Journeys of Discovery: Lac-Mégantic and (almost) Quebec City

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Quebec Heritage News

Vol 8, No. 1 Winter 2014

The Politics of Women's Suffrage

Exploring a Schoolmarm's Radical Side

The View from Under the Bridge

Finding Nature in Surprising Urban Places

The Lady in the Green Hornet

The Inspiring Ruby Leishman

Quebec Heritage News

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Cover photo: Eight oil cars that did not derail at Lac-Mégantic on July 6, 2013, and that have since pulled back to Nantes, the point from which the train began to roll.
Photo: Casey Lambert.

Editor's Desk

Accidental tourism

by Rod MacLeod

It's been a year, and the physical scars have healed, but the mental anguish still returns from time to time from the deep corners to which I thought I had banished it.

Ah, the things I do for QAHN. Even shed blood.

I refer to those heady early days of Significant Objects for Telling Identity (SOFTI) – a project that, I hasten to say, was a delight in every way to work on, only perhaps a little taxing on one occasion for a man past his prime. The challenge of writing the history of English-speaking Quebec through one hundred objects drawn from across the province was both intriguing and rewarding. The results, I think, speak for themselves. (http://www.100objects.qahn.org)

QAHN stipulated that objects had to come from collections that were accessible to the public, at least provisionally. So no buildings, outdoor monuments, or items from Granny's attic. Interacting with small museums was one of the project's perks. A call went out, and by late October a great many proposals had arrived from regions as far apart as the Outaouais and the Magdalen Islands. Unfortunately, as is often the case with Anglophone heritage, very few came from Montreal, where there are plenty of museums but most don't have QAHN on their radar. As both project coordinators worked from the Townships and I am based in the city, I agreed to be Our Man in Montreal and hunt for additional objects.

This meant that I got to play tourist for several days.

Some visits, predictably, yielded numerous SOFTI candidates – the McCord Museum in particular. Others were trickier, such as the Museum of Fine Arts, given that paintings and sculptures were technically out of the reckoning as depictions of things rather than objects in their own right. Still, I found some treasures, and there were more in the Bank of Montreal Museum, the Holocaust Memorial Centre, and the Redpath Museum – the latter accessible only after I had swallowed my age-old fear of the rampant gorilla and predatory lioness on the upper stairs. The Pointe-à-Callière Museum of archeology, by contrast, held only a couple of objects of questionable pertinence, and none that made the cut in the end.

On my last day as a tourist (a Saturday, November 3), I took the car to get to more out-of-the-way spots, beginning with the Pied-du-Courant Prison, aka Prison des Patriotes. This venerable 1830s building, which sits in the lea of Jacques Cartier Bridge, has the dubious distinction of being both the site of the incarceration and execution of some of the 1837-38 rebels and the current headquarters of the Société des Alcools. The content is mostly informative plaques – it's more of an interpretation centre than a museum – which I scanned for anti-Anglo bias and declared admirable in its impartiality. Little on E.B. O'Callaghan, T. S. Brown, or other Anglophone Patriotes, however. I did see some rather frightening rings set in the stone walls, a dandy maquette of the jail in the later nineteenth century, and the gloriously menacing wood and iron gates in front of which several patriotes were hanged. All in all, a sobering and moving visit.

I pulled out of the SAQ parking and hit the bridge for St. Helen's Island. The place had clearly been a construction zone during the week, and now most roads were closed with pylons; I had to navigate around abandoned piles of building debris. There seemed to be not a soul about, although signs assured that the Stewart Museum was open. The only available parking lot was a forlorn rectangle bounded on two sides by cliff and on a third by the back walls of the old fort, with the road side all but closed off by wire fence. There were two other cars when I arrived, so following that typically Canadian respect for personal space I parked equidistant from each. I assumed there would be access to the museum from the lot, but no; I had to go out to the road and follow it down below the fort, across a grassy knoll and through a much larger (closed) parking lot to the fort's entrance – a journey of several hundred yards made more disagreeable by that day's chill drizzle.

Glad to be inside and warm, I lingered over the museum's extensive selection of potential objects for the project, including yet more iron rings from the Pied-du-Courant Prison. An hour and a half later, my camera's memory nearly full and my stomach anything but, I decided to head back to my car, where lunch awaited me in the form of a clear plastic box of finger food that my

The view from the fence. Photo: Rod MacLeod.

spouse had brought back from a business meeting the previous day.

As I left the fort, I noticed a path meandering into the trees in the general direction of the parking lot. Surely, I thought, it would take me back to the road just above the lot and I could be at my car much quicker than by retracing my steps around the fort. The weather was no better, the rain harder than before.

I opted for the meandering path and soon found myself not at the road but at the crest of the modest cliff that partly surrounded the parking lot; the path continued through the trees away from where I wanted to be. I could see my car below me, awaiting. A fence and a short rocky climb stood between me and lunch. The alternative was to return to the fort and take the long roundabout route back, getting wetter and hungrier.

I assessed the situation. I was alone; even the other cars in the lot had gone. In any case, who would begrudge me a shortcut on a cold rainy afternoon in this natural setting? On the other hand, the cold and the wet meant that a shortcut might be dangerous. It had also been forty years since I'd climbed a fence.

The boy in me won. I cleared the fence easily, taking extra care not to rip my pants, which would have compromised the rest of the day's visiting. The rocks were slippery, but I took my time, waiting to ensure a firm purchase with each foot before shifting my weight to the other and making certain that every branch I grabbed was firmly rooted. I reached the asphalt of the parking lot and strode forward, only a little shaky and more than a little tickled at my pluck.

It was after I'd pulled out my keys and opened the trunk that I noticed the blood. I stood for a moment, baffled, clutching the white plastic bag with my lunch and wondering why it was smeared with red. Ah, I eventually realized. Without having felt any pain, I had scraped the skin off the palms of both hands.

Cursing, I unlocked the driver's door, flung the bag (and my camera) inside, crawled in, gingerly closed the door, and fumbled for tissues from the glove compartment. Fortunately, I had plenty, but it took a while to staunch the bleeding and even when dry my hands were stained and raw-looking. There was no way I could wash, the only water available was the rain, and its sporadic plops were useless for systematic cleaning.

But I needed to eat, so I set to opening the plastic box – which proved a good deal fiddlier than I would have expected, with its hard molded snaps and my raw, shaky grip. The box received a few bloody streaks of its own before I was through. And finger food is not the happiest fare when one's hands are a tad shredded.

As I ate, the nature of my predicament dawned on me. I could not be seen in this stained state without causing distress. The sight of a man with blood on his hands tends to prompt the worst conclusions. Any police officer would probably take me in for questioning. Were they to look inside the car, the red-and-white plastic bag and the floor deep in bloody tissue would almost certainly cause them to start fingering the guns in their holsters and I would soon be spreading my red hands on the fender.

The fender! I suddenly wondered how much blood I had smeared inadvertently on the side of the car while opening door and trunk. Streaks of red on a car's chassis would be a sure way to attract police attention. A quick dash around the vehicle put my fears to rest, however. I also checked myself over and discovered no incriminating stains on my coat or trousers. A glance in the rear-view mirror told me my face was smear-free. I resumed my pondering.

I could drive anywhere, so long as I gave no inducement for the police to stop me. Anyone who has contemplated driving home without quite knowing for sure that the last beer had been absorbed will understand how daunting that prospect can be. Anything – not pausing long enough at an intersection, going just a tad over the speed limit, having a tail light fail – could get one pulled over, and then… Still, I had no choice. Besides, any minute now some inquisitive authority figure might decide to check on me, seeing me sitting alone in a car in the rain. I had to move.

But where to go? Home was far away – and, anyway, I'd wanted to make more visits. I needed a washroom, but I could not go anyplace where I would have to interact with someone before getting to a sink: nowhere where I'd need to pay admission or order something first. Museums were out. Most restaurants were out. Gas stations definitely out. A mall, perhaps – but I was on St. Helen's Island, and the city's east end at the other side of the bridge was largely unfamiliar to me, and I did *not* want to get lost.

Then I had it. After stuffing as much of the tell-tale tissues out of sight as I could, I started the engine, held the steering wheel with my fingers, and glided forward out of the parking lot. Keeping a respectable speed and distance, and stopping and starting as smoothly as possible, I made my way up over the bridge, past the Pieds-au-Courant Prison, north on De Lorimier, west on Mont-Royal, and up the Camilien-Houde parkway to the sprawling parking lot on the mountain.

The Smith House, that 1850s mansion turned cultural centre for Mount Royal Park, did not charge admission and had serviceable washrooms. There were more people about than on the island, but not many. I succeeded in opening the front door without attracting attention and made a bee-line for the gent's in the basement. Last source of relief: there was no one else using the facilities.

Seconds later I was clean – still scarred, but clean.

Conscience clear, I headed back upstairs and tumbled into the café, where three young ladies were giggling aggressively behind the counter. Had they been monitoring my adventures over the last hour from some hidden camera, I wondered paranoically for a second? No, they were just bored; it was a long afternoon, with few customers.

When I asked if I could have a cup of coffee they squeaked with excitement and elbowed each other aside in a rush to serve me. This attention went a long way, if not quite long enough, towards making me forget that I was past my prime, that I had just rather spectacularly failed in the scaling of a fence and the climbing down of a cliff and the recapturing of a foolish bit of my youth.

Sometimes it's tricky being a tourist.

QAHN News

Security for Heritage Outreach and Workshop Initiative

Conceived as a way of assisting community-based museums, heritage organizations and historic sites around Quebec to attain a greater level of security, QAHN's "Security for Heritage Outreach and Workshop Initiative" (SHOWI) is well under way. Project staff have been busy developing a program of conferences that will take place at venues in Quebec City, Montreal, the Eastern Townships, the Outaouais and the Gaspé. Topics will include physical security (for buildings and premises), collections security (protection from theft and degradation), virtual security (digital vandalism), and security for staff and volunteers (insurance concerns). In addition to conferences featuring experts from various fields, instructional handbooks and other resource tools are also being produced.

The first event on the "Security for Heritage" schedule took place in late November at the Eaton Corner Museum in the Townships. The conference, called "Tales from the Storage Room," was led by Heather Darch who, in addition to being one of the project managers (along with Dwane Wilkin), is also the veteran curator of the Missisquoi Museum in Stanbridge East. Darch touched upon issues ranging from operating a small museum on a shoestring budget to the safe handling of museum artefacts. About twenty heritage workers from museums and historical societies around the region attended the lively and informative session.

For information on upcoming "Security for Heritage" events in your area, contact QAHN at: (819) 564-9595; toll free (877) 964-0409, or home@qahn.org.

Heather Darch presented "Tales from the Storage Room" at the Eaton Corner Museum. Photo: Matthew Farfan.

2014 QAHN Heritage Essay Contest

QAHN is offering students in Grades 4, 5 and 6 prizes for the best true stories about remarkable people, events and traditions from Quebec's past. The assignment: write an original brief story in English about one of the following topics: a man or woman from history who was important to the local community; a significant historical event that took place in the community; or a special festival or tradition that takes place in the community each year. 1st Prize: $175. 2nd Prize: $125. 3rd Prize: $75. All winners will receive certificates. Winning stories will appear in *Quebec Heritage News* and on QAHN's website. Contest deadline: April 30, 2014.

For full contest rules, contact QAHN at: (819) 564-9595, toll free (877) 964-0409, or home@qahn.org.

2014 Heritage Photo Contest

Back by popular demand, QAHN is pleased to announce the 3rd edition of its annual Heritage Photo Contest. This contest is open to students enrolled in English-language high schools in the province of Quebec. Photos must be of an object, person, place or event of significance to the heritage of the student's family, school or community. Subjects must be relevant in some way to life in the province of Quebec. 1st Prize: $200. 2nd Prize: $150. 3rd Prize: $100. All prize-winners will receive certificates. In addition, all prize-winning photos will be published in *Quebec Heritage News* and on QAHN's website. Contest deadline: April 30, 2014.

For full contest rules, contact QAHN at: (819) 564-9595, toll free (877) 964-0409, or home@qahn.org.

