

by Henry Paint

If we study the shape of the North American continent on the map, it is not unlike a cornucopia, or horn of plenty, and like it, it is full of good things. Nature in her bounty has plunged two vast funnels into the continent as a vintner places his spigots in a tun of

Reprinted with permission from The Canadian Banker, Winter 1956, for The Lake St. Louis Historical Society of Pointe Claire, Que., a non-profit society founded "to further the knowledge of Canadian History and Canadiana generally in a positive fashion aimed at strengthening our national consciousness".

*La Salle*

wine so that it may be easily tapped. One is Hudson Bay, yet to be fully appreciated, and the other is the St. Lawrence River, with the Great Lakes reaching 2,000 miles into the heart of the continent. Through the latter channel it is possible to siphon off the wealth, not only of the west and north-west, but of the south. By the agency of the St. Lawrence Seaway, cheap water transport has been brought to the greatest productive area of the world.

It was La Salle's supreme glory that he alone, of all Canadian explorers, visioned trade on a continental basis designed to include the whole of North America. Other explorers went forth with one specified, limited objective in mind. They were determined to find a north-west passage through the polar seas or a passage through the Rocky Mountains, or to explore the course of the Mackenzie River. La Salle alone visioned a continent-wide trading empire, whose trade would come from the south as well as from the north and north-west. He sought to explore the trade routes for a vast commercial dominion, which would begin at the shores of the Great Lakes and flow down the St. Lawrence, for the glory of France and the prosperity of his beloved city of Ville Marie.

"There is one thing more powerful than armies," mused Napoleon, the great commander in exile in St. Helena, "it is an idea whose time has come." It has taken Canadian government and enterprise several generations to realize what La Salle comprehended three centuries ago, viz. no country can reach its full stature unless its trade has depth from north to south, as well as breadth from east to west. The St. Lawrence Seaway was an idea whose time had not only come, but was overdue.

La Salle leaves Lachine for the West, 6th July, 1669



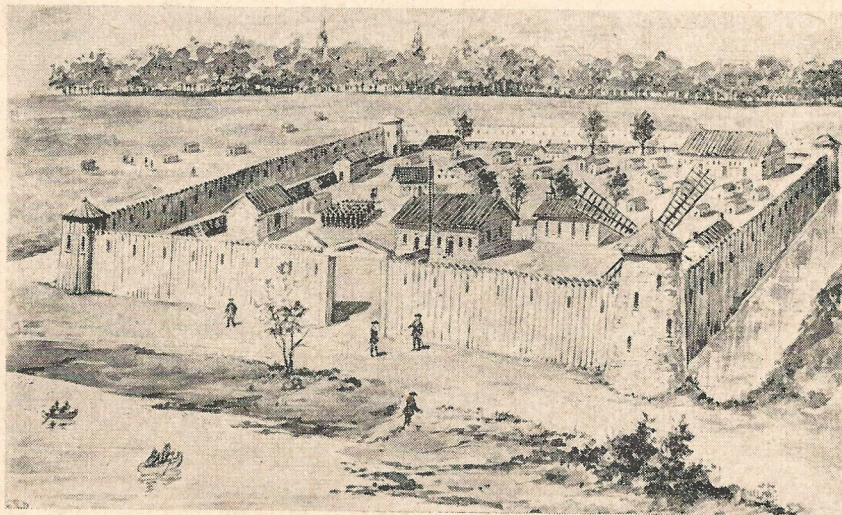
If the great explorer could stand on Windmill Point looking out over the 20-mile expanse of Lake St. Louis, as he used to do, and witness the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, it is easy to imagine him saying:

"The ships are huge, and no doubt each carries as much cargo as a thousand canoes, and so much more easily! The canal is vast and could not have been dug in my day. But the freight moves up and down the St. Lawrence to and from the Great Lakes, and much of it comes from the south. Everything else is as I told you."

