

# Quebec Heritage

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## News



### Spirited Away

Development Project Puts Griffintown's Heritage at Stake

### Same Cloth, Different Threads

Exhibit Explores Jewish Heritage in Province's Capital

### A Coastal Welcome

CoastFest Celebrates Life on the Lower North Shore

# Quebec Heritage News

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Cover: Graffiti on a wall circa 1970, photo courtesy McCord Museum MP-1978.186.3883.

## EDITOR'S DESK

# Clearing the air

by Dwane Wilkin

Anyone who cared to look could have read the writing on the wall. Many in fact did, and left. Yet health alarms, layoffs and the general air of decline still met with grim disbelief in my home town, as though the universal stigma attached to its name could be neutralized by some force-field of collective denial. I imagine this has something to do with memory's survival instinct. If you come from a place, as I do, that devoured itself in order to exist, the past endures in memory alone.

At least it's quiet now. I grew up within earshot of daily explosions and the round-the-clock growl of giant dump trucks hauling ore to the crusher. A wailing siren punctuated every afternoon, followed by a ground-shaking blast that filled the air with a sulphuric stink and a white fluff we called, mysteriously, curds. Stare across the open-pit Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos these days, and all you'll see besides a two-kilometre-wide void plunging into Appalachian bedrock, are gulls cruising overhead on their way to the dump.

Nor is there talk anymore of the metallurgical miracle that was supposed to have restored prosperity in the form of magnesium, wrought from mountains of asbestos tailings that ring one of the earth's largest man-made craters. In the 1990s, Noranda Mines talked the Quebec government into financing its Magnola project to the tune of a half-billion dollars, erecting what promoters touted as the world's cleanest and most efficient magnesium plant. Boy, did we ever take a soaking. Magnola closed the smelter two years after opening, blaming China for driving down world prices. Such are the fickle ties that bind branch-plant towns to shareholders.

While visiting the Chaleur Bay coast this spring, I saw the idle and now partially dismantled Gaspesia pulp and paper mill, and was reminded how widespread this precariousness is. Urban commentators whose notion of a good life never seems to include growing the food they eat or digging up minerals that go into their homes and appliances, or cutting down the trees that yield the paper in their offices, tend to view the life of regions in the narrowest terms of supply and demand, with locals providing a quaint backdrop for the real business of extracting wealth.

Such a view denigrates the role that company towns played in Quebec's social and industrial development. Different industries have come and gone. Many of the communities they supported eventually failed—including many English-speak-

ing communities. And they've all contributed in one way or another to Quebec's development.

Patricia Barrowman, an acclaimed Townships artist who is featured in this issue of *Quebec Heritage News*, grew up in Port Cartier and spent a number of her teenage years in Gagnon, a rough and ready iron-ore mining town on Quebec's North Shore that was closed and demolished by the company in the 1970s. I wonder how she thinks of those years. Not long ago, the copper-mining town of Murdochville in the Shick Shock Mountains came to a similar end. Other towns ditched by corporations struggle to re-invent themselves. Nick Fonda's brief history of the shoe industry at Richmond in the Eastern Townships recalls the vulnerability of regional manufacturing in an age of global free trade.

The demise of asbestos mining will not be mourned, not even by those of us whose families made their living by it and who, like me, for many years have made a point of coming to its defence, if only to deflate the hysteria that mention of the word usually triggers. I don't know how many times I've had to explain that asbestos is a natural mineral, not a nerve toxin. Nobody went around my town in Hazmat suits—though in hindsight, given what we know now, stricter environmental safety practices might have been a good idea. What makes the mineral deadly is its dust: thin needle-like particles which when inhaled, can cause diseases such as lung cancer, asbestosis (scarring of the lungs) and mesothelioma, a cancer of the lung lining. Quebec has one of the highest rates of mesothelioma on the planet. Which is certainly nothing to brag about, but neither is it the industry's only legacy.

Since the dangers of asbestos were not widely known in the early years—mining started in Quebec in the 1870s and only rapidly expanded after the Second World War—and because the illnesses it causes don't tend to manifest for many years following exposure, the fibre found its way into thousands of applications, from electrical wiring and building insulation, to automobile parts, cooking appliances, flooring and roofing materials, and cement products. One of the more widespread applications was in the form of a loose spray-on insulation.

In their heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, asbestos mines in the Townships—at Asbestos and in the Thetford Mines area—employed five thousand people and were a magnet for geologists and engi-

neers who hailed from all over the globe. A couple from eastern Europe who'd risked their lives to flee the Communists settled here to raise a family; her piano lessons would give dozens of local children their first taste of formal music training. One year at school a pair of sisters from Chile turned up, their father having sought asylum in Canada following Augusto Pinochet's military coup. The first time I ever tasted shish-kebab was at a barbecue in the back yard of an Egyptian colleague of my father. And for many years an English geologist and his Czech wife, a nurse, lived with their children in the house next to ours. There were families I remember from South Africa, Austria, France and the Netherlands. Where else but a company town would you expect to find such a cultural mix in rural Quebec?

All that, I guess I took for granted. Years would pass before I learned about a long and bitter strike here in the winter of 1949 that pitted workers against the mine's American owners and English-speaking managers. Some historians have suggested that the Asbestos Strike really presaged the sweeping changes to Quebec society that came in the 1960s. For me, it was the astronauts who made me realize the place was special.

In 1969 my family spent several summer weeks living at a motel in upstate New York while my father learned to program a mainframe computer system that his employer, Johns-Manville, was integrating into the milling process. Whatever notion I had about his work and the mine's place in the world began that day as we watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. Extremely resilient, fire resistant and pliable enough to be woven into textiles, asbestos was an essential part of space-flight engineering. NASA still uses it to insulate the solid-fuel boosters in its space shuttles. Here was a purpose that made sense of the pit.

Since whole sections of town were obliterated to get at the ore, frequent moves were a part of life. Some families would be reassigned to other houses, others lodged in trailer homes while the company moved their dwellings. Whole streets vanished in this way over the course of a few weeks. Sometimes even faster. One January morning in 1975 dozens of families living near the pit edge escaped from their homes just minutes before a landslide swept away the entire street. Standing with my father on the observation tower later that day, we watched one of the evacuated houses slide away and shatter into splinters.

In the late 1970s, René Levesque's Parti Québécois government aimed to do for the province's asbestos mines what he'd previously done a decade and half earlier with hydro-electric power while serving in Jean Lesage's Liberal cabinet, which is to say, take them out of the hands of private investors and use their wealth to fund an ever-

expanding public sector. Jeffrey Mine wasn't targeted by the takeover, but by the time the National Assembly had passed the law allowing the expropriation of General Dynamic Corp.'s Thetford Mines properties in 1979, families in Asbestos were already starting to pull up stakes. A looming referendum on sovereignty coupled with diminished career prospects in Quebec was too much to bear. Rumours of layoffs began to circulate. We said goodbye to a lot of neighbours that summer who'd put in for transfers to the Denver headquarters of Johns-Manville's U.S. parent company, Manville Corporation.

Layoffs did come. By the early 1980s, the deadly after-effects of asbestos exposure were making headlines and starting to scare away customers. I remember, in particular, the CBS 60 Minutes program that went to air with a segment on a car mechanic who was dying from exposure to dust from brake pads. The Manville Corporation found itself in bankruptcy proceedings fending off personal-injury lawsuits, and sold Jeffrey Mine to a handful of Quebec investors in 1983, including the new general manager, a likeable father of four who'd worked at the mine since his teens but who would die of lung cancer in his fifties. The industry went on the defensive; in a page out of Big Tobacco's public-relations play-book, producers, backed by Ottawa and Quebec, spent millions of dollars on research trying to show that Canadian mineral fibre could be used safely. But orders continued to drop off, as developed countries moved to restrict or ban its use. Even the province got out of the business, selling off the publicly owned Société Nationale d'Amiante in 1992.

To their shame, politicians in Ottawa and Quebec City continued to support the industry. The last scheme to keep the mine open at Asbestos involved spending \$60 million in the late 1990s to develop underground operations. In 2002 Jeffrey Mine's owners filed for bankruptcy protection and began to shed the remaining 300 jobs. Only two Quebec mines, both in the Thetford Mines area, remain in operation. Asbestos has been banned in nearly every developed country and even developing nations, whose comparatively lax safety controls have enabled the industry to continue to export, are moving to ban the substance.

The World Health Organization estimates that work-related asbestos exposure kills 90,000 people a year worldwide. Even Quebecers like me, who gained much from this industry's past, have to ask, is this a legacy we wish to go on spreading? In May the Canadian Labour Congress called for a complete ban on all asbestos mining in advance of a major report on cancer risks that Health Canada is expected to release later this year. It's time to face the facts, it's time to close this chapter in our history.

## LETTERS

**Grave future**

Many generations of my family are buried in the Ploss Cemetery, a small and historic graveyard not far up the road from my ancestral home near Bedford, Quebec. It has been well-maintained for many years but is probably an exception to the rule. There is still a Ploss Cemetery Corporation that has a modest endowment, and a few people who care, to run it. I have sent them money from time to time.

