!

Born in Mystic, Lena Elizabeth was the oldest child of Alexander Solomon Walbridge and Harriet Eliza Taylor (1846-1903). She had a comfortable childhood along with her six sisters and one brother. They were well-educated and musical; family tradition tells of in-house community concerts. In 1897, Alexander Solomon died tragically and his sudden death resulted in financial and domestic difficulties for the family. Only six years later, Harriet Taylor died. Walbridge had bequeathed parcels of land to each of his daughters, allowing them a small income, but his 14-year-old son Alexander “Allie” Walbridge inherited the ironworks and property. Unable to keep the business thriving like his father, Allie was forced to close the industrial complex. Although the mansion was to serve as a refuge

for the siblings, the upkeep costs were exorbitant. Allie and his sisters moved away to seek a living. Eventually the mansion fell into ruin and was dismantled in the 1940s.

Lena headed south and worked for the American Missionary Association, teaching at the Gregory Normal Institute between 1897 and 1898; this school served the Black community in Wilmington, North Carolina. She then studied piano at the Boston Conservatory of Music for five years and later at the Chicago Piano College. In 1907, her name appeared with the travelling musical troop The Alice Dale Company, and in 1908, she was performing with The Glazier Trio as a reader and whistler. “Her whistling,” noted one reviewer, “is especially fine and she received much applause from the audience... and it must be a natural gift and this has been assisted by years of the best training to be obtained.” By 1910, Lena was on the “Circuit Chautauqua,” hailed as an excellent and popular solo “Whistler, Pianist and Reader.”



Throughout rural America in the early twentieth century, the travelling “Circuit Chautauqua” was an annual educational, cultural, and entertainment event. Beginning in 1904 and continuing through 1932, the Chautauqua program was largely associated with small towns in the American mid-West, but it spread country-wide. The Chautauqua phenomenon also came to Canada, finding its greatest success in the western provinces.

For one week during the summertime, Chautauqua was a place where the whole family could gather with the rest of the community for uplifting speeches and wholesome entertainment. Considered more morally respectable than Vaudeville, the Circuit Chautauqua was, as Theodore Roosevelt called it, “the most American thing in America.” A full-page advertisement in the *Holt County Sentinel* of Oregon, Missouri, in 1908 summarizes its mission as follows:

[Chautauqua] is pre-eminently an institution of learning wherein is taught the science of true religion, the building of character – investing the mind with high ideals, the study and advantage of literary, scientific and artistic attainment, and the promoting and fostering of a social intercourse and

culture animating and inspiring the youth with sentiments of virtue, integrity and probity...

Chautauqua had two historical foundations. One was based in Lyceum societies. The Lyceum movement began in England in the early nineteenth century, and by the mid-1860s was popular in America. Lyceum societies sponsored cultural, informational, and scientific lectures during the winter. For rural America, they were an important avenue for adult education.

The second foundation originated at Lake Chautauqua in western New York state. In 1874, Lewis Miller, a wealthy agricultural inventor and Reverend John Heyl Vincent, a Methodist minister, established a summer Bible study for Sunday school teachers called the Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly. The purpose of this program was to enable people to gain training in teaching Bible studies in a more scholarly and enjoyable manner. The Chautauqua Lake site provided families with accommodation and an "uplifting" vacation for two weeks that included games, concerts, fireworks, and lectures.



Gradually, the speakers from the winter Lyceums came and lectured during the summer at the "Mother Chautauqua," which in turn initiated smaller independent and moveable Chautauquas to develop throughout the country. Circuit Chautauqua took place under large brown tents that could be moved from one town to another every five to seven days. Lecturers, musicians, actors, readers, singers, musical ensembles and assorted novelty acts entertained the gathered crowds for one "glorious

Lena Elizabeth Walbridge

Solo Whistler and Entertainer



In the art of whistling Miss Walbridge's recognized high attainment has been reached through several years of study and practice, having taken a course of instruction from the world noted whistler, Robert C. Bain, of Chicago. She whistles with perfect ease and absolute freedom. In her rendition of bird songs her notes are beautifully imitative of the warbling songster. Her solos are remarkable for their clearness of tone and brilliancy of technique.



Ye Merrie Birds

When the robird flies, his questionings—
 "What cheer" to me "What cheer."
 When from the azure skies above
 Sweet blubbed notes I hear,
 And "honks" of wild geese
 speeding north
 Fall softly on my ear—
 They're peremptory messages:
 They tell me spring is near.