It became obvious shortly after the foundation of Montreal that advanced trading posts along the Lakeshore above the Lachine Rapids, from Lachine to Ste. Anne de Bellevue, had great advantages in the fur trade. Such posts enabled their owners to intercept the Indians bringing their furs to the Montreal market, and to secure first choice of the prime skins. Accordingly, trading posts were established at Lachine and La Presentation (Dorval) in 1666 and at Ste. Anne de Bellevue about 1670. A very profitable trade was carried on here until the beginning of the Iroquois War in 1687, profits averaging 100 per cent. Fort Remy at Windmill Point, close to where La Salle's old mill now stands, and the fort at La Presentation afforded refuge to the scattered colonists when Iroquois war parties were detected on the river. Seeing the success of these early ventures, enterprising traders rapidly established other posts. These were as follows:

Charles le Moyne de Longueuil and his brother-in-law, Jacques le Ber, had a depot in Lachine near where the Canal lock is situated

Fort Remy, (Lachine) 1689



today. Le Noir, dit Rolland, had a small fort where he did a large business near the present site of the Lachine wharf. Piere de Guardeur, Sieur de Repentigny, had a store at the fort at La Presentation (Dorval). Opposite what is now Girdwoods Island at Isle Perrot, Antoine de Fresnye, Sieur de Brucy, ran a post for M. Perrot, governor of Montreal. Louis de Berthe, Sieur de Chailly, also established a post opposite de Brucy on fief Bellevue.

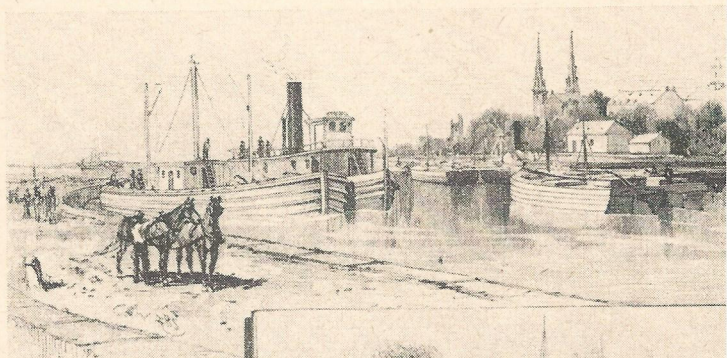
The trading post of the Sieur de Brucy was the occasion of a violent clash between Frontenac and M. Perrot, governor of Montreal. Both were men of haughty and imperious temperament. Both had powerful influence at the French court, M. Perrot being related to Jean Talon, recently returned to France and rewarded with the title of count for his exertions in Canada. M. Perrot had been in Canada since 1670. He was governor of Montreal both by goodwill of the seigneurs and by Letters Patent of March 4th, 1671, by royal commission. He considered his position impregnable and was unwilling to yield to Frontenac's authority in any matter affecting his profits from the fur trade, which were estimated at 40,000 livres per annum.

The island of Isle Perrot had been given to M. Perrot by Jean Talon as his seigneurie. It lay between the seigneuries of Bellevue and Vaudreuil at the western end of Lake St. Louis. The Sieur de Brucy, a former lieutenant of his company, gave protection at his trading post to the coureurs-de-bois, furnishing them with liquor and merchandise in exchange for pelts. A series of incidents took place and various provocations on both sides led to Frontenac arresting M. Perrot at Quebec, where he had gone on Frontenac's invitation to justify his conduct. On Frontenac's orders, he was arrested by Lieut. Bizard, his sword was taken from him, and he was placed in solitary confinement in the Chateau St. Louis. There he spent nine months, steadfastly refusing to acknowledge Frontenac's authority, and appealing to the King. In the meantime, the Sieur de Brucy and two of his servants were arrested and brought to trial. In the end, M. Perrot was sent to France and given a nominal imprisonment of three weeks in the Bastille. He was, however, allowed to return to Montreal as governor. Here he resumed his old ways. In a document, believed to have been written in 1681 by the intendant, Ducheneau, he is accused of illegal trading in person and through soldiers and representatives. He is stated to be encouraging coureurs-de-bois and outfitting them. It is alleged that he found time, perhaps as a relaxation from his duties as governor, to visit his trading post at Isle Perrot and with his own hands to fill brandy barrels. It is noted that he personally watered the brandy for sale to the red men! In August 1682 the Sulpicians, who did not relish his work among the Indians, contrived