However, I no longer live in Quebec, nor do my brother or sister. We all left many years ago when it became apparent that being English-speaking and with a name like McIntosh, we did not have much of a future in la belle province.

It is inevitable, with the exodus of the remnants of these rural, English Quebec pioneers—like myself—that these old graveyards will fall into disrepair and neglect. Heather Darch may bemoan the current lack of funding and knowledge to save these old, historical graveyards ["Losing Ground," page 15, Mar/Apr] but I am afraid the struggle was doomed long ago.

*Ron McIntosh,  
Bracebridge, ON*

**Website could solve puzzle**

I welcome the birth of Gaspesian Heritage WebMagazine because it may provide answers which have eluded me for too many years. My first and most relevant question is: who was the mayor of Grande Grève after 1882? William Hyman was mayor of Cap de Rosier, which included Grande Grève, from 1858 until his death in 1882. Grande Grève gained its independence at approximately that date, but with the exception of a single sentence claiming that Isaac Hyman succeeded his father and reigned for 40 years, no other proof exists.

If the Gaspesian Heritage Web-

Magazine could provide the proof, it would solve a mystery which has puzzled historians for over one hundred years.

*Eiran Harris, Archivist Emeritus,  
Jewish Public Library,  
Montreal, QC*

**Down Under bowled over**

I became acquainted with the Gaspesian Heritage site through a link on the GoGaspe webpage. I am impressed with the site content and commend you on the information inclusions as well as the photo gallery. Well done, and please keep adding relevant material.

My compliments on what is, in my opinion, a very professional presentation.

*Brian Dea,  
Sydney, Australia*

**Coast no longer alienated**

It was really great of your whole team coming to the coast. It was an honour to receive you all at the Kempffer Cultural Interpretation Center in New Carlisle. I would have wished our home to have been a little more set up; rest assured we're working on it.

The website approach certainly reunites us all in a common cause. Out on the coast, we sometimes feel alienated, and not to say we are less passionate about what we do. The website, we must use to our advantage in stimulating the importance of who we are, to re-discover our identities and become excited about it. The lifeline of any society is closely linked to its cultural activity. I believe that every time we delve into our 'reason to be' and manifest its positive multifaceted avenues, we actually celebrate life. So, long life to QAHN.

*Normand Desjardins,  
New Carlisle, QC*

**Readers' help sought**

I am seeking the help of your readers in researching Quebec shipowner and merchant Henry Fry, about whom I am writing a biography.

Fry's successful career in Quebec City prior to 1880 has been well documented by Eileen Marcil, author of *The Charley-Man*, a history of wooden shipbuilding at Quebec. Little is known, however, about the last years of Fry's life in Farnham and Sweetsburg, during the period 1886-1896. He was initially a patient of Farnham physician, Dr. George Slack. Slack owned several buildings in Farnham where he cared for, and may have housed, patients suffering physical and mental illnesses.

Some time after 1890, Henry Fry appears to have moved to Sweetsburg (Cowansville) where he wrote a memoir, essays, and the *History of North Atlantic Steam Navigation*, which is still a reference work used by maritime historians. While he was writing the book, he must have kept the Sweetsburg post office busy with his large volume of correspondence to leading ship owners around the world. He apparently resided in Belmont House (today, the Yamasaka Hotel), which may have served as some kind of retirement or convalescent home at the time.

He died in 1896, and is buried in Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery. He is my great-grandfather. I would be grateful for any information your readers can furnish about Dr. Slack and about the Eastern Townships years of Henry Fry.

*John Fry,  
Katonah, USA*

**Comments?**  
Send your letters to the  
editor at [editor@qahn.org](mailto:editor@qahn.org).

## TIMELINES

# A coastal welcome

## *Inaugural festival captures life on the Lower North Shore*

by Gloria Er-Chua

**T**ourists hoping to mark Quebec City's 400th birthday away from what will surely be a chaotic capital this summer might well consider a trip downstream to the Lower North Shore, where more than a dozen small communities on the Gulf of St. Lawrence are planning to celebrate their own role in the development of New France and Canada.

In what CoastFest organizers hope will be the inaugural edition of an annual summer cultural festival here, all fifteen historic fishing villages are taking turns playing host to eight weeks of special activities, beginning in Blanc Sablon on June 21 and moving westward as far as Kegaska. Each village will host the festival for a week, with some overlap between villages.

"As far as ecotourism goes, it's kind of a paradise that's pretty much undiscovered," notes festival coordinator Annelise Godber, who hopes to cash in on Quebec's 400th anniversary bash by luring adventure-minded sightseers further east, to the province's remote and rugged north Gulf coast, which can only be reached by boat or airplane. "It's not the most accessible, but for some people it adds to the excitement."

Lower North Shore residents lay proud claim to a long fishing tradition, rooted in the region's maritime history. During his first voyage to the New World in 1534—74 years before Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec City—Jacques Cartier charted much of the Lower North Shore coast. The Coast has historical links to Quebec City, too, as it was the corridor through which early French immigrants came to New France.

Along with francophone history, CoastFest organizers will highlight the equally strong English and Innu cultures of the region. After Carti-

er's initial explorations, the Coast was left alone by the Europeans for almost 200 years before the French began settling there in the early 1700s. Britain quickly followed suit, and by the 1760s had taken over many fur and seal trading posts. The oldest heritage, by far, can be traced through the Innu, whose ancestors arrived in the region roughly 2,000 years ago.

Today, you won't only find distinct pockets along the shore belonging to each of the three main cultures. While some communities may have a stronger Innu, French, or English presence, Godber says that what's perhaps most striking to visitors is how these cultures have co-existed. Where many other North American communities have failed, the Coast appears to have succeeded in combining their unique traditions rather than fighting to assimilate one another.

In Kegaska, for instance, a settlement taking its name from the Innu word "quegasca," is home to St. Philip's Anglican Church and a predominantly English-speaking population. Harrington Harbour, founded by Englishman Benjamin Simms and Scotsman John Chislett in 1871, boasts a monument to the French explorer Cartier.

CoastFest events reflect this diversity, Godber promises. She calls the festival a grassroots movement, saying each community gets to decide which events to host during its week.

"It should come from the people from there and what they think they should focus on and what they think is important in their history and culture," she says. Some villages will hold storytelling sessions and traditional skills demonstrations such as snowshoe making and net weaving.

There will also be food, and lots of it, from beach cookouts to community suppers. It's all



traditional Coast food, Godber says, but when asked what type of food that constitutes, she hesitates for a moment. "It's a mix of Innu and Inuit, with more stuff that comes from Labrador." Even their stories are intertwined, like the one about French explorer Augustin le Gardeur de Courtemanche who kidnapped the Aboriginal woman Acoustina, and which will be presented as a play in each village over the course of the festival, by a four-member troupe of actors.

Given the decline of the fisheries in recent years, Lower North Shore communities are understandably hopeful that tourism can help to revitalize the region's fragile economy. More than 5,000 people visited the Coast last summer, yet the potential remains largely untapped. Godber says she regards CoastFest as just one among many building blocks that will be necessary to develop the region's tourism sector in the years to come.

## Miner in history

### *Rubber baron's Townships estate slated for reincarnation*

by Gloria Er-Chua

**G**ranby already has a municipal park, a swimming pool, a bridge, and a golf course named for the Miner family. Now the small city southeast of Montreal is about to add another—a living heritage conservation site.

Caroline Gosselin, founder and director of the Miner Heritage Farm project, says her plan is to open the site to visitors by the summer of 2009. It won't be a traditional museum, either, rather a fully operational, organic farm meant to serve as a showcase for healthy living, modeled after educational farms that already operate in New Hampshire and Vermont.

"We want [people] not just to see us as some kind of tourist place you go to once a year," says Gosselin. "We want to create the habit for people to just come and have a coffee and then explore the activities."

Until late last year, it looked like the heritage farm project might not get off the ground. In May, 2007, the City of Granby defeated private developers to buy the entire 571-acre property on which the old Miner farm is situated for \$6.5 million, vowing to preserve 250 acres of woodland as a conservation site. The buildings were situated on the other half of the property, which city officials originally slated for new residential development. Gosselin had to work hard to persuade city council not to destroy the old farm. "I was told, 'it's not like you're trying to save Samuel de Champlain's house. It's just a century-old farm.'"

Harlow Miner began his career in Granby as a leather maker and by 1890 he and his brothers had acquired a large tract of land along the North Yamaska

River. Here they established the Miner Rubber Company towards the end of the 19th century, and by the late 1920s it was one of the most successful rubber industries in the British Commonwealth. Ownership of the farm was passed down through Stephen Henderson

Miner, a former Granby mayor, and eventually to his nephew, William Harlow Miner. "Although he was a very successful businessman, he admired the more natural side of life," recalls Maria Lubecki, W.H. Miner's granddaughter.

She says her grandfather would be pleased with Gosselin's project and is honoured that local people wish to commemorate her family's contributions to Granby's history.