"An Island of Stories" Contest

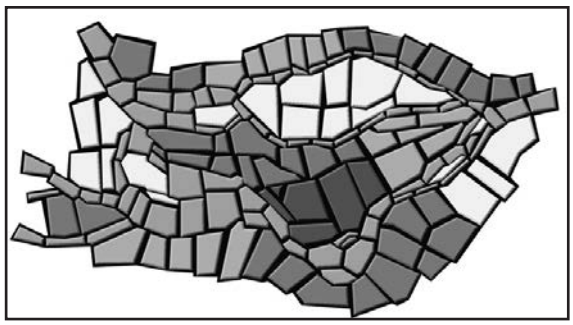
QAHN and The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA) have teamed up to create "An Island of Stories," an inter-generational contest that will enable students to explore their family history and to share it with their community. By asking their parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents to choose a location in or around Montreal that has a special significance for them from their youth, and by sharing that story with their classmates, students will be exploring Montreal history from a highly personal point of view.

Students are invited to submit a brief essay describing a location (such as a house, school or park), and its significance to their family history, with a photo of the location then and now, and to post their submissions to QAHN's Mapping the Mosaic website (www.mapping.montrealmosaic.com). Essays will be judged, with prizes awarded to winners from among elementary and high school students.

"An Island of Stories" was officially launched at the annual convention of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT), held in Montreal in November, where QAHN hosted a workshop for teachers and shared a booth with Learn Quebec.

1st Prize: a $200 Chapters gift certificate, plus a copy of Peter Gossage and Jack Little's *An Illustrated History of Quebec* (Secondary I-V) or *Into the Mist: the Empress of Ireland,* by Anne Renaud (Cycle 3). 2nd Prize: a $100 Chapters gift certificate, plus a copy of *An Illustrated History of Quebec* (Secondary I-V) or *Into the Mist: the Empress of Ireland* (Cycle 3). Winning submissions will be printed in *Quebec Heritage News* and posted on QAHN's website. Contest deadline: April 30, 2014.

For more information, contact QAHN at (819) 564-9595, toll free (877) 964-0409, or home@qahn.org.



Strategic Planning

QAHN is currently in the process of developing a new 5-year strategic plan. Now in its draft phase, this document will be submitted in the coming weeks to member-organizations for their feedback.

100 Objects DVD

"The Identity of English-Speaking Quebec in 100 Objects," the DVD produced as part of QAHN's "Significant Objects for Telling Identity (SOFTI)" initiative, is now available. This DVD, which comes with an attractive 12-page booklet, features essays on each of the 100 objects selected for the project, over 500 photographs, a detailed historical timeline, and six documentary videos. It is a veritable treasure trove, and a must for anyone trying to make sense of the patchwork that is English-speaking Quebec.

To order a copy, please send $13 (which includes s/h) to: QAHN, 400-257, Queen, Sherbrooke, Qc J1M 1K7. For non-QAHN members, add $2.00 per order. This DVD makes an excellent gift or fundraising tool. For bulk orders of 20 or more, send payment of $6 per DVD, plus $20 s/h. Order while supplies last!

Mystery Object

In the Summer 2013 issue of *QHN,* we ran the following query from the Morin Heights Historical Association:

> "One of our directors found this object as she was cleaning out her mother's place. She doesn't know what it is, and we don't either! Could this picture be placed in the next *Quebec Heritage News* so that someone might identify it?"

We received the following response from Pennie Redmile of the Quebec Family History Society:

> *Dawn Ouelette, editor of the QFHS Journal* Connections*, believes she has identified your mystery item. It is used as a guide for people with problems with their eyes (blindness) and the space helps guide them when writing or signing their name.*

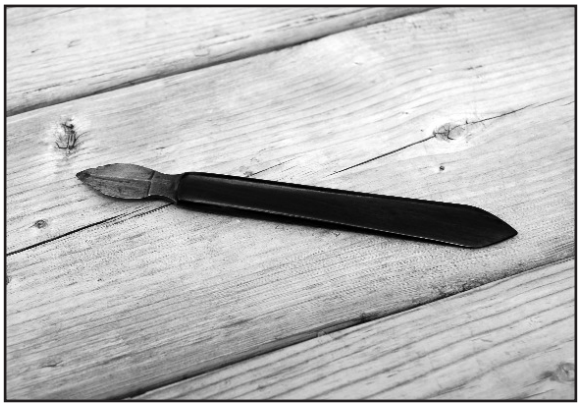
Our thanks to Pennie for clearing up the mystery.

Jim Caputo's Mystery Objects Challenge #2

Last issue, we ran a photo submitted by Jim Caputo of Heritage Gaspé with two antique items for readers to identify. We received the following from Sheila Bandry of Ville St-Laurent:

> *The small round item looks like a spindle whorl and the other is probably a pin to hold a cloak, but I cannot identify the specific historical connection.*

Sheila is right on both counts. We feel she deserves to receive the prize for a correct identification (a DVD of "The Identity of English-speaking Quebec in 100 Objects") even though she missed the historical connection. The objects were found at the excavations of the Viking Settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland.



Here is another instalment in the Mystery Objects challenge -- a photo of the item, and a clue from Jim:

> *In 1909, a 15-year-old boy working in an insurance office in New York City was killed with one of these.*

Send your answers to: editor@qahn.org.

Joe Beef is alive and well and living in the Point

QAHN had a presence again this year at the fabulous Joe Beef Market in Point St. Charles, held September 14. Montreal Committee members Sandra Stock and Rod MacLeod staffed a table sporting QAHN paraphernalia, including copies of *Quebec Heritage News*, "100 Objects" DVDs, and literature on the Mapping the Mosaic website and the SHOWI project workshops.

The Market has been on the local community calendar for many years. Residents of the Point drop in throughout the day, but a great many visitors are from other parts of the city and beyond. One of the women at the booth next to QAHN's had come up from Texas – to visit her friend, of course, but with the intention of taking part in the Market.

In addition to historical displays like QAHN's, and like that of Concordia's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (which has prepared several historical audio walking tours of the Lachine Canal area), the Market features artwork and handicrafts, and a variety of food and drink (both hot and most welcome, as September 14 proved unseasonably gray and chilly).

A highlight is always the performance by the Point St. Charles Community Theatre, which this year performed the Life of Marguerite Bourgeois with an array of actors of all ages, including many promising young performers.

Participants were delighted to see the market flourishing and getting such a good turnout, considering the poor weather. A year or so back, some were afraid that, without the vital leadership of Gisèle Turgeon-Barry of the Société d'histoire de Pointe-Saint-Charles, the market would never be the same, but in fact the torch was passed to the PSC Community Theatre which collectively rolled up its sleeves and put together an event every bit as enjoyable as in years past.

We wish the Joe Beef Market a very healthy future – and look forward to next September.

Rod MacLeod and Sandra Stock at the Joe Beef Market. Photo: Fergus Keyes.

QAHN Heritage Essay Contest Winners, 2013

This year, students from the following schools participated in QAHN's 2013 Heritage Essay Contest:

Cedar Street Elementary School, Beloeil, Qc.
St. Francis Elementary School, Richmond, Qc.
Christmas Park Elementary School, Beaconsfield, Qc.
Royal Vale Elementary School, Montreal, Qc.

Ice Storms

by Carrie Evans
Grade 6
St. Francis Elementary,
Richmond, Qc.

Today I will be talking about what happended when the ice storm started up. I also will be talking about the trees, food, animals and how people felt when it happened.

In 1998, the province of Quebec received a very bad ice storm that left many people without power for over one month. People had to move into shelters. They had to take their pets with them because it was winter and the houses got cold fast since there was no electricity so people couldn't live there. Even though it was hard for people to be away from their home everything was fixed up so that people could go back home in most places in the Eastern Townships in less than one month. My great uncle lived near Richmond and had no power for thirty-one days.

There were a lot of trees damaged by the storm. The maple trees were very badly broken and people were not able to make maple syrup that year. Many trees had fallen onto roads and on to houses. A lot of work had to be done to clean up the mess so that people could move around again and were able to travel again.

It was hard for people to search for food because most of the animals would be killed because of starvation and would not be able to live. Many electric poles were damaged and also power lines were damaged too because of the high winds.

I hope you enjoyed my heritage project.

Have a great day. Bye.

Frederick S. Coburn

by Megan Oakley
Grade 6
St. Francis Elementary, Richmond, Qc.

Frederick S. Coburn was a famous artist who was born and raised in Melbourne Quebec. He has made many paintings, portraits and sculptures that have been sold all over the world.

Mr. Coburn was a true artist from the start. As a child, he would sit down in a place that had a good view and sketch either horses, landscapes or portraits. He sold his first drawing when he was ten years old. He was best known for his paintings of the Melbourne countryside and horses but he also illustrated books for famous writers including Alfred Lord Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and others.

In 2010, the municipality of Melbourne had a celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of his death. A monument of horses pulling logs was put up in a park in Melbourne to honour him. He even has a bridge named after him because he was such a big part of our community. There was a play performed about Mr. Coburn's life which brought a big part of the community together.

During the celebration and even now people seem to feel a sense of pride that someone so famous was brought up and lived in their hometown. I feel really proud that we have taken the time to remember someone who was such a big part of our town's history.

Frederick Simpson Coburn

by Brogan Keenan
Grade 6
St. Francis Elementary, Richmond, Qc.

Fredrick Simpson Coburn was born on March 17, 1871, in Melbourne, Quebec. At the age of ten, Coburn sold his first sketching to the local bank manager. Coburn sketched the man's horse and he was so impressed that he gave Coburn a $10 bill: that was the amount of money Coburn's father earned in one week.

After high school, Coburn went to Montreal to study art. He was homesick but soon his drawings were printed in the *The Dominion Illustrated*. Coburn was making a living as an illustrator while studying art in New York and Europe. He often returned home to Melbourne to visit.

By 1915, Coburn sent money to Melvina S. Cheepers, a fellow artist in Europe, so she could come to Canada and escape the war. Eventually, they got married.

Once he settled in Melbourne, he painted mainly winter scenes, usually with horses. This became his trademark.

In 1933, Melvina died of cancer in Paris, France. Coburn returned to Canada alone and heartbroken.

Shortly after Melvina's death, Coburn met a young model and dancer known as Carlotta. Carlotta changed Coburn's outlook on life. Coburn helped Carlotta set up a dance studio in Montreal and Carlotta taught Coburn to dance.

Fredrick Coburn died at his home in Melbourne, Quebec in 1960.

The Ice Storm. Photo: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, www.photolib.noaa.gov /noaa_products/noaa6198.htm.

Wild Montreal

Discovering unexpected urban spaces

by Elizabeth Dent

When I moved to the *Sud-Ouest* borough of Montreal, near the Atwater Market, I put all of my hopes into the Lachine Canal. It had been three years of nature-deficiency. The canal was going to serve as a surrogate for the forest and the beach. When you are a car-free Montrealer, it's difficult to know where to go to find nature.

It was 2006, and my new place was on Walker Avenue, on the borders of Westmount, Little Burgundy, and St-Henri. It was a rougher part of Montreal, in the beginning stages of gentrification: factories along the canal were becoming condo buildings and trendy restaurants were being launched on Notre Dame Street.

I scoured my new neighbourhood for green space. I learned Montreal has a penchant for naming almost any square metre of public space after a famous person and designating it a park. Place des Hommes-Forts, for example, resides in the small concrete corner where St. Antoine and St-Jacques streets intersect. It commemorates strongman Louis Cyr, with several benches facing a large statue of him. Parc du Bonheur-d'Occasion doubles as a bus stop on the sliver of land next to a Banque Nationale on the corner of Rose de Lima and Notre Dame streets. It has a Canadian Heritage plaque commemorating Manitoban author Gabrielle Roy, who based her 1945 novel *The Tin Flute* on the then-impoverished neighbourhood. Parc Sainte-Cunegonde doesn't commemorate anyone, and sits further east on Notre Dame Street between two buildings with graffitied walls. It features several trees and benches on the periphery of an arbitrary path that takes about a minute to circumnavigate. Who frequents these spaces?

Parc des Hommes-Forts, Montreal. Photo: Elizabeth Dent.

I learned from historical spots along the canal that St-Henri's first tannery was established in 1685. The village became a popular stop on the fur trade route, but long before that, aboriginals had been walking through to bypass the rapids. It was hard to imagine Montreal as wilderness before the arrival of Jacques Cartier. The St. Lawrence Iroquois had been nomadic until they found Montreal Island and settled in a fortified village called Hochelaga to fish, hunt, and grow corn.