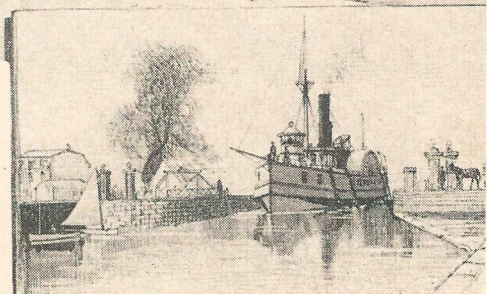


LACHINE

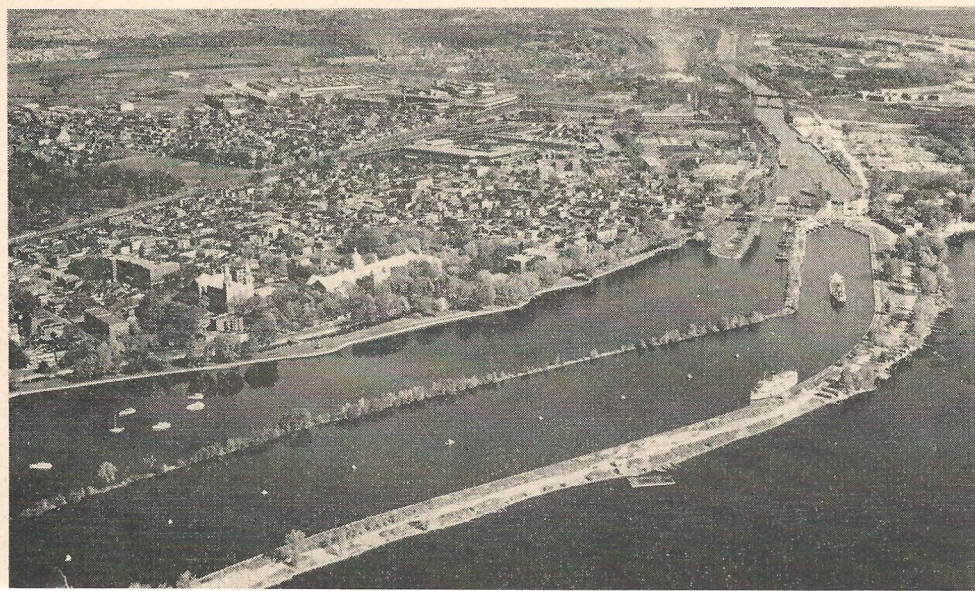
1826



1876



1956



to secure their troublesome neighbour a promotion out of their district, as governor of Acadia.