In addition to horses, cows, and the Canadian-bred Chantecler chicken, three of the heritage farm's 12.5 acres of land will host themed gardens with flowers, vegetables, and medicinal plants. All the produce will be sold in a café located in a

converted barn, and operated by Equiterre, a fair-trade organization. Visitors will also be able to attend classes on healthy eating, and get information about local producers.

Gosselin says she's aiming for 10,000 visitors next year when the site officially opens. Instead of charging admission fees, yearly memberships will be offered for about \$40 per family. If all goes as planned, revenue from membership and produce sales should keep the farm solvent.

Gosselin's also looking into government grants and holding off on a \$3-million restoration project that would see the farmhouse, barn, and outbuildings entirely renovated. "We will start slowly and small."



# Storyteller makes past come alive

*Hudson historian Rod Hodgson wins 2008 Phelps Award*

by Gloria Er-Chua

**R**od Hodgson knows how to make a bad situation work for him. Earlier this year the 2008 Marion Phelps Award recipient, and Hudson's go-to source for local history, underwent hip surgery. "It didn't slow him down at all," Martin Smith, Hudson Historical Society (HHS) president and Hodgson's nominator, says. "It just gave him the opportunity to write because he didn't have to go to work."

Hodgson has already authored several books about the Hudson region. When he's not working as a maintenance person with the town's public works department, he spends his time poring over town records and archives from the HHS, of which he was the former president and current publications director. He's currently working on a series of short stories chronicling the 100-year history of Wyman Memorial United Church. All of which helped win over this year's Marion Phelps Award selection committee.

Since 2001, the Phelps award has been presented annually by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) to recognize an individual's outstanding volunteer commitment to the preservation and promotion of anglophone heritage in Quebec.

Although Hodgson has developed a reputation as a professional history researcher, his true passion lies in personal, oral accounts. Around his hometown, Hodgson's name is often found in local newspaper advertisements, requesting people's stories. "He does rely a lot on going out and actually talking to people," Smith says.

Hodgson is a vivid storyteller and often gives school presentations dressed in costume as a fur trapper, reading



from his grandmother's journal. "It's more than just reading," Smith explains. "It's more like acting."

As a man in his early 50s, Hodgson wasn't born until after the Second World War. Nevertheless, he has developed a strong interest in Canadian military history. Once a year in Hudson, a group of D-Day veterans meet to commemorate their fallen colleagues. As they age and pass on, Hodgson has begun inviting their friends and relatives to the event, ensuring the discussion and their legacy continues. Some of their stories appear in his *Defenders of the Flag*, a book about Hudson veterans' military involvement since the 18th century.

"He makes it very much a personal discussion," Smith says, adding that the familiar, personal tone has made the book a local best-seller. "He knows a lot of the families that have been around for a long time."

Hodgson has done his share of public service, acting as chief of Hudson's volunteer fire department for 25 years. He's also an avid fire prevention memorabilia collector, with artefacts from different fire departments in the Hudson region. Friends say his house could essentially be a fire prevention museum. You won't get him to talk about his extensive collection, or his other achievements, though.

"I don't think you would be able to get him to blow his own horn," Smith says. Is this the man's biggest draw? Part of it, Smith allows. "I think the main thing that I found is, he's easy to talk to, easy to listen to. People will open up to him, and that's a strength of character." The award was presented to Hodgson at QAHN's annual general meeting on June 14.

## Heritage youth corps proposed

**V**andalism, encroachment, neglect—but mostly a dwindling English-speaking population—threaten the integrity of cemetery heritage in rural Quebec, a new study reveals. The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) surveyed more than three hundred old burial grounds in the Eastern Townships, Laurentians and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean last fall and winter.

In May, more than 130 cemetery trustees attended heritage conferences at Stanstead and the Laurentians and supported a resolution calling on the govern-

ment to recognize these sites as cultural properties and to develop a funding mechanism to support cemetery-heritage conservation activities. The organization is also calling for the establishment of youth-based work crews to help volunteer caretakers look after heritage cemeteries.

"It would be a great employment opportunity for young people in Quebec's regions," QAHN's executive director Dwane Wilkin says.

The conferences were made possible by a generous donation from Townshippers Foundation.



# The well runneth dry

*Summer student funding cutbacks threaten small museums*

by Gloria Er-Chua

**W**hen Bev Loomis received a letter from Service Canada's Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program a few weeks ago, she thought it was to confirm her eligibility to receive funding for a student to help her run the Patrimoine-Ascott-Heritage society's heritage schoolhouse. To her surprise, the letter said there wasn't enough funding in her federal Eastern Townships riding, Compton-Stanstead, to grant her request.

Now Loomis, who depends entirely on a student to run the Little Hyatt One Room Schoolhouse in Milby every summer, won't be able to open the building this year, save a few already-scheduled bus groups.

She's not the only one in this position, according to Sylvie Desjardins, a political assistant to Compton-Stanstead's Bloc Quebecois MP, France Bonsant. Desjardins says, of the 124 applications submitted from non-profit community groups, only 70 received funding and most didn't get as much as they had asked for.

Service Canada, which runs summer jobs programs CSJ and Young Canada Works (YCW), allocates a certain amount of money annually for each riding based on its population of students. But over the last couple of years, the program has drawn increasing criticism from historical societies and heritage groups, not only because of funding cutbacks, but because local regions are losing control over decision making.

In 2006, the office responsible for assessing applications in the Eastern Townships, for instance, was moved from Sherbrooke to Montreal. "The people [in Montreal] don't know the organizations and how they work," Desjardins says. "If someone said, 'I need 17 students', but in fact they need eight, they would be given 17." This resulted in fewer organizations being approved and some receiving more students than they had jobs for, Desjardins believes.

In the Compton-Stanstead riding,

which is home to Bishops University and its student population of around 2,000, subsidies for student employment from the federal program were capped this year at \$287,000, or about the equivalent of 2006 levels.

"Now the minimum wage is not the same as in 2006, so we have less than in 2006," Desjardins says. The Compton-Stanstead riding office received applications from 124 organizations requesting funding for 393 summer positions, totalling over \$1.1 million. "We only have less than one-third of that," Desjardins says.

Loomis would like to see Service Canada prioritize smaller organizations. She knows some large heritage societies that have been granted funding, whereas she only asked for one student. "With historical societies, there's always a paid member there, and a student just goes in and helps out. For us, it's just the reverse, there's nobody. That summer student is there strictly by herself."

Esther Healy, volunteer archivist with the Richmond County Historical and Museum Society, was approved funding for one student for six weeks. She's considered one of the lucky ones, though she might still have to end the museum's eight-week summer season early. She wanted two students for eight weeks each.

"We totally depend on summer students to keep that place going," she says. "We're going to try to hire a student an additional two weeks, but it's going to eat into our budget, which isn't very big."

Healy argues the government needs to recognize heritage societies' contributions not just to history and education, but individual students as well. She'd like to give more students opportunities to gain work experience, but finds it more difficult each year as she receives less funding. "We don't pay anybody other than the students," she says. "We really operate on a shoestring."

## THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS: ON LAKE AND RIVER BY MATTHEW FARFAN



A visual journey back in time through a fascinating corner of Quebec.

This stunning bilingual book (208 pages, soft cover) is a must for anyone interested in the history of the Eastern Townships.

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# Under new management

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*Gaspé heritage tourism group seeks new focus on exhibits, education*

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by Gloria Er-Chua

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**T**he new president of the Gaspesian British Heritage Village in New Richmond says all 28 heritage buildings situated on the 82-acre site will remain closed this summer, pending a complete overhaul of the Village's products and services, aimed at boosting visitor traffic.

Michael Geraghty says the temporary shutdown is part of a strategic plan adopted by Village directors earlier this year, one that calls for shifting resources away from costly onsite building maintenance to building partnerships with other heritage institutions. Situated on the beautiful Chaleur Bay coast, the site is expected to open as usual for recreational use beginning July 1, but the various donated structures that have made up the complex since its founding in 1985 won't re-open until 2009, along with new services and rotating exhibits.

Nowadays, "there's not that much to bring in people from one year to the next because it just doesn't change," Geraghty says.

Interest in the Village has dwindled since its heyday in the 1990s, when it saw over 16,000 visitors per year. Last year the site brought in only 5,000 people. Since its opening, the Village has maintained the same three-kilometre long tour of the property. There's the Gendron House, an interpretation centre with a historical portrait of the Loyalists' arrival in the Gaspé region in the 1780s. Other structures include a granary, a lighthouse, an old school, and a military museum. Summer employees go around in period costume, representing the various British and Acadian immigrants who settled in the Gaspé throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

"The village has always sort of survived on a year-to-year basis," Geraghty says, adding that this is also due to a heavy dependence on inadequate gov-

ernment funding. The strategic plan aims to increase traffic with both new and returning visitors, enabling the Village to become more financially self-sufficient.

Geraghty's in the midst of signing contracts with nearby museums to bring their exhibits to the Village. He hopes this will attract returning visitors and eventually make it financially possible to keep the site open year-round. And having exhibits means he won't have to charge admission to the Village itself—an attractive proposition for first-time visitors, Geraghty notes. "People will only pay to come into the exhibits."