These little historical sites in my borough revealed a Montreal that I hadn't discovered yet. I thought about how Montreal's wildness had been paved over and industrialized. With rich farmland reaching out from the cracked concrete, I felt closer to Montreal's past than its present.

Two months after settling into my Walker Avenue apartment, my friend Mico invited me to a guerrilla dance party taking place "somewhere in St-Henri." He had grown up on the West Island, and spent most of his life in Montreal. Mico loves the city and can usually be depended upon to know which underground parties are happening when. Underground, meaning unofficial, not to-code and likely illegal. I was no stranger to raves or outdoor dancing, but the outdoor parties of my past took place on some beach or in the middle of the forest, safely away from the eyes of authority. How could this happen in the middle of the city? Mico told me to meet him at Place-Saint-Henri metro and we would walk together to the site.

I had no idea where we were headed. It was dark, humid and muggy on that Saturday evening in August. He led me down potholed streets to a small opening below a bunch of highway bridges. The Turcot yards. A sign said NO TRESSPASSING. Having previously worked on trains for several years, I hesitated. Stories of live-tracks and train-yard safety had been hammered into my head. Trains can sneak up on you.

"C'mon Lis."

"Umm, we're actually not allowed in here."

This story, and the following ones by Stephen Lessard, Casey Lambert and Amy Fish, are the results of the "StoryNet" project, administered by QAHN in partnership with the Quebec Writers' Federation and with funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Emerging authors were matched with established writers who serve as mentors through the process of producing original non-fiction articles. *Quebec Heritage News* is pleased to publish these articles as an ongoing feature.

"No shit."

I sighed. I thought I had left my revolutionary days behind in Vancouver. After all, underground parties are illegal parties, but I ignored my better judgement in favour of a good time. Philosophically, the whole point is to find space and colonize it for a night. I couldn't miss out on something so avant-garde and exciting in the middle of the city.

The Turcot Interchange was a project that started in the 1950s and was completed in 1967. It links the Decarie Expressway, the Champlain Bridge access, the Ville-Marie Expressway, and Highway 20 together in an awe-inspiring knot. Carrying more than 300,000 drivers daily, it was built for around 60,000. Its timing coincided with Expo 67, solidifying Montreal's metropolitan status with its epic height and grandeur. It sits on old Grand Trunk Railway land, but it's no longer a train yard.

As we entered the area below the Interchange, it became clear that we weren't the first trespassers to make our mark within its confines. A genuine street art museum, the graffiti was everywhere. I stopped to gawk at an intricate mural depicting Stephen Harper as a BDSM sadist. He was wearing fishnets, with a garter belt, leather corset and a riding crop. His hair even looked tussled and wavy, not at all like his 'do on TV.

A lot of the art juxtaposed the natural world (forests, animals, oceans) with urban decay, pollution, and industry. It was striking to see such detailed, colourful attention paid to the concrete slabs of this industrial yard, which looked like a strip of gravel from the highway interchange above. There were patches of wildflowers and tall grasses pushing through overturned dirt, in defiance. The ubiquitous tag of Montreal's finest graffiti artists was ever-present. Mico was fascinated by street art, and was an artist himself. He told me stories about some of the pieces on display, recognizing artists from their tags. Shrubs fought their way through the gravel, all back-dropped by the tangle of highways overhead. The sound of cars speeding by above was strangely soothing, like the echo of the ocean lapping the rocks. This was sacred space.

We wandered further in, over holes and dirt piles. We walked over a mysterious platform – possibly the demolished roundhouse from the train-yard days. After the interchange was built, it was acknowledged that the roundhouse and parts of the Village des Tanneries had never needed to be demolished in the first place. The linoleum, in places, was still intact.

Approaching an area that was partially invisible to traffic and enclosed by the bridge of an on-ramp, we found our dance floor. The prominent underside of the on-ramp concealed us, covered with an ornate yellow, red, and black tag. The gravel was littered with empty paint canisters, and other random objects. I noticed a broken tricycle in a marshy quagmire.

The party-throwers had driven a pick-up truck outfitted with a generator, DJ equipment, and speakers into the space. They brought a couple of flood lights out to set the mood. The venue took centre stage as we danced late into the night. With outdoor raves in occupied space, it's never a question of if the police will come and shut you down. The question is *when*.

The music pumped in this dirty, hidden, corner. We drank wine we'd stowed in our bags from a local depanneur. We had triumphantly taken the space for the night, defeating the industrial complex with its wire fences and rules. We were rebellious, free, and invincible. The police finally arrived at 4 a.m. Mico and I scuttled out the way we entered; the police were more interested in the pickup truck.

After that night, my relationship with Montreal changed. Having found wild space beneath the urban sprawl was like having a defibrillator revive my heartbeat. I felt invigorated for the first time since moving to the city, like I am when I go to the ocean shore. An unidentified hunger was finally satiated. Wild space, no matter how urbanized, is hard to find in the city. But it carries the potential for solitude and creative inspiration.

I found almost every excuse to go back. I borrowed a friend's camera and tried to capture angle upon angle. Geometrical slopes intertwine like a concrete spider web, echoing as cars fly by in different directions. My friends, who visited from Victoria, got the "secret" tour of my neighbourhood, with the Turcot yards as the grand finale. On one trek, I was trailed by a butterfly, looking as at home there as I was. I ran my fingers through the wild grass and listened to the drone of the superhighway.

Just as I discovered this unlikely haven, it became a political focal point. The interchanges above the Turcot yards are dangerous and in high disrepair -- they were built with speed, but not precision. Concrete slabs have fallen and drainage is an issue. Now designated for a multi-billion revitalization project, the yards have been fenced off and patrolled. All the graffiti covered up like the lost urban rivers in the nineteenth century. Away from the public eye. Like the forests that get privatized by forestry companies, this wild, urban space became fenced off from me and all the artists who loved it.

I needed to find another wild space again. What had been missing previously in my relationship with Montreal had now become vital to my survival here.

In 2008, my friends pooled together to buy me a bike for my birthday. I was excited for adventure because my entire orienta-

Graffiti in St-Henri, Montreal. Photo: Elizabeth Dent.

tion of the city came from the areas I lived in and worked in. It was early April, and I headed to the canal because it was familiar. When I got there, I noticed another bike path veering off south. I followed it and ended up at the bottom of Verdun, at the path along the shore of the St. Lawrence. I had never been there before, but I rode further and further, dodging icy patches until I hit the Natatorium.

I thought: What on earth is a *Natatorium*?

It turns out it's fancy Latin for a swimming pool. Built in the 1930s in the Art Deco style, Verdun's was meant to be the biggest public pool in the country. It was inaugurated in 1940 to a spectacle reportedly attended by 2,000 residents. Each paid the 50 cent admission (25 cents for children.) The Natatorium provided a swimming experience for Verdun residents who were getting sick swimming in the contaminated St. Lawrence.

I was stunned. I had lived in Verdun when I first moved to Montreal, but I had never been to this riverside park with the spectacular view. I noticed white birch trees as I rode further. The sky to the west seemed vast and open, and was turning pink with the sunset. I could hear a faint roar far ahead. There were huge birdhouses on perches, fields covered in snow, greenhouses, and one of the oldest standing farm houses from colonial New France left on the island, all along this path. Did everyone know about this place?

Verdun became more and more interesting to me. I learned that in the twentieth century, it had an Anglophone history, originally settled by mostly British immigrants. This is why Verdun made nationally significant contributions to both World Wars. The statue at city hall in Parc du Souvenir commemorates the fallen soldiers from WWI.

A city that has been historically multicultural, Verdun was made up of French, English, and other cultures in the twentieth century when Montreal was a still a city divided by culture and language. Its origin was in New France, becoming a fiefdom in 1671 and a municipality in 1875.

Verdun has always been more of a village than a suburb of Montreal. It has all the amenities, its own Santa Parade, and its own summer festivals. It was built as a place where people of modest means could raise their families, which is why it banned taverns and nightclubs. There was a stigma attached to growing up in working-class Verdun; its residents were considered to be *tough*. But a modest upbringing was cross-cultural, and that's why Verdun was multicultural before the word existed. It fell on hard times in the 1960s when it became easier to get to Montreal, and the 1980s when Free Trade moved the area's manufacturing base. It's now in the process of falling out of obscurity and in the middle stages of gentrification.

Some crazy misadventures landed me in Verdun late in 2009, and I live there to this day. On one of my first nights on Fifth Avenue, my new roommate Seb invited me to take his dog Sandy for a walk. We headed down the street, past Wellington, and arrived at the riverside. I was amazed again to find myself so close to nature and open water. I had forgotten about my bike ride to Verdun the previous spring, and how at home I had felt with the river so accessible. The air was cleaner and there was a sense of space there I hadn't experienced since that bike ride. I was rejuvenated and excited. So was Sandy.

We continued along the path where I saw again the civic greenhouses and the Maison Nivard-de Saint-Dizier, the old French farmhouse that I couldn't identify a year earlier. Built in 1710, it sits on the largest prehistoric archaeological site on the island. There are collections of artefacts dating back 5,000 years to the first inhabitants – before the French, English, or even the St. Lawrence Iroquois. Montreal was lush and wild once. The sound of the rapids encroached as we walked further to the bird sanctuary – the deep roar I had heard the previous spring.

We arrived at Parc des Rapides, where dogs are not allowed. But this bird sanctuary in LaSalle is possibly the most arresting space in the entire city. The majesty of wild Montreal is still present as migratory herons, geese, egrets, cranes, and other marsh birds breed there. Some 250 species of plants provide a nesting ground for birds and fish that swim through the rushing rapids. This natural barrier was the chokehold that stopped ships moving further west until the creation of the Lachine Canal.

Shortly after moving to Verdun, I got a knock on the door; a man named Guy was selling high quality fish out of a freezer on his truck. It just so happened that I was on the lookout for good fish, seeing as I'm a pescatarian from the West Coast.

"It's hard to get good fish in Verdun," he told me, "which is why, when I'm around here, I usually come door-to-door and offer what I have."

He explained to me that Verdun is filled with Maritimers, from Gaspesians to Acadians. Those that know the water, tend to want live close to it. Like me.

Suddenly it made sense. I have depended upon these special spaces in Montreal for my solitude and sanity. My connection to the city is its true origins; the Montreal that is whispered through generations of birds and lies below the foundations of its highways.

Elizabeth Dent ended up in Montreal after her employment onboard a passenger train that did trips between la belle province and her native Vancouver ended abruptly in 2004. In order to convince friends at home that she wasn't a total loser, she started taking writing workshops a few years later. She never really learned French very well but she definitely got better at English.

Parc Sainte-Cunégonde, Montreal. Photo: Elizabeth Dent.

Safe in the Arms of Jesus

Itinerant Bible School in 1950s Argenteuil

by Stephen Lessard

I still see women who remind me of her peddling Bibles in Montreal metro stations. They look more modern than she did, but are still sensibly and unfashionably dressed. They stand smiling behind professional-looking displays, rarely speaking to anyone. Religion is a tough sell today, especially here in Quebec. But not so in Ruby Leishman's time.

That summer back in the late 1950s, I was nine or ten or something like that. Against the wishes of my father, my mother, Lily, sent my brother and me to Miss Leishman's Bible School. It was a well-established itinerant summer institution by then and Lily, in her no-nonsense way, had determined it would do us all good. It would free up her mornings (three less underfoot, for we were also to take our younger sister), give us a little knowledge of the Great Book, and, besides, what harm could there be? I know her thought process because when it became known to my father, these were the reasons she calmly and systematically enumerated. And their argument ended as their arguments invariably did, with her moving off to continue something she had been doing (in this case washing dishes), while he was left fuming and defenceless, made to feel as if he had overreacted.

My French-Canadian father had a difficult relationship with religion. A Roman Catholic married to a Protestant, he had signed a document promising that his children would be raised in the Roman faith. In spite of the fact that he was a good provider and a caring father, in this promise he failed miserably. But marriages between those of different faiths were still uncommon in the 40s and certainly not encouraged; nor were marriages between those of different language groups. Our religious and language ambiguity set us apart from other families, making us at times quite insular, for this was an age when people took religion very seriously. And, like most Catholics of his generation, my father believed that the mystery and interpretation of the Bible were best left in the hands of priests and religious scholars; this was not a book to be messed about with by everyday men with jobs to go to and wives and children to provide for, let alone by a spinster of major age trained at the Toronto Bible College, and a Baptist to boot.