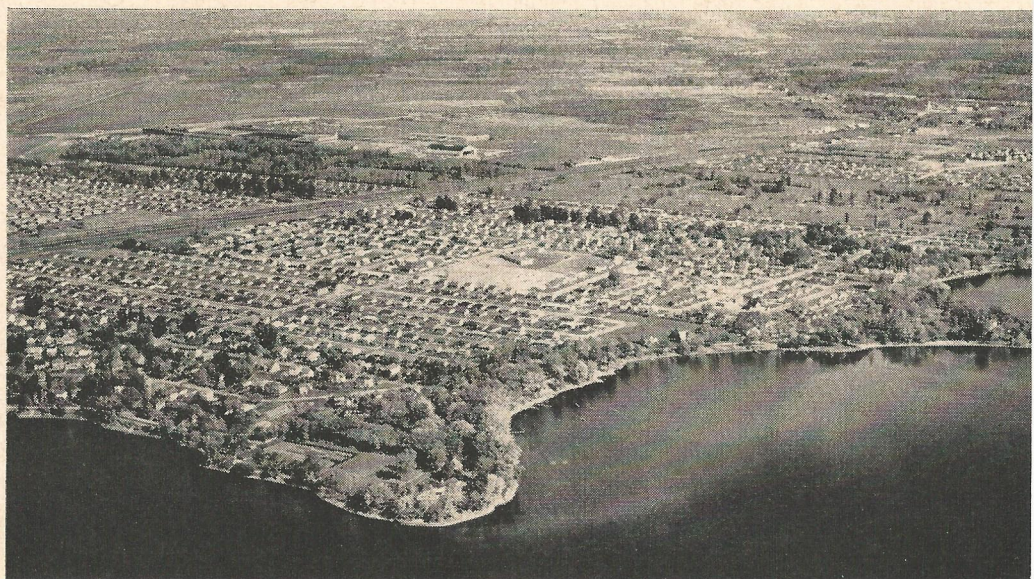
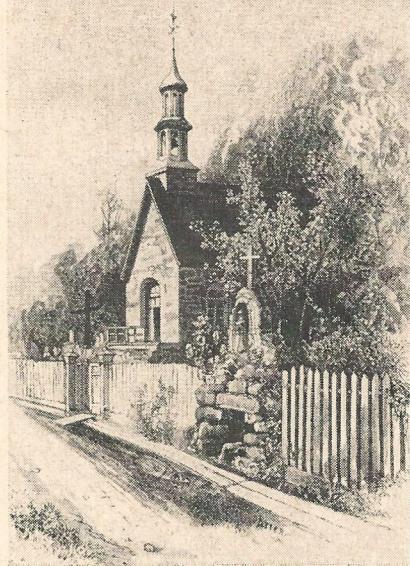
Beaurepaire, formerly known as Pointe à Quenet, was granted in 1678 to M. Jean Quenet, beaver license inspector. In 1694 he secured a second grant of eight arpents by forty, west of Beaurepaire. He was a merchant of considerable means and imported goods direct from France. In later life he fell into disfavour with the authorities for illegal trading with the Indians. Due to his official position, a severe view was taken of his action and he was given a heavy fine of 2,000 livres. The shores of Pointe Claire, as far as Beaurepaire, were entirely settled by 1709, having been granted to 46 inhabitants and their families. In fact, the clearance of land along the lakeshore was so far advanced by 1706 that Intendant Randot ordered the opening of a main road along the river's edge from Dorval to the upper end of the island. The inhabitants were ordered to clear the road, remove trees, and build the necessary bridges, under penalty of a fine of 10 livres payable to the parishes of Lachine and St. Louis.

It was a farmers' road then and, fortunately, is so still; though paved now, it is still winding and beautiful. It rises and dips in gentle undulating waves suitable for heavily loaded carts. It follows the side hill around knoll and hollow, for the men who built it had their own farms to tend, and were eager to return to them. So the road winds where cut and fill balanced evenly with the minimum of labour. The ancient trees were spared, for stumps created meant infinite toil and time lost. So the Lakeshore Road remains today, beloved by everyone who values beauty more than speed, a sheer delight to the eye, a restful road, on which he who hurries courts disaster.

In 1714 Pointe Claire was erected into a parish, and was given the name of St. Joachim de la Pointe Claire in 1715, when the first church was built. This parish was created at the expense of the parish of St. Louis, from which the mission at Chateauguay, the lower portion of Isle Perrot and the greater part of the Lake St. Louis shoreline were detached for the purpose.