The Village's operating expenses average \$350,000 yearly, with roughly 60 to 70 per cent coming from government grants. It has struggled financially in recent years, as funding has decreased and maintenance costs have risen. Geraghty hopes the Village will eventually cover 60 per cent of its own expenses. Last year it broke even, and there's a projected surplus this year, due to reduced operations. The only major capital project in the works is repairing Gendron House's roof.

In the future, the heritage village may see additional commercial services added to bring in much-needed revenue. Already, the site plays host to the annual New Richmond Bluegrass Festival, celebrating a music style that's a fusion of jazz and American country, with roots in Irish folk. This year's event runs August 29 to 31. The village also throws a Canada Day celebration. Next year's visitors can also look forward to a new, more comprehensive visitor's centre, and events with educational aspects and historical roots.

"We've gone away from that in past years just because it was easier to do, probably," Geraghty admits. "When you have a disco night for fundraising, it's not exactly historical."

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# Family ties

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*Montreal gathering allows sister societies to share their histories*

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by Barbara Lavoie

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**A** year ago, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network organized Montreal Mosaic, a conference held in the McCord Museum's auditorium that attracted close to 100 participants. The event was intended to generate knowledge of the city's multicultural history, and make contact with heritage-minded groups and individuals from its culturally diverse English-speaking communities.

As a follow-up to that event, the Sister Societies

of Montreal conference was held at the historic Masonic Memorial Temple in downtown Montreal on Saturday, April 19, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Representatives from four sister heritage groups were invited to talk about their histories: the St. Patrick's Society (Irish Catholics), the St. Andrew's Society (Scots), the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society (Irish Protestants), and the St. David's Society (Welsh). Historians refer to them as the 'sister societies' because they were all

founded in Montreal between 1834 and 1835, and they share a desire to represent the interests of their members, most of whom emigrated from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

By coincidence or by chance, the event fell in the wake of the current provincial government-sponsored Bouchard-Taylor Commission, a public consultation into accommodation practices related to cultural differences. Although the issue wasn't raised at the conference, thoughts about the minority status of anglophones in Quebec—as highlighted by Premier Charest's recent full-page ads informing new immigrants that Quebec is a French-speaking nation that attempts to accommodate English speakers—couldn't have been far from people's minds.

In fact, conference participants learned that both the St. Patrick's and the St. Andrew's societies were founded within a few months of the French St. Jean-Baptiste Society being established. Their membership was restricted to men, usually business elite, and they openly admitted they were created out of a need to “resist oppression and emit propaganda in favour of the so-called British party.” The theme of the day focused on that decade, which saw the Upper and Lower Canada Rebellions in 1837 and 1838. Keynote speaker Heather McNabb, historian and author, spoke about Montreal in the early 1830s to set the tone. Through her lecture and slideshow of drawings, engravings, the writings of well-known historical figures such as Sir Hugh Allan, and even political cartoons of the time, participants gained an understanding of the political climate in which the associations were founded.

“Historians generally agree economic conditions began to decline in Lower Canada during the 1830s, particularly in the rural areas, and social unrest was not far behind. By 1834 political issues were beginning to surface that eventually led to the Rebellions of 1837 and 1838,” McNabb noted. “The conflict [wasn't] equally divided along the lines of the French against the English, but about the ‘have nots’ versus the ‘establishment’ or ‘the haves.’ It was into this increasing immigration, urbanization, and political unrest that many of the sister societies we know today were born.”

During the Rebellions, the camps were divided into the Loyalists, mostly English speakers, and the Patriotes, mainly French speakers. Referring to Elinor Kyte Senior's book, *Redcoats and Patriots: The Rebellions in Lower Canada, 1837-38*, McNabb explained that the St. Jean-Baptiste Society was the social wing of the Patriote party, while the four sister societies were under the wing of an umbrella organization, the Constitutional Association of Montreal. “People were crazy for clubs,” she said of that period in history. There was no social safety net as exists today, no unemployment or health insurance, and the

societies were formed for mutual aid, for insurance, for themselves and for others, and to be a social welfare network.

The sister societies were critiqued by a contemporary writer and member of the Patriotes in the newspaper, *The Vindicator*, who wrote that the sister societies were connected to the Constitutional Association in order to “assume the sacred garb of charity to conceal their dark and real designs,” and as a means to “gain political power and control of the few over the many.”

The four presenters, Mary McDaid, president of the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal, Brian Mitchell, president of the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society of Montreal, Moira Barclay-Fernie, past-president of the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal, and Leslie West, president of the St. David's Society of Montreal, provided detailed accounts of their societies' history, heritage, and legacy. From filmmakers, musicians, dancers, and authors, to annual balls, parades, and public exhibitions, to educational scholarships and church preservation, all four societies have

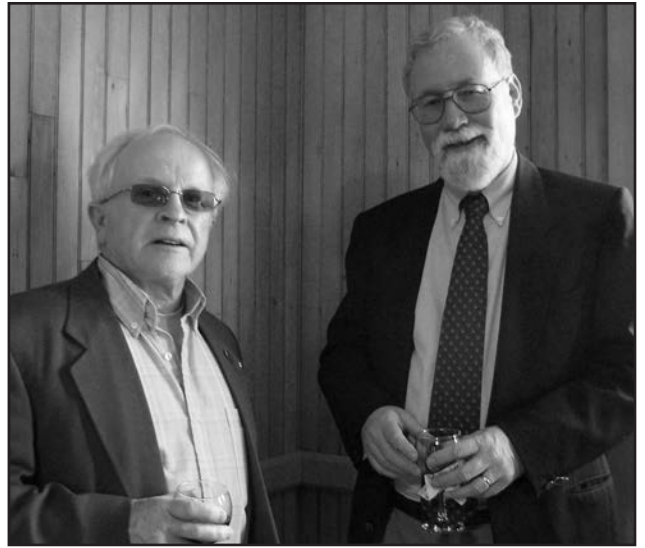


made considerable contributions to the city of Montreal over the past 175 years. In addition, they continue to loyally serve their members and uphold their goals to assist newcomers in settling into a new life in a strange land with different laws, traditions—and, for the Welsh, a different language—and becoming contributors to a country they're not familiar with.

The day, which was devoted to creating networks between different heritage societies and looking ahead to the future of anglophones in Quebec, ended with a tour of the conference's special location. Peter Snickers, longtime Freemason and building manager for the Masonic Memorial Temple, conducted a tour of the main hall, renowned for its Art Deco ceiling. He noted, in detail, the significance of various symbols around the room and responded to questions and comments from participants. The group then moved to the building's front entrance, where another conference was underway. Snickers drew attention to a set of six murals that depict the history of Freemasonry in Quebec.

These were built between 1927 and 1929, to honour Freemasons who had served and fallen in the First World War, and designed by architect John Smith Archibald, a member of the Masonic Foundation of Quebec. The building, which is recognized as a heritage site by Canada, is unfortunately in need of some costly restoration, but the structure remains a most elegant example of beaux-arts neoclassical revival style. It continues to be the headquarters and meeting place of the Grand Lodge of Quebec.

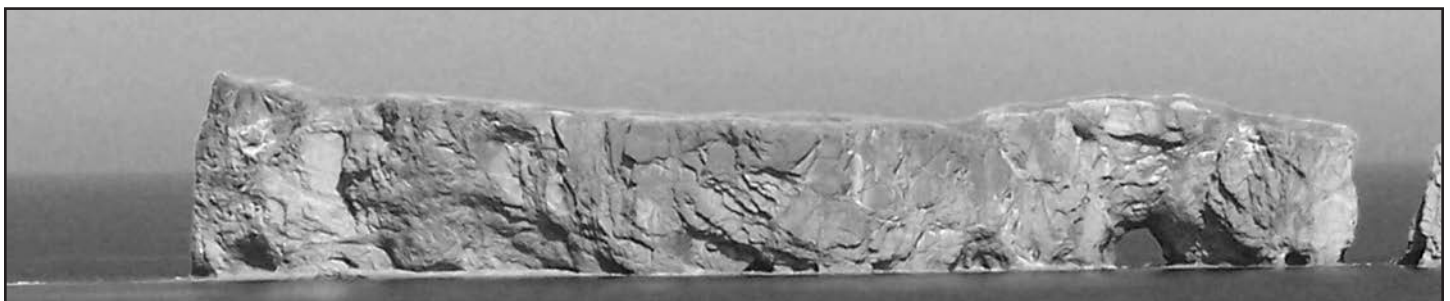
Group tours can be arranged by contacting the Temple at 514-933-6739.



QAHN directors help  
Heritage New Carlisle  
and the Committee for  
Anglophone Social  
Action launch  
Gaspesian Heritage  
Web in April.

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Photos by  
Renee Arshinoff





# SPIRITED AWAY

*Griffintown makeover could jeopardize neighbourhood heritage*

by Gloria Er-Chua



**Y**ou can't have a ghost town without ghosts. According to local lore, this one's name is Mary Gallagher, a prostitute who was murdered with a wood-axe by a jealous rival on June 27, 1879.