When from the distant south there
 rings
 The clarion notes and clear,
 And comes the wild voice, hastening
 On wings—"Killdeer,"
 "Killdeer"—
 I bid farewell to winter
 And we part without a tear:
 For spring's authentic messenger
 Is come and spring is here.
 — Isaac C. Hess.

Miss Walbridge has taken a thorough and complete course in musical training, having studied piano for five years at the Boston Conservatory of Music, and later at the Chicago Piano College. At the piano her work is very fine in artistic execution, and as a cultured musician she equals the best.

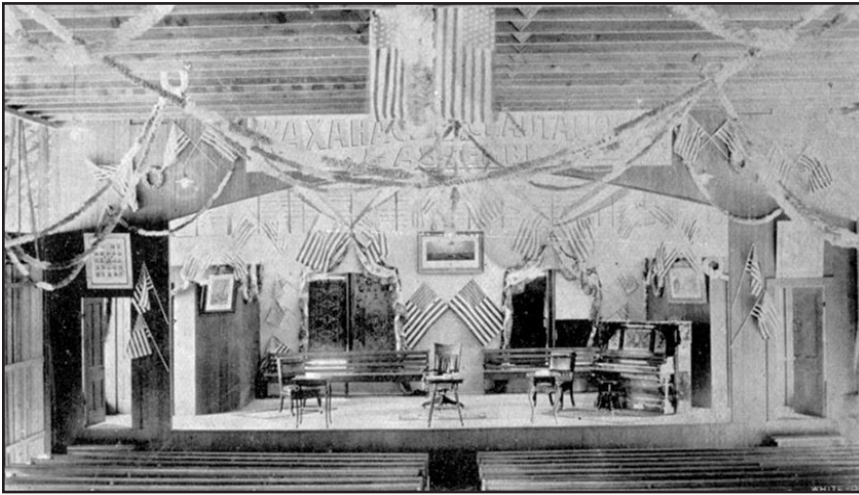
Her rare ability and success as a reader of the French dialect add very materially to the profit and pleasure of her entertainments. Having acquired the dialect from real life in Quebec, her knowledge is not merely theoretical, but practical, and her accent and expression not mechanical, but perfectly natural.

Miss Walbridge's costume worn in recital work, resembles the costume of the early French settler, and gives a fine effectiveness to her complete representations of French life and dialect. Her many testimonials and press notices testify to her excellent worth and wide popularity as Whistler, Pianist and Reader.



Lena Elizabeth Walbridge

Home add. Dumfries, Quebec, Canada,
 now booking Chautauqua engagements,
 see future program in Dec. of Jan.
 Lyceumite Talent
 open for season of 4011-12



Chautauqua week.”

Even though music and other forms of entertainment were included, the lecture was the “backbone of the Chautauqua” and encompassed informative, inspirational or political topics. “Chautauqua patrons could listen with sympathy and enthusiasm on the same day to Catholics and Protestants, Republicans and Democrats, Socialists, single-taxers, free-traders, and atheists.”

Audiences applauded authors, preachers and humorists like Mark Twain and they heard political opinions from future and ex-Presidents, including Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt. Notable “select folks” included Susan B. Anthony, who made appeals for women’s suffrage, and Carry Nation, who blazed the trail to National Prohibition. Retired actors and “prima donnas, no longer welcome on Broadway,” could become famous again under the brown tents. Even international lecturers came from “the Far East” to tell their stories alongside “cowboys, mountaineers, and Native Americans.”

Lectures always had an opening act, and these included brass bands, musical soloists and ensembles, magicians, and readers reciting selections from plays and poems. Other preludes involved stage productions that ranged from Shakespeare to Gilbert and Sullivan, bagpipers, bell ringers, whistlers, yodelers, and jugglers. Music was patriotic, sentimental or folkloric and there was always a demand for pretty girls, attractive costumes and bright uniforms.

Reviewers of Lena’s shows marvelled at her abilities. “In her rendition of bird songs,” one wrote, “her notes are beautifully imitative of the warbling songster.” Another said that “her solos are remarkable for their clearness of tone and brilliancy of technique.” A small glimpse into Lena’s performance can be imagined by the description of one admirer who wrote:

As a cultured musician, she equals the best. Her rare ability and success as a reader of the French dialect add very materially to the profit and pleasure of her entertainments. Having acquired the dialect from real life in Quebec, her knowledge is not merely theoretical, but

practical; and her accent and expression not mechanical, but perfectly natural.

Lena also added her own twist to her performance by “dressing in the historic costume of the early French settler of old Quebec.”

Like her fellow performers, Lena worked for a set fee for each engagement. While any town could host a Chautauqua, they had to gain enough community support to ensure that the requisite number of tickets could be sold to cover the costs and the performers’ fees. A ticket to the full week’s program was generally established at \$3.00.