There was another great Frenchman, intimately connected with the Lakeshore as was La Salle, who also dreamed greatly. This was Dollier de Casson, early historian of Montreal, wise counsellor, able administrator, Superior of the Sulpicians and great spiritual leader. He advocated a canal around the Lachine Rapids using the navigable channel of the little St. Peter River as the main part of the channel. As every trace of this considerable stream has now disappeared from the Montreal landscape, and few persons today even know where it flowed, a few words of explanation are necessary. The river St. Pierre had its source near the head of Montreal Island. It wound its way to

DORVAL



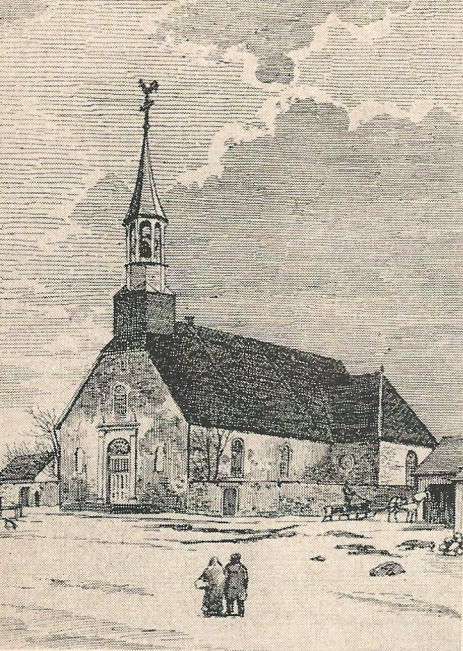
join the St. Lawrence below the Lachine Rapids, passing through meadow, woodland and marsh. It was quite a large stream, being several feet deep at its mouth. At one point in its course it passed behind Lachine, about where the C.N.R. station at Dominion now stands. Here, even in mid-summer, the river was always two or three feet deep. From the most suitable point in its course behind Lachine only a mile of actual excavation was necessary to provide a canal 12 feet wide at the surface, which would have 18 inches of water in it, even at low water in the St. Lawrence river. This depth was carefully calculated; for a 35-foot canoe, five feet in maximum width, with a crew of eight and three to four tons of trading goods and supplies, drew only 18 inches of water. The project suggested by de Casson was perfectly sound, and its advantages obvious. After many fruitless appeals to the King to sanction and give the plan financial support, de Casson let the contract, the cost to be met out of the revenues of the Sulpicians. Their revenues available proved insufficient, and the contractor himself went bankrupt in the following year. The canal was almost finished, only a shelf of earth three or four feet deep and half a mile long remaining to be excavated. No further progress could be made as the money available remained insufficient. In 1708 King Louis XIV ordered plans, specifications, and estimates to be prepared with a view to completing the canal. The report of the engineers was favourable, and the estimate of costs moderate; but no action was taken. The situation in Europe explains the delay. The disastrous campaigns against Marlborough were draining the French treasury. It taxed all the ingenuity of the King's financial advisers to provide sufficient funds for both the army and the court.

In this gloomy picture there was one bright spot. The French commander in Germany, Marshal Villars, continued to forward huge sums to Versailles, as he laid the rich German cities under special levies, and forced contributions, fines and exactions of all sorts. As the King was well aware, Villars retained large sums to repair his own damaged finances, then in great disorder. The genial Marshal did not seek to hide his actions from his King, his contemporaries, or from posterity. In his *Memoirs* he wrote with soldierly frankness, "I told the King that he really must let me fat my own calf."

A jealous courtier said to the King at Versailles at one of his levées, "I hear that Marshal Villars is doing very well for himself in Germany."