Gallagher's ghost is said to appear every seven years at the corner of William and Murray streets, in Griffintown, seeking to avenge her brutal death. Her legend is part of the fabric of stories that make up Griffintown's colourful past, tales which have long outlived the neighbourhood's rise and decline as Montreal's industrial hub.

Irish immigrants escaping the potato famine first settled Griffintown in the mid-1800s, providing much of the labour needed to finish digging the Lachine Canal, which established an inland shipping route from the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes. Following construction of the Grand

Trunk Railway, completed in 1852 and the Victoria Bridge, opened in 1860, Montreal's southwest flank industrialized rapidly, and Griffintown, tucked between the river and the factories on the canal, grew into a tight-knit, working-class community with a character all its own.

Those factories are empty now, along with most of the other remaining buildings, the product of a steady decline that began half a century ago. In 1963, the city rezoned the area, causing a mass exodus of families from which Griffintown never recovered. You can still see heaps of bricks in the old neighbourhood today, the remnants of houses that developers bulldozed to make room for the Bonaventure Expressway in 1967. Even such architectural gems as the New City Gas Company factory, built in 1859, and the so-called Horse Palace, which has been in

the hands of a local Irish family since 1862, don't make up for Griffintown's burnt out ghost-town look, just blocks away from busy downtown Montreal.

City officials are now hoping to reverse decades of neglect and bad urban planning by giving Griffintown a \$1.3-billion facelift, courtesy of the Devimco company, whose controversial development project has been much in the public spotlight these last few months. The project would see the construction of more than 100,000 square metres of retail space, two big-box stores, 3,900 residential units, two hotels, and 5,000 underground parking spaces. But what may be a sincere attempt to revitalize the neighbourhood has some urban planning experts and community activists concerned for Griffintown's historic character, indeed its very soul and spirit.

The area slated for development

runs north to Ottawa Street, south to the Lachine Canal, east to the Bonaventure Expressway, and west to rue de la Séminaire. Most of the built heritage, historic landscapes, and even the legacy of urban planning around this area are at risk, warns Dinu Bumbaru, Heritage Montreal's program director. Bumbaru says Devimco's development plan will not only result in the loss of interesting heritage buildings, it will also obliterate key traces of Griffintown's 202-year-old street grid. The story behind the grid is as fascinating as its layout.

The neighbourhood originally belonged to a group of nuns who operated the Hotel-Dieu hospital. They leased the land to Irishman Thomas McCord in 1791. Unbeknownst to McCord, the land was illegally sold to Mary Griffin, wife of a soap-factory owner, while he was abroad. She immediately commissioned the surveyor Louis Charland to subdivide the area into streets and lots, and it became known as Griffintown, Montreal's first planned suburb.

When Charland designed Griffintown in 1804, he envisioned a neighbourhood with low buildings, to preserve the view of Mount Royal. "The character of Griffintown's street grid is to have a very regular pattern of city blocks, with a centre square," Bumbaru explains.

A report by the city's own heritage advisory council, Le conseil du patrimoine de Montréal, urges the develop-

*"The reality with architecture is, if you make a mistake it lasts for about 50 years" — Dinu Bumbaru*

ers to maintain the existing street grid, which hasn't changed since 1806. Griffintown's original designation was as a primarily residential area. Streets that were designed around buildings have outlasted them, and should remain as an important marker of those buildings' existence, the report argues.

The first plan Devimco submitted for the city's approval, known as a Programme particulier d'urbanisme (PPU), was to close Murray, Young, Shannon, Dalhousie, and Smith streets. After a series of public consultations, a second PPU was approved by city council on April 28 that will preserve Murray, Dal-

housie, and Smith streets; the former will be open for pedestrian-only use and the latter two will be almost entirely reconstructed. Other streets are to be widened to support the heavier traffic flow expected due to the big-box stores. It's a small improvement, Bumbaru says, but Griffintown's character is still threatened by the remaining changes.

"When you cut a section of a street, you create discontinuity in the streetscape. It's very subtle. We're not talking of monumental architecture, but we're talking about the spirit of the place." He's also worried the proposed underground parking lot will destroy potential archaeology in the ground.

The lack of foresight is due to the speed with which the project is progressing, Bumbaru says. Because the project is so large, he wants Devimco to spend more time assessing its effects on Griffintown's heritage. "The reality with architecture is, if you make a mistake it lasts for about 50 years," he says. "You basically kill the city for two generations."

Marie Lessard, president of Le conseil du patrimoine de Montréal, echoes his sentiments. She wrote the report in response to the first PPU, asking the developers to downsize the project. Lessard hasn't had the opportunity to analyse the second PPU. "Our concern was the radical transformation of the area," she says. The report warns that the office towers and condo buildings, which may reach heights of 20 storeys or more, may block the view of Mount

Royal. The city's 2005 master plan limits buildings in Griffintown to 25 metres, or approximately six storeys, but has been put aside in order to approve the second PPU.

All of the plans are too grandiose, architect Harold Ship argues. Ship, who designed Montreal's Alexis Nihon Plaza, is concerned with the proposed amount of retail space and two big-box stores. Devimco's website boasts that the new Griffintown will have 65 per cent residential space and only 18 per cent commercial. "We're still basically saying it's a residential district with a very large shopping centre. Those two

things don't go together too well," Ship says, adding that he would rather see a small shopping complex to meet local needs. He, like many others, worries that the new Griffintown could take traffic away from Ste. Catherine Street, the city's famous shopping district.

Regardless of how the project's critics may feel, there's probably little they can do now to influence the Griffintown makeover. The city has approved the second PPU and Devimco is scheduled to begin construction next year, with the entire project finished by 2019. The company's in the midst of buying up all of the land in the development area, and has already acquired more than 70 per cent of the properties on the 10.2-hectare project site.

Because the project's still evolving, Bumbaru believes there's still some hope that Griffintown's historic character will be preserved. He points to Devimco's recent decision to preserve the Horse Palace stables as a positive step. In the original PPU, the Horse Palace was listed among the buildings to be demolished.

Leo Leonard has owned the property for 40 years, buying the tack house, eight-horse barn, corral, and some residential space for \$15,000 in 1967. Today, people can still go there for a calèche ride. Historians estimate that the stables were built in the 1830s. The first readable deed shows that Irishman Martin Kiely bought the property in 1862. After the city stepped in, Devimco agreed to preserve the Horse Palace, but it will no longer serve as a stable. Co-president Serge Goulet says he can see the Palace becoming a daycare or some other type of community space.

Devimco has promised a lot of community space, and the company website notes that its plan for Griffintown includes parks and a cultural, historical, heritage, and tourism block along the Lachine Canal. The block will host a culture and heritage centre and a concert hall. But Bumbaru sounds skeptical. "You can say, 'these buildings will be kept' and 'there will be a plaque about the Irish', but it's not having a little dot on the map that's going to raise a sense of history."

# HORSE PLAY

*Motif metamorphosis and echoes of Coburn in Patty Barrowman's art*

by Nick Fonda

**F**redrick Simpson Coburn (1871-1960) was born and died along the west bank of the St. Francis River, in what was, during his lifetime, Upper Melbourne: a store, a post office and a string of houses, squeezed between river and escarpment. The house in which he was born burned down decades ago, but the house in which he died still stands, not more than a few hundred yards from the site of his birth.

There's a certain irony to this, for Coburn was quite young when he left home to study. He lived in Montreal, New York, Germany and Belgium. He married a fellow painter, Malvina Scheepers, a Belgian woman, and there was every indication that Europe would be where he would stay. For an artist at the turn of the 20th century, Europe was Mecca, and Coburn felt very comfortable there. It was only his wife's death that made him quit the Continent and return permanently to the Eastern Townships.

Coburn tends to be thought of as a painter, yet he experimented successfully with other media. He did woodcuts and etchings. He made photographs. He was also an illustrator and at different periods worked prolifically in that field. Still, when you think of F.S. Coburn you think of a painter of horses, and you think of a typical Coburn painting as depicting a work horse in a winter landscape which is unmistakably Melbourne Township.

That is why, when you step into the backyard of what was, half a century ago, Coburn's house, Patricia Barrowman's horse catches your attention. Made of cement, the horse stands about four feet high. Its elongated neck stretches upwards to an improbably narrow head. The hindquarters burst with roundness. Its long, fragile legs are slightly splayed. The statue is unmistakably a horse, and the horse is unmistakably a piece of art. It's nothing at all like the horses in Coburn's paintings, yet it's easy to imagine that he

would look on it approvingly.

Barrowman's work is nothing like that of Coburn, yet it's hard not to notice certain parallels. On this day Barrowman is preoccupied with the delivery of a kiln she has just purchased, and which will have to be installed in an improvised studio in the basement of a small building across the river in Richmond.



"I started working with clay again, a little while ago," she says. "And now it's all I want to do. I love the clay. It's amazing material that seems to have a life of its own." While enrolled at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design in the 1970s, Barrowman hesitated between working with clay and working with canvas. Canvas won out, at first. After graduating and moving to a farm in South Durham, where she divided her time between painting and looking after 80 head of beef cattle and as many as a dozen horses, she knew that something had to give.