Ruby Leishman was a tiny woman who spent her summers travelling the countryside of Argenteuil County spreading the word of the Lord. In her early fifties, her long grey hair tied in a loose bun on the back of her head and set inside a fine net, she wore no-nonsense shoes, and seemed the picture of everyone's favourite maiden aunt. Without jewellery or makeup, her only wave to femininity was her print blouses. An elderly gentleman I spoke to described her as "Plain, but light on her feet. That woman couldn't sit still for two minutes. And talk! Dear Lord, how she did rattle on." Ruby smiled continuously and seemed to shine with an inner light.

"Girlish," my mother called her, with a touch of envy in her voice. For here was an independent woman with her own car and job, and, most important of all, a woman accountable to no man (unless we count the Lord). The responsibilities and constraints of marriage were unknown to Ruby, and yet she had a multitude of children to love and nurture. But they all went home to their real mothers after school. Not that my mother would have necessarily wanted Ruby's life, but at that particular moment in time, it must have appeared more liberating than hers.

Although their roots were back in the hills behind Arundel, Quebec, Ruby Leishman and her twin brother, Earl, grew up on a farm outside Guelph, Ontario. Theirs was a life of rural poverty. But as one woman who knew the family said, "Show me someone scratching out a living on a small farm who wasn't poor back then. At least they had food on the table if not much else." It seems they were burned off one farm and expropriated from another. In Guelph, Ruby took a job with Groat's Feed Store, while Earl became a school janitor. Ruby's relationship with Mr. Groat proved to be providential as he allowed her time off in summer, as much as two months, so that she could pursue her religious calling. When their father, William, died in 1929, the twins were 21. Neither ever married, living together with their mother, Emma, until her death in 1977.

Ruby was a travelling one-woman show, her car packed to the roof with whatever she needed for her ambulatory summer school. She was a master of the recycling process, for the Lord did not always provide her with the necessary budget to do her good deeds. She relied

Ruby Leishman and her Green Hornet, c.1950. Photo: courtesy of Violet Neill.

mostly on friends and family for moral and financial support. Craft items (they took up most of the back seat) were donated by people who appreciated her devotion. Images on used greeting cards soon became a background for transcribed Bible verses. I vaguely remember sewing scraps of plastic tablecloth together with a darning needle and bits of wool to make a change purse for my mother. Small trinkets, given as prizes (for Ruby believed in honouring those who did good deeds or memorized chapters of the Bible), came from the shelves of the Five and Dime. She did take up an offering to keep her head above water and gas in the car. Some gave nothing, but most children paid a nickel or a dime a day to participate in the miracle that was Ruby.

Ruby loved her car, referring to it as her "Green Hornet." Earl, who didn't like his sister on the road all alone roaming the dusty back roads of Argenteuil County, later installed a CB in her car. Just like a trucker, Ruby learned to use the lingo, even going by the handle of 'Laurentian Rascal.' She sometimes used expressions she'd learned on the CB to let students know she was watching them: *I'm eyeballing you*, she'd say, raising and lowering her eyebrows. Strange words coming from the lips of a Bible Lady. But Ruby was no ordinary straight-laced Evangelist; she was a woman who loved life, children and laughter.

In the village of Grenville, Miss Leishman's Bible School was held at Knox-Wesley United Church on Queen Street. It was mornings only and we were home in time for lunch. But there were other schools in subsequent weeks and afternoons during the summer: Calumet United, Ogdensburg Baptist, Rawcliffe Baptist, Harrington United, as well as others up in the Arundel area. Most children found their own means of transportation, but, when necessary, Ruby squeezed a few kids from outlying farms into that already crowded back seat.

Mornings began with hymns or Bible verses set to music. "Jesus loves me." "How beautiful are the feet of them." "Zacchaeus was a wee little man" (a particular favourite as it was learned with accompanying hand movements). In the 50s, singing was still an important part of elementary school curriculum, so we belted out these songs of praise to Ruby's great enjoyment while she played the old pump organ, her feet going a mile a minute.

Using a felt board with cut-out people, mountains and burning bushes, gardens and loaves and fishes, shepherds' crooks and coats of many colours, Pharisees and Good Samaritans, Miss Leishman would tell the stories of the Old Testament and the New. Sometimes we'd get bored with a particularly moralizing lesson and begin to crawl under the pews to poke at girls' legs or wipe boogers on their shoes. Or take out comic books to read secretly under a back pew. (At that time I was addicted to the Classics Illustrated Comics series, spending time with Quasimodo, Huck Finn and Robin Hood, as well as with Jesus.) Things often got out of control since Ruby was not strong on discipline and the older girls who acted as monitors were equally ineffective. But Ruby had her own way of restoring law and order; like any good teacher, she would move the story into the present in order to make it more relevant to the twenty-some youngsters in her charge that morning.

These modern-day anecdotes were linked in some way to the lesson and were always inspired and invariably gruesome. If there was a sycamore tree, then there was a disobedient child who fell from a tall maple; a burning bush led to a forest fire with children caught in a burning home; Noah's ark to children battling raging river floods. Her tales would begin quietly enough but then Ruby would get carried away and spin the wrath of God upon us like some Old Testament prophet. Arms lifted into the air, her face bright pink, she spoke as if she were the voice of the Almighty himself. And always, in the end, the child landing safe in the arms of Jesus. Because he was a believer; because he was saved. "Yes, boys and girls, remember that you, too, will always be safe in His arms if you believe in Him and accept Him as your Saviour." And then she followed it up with chapter and verse, John 3:16: " 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.' " This she told us over and over again. At the end of the story, Ruby seemed exhausted and needed to sit while the organ struck up 'Jesus Bids us Shine,' or some particularly smarmy teenaged girl recited a whole chapter of Luke. I remember being enthralled by these stories, but also frightened by them.

Nightmares ensued and I often fled to the safety of my parents' bedroom. Packs of roaming dogs chased me through burning forests; mangled children were pulled from the canal. Eventually, after a quasi-military investigation, my father realized that the nightmares were coming from Ruby's stories. "This is what she teaches my children, your harmless Bible lady," he threw at Lily. (We were always his or her children when it came to an argument.) "Fires and floods! Terrorized by a Holy Roller!" As the tornado built in force,

Ruby Leishman's Bible School, Grenville, 1951. Photo: courtesy of Violet Neill.

Lily calmly bathed our baby brother in the kitchen sink.

"Stop ranting, you'll make the baby cry," she told him.

"I forbid for them to go to this camp," he said in his flustered English.

"Oh, don't be silly," she responded. "You know nothing about it."

"Only that I forbid it, Lily. I do."

It was altogether a fine familial tableau, one that was typical of my childhood.We wanted to run to our mother, but didn't dare. "Get me a towel," said Lily. We ran for the bathroom. Then, the baby wrapped tightly in a towel, my father's car keys in her left hand, she calmly said, "Go to work."

Lily amused us that morning with her own Bible story: David and Goliath, the small boy who stands up to the bully. I knew this had a link to our father, but today I question who the real bully was. Then, wonderfully unsupervised, in a way our father would never have allowed, she let us use axes and knives and scissors to fashion our very own slingshots out of branches and pieces of inner tube. By the afternoon we could hit the lightning-rod on Mrs Reeves' barn and pretty much keep old man Carlin's German shepherd confined to his dog-house. Friday we were back on our bikes and down by the canal watching Ted Moncrieff open and close the locks. Bible School was a thing of the past.

But was it really? Ruby Leishman certainly wasn't. She lives on in my memory and the memory of many former students. The kindness, the generosity, the passion. The blood and gore. And of course the smile, always the shining smile. 'Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light.' I wonder if she was unique, or were there others just like her giving of their time to spread the gospel some fifty-odd years ago? It now seems a different world.

I've spoken to many people about Ruby – former students, others who knew her from the community – and although there is much consensus there are also glaring gaps. These gaps continued to gnaw at me. I'd found little about Ruby's childhood, or when she received her calling. And I wondered that neither she nor her twin brother ever married. Did the need to take care of their mother preclude their ability to connect to an outsider? Did it have something to do with the strong bond that often exists between twins?

After speaking with Violet, a former fellow student who still lives in Grenville (Ruby had spent summers there with Violet's mother), I felt that the Ruby Leishman story needed some closure. So I called my sister.

"How'd you like to take a spin up to Arundel?"

"When?" she asks.

"How about right now?"

"This has something to do with your obsession with that Bible lady, doesn't it?"

"It's not an obsession," I say. "It's research."

"Give me half an hour," she says. When she comes out of the house she is carrying an umbrella, an extra pair of shoes, a woollen hat, a raincoat and a novel. "You never know," she explains.

We take the Kilmar Road and head to Harrington. As we turn onto the Rouge River Road from the Harrington Flats, laughing like teenagers, we think of all the road trips we took with our father here in the hills behind Harrington. I explain that Ruby is buried behind the United Church in Arundel. Violet had attended the service some twenty-five years back. She'd actually said: "Ruby's laid to rest in Arundel. Well, Crystal Falls. The little white church up there on the hill. On the road to Saint-Jovite. You can't miss it." I'm always a little wary when country people tell me I can't miss it.

It's a dry cold day, too cold for mid-September, and the dust from the gravel rises like mist behind us. When we pass the Buddhist Monastery, we both wonder how all those little Asian men wearing thin orange clothing ended up here. We get lost in Weir. My sister has the map on her lap but has never learned what navigating actually means. She prefers to stop and ask for directions from locals. I pull into a chip-stand just past a deer farm and the lady points us in the right direction.

The United Church in Arundel is not on a hill, nor does it have a graveyard. But then, as we look up, we see another church in town, this one on a hill. It turns out to be Anglican and does have a few dozen tombstones. But no Leishmans. All the same, we take a moment to admire the beauty and quiet dignity of Grace Church, the fall colours just beginning, and remember our mother, Lily. "She'd be up for this," says my sister.

At the crossroads in the village we take the road to Saint-Jovite, stopping at a garden supply centre for help.

The lady is all smiles and tells us in French that there is a Protestant cemetery just up the road on the left.

We pull into the graveyard feeling a little discouraged as there must be three hundred stones divided by a central path more or less down the middle. At least they are organized in neat rows. A fellow on a tractor-mower smiles at me and waves vigorously. I wonder if he's a little simple and then remember that we are in the country and people still do this. I take the larger left side and send Sis over to the right. Half an hour later we have not found a single Leishman. The trail is cold. Stone cold.

On our way back to the car, the man on the mower gives me another wave and smile. I wave back and start walking toward the tractor. He gets off, extends an enormous hand and says, really he does, "John Bennett, at your service."

I explain that we're looking for the tombstone of a Leishman, Ruby Leishman.

"Oh, she's not here," he says, as if it were common knowledge. "She's with the Leishmans in Crystal Falls six miles up the road on your right. If you get to bush, you've gone too far."

"Miles? Who says miles anymore?" I say to my sister. Hungry and cold, she

Crystal Falls Cemetery, Arundel, Qc. Photo: www.laurentianweb.com /knox/opencem_page.htm.

merely shrugs her shoulders. So we clock for 10 K and head out. The countryside is beautiful; sweeping fields and rolling hills, cattle and horses, beautiful farms. The kind of countryside my father loved. We soon spot another small white church, this one with the shortest steeple in Christendom, low on a hill with a small graveyard rising behind it. 'Knox Presbyterian 1903' (or is it 1908?), says the blistering sign. I'm thinking that if you really have to check out, and we all will one day, this would be the ideal spot to plan for your eternal rest. There are perhaps two dozen stones and half of them are Leishmans. The very first one is Ruby's. The trail is red hot like a burning bush. She shares the stone with her twin brother, Earl. "I remember him," I tell my sister. "He sometimes played the violin at Bible School."

I am filled with a sense of wonder standing in the cold on that hill in Crystal Falls. Clouds fast track their way across a pale sky. To hell with the gaps, I think. The dead have come back to life. Now there is some finality to my Ruby story, for what could be more final than a tombstone? And Sis seems relieved because she wants to stop for lunch.

A few dates and 'Resting in His

Arms' are all that is written on that stone. I'm not quite sure what I'd expected, probably something that would recognize, even celebrate, the tremendous influence she had on youngsters attending Bible School in Argenteuil County in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. But 'Resting in His Arms' will have to do.