The circuit was organized with one day’s travel distance between towns. Performers travelled along a planned itinerary, arriving at a new town every day during the summer months “in the midst of midwestern heat, rain, wind, or tornadoes.” The presenters gave their afternoon and evening programs in a new town each day and took care of their own travel and accommodations, some opting to sleep in railway stations to save money.

During its peak in the mid-1920s, there were 21 Circuit Chautauquas providing programs in more than 10,000 communities in 45 states to an estimated 40 million people. By the end of the 1920s, however, Circuit Chautauqua began its decline, primarily because of the availability of radio programming and the automobile, which gave rural citizens the chance to find amusement elsewhere. With the financial crash of 1929 ushering in the Great Depression, rural townspeople were no longer able to finance Chautauquas. The Circuit Chautauqua was over by 1932 and “Mother Chautauqua” limped along with ever-diminishing attendance numbers until the beginning of World War II.

Chautauqua filled a vast need for education in rural communities and it met a high standard for cultural entertainment. Its often progressive lectures brought topics to rural citizens in both Canada and the United States, awakening their “understanding of their role in their nation and the world.” Today, the revived Chautauqua Institution, still based in Chautauqua, New York, offers a variety of activities, including lectures, music,





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dance and art over a nine-week season each summer. It is “at once a community, a learning centre, a retreat, a vacation destination, and an American Utopia.”

Lena Walbridge retired from Chautauqua in the late 1920s, and settled permanently in Chicago, where she studied and practiced nursing for a few years. She lived with her sister Mabel until her death in 1933 at the age of 63. The greatest honour that could be given to a Chautauqua presenter was for the audience to wave their handkerchiefs as they cheered. It can only be hoped that Missisquoi’s whistling songbird received a “Chautauqua Salute” before her last curtain call.

Heather Darch is a project director with the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network. She is also a heritage consultant and the former curator of the Missisquoi Museum.

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LOTS OF WEATHER BUT NO WAR

Reading a Rural Diary from the Eastern Townships, 1916-1918

by Jane Jenson

Readers of L. M. Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* might imagine that all of rural Canada was paying close attention to the daily military news during World War I. Susan, the housekeeper at Anne (Shirley) and Gilbert Blythe's Ingleside home, regularly raised the flag in the garden at the news of an Allied victory. General anxiety and dismay followed setbacks relayed down the telephone wires from Charlottetown or in the newspaper. However, rural folk keeping diaries during the Great War provided a non-fictionalized literature from which European and Canadian war news was generally absent. They concentrated instead on recording the weather, their planting and harvesting, and visits from family and friends. More than 100 years later, we are initially startled to observe wartime rural or farm diaries devoting so much attention to the weather and so little to the transnational conflagration.

A farmer and forestry worker in Cherry River in Orford Township, John Buzzell (1850-1944), kept a typical rural diary, in which the only direct mention of the war appeared on the second-to-last page, when he wrote: "War is ended Nov 11th 1918." Indirectly, he mentioned the conflict when recording three visits from young men who had enlisted in the Eastern Townships 117th Battalion.

The collection housed in the Rural Diary Archive at the University of Guelph observed a similar absence in many wartime diaries. Of rural diaries from the 1860s, during the bloody years of internecine conflict in the United States, Marilyn Motz wrote: "National events are seldom recorded unless they have an immediate impact on the diarist, as when a son goes to fight in the Civil War" (p. 136).

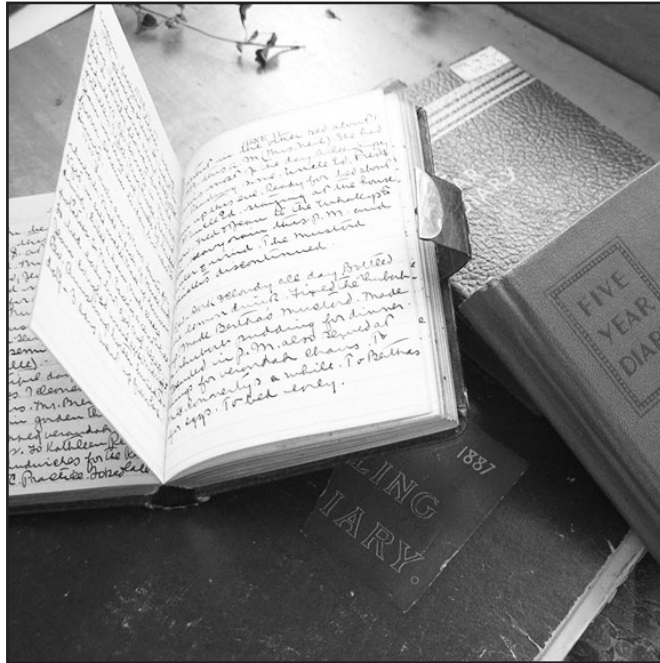
What are we to conclude from this silence about national events in diaries such as the one John Buzzell kept between March 1916 and December 1918? Was it that he, as much of the population in our own times, had no interest in current affairs and did not follow the news? The diary itself belies this hypothesis. He was an informed citizen, who subscribed to a daily