"I couldn't physically do it any more," she remembers. "I had to do one or the other. And I had to paint." About that

time a friend wrote to ask why she wasn't showing her work; by then she had created a huge collection.

In 1989 the David Morgan Gallery in Lennoxville held the first Barrowman exhibit. This was followed by exhibits at the Chris Evers Gallery in Knowlton and exhibits in Montreal, Sherbrooke, Sutton, and Quebec City. The work, inspired by her years on the farm, drew interest, and sold.

The first time I saw a Barrowman painting was in an old Townships farmhouse. The painting, a large piece in subdued earth tones, was a landscape with sheep. Yet even that description is not quite accurate. The painting left me partially intrigued and partially irritated. I remember the canvas as being one on which the paint had been used very sparingly, as if there were thin layers of overlaid pigment. The painting itself seemed to straddle genres. It could have been a very bad figurative painting, but it was impossible to look at it and find it bad. It could also have been an abstract, if the animals hadn't already defined themselves so clearly and I would have failed to sense the rolling countryside. I've seen a number of Barrowmans since then: the style is unmistakable and the subject, more often than not, is

horses.

**L**ike Coburn, Barrowman has returned, time and again, to the horse as theme. Here, the treatment is different. Coburn's steeds are almost alive, while Barrowman's mares—with pregnant, distended bellies and impossibly long and thin necks and legs—shy away from realism. Yet there is something else in the paintings of the two artists which seem to reach out, one to the other. Coburn's last paintings, studied closely, unmistakably hint at the abstract, while Barrowman's paintings can be seen as abstracts reaching towards realism.

One cold winter night Barrowman started doing papier maché horses, which



are probably as much a trademark as her horses on canvas. "I hadn't done papier maché in years," she recalls. "I took out some brown paper bags, flour and water and tinfoil and I suddenly found myself working with it 10 hours a day, seven days a week."

The papier maché horses—later horses would be done in cement and bronze—were both a departure in terms of medium, and a continuation in terms of subject.

**B**arrowman grew up in the iron-ore town of Gagnon on Quebec's North Shore, "a place," she says, "where the men went fishing and the women went crazy." Her father, Bruce, a high school athlete who counted Oscar Peterson among his friends, was a blue-collar man who instilled a strong work ethic in his daughter. From her maternal grandmother—an artist and potter in her own right—came what may have been a genetic predisposition to art.

Coburn's canvases, even when he was painting them, were already tinged with nostalgia. The work horse had already largely given way to the steam locomotive and the internal combustion engine. Given that Coburn was forward looking and forward thinking, his choice of subject is unusual. Today, the horse population in North America is on the rise, not because horses are being used as work animals but because our growing affluence permits us to keep them as pleasure animals.

This, one might argue, is reflected more in the work of Barrowman than Coburn. Coburn's horses are almost invariably in harness: working, or about to work, pulling cutters or sleds loaded with logs. Often, Coburn's horses seem to have just come to the crest of a slope, or just left shaded pine

woods and come trotting into the sunlight. On the other hand, Barrowman's horses aren't harnessed to the service of people. They stand in open spaces, their long necks curved like stylized question marks. They are flight animals staring out with something between curiosity and apprehension, momentarily still but ready to spin away and run.

It has been a struggle for the Townships-based artist to decide whether or not to show her work. One doesn't necessarily need to sell in order to be considered an artist, Barrowman argues, adding that it's equally important for her exhibits to receive feedback that might point her in the direction in which she should continue. "It's nice to make some money but if what I'm doing doesn't speak to me, nothing good is going to come of it."

If there's a difference between an artist and a painter, it's that the painter is a craftsman who wants to help us decorate our surroundings with something pretty, while the artist, whose work may not be attractive at all, speaks to something deeper in our souls and minds.

An artist, like Coburn or Barrowman, can keep us looking at a painting for an inordinate amount of time, not because the canvases are pretty to look at, but because of their effect on us. Often, what holds us is a puzzlement, a curiosity, a wonderment

In what was once Coburn's back lawn, Patricia Barrowman's cement mare has momentarily stopped grazing and flung her head skyward to whinny. Is that cement mare crying a warning, or just calling out a greeting to the steeds 30 miles upstream, stepping briskly out of a Coburn canvas?

*Find images of Patricia Barrowman's sculptures and paintings at [patriciabarrowman.com](http://patriciabarrowman.com).*

*"It was great... it's not often that a documentary makes you laugh and cry at the same time"*

- Louis M.

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# A COBBLER'S TALE

*The rise and fall of a Quebec town's local shoe industry*

by Nick Fonda

Unlike the railroad, which has always had about it a romantic cachet, there is little about a shoe factory to evoke a sense of nostalgia. Yet the footwear industry, as much as transportation, once provided a livelihood for large numbers of people in the Eastern Townships, as well as providing a much vaster population with one of the basic necessities of life.

The story of the shoe industry in Richmond begins in 1931 when Joseph-Isaïe Beaubien opened the doors of La Diva Shoe, the first of four shoe factories to operate in this town on the St. Francis River over a span of 69 years, ending with the closure of the Brown Shoe Company eight years ago.

Joseph-Isaïe was the son of Louis Beaubien, a shoemaker from the working-class Basse Ville district of Quebec City. Louis was ambitious for himself, and for Joseph-Isaïe who did well in school and attended le Séminaire de Québec. For the young Joseph-Isaïe this meant not only the best possible education, but also a doorway to the Haute Ville.

For his part, Louis was pushing on the same door. Louis acquired a tannery and his cobbler's shop grew into a shoe factory. Joseph-Isaïe joined his father in business and the business prospered. The family moved, figuratively and literally, from the Basse Ville to the Haute Ville.

By the mid-1920s, Joseph-Isaïe was the owner of three shoe factories. In ad-

dition to the one in Quebec City, he owned factories in Trois Pistoles and the Beauce. Indeed, until the historic stock market crash of October, 1929, he was a rich man. There was a chauffeur for the car, horses for riding, and expensive private schools for his seven children, at least two of whom received part of their education in Toronto.



Left all but penniless at the outset of the Great Depression, Beaubien found work as the manager of a shirt factory in Pont Rouge, near Quebec City, and that's where he was in 1931 when opportunity knocked.

It seems that someone in Richmond had heard of Joseph-Isaïe Beaubien. A large industrial building was sitting, empty. If Beaubien could see his way to operating a factory there, the town would offer him a financial incentive and tax exemptions for a number of years.

In 1931, Beaubien was 47 years old. He was married to a sensitive, soft-spoken woman who was both a painter and a musician. One of his children was severely afflicted with arthritis. He had gone from rags to riches and back to rags again. Now, well into middle age, he was starting over with a small

shoe factory grandly called La Diva Shoe.

Richmond already had at least one shoe-related industry, the Boston Last Company. That would have been of little, if any, consequence to Beaubien. Lasts and shoes were intimately related in terms of household use—wooden lasts were slipped into leather shoes to main-

tain their shape—but a shoe factory next to a last factory was just a cute coincidence. There was neither competition nor benefit. But Richmond was conveniently linked by rail line to Montreal, Quebec City and a small but growing industrial centre, Sherbrooke. Shipping costs would be comparable to those

larger centres, as would the costs of bringing in primary materials such as leather hides and wood heels.

Did La Diva Shoe do well? Unfortunately, little in the way of documentary material on La Diva operations has been found, but it's easy to imagine that the answer is no. In 1935, only four years after starting it, Beaubien sold the business to a certain man named Tétreault, who moved it to St. Jerome, in the Laurentians. Then in 1937, at the age of 53, Beaubien opened up a new factory, which he named La Duchesse Shoe.

Two interesting questions concerning the transition from La Diva to La Duchesse arise. One has to do with manufacturing practices and the other with labour practices.

Baubien was a great admirer of Henry Ford and the manufacturing

method that the American automobile pioneer had made famous in the first decades of the 20th century—the assembly line. In the shoe factories that Beaubien owned and operated until 1929, cobblers had made shoes individually, one by one, from beginning to end. But at La Duchesse, shoes were made in stages, as they would be on an assembly line. The factory was organized into five departments: cutting, fitting, lasting, finishing, and packing.

**H**iring practices also seem to have reflected the economic times, a period in which the supply of labour far outstripped demand. Prospective employees who sought work at La Duchesse had to undergo an initial training period during which they weren't paid or otherwise compensated. It isn't clear how long each new worker was expected to forego wages, nor do we know precisely how many years the company practiced this policy, although by 1957 it had been discontinued.

Whatever success had eluded La Diva, it did not elude La Duchesse, at least during Beaubien's lifetime. All four of his sons, at one time or another, worked in his factory, and all four went on to own factories of their own. Louis-Paul became a sock manufacturer in Montreal and Robert briefly owned a textile factory in Quebec City. Henri opened his own shoe factory, Teenage Shoe, in Richmond. In 1948, Joseph-Isaïe's youngest son, Jacques, joined him in business at La Duchesse.

There were three Beaubien daughters: Marguerite, the oldest child, was afflicted with arthritis at 18 and died of it prematurely at age 42; Jeanette married René Chaloult who served for over a decade in the National Assembly; Madeleine, the youngest daughter and last remaining child of Joseph-Isaïe, passed away in 2003.