"It would be nice to leave something," says Sis. "Just to show we've been." I remember how Lily would give us small change every day for the freewill offering at Bible School. I find a dime and leave it on the base of Ruby's stone. Sis spots a feather and plants it in the grass in front. On the way home, the river looks cold as black marble, but the autumn colours shine forth with everlasting light.

With thanks to Shelagh, Moira, Vera, Violet, John, Cecil, Heather and Mrs Labrosse.

Stephen Lessard is a retired educator interested in writing about local history and childhood experiences. In 2012, he was short-listed in the CBC-QWF short story competition.

Leishman grave, Crystal Falls Cemetery, Arundel, Qc.
Photo: www.laurentianweb.com/knox/opencem_page.htm

Silent Suffragette

Great Aunt Dee Dee's militant tendency

by Dorothy Nixon

Suffragette: derogatory form of the term suffragist, describing a woman who lobbies for the vote, especially a militant one.

A century ago, 29-year-old Edith Nicholson wrote a letter home to her mother in the Eastern Townships, giving her all the Montreal news.

That morning, Edith and her two younger sisters Marion and Flora had gone to the St. Antoine Market and purchased a roast of beef, potatoes, strawberries and a pineapple. "Fruit is selling quite reasonable," Edith commented. That afternoon, the Nicholson girls had received a visitor from Richmond at their Guy Street digs: their Presbyterian Minister, who had regaled them with his funny Methodist jokes. Edith assured her mother that her sore throat was almost gone. The girls, all school teachers, suffered from constant colds, a great worry in an era before antibiotics.

And then Edith, my husband's Great Aunt Dee Dee, signed off with a phrase that may mean little to the modern reader: "We are going to try and hear Mrs. Snowden, but she is not a militant for which I am very sorry."

This is a loaded sentence – a 100-year-old sentence, loaded, as I discover, with long-forgotten Montreal history.

To begin with, who was Mrs. Snowden?

The guest speaker at Montreal's St. James Methodist Church on the evening of May 5, 1913, was the young and pretty wife of British Labour M.P. Philip Snowden and herself a prominent British suffragist and public speaker. The occasion was the National Council of Women's Annual General Meeting. The audience consisted largely of influential social reformers, clergymen and McGill professors – and the press.

Ethel Snowden was touring North America to reassure citizens that giving women the vote wouldn't be the end of civilization as they knew it. She was a "moderate" suffragist, as opposed to a "militant" one; a "maternal" suffragist, as opposed to an equal-rights one. Giving women the vote, she said, would serve only to entrench traditional family values and protect the sanctity of the home. The goal of the suffrage movement was "to make sure that every baby is well born." She had no interest in seeing women run for political office – or work in any office, for that matter. Mrs.

Snowden called Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst's militant suffragettes "cavemen," handing the press a perfect headline for the next day's news.

To be sure, the male reporters in the room lapped up her every word. One reporter described Snowden as "a daughter of the gods, divinely fair," while another wrote she had "more intelligence than possessed by 50 average men."

I don't know whether Edith or her sisters set eyes upon the transcendent Mrs. Snowden that evening. No future letter mentions it.

More to the point: why would Edith Nicholson, an evangelical Presbyterian brought up on daily sermons about the importance of self-control, especially for women, be "very sorry" to find this Mrs. Snowden such a moderate on the question of suffragism? And why would she think good things about Emmeline Pankhurst's militant suffragettes who were being described in the local press as "fanatical," "hysterical and foolish," "vinegary virago," "man-haters" and, yes, even "terrorists?"

Many people in England in 1913 were very afraid of the suffragettes. These militants were only one faction of the British suffrage movement, but they were the faction that got all the attention – and getting attention in the press, of course, was what it was all about. In 1913, the militant suffragette movement in England was peaking. Mrs. Pankhurst had openly declared that she was waging a war on the government with a campaign of civil disobedience, which included the deliberate destruction of government property. No longer satisfied with arm-in-arm marches and fiery in-your-face speechifying, the suffragettes fire-bombed a house being built for Lloyd George, ransacked a golf course, tossed a bag of flour and even an axe at Prime Minister Asquith, and, when they were thrown in jail for these acts, they went on defiant hunger strikes. In April 1913, the sickest hunger-strikers were put under house arrest so they wouldn't die in jail and become martyrs for the cause.

Yet, despite this militancy, Edith Nicholson, prim and proper missionary schoolmarm from a respectable working-class family in the Eastern Townships, identified with these would be Bodiceas.

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Women's suffrage was not an unfamiliar subject to Montrealers in May 1913, nor was it Mrs. Snowden's first public appearance in the city.

The Montreal Local Council of Women had invited her to speak at Stanley Hall in December 1909, just as the militant movement was gearing up in England. The attractive young Englishwoman was introduced by the president of the Council, Carrie Derick, a rather plain-looking middle-aged spinster with large doleful eyes – also a professor of botany at McGill, the first female university professor in Canada. Derick explained to the audience that most of the Council's members were for equal political rights but they wanted to hear more on the subject of suffrage before taking sides on the issue.

Emmeline Pankhurst in prison dress, 1911, from Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette, *New York, 1911.*

In her Stanley Hall speech, Mrs. Snowden claimed that "all men care about is money and property, but women care about family and humanity." She told a heckler in the audience that "she would use her vote in the cause of peace and temperance." She believed that Mrs. Pankhurst, by contrast, had unleashed a Frankenstein monster.

Two years later, Mrs. Frankenstein herself spoke at the very grand Windsor Hall, invited by Carrie Derick "to explain the other

side of the suffrage question." Emmeline Pankhurst delivered her address from the same stage where, ten years before, her nemesis, Winston Churchill, had impressed Montreal's elite with an account of his Boer War exploits.

Pankhurst's topic was "The Suffrage Movement in England," and she chose her words carefully so as not to seem to be inciting Canadian women to militancy. She said she wished for the same political cohesion among the women of the Empire as exists among the men.

It was no coincidence that John James Guerin, the last English mayor of Montreal, was sitting among the head table guests. Guerin held this office largely thanks to the efforts of the Montreal Local Council of Women, who, inspired by Mrs. Snowden's Stanley Hall speech, had participated full-throttle in the 1910 municipal election, with over 100 volunteers donating their time and energy to help get out the female vote. (Women with property could vote at the municipal level.) A 1909 Royal Commission into local municipal malfeasance had found that Montreal's City Hall was saturated with corruption, prompting the formation of a Citizens' Committee, which endorsed a slate of Reform candidates. Thanks to the female vote, almost all the Reformers had won their seats and Guerin had been elected mayor.

The Council's efforts had shown that women's suffrage was a means to clean up the corrupt City Hall. Women's suffrage was also seen as a path to social and moral reform. If women got the vote at every political level, the world would get a good old-fashioned scrub-down and the problems of industrialization might be solved.

Emmeline Pankhurst's December 1911 speech appears to have given a boost to suffragism in Montreal. Early in 1912, the Council created a separate organization with the mandate "to keep the interest in suffrage alive." The Montreal Suffrage Association was probably designed to keep suffrage distinct from the Council's other interests; by no means did all of its forty member organizations support the cause.

Carrie Derick accepted the presidency of the MSA, having recently stepped down as president of the Council, although she remained Honorary Past-President as well as V.P. (education) of the National Council of Women. Derick told the press that the new organization would dedicate itself to the "quiet education of the people." Honorary President Julia Parker Drummond (another former Council president) promised that the MSA would be characterized by "sweet reasonableness." Honorary V.P. Reverend Herbert Symonds of Christ Church Cathedral declared that the women's vote was in the true spirit of the Scriptures – and then added that it was vital that the new organization distance itself from the British Suffragettes. Reverend Young of Douglas Methodist Church took it even further. He said it would be better for the cause of woman suffrage if the British militants starved to death in jail. At this, whispers of "No, no!" were heard in the audience.

The MSA was officially launched on April 25, 1913 – just one week before Edith Nicholson wrote that pineapple-and-sore-throat letter home to her mother. Edith likely read all about the launch in the *Montreal Herald* or the *Witness*. No doubt she was as sorry to read of the statements made against Pankhurst-style militancy as she was to hear that the MSA had invited Mrs. Snowden back to speak.

According to scholars, the short-lived (1913-1919) MSA was a legitimate, even influential organization. I think it was created by the Montreal Council of Women executive as a way to contain and control the suffrage discussion in the city. But what was the executive, and the leadership of the MSA, so afraid of?

The New Woman.

The decade of the 1910s was the age of the "New Woman" or the "Restless Woman" – who was usually young, unmarried, middle-class and working as a teacher, stenographer or shop girl. At this time, thousands of women were flocking to the big, bad city to find work, and in the process creating problems for the moralists who considered them vulnerable and impressionable and in need of protection and surveillance. In those days, a young woman could not walk alone at night, eat alone in a restaurant, or share accommodation with fellow working girls to save money. But all that might change with female suffrage. If a New Woman supported Votes for Women she was a "self-interest" suffragist, intent on

living her life to the fullest outside the traditional sphere.

Mrs. Pankhurst's 1911 visit left its mark on the potential New Women of Montreal. Edith Nicholson makes no direct mention of the visit in her letters, but one yellowed newspaper clipping from a whole slew she left behind describes the subsequent Montreal visit of one of Pankhurst's own, Miss Barbara Wylie.

Wylie was a British suffragette who had a brother in politics in Saskatchewan. Given this connection, she had contrived to meet with Prime Minister Borden when he was in London, in August 1912. Wylie, accompanied by two suffragettes who bragged about having been to jail for the cause, demanded that Borden give Canadian women the vote. Borden declared he was not impressed and that he

Left: Carrie Derick, 1890. Photo: McCord Museum, II-91932.

Right: Julia Parker Drummond, 1894. Photo: McCord Museum, II-105875.

would never be swayed by militant action; then he lied and told the petitioners that suffrage was a provincial issue, and so out of his hands.

This "meeting" was written up in Canadian newspapers. "Suffragettes to strengthen the battle lines in Canada," shouted the *Montreal Gazette*, and soon after: "British Suffragettes barred from Canada." Apparently the Canadian government wanted British suffragettes declared "undesirables."

This did not stop the Montreal Local Council of Women from bringing Miss Wylie to Montreal to speak at the YMCA in September 1912. In her speech, Wylie "ably defended her militant movement" while recommending that Canadian women first use constitutional means to get the vote. Even so, heated arguments broke out in the audience, and two men almost came to blows.

The article Edith clipped from the *Montreal Standard* describes Miss Wylie's arrival at Viger Station. Reporters almost missed her, expecting a battle-axe but encountering a lovely tall refined-looking woman. One of them asked Wylie about the incident where a suffragette threw an axe at Asquith. "If it had hit him it would have only knocked some sense into him," she replied.

Barbara Wylie may have had plans to become the leader of Canada's militant suffragist movement, but they did not involve Montreal. She soon left for the West, where she gained a few followers, but within a year was back in England getting arrested at a demonstration in front of Buckingham Palace.

The New Women of Montreal may also have looked south of the border. On April 30, 1913, two days before Edith wrote her letter home, 27-year-old Inez Milholland led thousands of women marchers in a peaceful suffrage parade down New York's Fifth Avenue. She sat astride a beautiful chestnut horse, holding aloft a banner in the purple, white and green colours of Mrs. Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union. *The Times* took two full pages to report on the eye-popping spectacle, publishing three large photos and some first-class interviews serving up a lively cross-section of public opinion on the suffrage issue.

Edith very likely read the article, since it was re-printed, much edited down and sans photos, in the *Montreal Gazette*. The lead seems like something from the fashion page: "The Woman Suffrage Parade shaped in straight and graceful lines which were brightened with resplendent decorations, passed in attractive and impressive dignity up Fifth Avenue, 10,000 strong." How could a young unmarried working woman like Edith resist such a word-picture? Perhaps she even imagined herself astride some shiny red steed leading a thousand marchers down Sherbrooke Street, waving placards and shouting out "Votes for Women."

I'd like to think so.

Carrie Derick may have participated in this New York event. She missed the first executive meeting of the MSA on April 29, 1913 – "with very good reason," according to the minutes – and she was absent from a May 1 concert at McGill's Royal Victoria College in honor of the National Council ladies. *The Times* also stated that there was a Canadian contingent present.