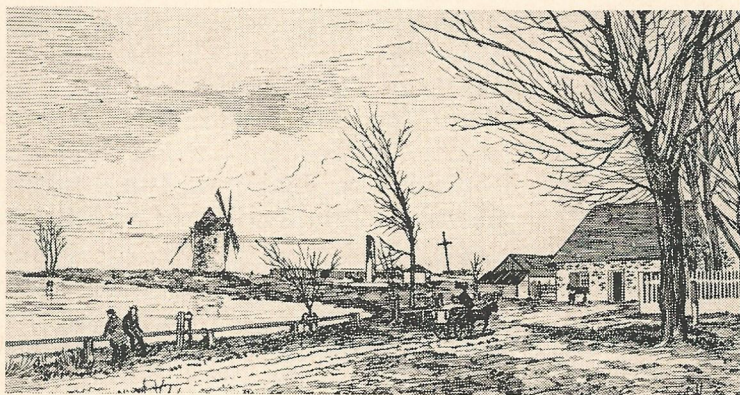
"Yes," said the King, "and for me too!"

In 1717 and again in 1733, the St. Peters Canal project was urged



▲ *Stone Church 1750,
destroyed by
fire 1881.*

POINTE CLAIRE

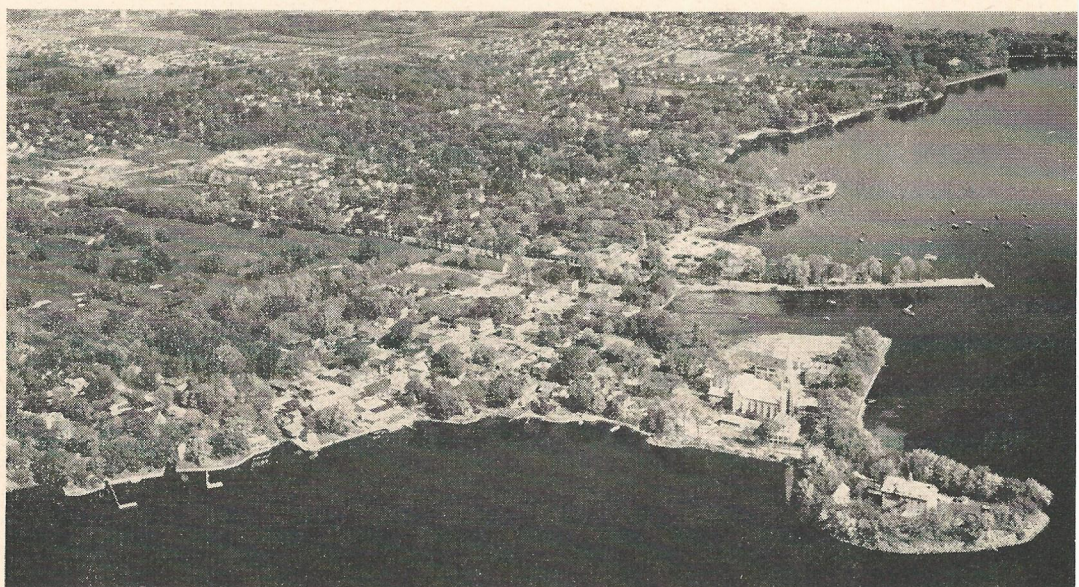


1867 ▲



1872 ▲

▼ 1956



by the local Montreal authorities; but no action was ever taken by the French court.

The town of Dorval, site of the La Presentation Mission, takes its name from John Baptiste Bouchard, Sieur de Dorval, who bought the domain of La Presentation on the 29th January, 1691, for 2,200 livres. He was well-off at the time; but the fur trade was a risky business. He died insolvent in 1711, his estate being divided between his children and his creditors. In the course of time, the name Dorval gradually superseded that of La Presentation.

What kind of people were the French inhabitants? In 1685 the Marquis de Denonville, in letters dated August 20th, September 3rd and November 12th, said in part: "The youths are independent and do not take readily to agriculture but to hunting . . . the nobles live in extreme poverty."