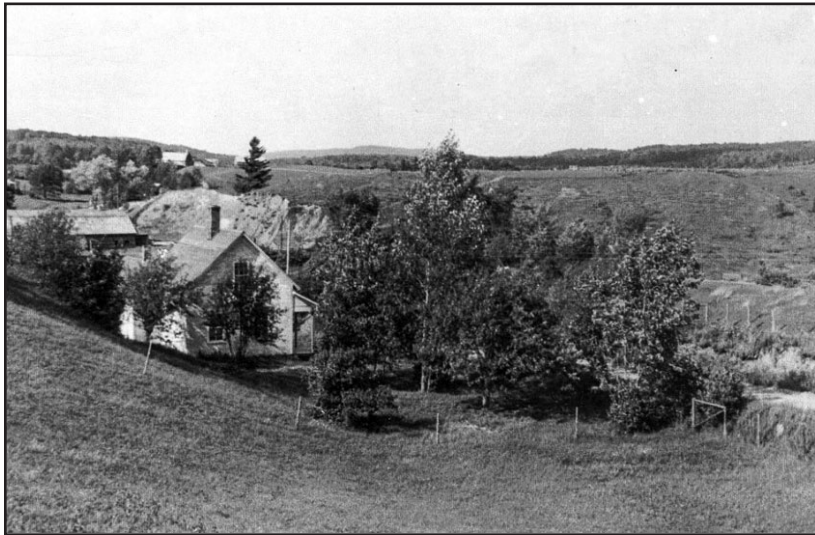
newspaper. Yet, he devoted more space to recording the steps he took to renew a subscription to the *Montreal Star* than he did to the events he read in it. On January 16, 1917, he wrote: "I Put \$2-- in a letter to Night to send to the Daily Star tomorrow to renew my subscription for another year." The next day he reported: "My letter went in this morning Mail from here for the Star." The only news story he logged, however, was on September 11, 1916, when he wrote in large script: "The Quebec Bridge fell again today, killing 25 men." Nor was he impervious to the carnage of the war and risk that volunteers took. He wrote on July 21, 1916, of one of the soldiers who had visited: "Saw Bob Baird He Starts for Valcartier to Night he may never return again."

A focus on daily and local events was the expectation for rural diary keeping, encouraged by "experts" who promoted such journals as a useful form of discipline for farmers' record-keeping. Rural Canadians, well into the twentieth century, wrote "account-book diaries," usually composed of a short entry that provided a weather report, a description of the day's work and any neighbourly visits, as well as monetary transactions. John Buzzell's entries rarely were longer than six lines and often only one: "I drew wood; Haying today." Many men kept such journals, and his was strikingly similar in content and form to those collected in Ontario and the American Midwest.

Rural diarists considered they were keeping a record of their everyday experiences and those of the neighbourhood that might be useful in future years. Hence, they took care to date the first snow, beginning of haying, potato planting and harvesting. The journals were open to the family, with entries made by children learning penmanship and visitors providing an autograph. Thus, the diary page was not the proper place to express feelings, whether joy or sorrow.

When his wife of 47 years suddenly died in November 1917, John Buzzell did write of his deep distress, but he quickly reverted to the familiar style, carefully recording his payments for the funeral costs. When his brother died, he absorbed the





Jane Jenson is a member of the Société d'histoire du Canton d'Orford.

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fact into his workday: “Myron died this morning A little past 2 Oclock. I went to Magog today. JB Oliver gave me a check.” He was by no means indifferent to the loss of this sibling and had been recording worrisome health reports for over two weeks, but the diary logged bald facts. Moreover, while he mentioned many family and neighbourhood events, these had to be experienced close to home.

In 1916, John Buzzell and Julia Wilson had five living children, but he barely mentioned the two daughters living in Paris, Ontario, except when they visited Cherry River. In contrast, a significant portion of the diary covered the doings of the other three families who lived close by. There was no estrangement from the daughters living out “west.” They were simply beyond the circle of daily life that the diary chronicled.