In due course, Derick and the other members of the MSA embarked on their plan for the "quiet education of the people" through "sweet reasonableness." They pinned a few posters in the refined Edinburgh Café, sold some pamphlets at Chapman's Book Store, handed out bilingual flyers at the Montreal auto show (the first annual event of that kind), and visited a few country fairs in the Eastern Townships. They also held a few education evenings, one on the very controversial topic of Social Purity.

In November 1913, Edward Beck of the *Montreal Herald* offered the MSA a special section to promote its agenda. Edited by Carrie Derick, the section contained a short note by Mrs. Pankhurst's daughter Christabel, written from her hide-out in Paris, but otherwise nothing to stir the blood of young Montreal womanhood. Most articles, including a full-page front-of-the-section piece by Julia Parker Drummond, seem aimed at convincing men of the value of woman suffrage. Nowhere is there a call for new members.

Soon after World War I was declared, the MSA began focusing all their energies on patriotic work. "Women have been asking for their rights, now it is time to do their duty," said Carrie Derick. In 1917, it was the Montreal Council of Women (and especially its president, gynecologist Octavia Grace Ritchie) that got into hot water criticizing Borden's conscription election and his "limited suffrage" gerrymandering. Derick, who was busy with food conservation and the Khaki League, steered the MSA clear of all the controversy.

The cause of women's suffrage seems to have been taken up by a rival organization which random newspaper articles refer to as of 1913: the Montreal Equal Suffrage League, part of an upstart national organization with locals in Montreal, London, Ottawa and Toronto. In June 1913, the Ottawa Equal Suffrage League held a picnic, and the keynote speaker was a Miss Caroline Kenney "of Montreal." Kenney was a name not previously associated with the suffrage movement in the city, but this Caroline (very, very likely) was English and the sister of prominent suffragette Annie Kenney, the highest-ranking "working class" militant in Mrs. Pankhurst's army. The eldest Kenney sister, Nell, had moved to Montreal in 1908 with her husband, Frank Randall Clarke, a former *Daily Mail* reporter. Caroline Kenney's name comes up again in an October 1913 newspaper clipping in which she is listed as chairing an Equal Suffrage League evening at Montreal's YMCA.

But that's where the Montreal trail goes cold for Caroline Kenney, although her brother-in-law Frank left a local legacy to the McCord Museum, including photo albums filled with pictures of the city's Depression Era homeless. Caroline's sister Annie Kenney wrote her autobiography in the 1920s, divulging all about her life as a suffragette and describing her happy childhood.

The Kenney sisters were raised in Lancashire, in an enlightened but poor working class environment. Their mother allowed the girls "freedom of expression in all subjects, whether it was dancing, spiritualism, Walt Whitman or Paine." The Kenney children all left school at 13 to work in a local textile mill. Eventually Annie and at least two of her sisters were trained as suffragettes by Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political

Sherbrooke Street near the Ritz Hotel, c.1915. Photo: McCord Museum, VIEW-5532.

Union (WSPU). Single-minded, and very pretty, Annie soon became a favorite with Mrs. Pankhurst. Her first mission was to harass Winston Churchill at an election event in Manchester. Apparently, the future prime minister couldn't get a word in over the yelling of the suffragettes, and this greatly upset him. Later, Annie Kenney would be jailed, go on a hunger strike and, according to her autobiography, be the very first to play cat and mouse with the police while on house arrest, at one time stuffing two plums in her cheeks and putting on a grey wig to escape from right under their noses.

Nell Kenney and her husband lived in Verdun in 1911 and sometime later moved to St. Lambert. Frank Randall Clarke was working as City Editor for the *Montreal Witness* newspaper in 1913 – ironically, the local newspaper with the most over-the-top headlines about the British suffragettes: "Suffragettes Attempt to Blow up St. Paul's Cathedral" and "Suffragettes Try to Murder Magistrate."

Caroline Kenney must have come to Montreal as part of the WSPU Invasion in 1913. In the clipping she is described as a resident of the city. But if Caroline were trying to provoke a truly militant movement, with marches, parades and civil disobedience, there is no evidence of it; perhaps the rival MSA had too much pull in the press. There are a few other mentions in the newspapers of this Equal Suffrage League, including a hint that another of Mrs. Pankhurst's troops, her secretary Mrs. Wallace, was Montreal President for a time, but it is all very sketchy.

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I recently visited the City of Montreal archives to see the dossier on the Montreal Suffrage Association. A log book lists about 200 members, including a disproportionate number from St. Lambert, and, to my surprise, only two members living at McGill's Royal Victoria College. Since the warden of RVC, Ethel Hurlbatt, was a prominent suffragist on the executive of the Montreal Council of Women, I would have expected her to have recruited some of her girls.

I quickly flipped to the N's, to see if Edith's name was there. It was not.

I have to wonder: Did Edith get involved with the Equal Suffrage League, or another grassroots movement that was friendlier to young unmarried women? Did she really and truly consider parading down Sherbrooke Street carrying the WSPU colours? Or was her activism of the dreamy variety? Did she stick to collecting newspaper clippings?

I will never know. Aunt Dee Dee never talked to her great nieces and great nephews about her years as a suffragist-sympathizer.

Still, I suspect the Nicholson women would have gotten along famously with the Kenneys. They were feminist birds of a feather. Edith and her sisters, Marion and Flora, were brought up in similar free-spirit fashion, in a female-centred family where education was highly-valued.

When war was declared in 1914, Edith Nicholson was living at home in Richmond and working as a teacher at St. Francis College High School. Like so many other Canadian women, she jumped right into war work: she knitted socks, took the nursing course, and helped organize a concert for the Patriotic Fund. In 1917, Edith moved back to Montreal, taking a job with Sun Life Insurance. Her sister Marion was married then, with a toddler and a newborn, living on York Avenue in Westmount. Her other sister Flora, a teacher at William Lunn School, was boarding with Marion. Edith joined the Naval League, and later worked with the YMCA's Red Triangle Organization, caring for displaced war veterans. This would prove good practice for her World War II career as Commandant of the Quebec Red Cross.

In 1920, Edith began to work at the Registrar's office at McGill. Later, she became Tutor-in-Residence, then Assistant Warden at Royal Victoria College, second-in-command to Mrs. Hurlbatt. She worked at that university the rest of her career.

Of course, she wrote regular letters home.

At a 1917 Dominion Square rally for the Irish Rangers, Sir Sam Hughes, Minister of the Militia and Defence, ogled her. "I think my green suit must have caught his eye as the Col. asked Ella Mac and Mrs. Williamson if I was with them," she wrote.

She started losing friends to the Spanish flu. "So many sudden deaths. So many have been taken." One family she was close to, the Tuckers, lost their eldest son to the war and a daughter to the flu. Edith visited their home in 1919 and wrote to her mother: "That family is not the same." Alas, so many families would never be the same.

There was no more mention of the suffrage movement in her later letters home – although her mother wrote to her in December 1921 describing her own first experience voting at the federal election. "I am so thrilled with this country," Mrs. Nicholson exclaimed.

In a 1927 letter home, Edith described having spent the evening comforting a distraught co-ed whose parents were getting a divorce. Then she discussed an upcoming trip to Europe with McGill, eagerly awaiting a visit to Oxford's Bodelian Library and the Louvre in Paris.

And then she added this little tidbit: "I am stepping out to the McGill Concert tomorrow night…with Miss Carrie Derick."

Well, what do you know? Yet another loaded sentence. Here I go again.

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Navy League ladies (Edith is second from right), 1918. Photo: courtesy of Dorothy Nixon.

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The Huguenots and New France

Coligny and the Protestant potential

by Joseph Graham

"The shot came from the window where the smoke is!" Admiral Gaspard de Coligny is reported to have declared. The bullet had penetrated his wrist and exited near his elbow. His men milled around in confusion as the gunman escaped.

It was midday on Friday, August 22, 1572, and Coligny, the leader of the French Huguenots, had just met with King Charles. When Coligny left the Louvre, he detoured around the Hotel Bourbon. A young man thrust a petition into his hands. Reading it, he stooped to adjust his boot, an action that foiled the intentions of the assassin.

Coligny could take satisfaction in the headway the Huguenots had made. The Court was assembled for the marriage of the king's sister to Henri of Navarre, an important Huguenot. The wars between Catholics and Huguenots stopped for the wedding and the whole Protestant leadership was in Paris to attend. New hope was in the air.

While he was not involved in Calvinist Jean-François Larocque de Roberval's failed attempt to colonize the St. Lawrence Valley in 1542, Coligny sponsored four subsequent attempts to establish New France in Brazil, Florida and South Carolina. He envisioned a colony that would offer freedom for the religious minorities, but each colony suffered inhumane slaughter at the hands of Catholic Spain and Portugal. Directed at the infidel Protestants, the attacks were so heinous they were considered among the most barbaric acts of the sixteenth century.

In the afternoon, as he lay convalescing, cared for by the royal physician, Coligny received a visit from the king himself, who swore he would find the assassin.

That same night Catherine de Medici, King Charles's mother, who feared the rising power of the Huguenots, explained to her impressionable young son why Coligny had to die. The Protestants could not be trusted and sought only to take power, she told him. She also shared a rumour that they were planning to kill the king in retaliation for the attempted assassination of Coligny, an idea that was ludicrous, but it somehow galvanized the young king into action. Catherine had a vengeful ally, the Duke of Guise, who held Coligny responsible for his father's death during the wars of religion.

By the time Catherine had finished with her son, the king ordered the assassination of the Huguenot leadership, most of whom were in Paris still. The wedding had been held only a few days earlier. Guise, assigned to fulfill the king's orders, sent his henchmen to the home of the invalid Coligny, beat him senseless and tossed him, still alive, out his second-storey window into the street. Then, to make sure he was dead, they decapitated him.

Spreading through Paris, sanctioned murders of Protestant leaders led the Catholic citizenry to rise against their Huguenot neighbours, beginning a massacre that swept beyond the capital and across France. Catholic mobs chained off streets, locking their victims in certain neighbourhoods, slaughtering whole Huguenot families. Known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the nightmare lasted much longer than a day, with the carnage running from Catholic claims of 7,000 dead to more realistic estimates as high as ten times that, while some Huguenot sources placed the numbers in the hundreds of thousands. From about twenty-five percent, by the time the dust settled the Protestant population of France had plummeted to around one percent, most of the Huguenots and other Protestants having declared themselves to be Catholics to save their lives.

While French jurists and intellectual leaders were horrified, Catholic Europe celebrated the gruesome orgy of murder. The pope ordered a Te Deum, a mass in praise of God, and had coins struck depicting an angel with a sword in one hand and a cross in the other, floating through bodies, celebrating France's return to the Church.

Among the survivors was the king's new brother-in-law, Henri of Navarre. Protected by the Court upon a promise to convert to Catholicism, he was effectively under house arrest. Over the next few years, he witnessed King Charles

"Death of Admiral de Coligny," from an 1887 copy of Foxe's Book of Martyrs, *illustrated by Kronheim.*

descend into a state of insanity over his part in the massacre, alternately holding himself or his mother responsible for the blood on his hands. Declaring his love for his once-Protestant brother-in-law, he succumbed to tuberculosis and died during the spring of 1574. Henri eventually escaped the Court and rejoined the Huguenots.

Henri of Navarre would follow in Coligny's footsteps, leading the Huguenots across the south of France to the edge of Paris, only in his case he did it because he claimed the French throne. To take Paris, he converted again to Catholicism in 1593, and, after ascending to the throne, he passed the Edict of Nantes, putting an end to the wars of religion, at least for the duration of his reign.

The new king favoured the policies of Coligny and soon sponsored another Protestant to try one more time to establish a colony in the New World.

Pierre du Gua de Monts, a trader and venture capitalist from near La Rochelle, was given exclusive trading rights on condition he establish a colony, fulfilling the dream of Gaspard de Coligny. In his crew that left France in 1604 were Catholic priests and Protestant ministers as well as Catholic and Huguenot mariners. His officers included François Gravé du Pont and Samuel de Champlain. Over the next four years they explored the coast of Maine, the Bay of Fundy and the St. Lawrence, establishing permanent French colonies at Port Royal in the Annapolis Valley and at Quebec.