When Joseph-Isaïe Beaubien retired in 1958, leaving La Duchesse in the capable hands of his youngest son, Jacques, Richmond's shoe industry was at its vibrant peak. There were three thriving shoe factories. The smallest, Teenage Shoe, was owned and operated by Henri Beaubien, whose early apprenticeship in the shoe industry had cost him two fingers. The largest, a branch plant of the American-owned Brown Shoe Company, was the newest, having arrived in the ear-

ly 1950s. And of course, there was La Duchesse.

Jean-Claude Durocher, who went to work for La Duchesse after finishing high school, still remembers the Beaubiens with a fond admiration. "You could make more money at the Brown Shoe, because they paid piecework instead of an hourly wage, but people preferred to work at La Duchesse," recalls Durocher, who characterized the Beaubiens as strict and demanding, but also very generous, employers. "They were good to their workers and they were good to the community. They always listened if you needed to talk and they never failed to help someone who needed help. It was a different time."

In 1957 Durocher's starting salary was \$15 per week, considered a decent amount for a young man who didn't yet have to look after a family. A typical hourly wage was 45 cents an hour. A pair of shoes bought in a store or from the Eaton's catalogue would have cost around three dollars.

To put this in perspective, it would have cost Durocher a fifth of his first week's earnings to buy a pair of three-dollar shoes. Today, at minimum wage, a worker might make \$320 per week before taxes. Shoe prices vary widely, but a pair of brand-name shoes such as Nike easily retails today for more than \$100, or nearly a third of a week's earnings at minimum wage.

La Duchesse had three representatives on the road: one in Toronto, a second one in Montreal, and a third in the Maritimes. Twice a year they would come to Richmond to look at, and pick up samples of, the latest shoes. Sometimes they asked to have a particular size, or a particular colour, or even for particular modifications.

Then they would leave with a suitcase—or more—full of samples.

The three representatives would regularly send back orders by mail. Using large sheets, Durocher would note what had to be manufactured, and in what quantity, before the machines on the shop floor were given the go-ahead. Every shoe passed through the same procedure. The shoes were designed by Henri McCaughan. His shoes—in contrast to the stylish but delicate shoes imported from Spain and Italy—were simple and durable. McCaughan's design would then be given to the cutting room. Ten to

twelve per cent of the company's labour force worked in this department and were among the best paid workers at the factory.

At peak times, La Duchesse employed as many as 175 people who pumped out as many as 18,000 pairs of shoes a week. Typically the total number of employees hovered between 100 and 125, with production averaging around 12,000 pairs per week.

The factory normally manufactured shoes six months ahead, that is, in the winter months it would produce shoes for the summer season, and in summer, shoes for the winter season. Spring tended to be the slowest time of the year, hence the time employees were most likely to be temporarily laid off. To avoid lay-offs the factory would produce what were called spares, shoes which would be warehoused and later sold at discount.

The factory closed completely every year for two weeks in the summer.

**O**f course, shoes were not the only type of apparel manufactured in Richmond. A number of small factories operated here, making everything from jeans to specialized suits for firefighters. But it was the shoe industry which was, for many decades, the mainstay of manufacturing in Richmond, and the town's major employer.

In 1967, the world came to Montreal, and in the aftermath of Expo '67, barriers to international trade in manufactured goods seemed to fall steadily. In the 1970s, cheaper footwear from far-flung parts of the globe came not only to Montreal but to Richmond as well. And in 1977 La Duchesse Shoe closed its doors for the last time, a decade after the demise of Teenage Shoe, and a decade after the death of its founder.

Its closure was a financial blow for the town of Richmond and an emotional, and eventually fatal, blow to Jacques Beaubien. Only the Brown Shoe Co. hung on in the face of ever stiffer competition from low-cost imports, in part by paying wages that were tied to pieceworkers' output. For the next two decades the factory continued to provide employment for hundreds of residents, until its American owners discontinued all operations in 2000, bringing to a close an important chapter in Richmond's industrial heritage.

# Hometown History writing contest winners

When Michael Doucet got the assignment to write an essay on local history, he knew he wouldn't have to look farther than home. Taking stories his grandfather told him, Doucet pieces together a vivid account of Ralph Boomhower's time on the Beebe police force. Doucet is this year's winner of the province-wide Hometown History Writing Contest, sponsored by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network. The award comes with a cash prize of \$150. Oriana Guerrier-Freud takes home second place and \$100 with her look at the Great Train Robbery of 1963. Third-place recipient Dayton Glover Kirby will receive a \$50 prize for his piece on the Battle of Chateaugay during the war of 1812.

## The talented Mr. Boomhower

by Michael Doucet

My Grampy was born November 11th, 1943. He was one of eleven children. They were not a wealthy family but they were hard workers. Grampy's name is Ralph Boomhower. He went to school until grade six, then he had to quit so he could go to work and help support his family. This is his story.

After Grampy quit school he worked in a quarry in the summers and in the winters he did other jobs like construction and masonry work. By the time he was twenty two he was married and had two children. There wasn't enough money, that's when he decided to become a policeman.

He took part of his police course in Magog and the forensics part in Montreal. What was most amazing was that the course was in French and he only knew English then.

He was a policeman for the town of Beebe. Most of the time he worked alone except for special occasions. He was a policeman for about 12 years. In that time he caught bank robbers, broke up lots of bar fights at the Beebe Hotel and went to fires. There were a lot of high speed chases then too.

Once there was a big fight with about 50 people and he and his partner had to get German Shepherds to help break up the fight. Another time he was scared because someone was drunk

and tried to kill him with a tire iron. Still another time he was on a high speed chase and the other car smashed into the side of the police car, behind Sunnyside School.

Some of Grampy's hardest times were like when he had to go to a car accident and five of his best friends died. Another time he found a new born baby dead in the Beebe dump. The hardest one was when he went to a fire and everyone got out but no one told them there was still a little baby girl inside and she died. When they found her she was right by the window and if someone would have told them they could have reached inside the window and got her out.

Grampy has lots of cool stories and he still misses being a police officer even though he got called names like pig, and people drove by and shot at his house. Today Grampy is retired, but he still works hard.

I am proud of him because, even though he only went to grade six, he worked hard and didn't give up and he helped a lot of people, who are still his friends today.

*Michael Doucet is a Grade 5 student at Sunnyside Elementary School in Stanstead..*

## Alias Alloway

by Oriana Guerrier-Freud

This is how Hudson, Quebec is connected to the Great Train Robbery of August 8, 1963. Some thieves had robbed the London post office train of 2.6 million dollars (probably \$80 million, nowadays.) About two weeks later a man named Charlie Wilson who was one of the ringmasters in the gang got captured, as did 13 out of the 15 gang members. Many months later Charlie escaped and went into hiding.

On February 1st, 1968 the *Lake of Two Mountains Gazette* said, "Alloway Arrest Stuns Area." Ronald Alloway, his wife and their 3 daughters lived for many months in Hudson near the St. James church. Ronald and his beautiful wife Pat were very well known and liked in the community. But their wonderful lives soon fell apart when Ronald invited a cousin over. The RCMP helped the Scotland Yard as they followed close behind. It was soon found out that Ronald Alloway was actually the notorious train robber Charlie Wilson.

*Oriana Guerrier-Freud is a Grade 5 student at Mount Pleasant Elementary School in Hudson.*

## American invasion

by Dayton Glover Kirby

On October 25, 1813 the Battle of Chateaugay started. The Americans wanted to capture Montreal and Ontario from the British. The British forces were made up of Canadians and Mohawks from Chateaugay. Charles de Salaberry led the Canadian troops.

There were five hundred Canadians and natives fighting against four thousand American soldiers. Salaberry spread his troops over a big area to make it seem like he had a lot of men and weapons. The bugles and Mohawk war cries confused the Americans. By the end of the battle the Canadians had five dead and sixteen wounded. The Americans had fifty dead and two hundred wounded or missing.

The battle was short but it stopped the Americans from advancing and it saved Montreal. If it wasn't for this victory we might be American instead of Canadian.

*Dayton Glover Kirby is a Grade 5 student at Harmony Elementary School in Chateaugay.*

## REVIEW

## Same Cloth, Different Threads: Jews of Quebec 1608-2008

*Gare du Palais, Quebec City*

*Exhibit runs until September 26, 2008*

*Online companion exhibit, [www.shalomquebec.org](http://www.shalomquebec.org)*



A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending the launch of this exhibit on Quebec City's little-known Jewish heritage and it was nice to see a bit of action at Quebec's railway station, which is usually eerily deserted except when the rare train from Montreal comes in. Unlike most exhibit launches, which involve being crammed into a labyrinth of interpretation panels with hordes of sweaty people, the railway station was spacious enough for pleasant browsing.

I had scarcely begun looking at the exhibit when I was ushered into a room for a litany of dull speeches by politicians. The room was full. There were French-speaking North African Jews and young Latin-Americans with bright red yarmulkes.