Understanding John Buzzell’s expectations of the purpose of rural diaries, perhaps derived from didactic articles in the very press he read, explains why the weather took precedence over the Great War in his journal. It also serves as a caution to researchers using such documents. Much as farm diaries provide useful information about work and social relations in rural areas, they must be carefully parsed and supplemented by additional sources before they reveal the emotional life, family ties, and civic involvement of the diary keeper. Having no sons in the army, John Buzzell may have been less immediately touched by the war news than was the family at Ingleside, but his silence does not indicate indifference.

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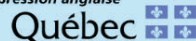
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WAVES OF CHANGE IN THE LAURENTIANS

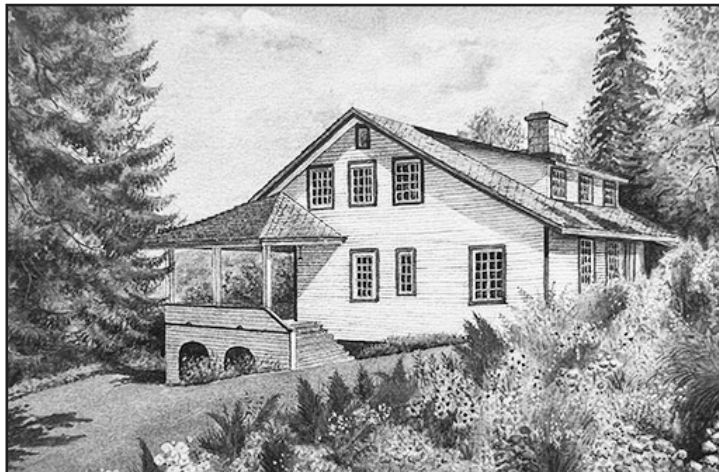
The Hague Family
by Joseph Graham

W ealthy Montrealers have a deeply held affection for Métis-sur-Mer, or Metis Beach, which lies a little east of Rimouski on the Gaspé peninsula. It was the holiday location for the family of George and Sarah Hague from the late nineteenth century, the place where they had built a large, gracious summer villa. The family still owns the property in Metis Beach, but in the late 1890s George Hague acquired a parcel of land in St. Agathe from Raymond Préfontaine, the mayor of Montreal, and built an exact replica of their Metis villa on a hillside overlooking Lac des Sables. He built it for Sarah, because she was too ill to travel the long distance to Metis. Its similarity to the villa that she knew well would render it instantly familiar to her. Sadly, she passed away shortly before the new building was completed in 1900.

Both houses were built strictly for summer use. The original Metis structure was destroyed in a fire in 1967, but the St. Agathe house, which Hague dubbed “Fairmount,” still exists and has been renovated into a year-round home. George Hague used it until his own death fifteen years after Sarah’s, but circumstances led the family to abandon this prized possession. In 1902, George married his housekeeper, Mary Frances Mitcheson, and his grown children seemed uncomfortable with this development. Fairmount Cottage became the innocent victim of their discomfort, and the family history talks little about the widow. Frances survived her husband by four years, following him to the Hague family plot in Mount Royal Cemetery in 1919. The house sat empty and for sale. Of the children who could have used it, only the fourth son, Henry John, stayed connected to the Laurentians, buying a farm in nearby St. Lucie shortly before his father’s death.

Almost every local farm changed hands between 1892 and the Great War. Most of the time the purchasers were self-styled gentleman-farmers from the city. Donat Raymond bought the remaining property that Préfontaine had acquired from the Chalifoux family, and, along with people like Lorne McGibbon and Osias Renaud, he entered animals into competition at the agricultural fair organized every year by the *Cooperative Agricole de Sainte-Agathe*. With all his money, Raymond could of-

ten boast of winning, but his stiffest competition came not from other wealthy gentlemen but from Osias Renaud, who had started his working life in the Parent mill just down the road from Fairmount Cottage. Renaud became a well-known professional photographer, leaving us one of the best collections of those



times, but when his second child was born he abandoned photography and bought the Lee farm on the road to Lake Manitou. Declaring that an honest living could only come from the soil, he and his family built one of the most successful farms in the region. The road running through his farm towards Ivry still carries his name.