New France was conceived as a refuge for freedom of religion, a home where religious minorities could live freely under the French king. The potential for immigration was staggering.

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Rolling to Megantic

A personal journey

by Casey Lambert

One hundred years before a runaway train razed Lac-Mégantic's town centre, destroying homes and businesses and ending 47 lives, a passenger train rolled into its station and unloaded a peculiar guest. Clutching a chest-high walking stick, clad in a bearskin robe with hand-woven boots, Joseph Knowles strode onto the platform and into a raucous crowd.

Two months earlier, on August 4, 1913, Knowles, a middle-aged artist, had shed his clothes and walked naked into the woods in western Maine. His goal was to assert his survival prowess and show the New England public that modern man can subsist as a cave man. He originally boasted that he would emerge clothed and vigorous two months later at the same Maine location. But fearing that Maine's game wardens would arrest him for poaching violations, Knowles decided to trek 30 miles across the Canadian border and surface at Megantic instead.

Members of the Boston press descended on the village of Megantic on October 4 awaiting the arrival of the nature man.

With steamships patrolling the lakeshore and a brass band gearing up downtown, Knowles emerged at 4 p.m. along the CPR railway tracks several miles southeast of Megantic. The first person to spot him after he stumbled out of the forest was a 14-year-old girl. Standing on the tracks, she eyed him suspiciously as he approached to ask how far it was to Megantic. Her response was "a torrent of French," so he repeated the question with his limited French and the girl, Frienie Gerard, replied that it was about seven miles. She also told him a passenger train heading to Megantic would be passing soon.

Sixty-two years to the day after Joseph Knowles walked naked into the woods of Maine seeking a long-lost connection to Mother Nature, I was wearing the same outfit in a Calgary hospital having my umbilical connection to my mother severed. Thirty eight years later I hopped on my bike in Montreal to embark on a journey of my own to

Lac- Mégantic. Originally I was planning a cycling tour of the Eastern Townships, but after the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, I decided to make it my primary destination—not to gawk or to offer anything other than a few tourist dollars—but to see for myself the impact of the devastation and gain a deeper appreciation of what had transpired.

I started pedaling just after daybreak because, unlike Joseph Knowles, who took a two month hiatus from normal life, I promised I would return to mine in three days. At 6 a.m. on Sunday, I expected to have St. Catherine Street to myself, but instead I had to dodge taxis jockeying outside after-hours clubs. After crossing the Jacques Cartier Bridge, I joined Route 1 of Quebec's sprawling Route Verte cycling network. Route 1 starts in Montreal and goes to Sherbrooke and the Eastern Townships before heading north to Quebec City. In Longueuil, as in most municipalities, the Route Verte uses existing bike paths and is distinguished only by small signs erected along the route. When the bike paths end, the Route Verte continues on ordinary roads that are navigated by following arrows painted on the surface.

Signs and arrows led me to Chambly, whose stone fort appears less daunting in person than on the label of my favourite white beer, Blanche de Chambly. I continued along the Chambly Canal and startled a few stoic herons, prompting them to spread their expansive wings and take flight. Before crossing the Richelieu River on Gouin Bridge in Saint-Jean, I stopped to survey the train bridge next to it. This is where the 72 oil tankers of North Dakota crude passed from the CPR-owned railway tracks onto the line owned and operated by the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic (MMA).

Long before the train bridge was built, a seminal event in Canada's railroad history occurred along this shore. In 1836, only six years after the world's first passenger train ran from Liverpool to Manchester, Canada's first passenger train arrived here after the 24-km trip from La Prairie. The railway line, made not of iron but pine, was financed by John Molson and his business partners. The inaugural trip started with 300 passengers in La Prairie but after the locomotive struggled,

Joseph Knowles on the day he arrived at Megantic, October 4, 1913, from Joseph Knowles, Alone in the Wilderness*, Boston, 1913.*

all but two first-class cars carrying 32 VIPs were removed. From this modest wooden origin, railroads sprouted throughout Lower and Upper Canada, laying the foundation for uniting the country.

Shortly after crossing through Iberville, I was rolling amidst fields of corn on a dedicated bike path named the Montérégiade. Established in 1993 along an abandoned CN rail line, its gentle slope, isolation from traffic, and tree cover make it, like other former railroads such as Granby's Estriade or the Laurentians' P'tit Train du Nord, among the most enjoyable sections of the Route Verte.

Before reaching Farnham, I came to a clearing in the corn fields where several people were staring up at the sky. I stopped to stare, as well, and eventually spotted what looked like tiny flower petals fluttering in the sky. A minute later an orange petal swooped above my head and delivered a skydiver back to Earth. Twenty-one more parachutists would land in the next few minutes. Some were more graceful than others, but without exception all were smiling ear to ear as they walked back to their clubhouse. Although I was content to spend long hours pedaling my bike, I knew a smile that wide was not likely to be part of my day.

During his two months in the woods, Joseph Knowles lost eleven pounds, which is not a lot considering that he had to rustle up all of his own food. In his book, *Alone in the Wilderness*, he claimed that it was not until the third day that he felt the need to eat. I had been gone barely three hours when I approached Cowansville, and although I had eaten a mountain of Cheerios earlier that morning my thoughts were now monopolized by the prospect of a hot breakfast. One of my favourite things about Quebec is that good, greasy but hearty breakfasts for under $5 are still ubiquitous. In Cowansville, I paid $4.25 for scrambled eggs, toast with peanut butter, hash brown potatoes, beans, orange juice, fresh fruit, and a coffee I didn't drink.

I initially thought that I would follow the MMA track all the way to Lac- Mégantic, but after Cowansville I decided to dip south towards Sutton instead. This was my first trip this deep into the Townships and I wanted to see as many places as my pedaling legs would allow. Soon I found myself on a quiet country road where I glimpsed my first round barn tucked in amongst trees beyond a roadside soccer field. There are seven left in the Townships and none elsewhere in Quebec.

I stopped next in Mansonville to restock my liquids, and was rewarded with a peek inside my second round barn. Built in 1912, it would have still had the 'new barn' smell when Joseph Knowles was hunkering down in the forest. The top floor has been restored and is open to tourists on a donation basis. It was not a windy day, but under the vaulted ceiling, its long radial planks were creaking and groaning. I asked the volunteer guide why it was built this way, and she said, "You don't know? It was to prevent Satan from hiding in the corners."

After Mansonville, I went up and down a series of hills and found myself near the shore of Lake Memphremagog. Appreciating the view of Owl's Head Mountain rising above the wrinkled countryside next to the dark blue waters, I started to feel anxious about where I would be spending the night. Inspired by Joseph Knowles, I wanted to sleep outdoors; I pictured myself lying under the stars by a secluded cove with gentle waves lulling me to sleep. But after riding the whole length of the lake, I did not find my cove, nor any stretch of lakeshore that wasn't private property. Giving up on rogue camping I used the final few hours of daylight to pedal to an official campground on Lake Magog.

I was carrying a hammock so I took the first site that had two trees 15 feet apart. Although relieved to have secured a place to sleep, I didn't feel completely at ease until splashing 225 km of sweat and grime from my face and arms. To appease my mounting hunger I boiled water with my primus stove and poured it into a dehydrated camping meal of Kathmandu Curry. The package said it made two 14-ounce servings – just enough for my appetite and my tolerance of spicy food. After stargazing by the shore I climbed inside my hammock and dangled contentedly for the next nine hours.

Joseph Knowles claims he spent most of his nights under a lean-to he built near a remote lake. However, not everyone was convinced that his two months in the woods were as solitary or as natural as he asserted. *The Boston Post* paid Knowles for exclusive rights to his story, and ran a special feature every Sunday during his back-to-nature stint. The *Post* gathered material for the stories from caches of birch-bark sketches and reports scribbled by Knowles with charcoaled twigs. With lifelike sketches of deer and wildcats accompanying detailed stories of this New England Tarzan clubbing a bear, chasing a mink that ran off with his trout, and shooting pheasants with his handmade bow and arrow, the *Post* doubled its circulation and the public became enamoured with Knowles. After he returned to Boston from Megantic, a third of the city's 600,000 inhabitants turned out in the streets to greet him.

A rival newspaper, the *Boston American*, responded with a story alleging that instead of hunting game and weaving bark shoes, Knowles was living comfortably in a log cabin – and instead of navigating to Megantic using north-facing tree moss, he was guided by a Native American. Much of the evidence used to discredit Knowles centred on his bearskin robe. Knowles claimed that he had clubbed the bear to death after trapping it in a pit that took him three days to dig. Bert Ford, the first reporter to interview Knowles in Megantic, asserted that the bearskin had been bought from a trapper for $12 and had four bullet holes in it.

Knowles sued the *Boston American* and they temporarily retracted the story, but with wounded pride he arranged to

Campsite at Lake Magog. Photo: Casey Lambert.

club and skin a black bear while on a publicity tour on Prince Edward Island. The bear was not delivered at the arranged time, so Knowles bought the 250-pound bear and brought it with him back to Maine. He returned to his bearpit with a throng of reporters, and displaying none of the affection towards wild animals that he wrote of in his book ("my contact with them during my two months alone in the wilderness has made me love them even more"), he bludgeoned the hibernation-deprived bear with a wooden club.

* * *

Early the next morning, after eating four packets of instant oatmeal, I pedaled towards North Hatley. I stopped on its flower-lined boardwalk long enough to confirm that the lakefront village at the base of green rolling hills justified its reputation for being serene and picturesque, but the highlight of my morning was the 15-km "Grandes Fourches" bike path to Lennoxville. The mild slope and curvature of the trail along a valley carved by the Massawippi River suggest that it too was built on the site of a former railroad. Emerging from the forest I spilled onto the red-brick campus of Bishop's University. It was much busier than I would expect for the summer semester; I understood why when I reached the entrance and saw a flame burning for the 2013 Canada Summer Games, for which Bishop's was hosting the athletes' village.

I turned onto Highway 108 and rode on the shoulder until Cookshire where I stopped for another cost-effective breakfast. Heading the wrong way out of town, I came across my first covered bridge in the Townships – the red-roofed John Cook Bridge. It is right next to the highway and, although it has been restored, it remains closed to vehicle traffic. I returned to the town centre and from the perch at the top of Main Street I was dismayed to see that the proper route heading east to Nantes, Highway 214, involves climbing and crossing a high plateau.

Feeling less energetic than the day before I struggled up several long hills, and was further frustrated by the lack of shoulder space on this highway. For the first time on this trip, cars and trucks going 100 km/h were whizzing by only a few feet from me. There was nothing to do except keep pedaling. I thought often about how the MMA tanker train had rolled unassisted the 13 km from Nantes down into Lac-Mégantic – and I eagerly awaiting the opportunity to do the same.

When I reached Nantes I stopped to examine the railway tracks where the MMA train was parked prior to its descent into Lac-Mégantic. It was eerily quiet in the village, and it got more eerie when I noticed eight black MMA tanker cars sitting on the track. These were tankers that did not derail during the disaster and were removed from the wreckage by brave locals while the fire was still raging.

Pedalling sporadically, I rolled into Lac-Mégantic and the highway turned into Laval Street. As I passed busy strip malls with McDonald's, Walmart, and the like, I could see the lake's blue waters take shape below. I kept riding downhill and was shocked to pass through such a large portion of the community and see no indication that anything was awry. That changed when I reached the bottom of the hill at Villeneuve Street and got a clear view of the huge void where the town centre used to be.

It had been over a month since the disaster so the 'war zone' that Stephen Harper described in the immediate aftermath had been mostly cleared. What I saw resembled a construction site. Only one black tanker was visible, and it was upright and intact. Beyond a large rubble field that heavy machines were busy clearing, a few unaffected buildings lined the deserted streets.

These same streets were alive a century ago when Joseph Knowles came to town. Approaching the station, he looked out the window and saw a "sea of faces." The town's dignitaries were onsite to greet him, including the mayor, a Member of Parliament, and the colourful priest, Joseph-Eugène Choquette, who was famed for his inventions, and who had introduced electric lighting to the town a decade earlier. Knowles was ushered to the Queen's Hotel through streets that he noted were "choked with humanity."

Nobody turned out to usher me to a hotel, so I rode back up Laval Street and got one of the last rooms in town at the Château Motel. After a much-needed shower, I walked back down to the disaster zone. Standing at the fence along the perimeter, I was approached by a young boy on a BMX bike. Like Knowles, I was greeted by a "torrent of French." From what I could understand he was telling me how much oil had been spilled, how much had been recovered, and how much was still in the lake.