Though I dreaded the speeches I was surprisingly entertained. One deputy made a fool of himself, and another delivered a surprisingly touching speech. The fool began by praising Peter Simons, head of the Simons fashion retail empire, and then went on about the philanthropic efforts of this exemplary Quebec City Jew. The problem, of course, is Simons isn't Jewish, a fact apparent to most people in the room, judging from the fidgeting.

Nobody said anything, not even when the fool moved from Simons to a series of obtuse statements that left everyone dizzy: "We are not Canadians," he pontificated, "we are not Quebecers, not francophone, not anglophone, we are not Catholic, not Jewish ..." By the end of his sentence it was unclear who or

what we were.

Thankfully, all this was followed by a heartwarming speech by Montreal deputy Lawrence Bergman. He recalled how his grandfather had arrived in Quebec City a century ago, penniless, only to be welcomed by a fellow Jew who gave him clothes to peddle and a French-Russian dictionary. He then recalled his mother, now 90 years old, who grew up in Quebec's working-class neighbourhood of Saint Roch.

Bergman phones his mother every morning, and that morning he had mentioned the exhibit launch. "You're coming home to us," she had replied. He asked her to repeat, thinking she'd made a mistake. "Quebec City," she said, "that's us—that's home." I never saw a deputy with a tear in his eye, but Bergman was clearly moved, and it was moving to see him rekindling links with his own Quebec roots. The moment reminded me of how powerful these connections can be and once again confirmed the value of dredging up the past.

Quebec City's Jewish heritage is richer than most people probably assume today. Thanks to Shalom Quebec, the community group which sponsored the research that went into the exhibit's development, we are reminded that this heritage goes all the way back to the French woman Esther Brandeau, who arrived in Quebec in 1738, pretending to be a male sailor under the pseudonym Joseph La Fargue. When her identity was found out, she was handed over to Ursuline nuns and later sent back to France for refusing their attempts at

conversion.

Later figures include Ezekiel Hart, who secured equal civil and political rights for Jews in Quebec years before they were granted in Great Britain. The exhibit also dwells on the first few decades of the 20th century, when anti-Semitism was rampant. A new generation of Russian Jews came to Quebec around this time, notably the businessman Maurice Pollack. This was also the time of labour activist Lea Roback, who grew up in Beauport before getting things moving in Montreal.

The exhibit also tells about contemporary figures like Yoav Talmi, currently principal conductor of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra. And though today's Jewish population can be counted in the hundreds, recent census data show a hopeful increase in Quebec's Jewish population for the first time in decades.

This exhibit will be complemented by several cultural events throughout the summer, including musical performances and meetings with local Rabbi Dovid Lewin. A parallel online exhibit has also been launched. This virtual treasure trove takes things one step further, with an impressive collection of stories and images. There's even a detailed headstone inventory of the local burial ground, the oldest active Jewish cemetery in Canada.

Simon Jacobs, who is spearheading this project with enormous energy, told us that the website is a work in progress. He will happily add new stories and photos sent by people linked to the local community.

*Reviewed by Patrick Donovan*

APOLOGY

# Shame on Canada

*From Prime Minister Stephen Harper's speech in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008. The apology, praised by many aboriginal leaders including Assembly of First Nations chief Phil Fontaine, notably left out Labrador Inuit because their residential schools weren't administered by the federal government. One hundred and thirty-two schools were located in all provinces and territories with the exceptions of Newfoundland, New Brunswick and P. E. I.*

**M**r. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history. For over a century, the residential schools separated over 150,000 native children from their families and communities.

In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United churches. The government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others nev-

er returned home.

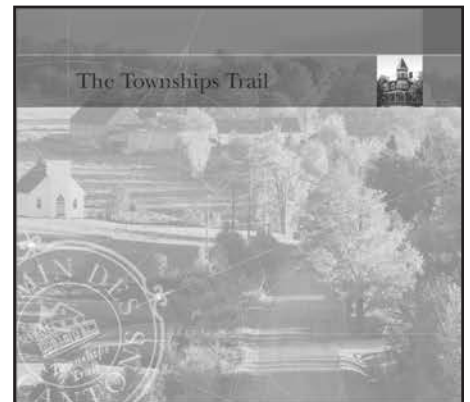
We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today. It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the government of Canada.

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this.

The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. Nous le regrettons. We are sorry.



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## HINDSIGHT

*Stuff I Didn't Know*

by Rod MacLeod

It has been my good fortune to have spent quite a number of very happy nights (and days) in the Laurentian community of Morin Heights. It has been an even greater piece of good fortune for me that none of them took place at the home of Mr. Renwick Spence. I say “good fortune” not in the sense that you read a newspaper account of some horror and are glad it took place miles from your own experience, but rather in the sense that such an account makes you realize what was going on under your nose without, somehow, touching you.

The news about Spence’s trial over the course of the last year has pushed a number of unpleasant buttons in my brain which I have managed not to let upset me as other, more immediate issues take up my time. But it is harder to ignore those buttons as the notices begin to appear for my 30th high school reunion. I missed the 25th for some reason and I was sorry, if only because I wanted to see if certain people were still as obnoxious as ever, bald, fat, etc. This time around, I find myself wondering different things. How many of them—the boys, anyway—may have had unwanted encounters with Mr. Spence, even nights at that infamous Laurentian cottage.

I sat in Mr. Spence’s Grade 9 biology class at Montreal West High School in the company of a bunch of what I now recognize as misfits: Dan and Fred, who played endless rounds of a game where you flick one coin across the table and hope it slides between two others; Carl, whose claim to fame was the weird thing he could do with his nose; and Jim, who spent his time gouging rubber strips out of his sneakers with the end of a compass. Ours was an unruly corner but the whole class was like that: forty-five strong, with more than a streak running through it of what we would now classify as Attention Deficit Disorder or worse. Many of us were keeners, including my good friend Bill, a studious type who suffered for that, and for wearing glasses and being overweight. It was a treat when Mr. Spence would drop by like a tired waiter to check up on our work and nod his approval or grin that we

had understood something; we felt as though we were helping make his task a little more bearable. As recent newspapers have accurately noted, Mr. Spence was a dynamic and dedicated teacher who had a way of making science seem vital as well as interesting. I envied (at the time, yes) those students who had him in the smaller enriched classes where he didn’t have to fight for your attention. We all deeply respected his ecological conviction that dissection never had enough value to warrant killing an animal for that purpose. He gave me the only perfect mark I ever received in my life, a report about bees on which he wrote: “I can find nothing to criticize about this paper.” Now, I find myself reading things into this mark.

I also find myself thinking of Bill, who I seem to remember as being one of the gang that hung around Mr. Spence’s lab at lunchtime doing odd jobs like real apprentices. Does that mean anything? Not necessarily, of course. I have no memory of Bill going on one of those weekend ski trips that ended so shockingly for a number of young men—although this doesn’t mean he didn’t go or that he wasn’t invited. Bill’s family moved away at the end of that year and I only saw him a couple of times after graduating. I always assumed they moved because of his father’s new job, and I have no evidence to think otherwise. I know I have no business merely wondering, but I do.

I wonder how many of my old schoolmates were victims without my having been aware of it at the time. I wonder how many of my teachers knew or suspected what was going on without knowing what to do about it. I wonder what the guidance people knew or thought at the time, and what they are thinking now. This last group’s of special interest for me, as my father was a school social worker for the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal at the time. Did any of it reach his ears? I suspect not, but I do shudder to think what would have gone through his mind had he been alive this past year to read about these incidents. Like most fundamentally good people, my father constantly worried he wasn’t doing enough,

that he was morally responsible even for children for whom it was widely acknowledged nothing could be done. I do not believe he had any contact with Mr. Spence outside of parent-teacher night, but a colleague of his, a family friend, did. I remember her telling me how much I would enjoy this inspiring and affable teacher—and she was not wrong.

I, too, am troubled to realize that people within my entourage were victims of abuse. I feel for the members of the faculty and administration whom even vague suspicions may well have given considerable pause, even anguish. I can even spare a thought for a teacher whose sexual frustrations, even when acted upon, must have provoked in him fears, guilt, remorse, and other demons I cannot imagine. Villains do have their demons, and most of the time we should not envy them even if the legal system appears to treat them more lightly than they deserve.

Part from the mental exercise of going back three or more decades, there is a point about history and heritage that I would like to make here. Our knowledge of the past depends so much on “facts” that we can easily forget how little facts often tell us. The facts about my own high school experience do not involve a teacher who made improper advances to students, often in highly compromising situations. The “facts” are Carl’s nose and Jim’s sneakers and Bill’s enthusiasm for lunchtime chores in the lab and my own perfect bee report. How often, we should all ask ourselves, do things—crucial, even horrific, things—slip by our notice entirely, and by extension escape historical record? I’m not suggesting we should become obsessed with always uncovering nasty stuff, though many historians do just that, but I believe it’s good to acknowledge from time to time that the evil, as well as the good, is oft interred in the bones of the past. Perhaps a sunny disposition and a tendency to remember only the good stuff keeps us sane, but that isn’t the whole truth, as victims will tell you.

That is, assuming they haven’t spent thirty years suppressing their memories.

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Photo: Sébastien Larose

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