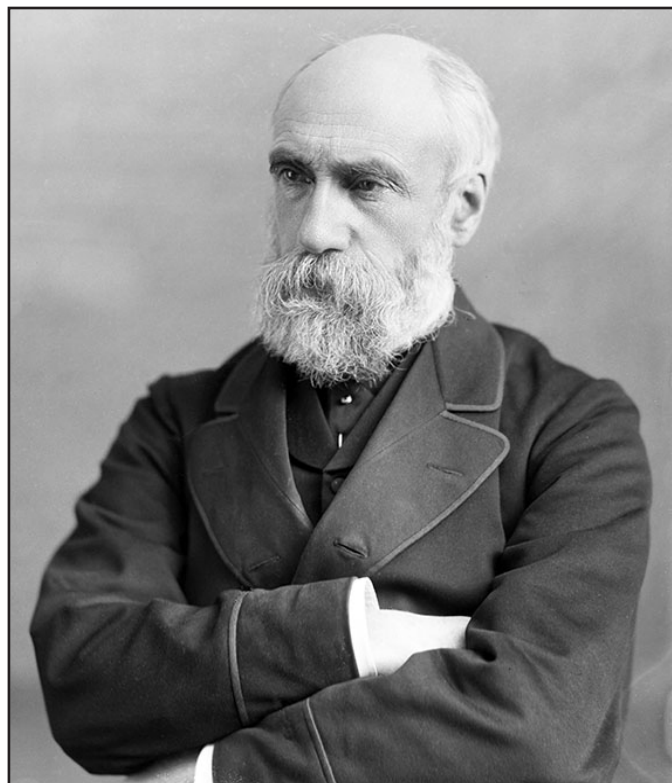
Most of the Montrealers did not really know what to do with their farms, but just enjoyed the open acreage, cleared by the sweat of the

brows of the two generations who had settled them before the arrival of the train. Some of these families, happy to have a small amount of hard cash, managed to establish more lucrative businesses in the town, but many excluded the manure or compost from the sale, presumably intending to continue gardening or farming on some smaller scale.

George Hague and his contemporaries rode a wave of change that brought in new banking rules, more credit and an era of easier access to money. That wave was followed almost immediately by a second wave auguring the petroleum age. Sweeping across the Laurentians, these two massive social changes displaced farmers and older technologies. The Parent mill, running on the small river that drained Lac des Sables, boasted 90 horsepower, providing work for 55 men. It and other river-driven mills, along with farming techniques that relied on composting, and even the steam-driven train itself, were all washed away in the new economy.

Of course, the newcomers did not see themselves as riding a wave. Morris Ryan acquired a farm, planning to sell cottages to other Montrealers. After the crash of '29, his son-in-law, Henry Kaufmann, envisioned the property as a hotel featuring horseback riding. Together they created Palomino Lodge overlooking Lac Giroux, a small lake that to this day respectfully carries the name of the original owner.

George Hague’s son Henry was looking for a peaceful refuge far removed from the pressure and noise of his legal



practice in Montreal, a place for himself and his wife Edith McLeod. He purchased the Brunet and Beausoleil family farms in St. Lucie, which were accessible by a road wide enough for a horse-drawn buggy. There were a few small lakes on the farms, one that carries his name and another named for the Beausoleils.

Henry Hague rose to head one of the most important legal firms of his time, but suddenly, at 64, he started over with his son H. McLeod Hague. Like his father George, Henry was financially comfortable, but there were still challenges calling to him. His major account, Imperial Tobacco, still needed him. The president and founder of that company, Sir Mortimer Davis, also owned a farm in St. Agathe. The Davis estate, on the shore of Lac des Sables, comprised a large greenhouse, a stone mansion that he called Chateau Belvoir, many outbuildings and good-sized barns. The two men likely had many meetings at Davis's chateau or in his private train car coming and going from Montreal, but Davis died shortly after the new firm was established.

Henry Hague retired two decades later, at 85. His son, McLeod, a graduate of the Royal Military College and a practicing lawyer, was called to active duty at the beginning of the next great war in 1939. He departed for the Front, leaving his wife and three children between the ages of 4 and 11 to keep the home fires burning in St. Lucie and Montreal.

This story is dedicated to the late Kenneth Hague, 1952-2023.

Joseph Graham (joseph@ballyhoo.ca) is the author of *Insatiable Hunger*, which reinterprets our historic understanding of the colonial period, here and in New England. It tells some of the stories that we were not taught in school.

Sources

John Anthony Turley-Ewart, "Gentlemen Bankers, Politicians and Bureaucrats: the History of the Canadian Bankers Association, 1891-1924," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2000.

Edward Hague's Autobiography, privately published.

Kenneth Gifford Hague, *The round of Sixteen: Two Hundred Years of a Family's History in Montreal*. Ivry-sur-le-Lac, Quebec, 2014.