My questions came in trickles of French, and I soon learned that the boy's name was Guillaume, and that he was eleven years old. The only English word Guillaume used had four letters and started with an 'f'. He repeated it a few times when explaining how the contents of the exploded tankers could not have been pure crude oil. He insisted that there must have been something else added to make it burn so violently. Obviously he was repeating what he had heard other people say, but it is remarkable and sad that such a young boy knows so much about the volatility of crude oil.

We talked for another ten minutes before I asked him the question I had been thinking all along: "Did you know

On the road west of Lac-Mégantic. Photo: Casey Lambert.

anyone who...?" I didn't have to finish the sentence; Guillaume was eager to pass on information. He started listing people he knew who had lost parents, siblings, and even some kids from his school who had been killed. I didn't know what to say, so I looked down and shook my head slowly.

After thanking Guillaume and watching him ride away with his mom, I started walking up the train tracks. After a few hundred metres, I came across a handmade sign stuck in the ground that said in crude block letters, "You, train from Hell, don't come back here, you are no longer welcome." Prior to the disaster, the railroad's prominence in the community was displayed on signs in the town centre carrying the motto, "From the Railway to the Milky Way." I do not know what the railway's future is in Lac-Mégantic, but I hope it will be up to the locals to decide if and when to welcome it back.

The next morning, I was disheartened to see dark rain clouds hovering above Megantic Lake and all points west. In a moment of weakness, I phoned a taxi company to check the rate to Sherbrooke. Too thrifty to part with $180, I donned my rain gear and started pedaling. To avoid the busy highway from Nantes to Cookshire, I took the pine-scented cycling route known as "Eau Sommet" which passes by the base of Mount Megantic. In Notre-Dame-des-Bois the rain stopped and I celebrated with a final hot breakfast before completing the 125 km ride from Lac-Mégantic to Sherbrooke.

At the former Union train station, I stowed my bike under a bus and in the same manner as Joseph Knowles, I finished my journey on a plush seat looking out the window. Exactly one hundred years earlier, Knowles celebrated his 45th birthday alone and semi-naked in the forest just across the border in Maine. Although I am aware of the ample evidence contradicting his account of his stay in the forest, like the crowds in Boston and Megantic, I am drawn to the spectacle of a 'modern man' venturing boldly to and from the stone age.

It is a wonder what nuggets of our human experiences get recorded and remembered by future generations. Surely the Lac-Mégantic disaster will be a part of Quebec's collective memory in one hundred years, and through digital archives people will be able to see the inferno and its aftermath. But like the news coverage I watched of the disaster, information and images do not provide a 'real' connection to the tragedy. History speaks loudest to those with something invested. By going to Lac-Mégantic I got to see for myself the gutted heart of the town. I got to hear the voices of those whose lives shook when the train from hell rolled in from the darkness. And that is something I will not forget.

Sources:

Joseph Knowles, *Alone in the Wilderness*, London, 1914.

Jim Motavalli, *Naked in the Woods*, Cambridge, Ma., 2007.

Casey Lambert is a mechanical engineer working at the Canadian Space Agency and teaching part time at McGill and Concordia. He likes writing travel stories and riding his bike to faraway places. He is trying to find the time and skills to write a book about a bike ride across Cuba.

Antique store and restaurant in Notre-Dame-des-Bois. Photo: Casey Lambert.

Pancakes for Breakfast, Crêpes for Lunch

The day we put Quebec City on the menu

by Amy Fish

My cousin's job requires mixing with all kinds of characters from around the world. She has a technique for getting to know people quickly: ask them to reveal something unexpected they've never done. Something surprising.

Like the very well-groomed woman with perfectly frosted hair who admits that she's never had a pedicure. Or the twenty-something who has never seen an episode of LOST.

Or the 44-year-old native Montrealer who is widely travelled yet has never been to Quebec City.

That's me.

At least, it was.

A family trip to Quebec City was my top priority last summer. As I prepared with trepidation and excitement, the trip took on a mythic quality in my mind.

I reviewed our schedules: two full-time working parents, one high schooler who plays the drums and needs to study really hard, one almost in high school who is on a swim team, in a running club and plays community football, and a grade three-er with dance, piano, basketball and tennis lessons. By the time I circled the ideal weekend in red on our family calendar, I was exhausted.

But not too exhausted to launch a preparation campaign worthy of the October Crisis. I picked up a couple of novels by Louise Penny who writes mysteries that stay for weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list, including *Bury Your Dead*, set in Quebec City. I borrowed a few books about la Nouvelle France. My friend in Quebec City highlighted a route that included the best place ever to enter the city and told me where to leave the car. I Yelp*ed a few local restaurants for lunch and dinner.

I also listened to a wide range of helpful advice.

To get the most out of the trip, you probably should go without your kids, numerous people cautioned me (not in unison).

My kids are great travellers, I protested. I couldn't wait to show them the cannons in the Old City. Plus I had promised we could ride the funiculaire.

"The funiculaire is a glorified elevator ride that lasts about three seconds. And didn't you say your boys are in high school? Maybe your daughter will want to climb on some boring old war monuments but the boys will probably be more interested in the animal skins at the Native Canadian store. That or the Starbucks".

"Amy – be sure to take the kids to the Christmas store. You will be able to get ornaments for your tree, and plates for your cookies and the best gifts for – "

On the second thought, maybe we don't need any advice.

This trip is about my person experience as a Jewish girl from Montreal going to Quebec City for the first time. Not about what you think or what my kids' travelling habits are. It's not about the secular Christmas debate and it's certainly not about pancakes versus crêpes. Or is it?

My extended family was mainly preoccupied with where we were going to eat. Auntie Havie told me that her favorite eatery in Quebec was a chain called Marie Antoinette's where they have the best lemon meringue pie she's ever tasted. White fluff at least a mile high. I looked online and couldn't find a Marie Antoinette. "Oh maybe it was Albany," she said. Not the first time she's been vague on the details.

My 88-year-old great uncle, however, was not vague at all. "Quebec City. That's where I first tried broiled eel."

"Broiled eel?

"Yup. We were in Quebec for a curling tournament. Invited us to a dinner. Served eel."

"You were in a curling tournament?" I asked.

Every family's history is constantly unfolding. Conversations like this one, around the Shabbat dinner table, offer an opportunity to learn more about previous generations, and, in this case, broiled eel.

Clearly, I was the only member of our family who had never been to Quebec City. Even my husband and kids went a few years ago, on a ski trip with his American brother and nephew. I almost joined them, but when I saw my husband making eyes at the Ice Hotel, I said No Thank You. Clear your browser history, honey.

The date drew near. I imagined that the minute we parked the car we would cross over into another dimension. I would immediately experience a thunderbolt of emotions heretofore unfelt about my culture, my heritage, the Anglo-French conflict. The weekend we budgeted for this adventure would be nothing short of a light-

A much-anticipated trip to Quebec City. Photo: Amy Fish.

ning strike.

Three weeks before departure, we got a call from Favorite Aunt and Uncle who live in Toronto. Great News. We're coming to visit. Guess which weekend. I searched around for an alternate date for our trip. Came up empty.

Too bad, I was so looking forward to a spiritual awakening, an intense family bonding experience and some authentic crêpes. Instead, I busied myself with getting ready for my houseguests. Roasting chickens, fluffing pillows.

Seventeen hours before their hastily planned arrival, Favourite Uncle got a cold, called to say they weren't coming.

"Sorry to hear that," I said, tucking the phone onto my shoulder and typing Hotels Quebec City Cheap as fast as I could. The trip to Quebec was back on.

Waiting till the last minute usually produces lower prices. Not this time. Hotels were fully booked or outrageously expensive. Looked into renting a ski chalet, found one affordable in the summer but requiring a detour of at least 45 minutes. Now we were going to Quebec City for the day.

I consoled myself. We'll still be able to have an authentic Old World experience. We will be able to visit all the important heritage sites in my guidebook. We will walk together arm in arm down cobblestone streets pausing to gaze admiringly at the street art.

The big day finally arrived.

Our first stop would obviously be Tim Horton's, just after the tunnel. Efficient, Canadian and extra large coffees. Double doubles for us, throw a few muffins at the kids and save enough time to stop at the prison in Trois-Rivières. (Part of being a Quebec Anglophone is that we call some cities and streets by their French names and others by their original English, a choice that correlates with the decade in which you were born. I've never heard anyone under ninety mention Three Rivers.)

We go through the Louis-H.-Lafontaine tunnel and my husband takes the Tim Horton's exit, exactly as planned. But instead of parking, he pulls up in front of an adjacent diner.

"Surprise!"

I don't want a surprise. I want to down a quick coffee and get back on the road to Quebec. I want to light a candle in the Notre-Dame-des-Victoires church. My mom was raised in part by a French Canadian housekeeper named Leda who was rarely given Sundays off. Mom therefore grew up lighting candles in church and encouraged my sister and me to do the same. We like to continue the tradition in her memory.

Husband's face is beaming. He is so excited to have discovered a modern diner with lime green vinyl booths and screaming orange walls. He thinks this will be good news. And I want him to feel part of the whole Quebec City experience. I want him to know his vote counts. When it comes to Quebec, we Anglos are sensitive about being sure our votes count.

We sit down to an extensive menu. Coffee cups are not extra large.

I pull out the guidebook and began reading out loud about what sights we will see that day.

For example, the Plains of Abraham.

"Oh, right, the Plains of Abraham, who won that again?" Ezra wants to know. He's 13.

"You just finished Grade 8, don't you know anything?" asks recent Grade 6 graduate, Benji. "The English won."

"No, France won. That's why Quebec is French. And now we have to take French in school, which is so unfair. Right Mom? Isn't that unfair? Didn't the French win?" Ezra persists.

For one brief moment, his question has me. I'm sure the English won, but the kids are making some decent points. They are also arguing at the top of their lungs. Am I going to have another historical battle on my hands?

Slipping my phone out of my purse, I frantically Google for a hint, keeping my hands under the table, hoping they wouldn't notice. No wonder the Quebec government is considering a mandatory Quebec history class for all CEGEP students.

"I thought you were prepared for this trip," says my husband, looking up from the *Montreal Gazette*. "Who the heck is Abraham? And why is he flying a plane?"

Of course I prepared. I interviewed my Quebec City-loving colleague. I bought an illustrated travel guide. I borrowed three books on the Battle of 1759. I read half of two Louise Penny novels. That constitutes a whole, right? Heck, for six weeks, I slept beside a stack of relevant books. I'll admit I probably should have read them. I also should be moisturizing my cuticles. I never claimed to be perfect.

"Here it is, Mom, on Wikipedia. The English won. That's why the rest of Canada is English," declares Benji triumphantly.

Eight-year-old Liberty dissents: "That makes no sense, Mommy. If the English won, why do I have to take French math?"

Good question.

I have a few more.

Why do bilingual schools in Quebec only start teaching English in Grade 3? Why can't the kosher bakery have Hebrew letters on its sign? Why does the Quebec government offer free French classes? Why don't free French classes offer free babysitting?

Why have I been to France three times, Italy four times, Israel five times and this is my first trip to Quebec City? And why have I always felt a little insecure about my "Quebeckiness"? When I go East of Boulevard Saint-Laurent, why am I instantly recognizable as a knitter with not pur enough *laine*?

The actual visit to the city of my dreams would turn out to be little more than a quick walk through cobblestone streets, $89 for a round of French onion soup and a few crêpes, and some, er, innovative street performers. We were in and out in three and a half hours.

In retrospect, this conversation in a non-descript diner, miles from our destination, would turn out to be the epicentre of the experience. A day circled in red. I probably should have used blue. Politics are everywhere.

I don't want to go into all this angst right now. I want my children to feel connected to Quebec – both the province and the city. I want them to be seamlessly bilingual and travel safely along the 40 East to the capital without a second thought.

Like so many mothers before me, I protect my family the only way I know how. With food. I open the menu and smile bravely.

"Oh, look," I exclaim. "They have pancakes."

Maybe we should have started with the crêpes.

Amy Fish's first book The Art of Complaining Effectively *was published in March 2013. Amy blogs regularly at www.complaintdepartmentblog.blogspot.com.*

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