REVIEWS

HISTORIES REVEALED

The Seven Nations of Canada, 1660-1860: Solidarity, Vision, and Independence in the St. Lawrence Valley

by Jean-Pierre Sawaya
translated by Katherine Hastings
Baraka Books, 2022

The Calf with Two Heads: Transatlantic Natural History in the Canadas

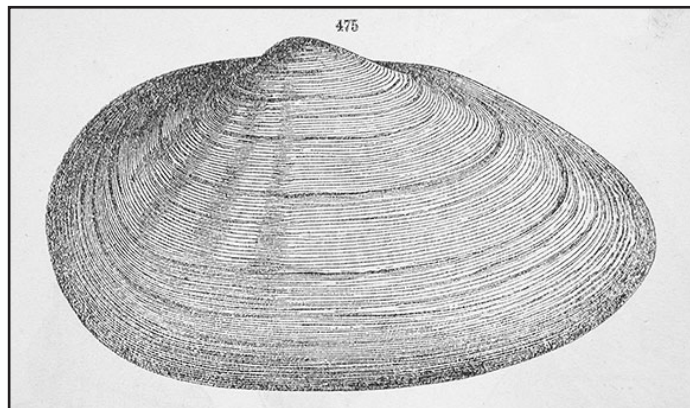
by Louisa Blair
Baraka Books, 2023

Two very different, but equally interesting, new publications, have become available from Baraka Books. Both focus on areas of Quebec’s past and, more widely, Canada’s and North America’s past, that have been either omitted or viewed as marginal by many traditional historians. This attitude has begun to change and a fuller, more comprehensive historic landscape is now appearing.

With *The Seven Nations of Canada, 1660-1860: Solidarity, Vision and Independence in the St. Lawrence Valley*, by Jean-Pierre Sawaya, translated from French by Katherine Hastings, we read about the very sophisticated and complex governance and diplomatic culture of the Indigenous peoples of Eastern North America. Until the increased growth of European population and the coming of industrialization, Indigenous peoples of our area formed an alliance, called the Seven Fires, with contacts and outreach to a variety of groups of considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity. This alliance centered on Iroquoian Kahnawake – named “Keeper of the Wampum” – a kind of capitol city for tribes that stretched from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic coast.

Sawaya presents in-depth research into the political organization of these populations, both their internal social structures and their intergroup relations. Communication among often quite diverse language speakers was done with a kind of “aide memoire,” called wampum. These items were not essentially decorative, but were important guides for pre-literate cultures.

Sawaya also examines the relationships between these Indigenous nations and the French, Dutch and English colonial powers. At first, these European incomers viewed Indigenous people as more or less their equals – for trade purposes and eventually as military allies to be played off against each other in



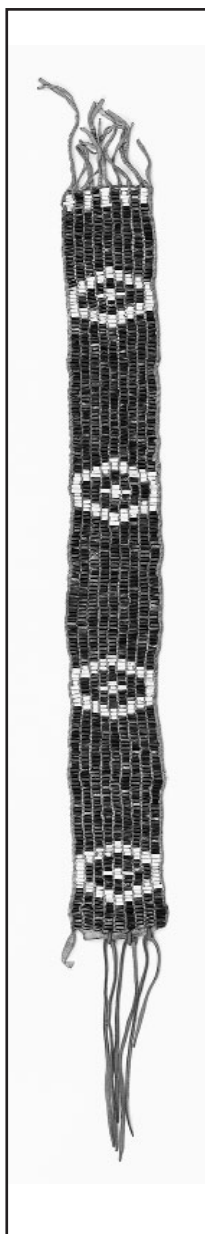
colonial wars. However, relations deteriorated considerably, especially after the War of 1812, when many Indigenous peoples were pushed beyond the Ohio River or confined to much-diminished territories that became the “reserves” of today. Sawaya has helped preserve and communicate this almost lost and certainly discounted history of the St. Lawrence Valley peoples that underlies the whole story of Eastern North America.

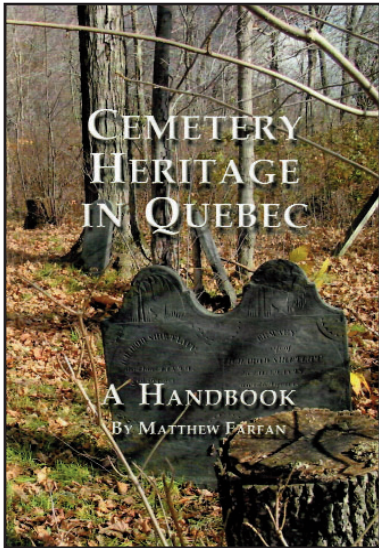
The other recent publication from Baraka Books is *The Calf with Two Heads: Transatlantic Natural History in the Canadas*, by Louisa Blair. Again, as in Sawaya’s book, we read about aspects of our history that have been somewhat discounted and not emphasized as they ought to be. Canada has a great deal of Wild Nature – we forget this now as most of us live in cities and towns and our contact with the natural world is sadly often limited to pets and garden plants. Nature is still out there, although not what it was, with the terrible effects of climate change. Yet, we still have a vast natural environment that, like our political and social history, has an important past.

Blair is a really delightful writer and has the skill of maintaining the reader’s interest for topics as diverse as Captain Cook’s sounding of the St. Lawrence River, the Franklin expedition to the Arctic, and Logan’s epic geological survey of Canada. Darwin and Wallace are touched upon to show the expansion of scientific thought in the nineteenth century. Blair also relates the establishment of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec City in 1824. This institution was one of the first natural history museums anywhere, with much of its work based on botanical research by women. Blair’s book contains many excellent illustrations – some unexpected – indicating a wide access to source materials. This adds much to the book’s appeal.

Both these publications are examples of why so many of us love history. The presentation of overlooked yet important aspects of our world can lead to new knowledge by increasing our curiosity to pursue these themes further.

-Reviewed by Sandra Stock





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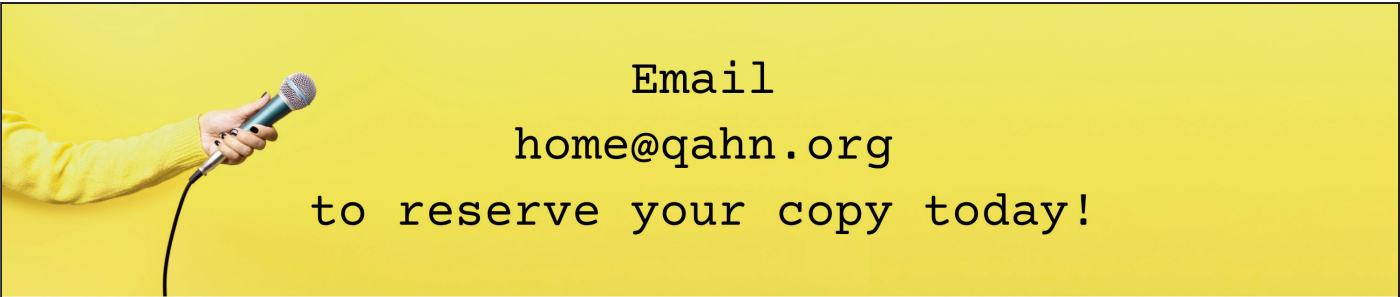
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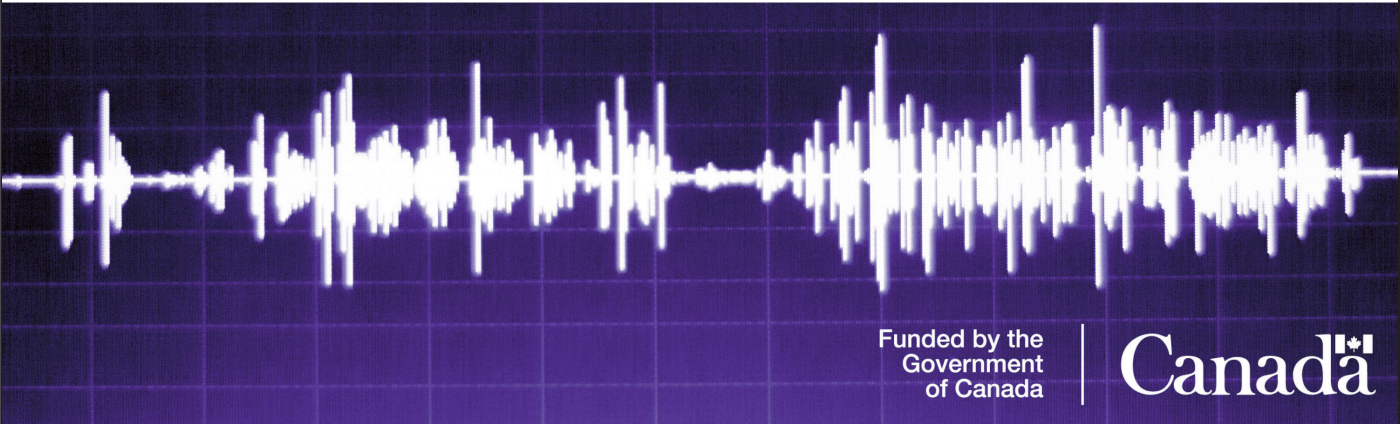
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