Denonville could not imagine a gentlemen dressing like his tenants, eating the same food and travelling the forest trails for any reason except necessity. Nor did he understand the difference between the downtrodden French peasant and the Canadian habitant. The latter had few wants, and these he could supply by his own initiative without fear of his seigneur's displeasure. Hunting, fishing and fowling gave him abundant food. He manufactured his own furniture and clothing, and breathed the air of freedom from his birth. By the time the English took Quebec, most of the habitants had begun to feel that, saving the respect due to an honoured name or outstanding personal worth, their seigneurs were little better than themselves. A British officer who came to Canada in 1768 wrote: "The peasantry salute and bow to one another with as good an air as people of higher rank. They testify no bashfulness, or awkwardness in any company of what rank so ever; but speak and act with great ease and freedom."

With the fall of the old regime independent traders soon began to attempt to challenge the efforts of the Hudson's Bay Company to extend its monopoly to all Canada. For a generation these small traders were mostly French. The factors of the Hudson's Bay Company pretended to despise their unorganized competition, always referring to them by the term "pedlars" rather than as traders. Nevertheless, they watched them with a jealous eye and sent full reports of their activities to their head office. In due course, well organized expeditions financed by English companies began to operate further and further into the north-west.

To meet this severe competition, the Hudson's Bay Company found it necessary to establish its own chain of posts along the Canadian river routes. When Mr. Frobisher and Simon Fraser consolidated the

independent traders into the old North-West Company, a bitter trading duel began between these two great rivals. Business was sought by every stratagem known to shrewd traders—nor was the use of force disdained upon occasion. In 1804 the old and new North-West companies entered into a coalition agreement, and the trade war grew still more bitter.

The main pathway to the north-west was the route up the Ottawa to Lake Nipissing, thence to Georgian Bay and Lake Superior; but the starting point was Lachine upon the Lakeshore. Every spring both the North-West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company sent out giant brigades of 90 to 100 canoes manned by 800 men. In addition, the expeditions of individual fur-traders and lumber companies fully equalled either of the great rivals in size, if taken in the aggregate.

Every spring nearly 3,000 men, the cream of Canadian manhood, left Lachine with the brigades. They were hired by signed articles of agreement, which defined their obligation to their employer, the length of their employment, their duties, and the rate of pay agreed on. This was generally 100 livres per annum or its equivalent. For two or three weeks before the departure of the brigades, the three Lachine notaries of the day, Gray, Griffin and Mailloux, reaped a golden harvest as they drew up hundreds of these important documents in great haste.

Let us think of this annual spring faring forth as the first slow pulsation of the heart of the great industrial giant that is the Canada we know today: a heart as yet dormant in a giant's ill-coordinated frame, a heart as yet capable of only one annual spasmodic effort—yet an effort great enough to send its best blood surging out along the rivers which were its mighty arteries to give strength to a giant destined one day to stand erect and bestride a continent.

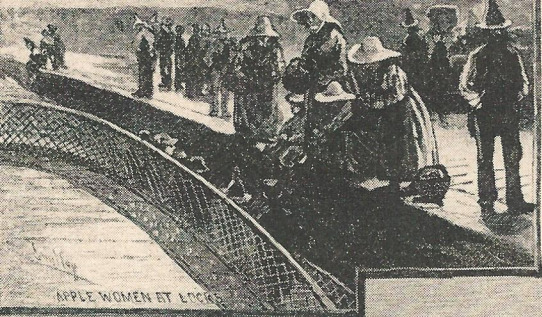
The brigades left Lachine and headed up river to St. Anne's where a halt was always made for a brief prayer, in which the intercession of good Saint Anne was asked for the personal safety of the men of the brigades and the success of their venture. After the prayer all bowed their heads for the benediction. The first day's travel generally ended here, both to check stores to see if anything had been overlooked, and to give the voyageurs a good night's sleep to recover from their farewell celebration. Sir George Simpson states in his *Overland Journey Around the World* that his first day's travel was a short one. "My voyageurs were sober, or at least as sober as voyageurs ever are on beginning such a journey."

For two weeks before the brigades set out the voyageurs were entertained by their families and entertained them in turn. There were sports, fêtes, festivals, merry-making of all kinds and a tremendous

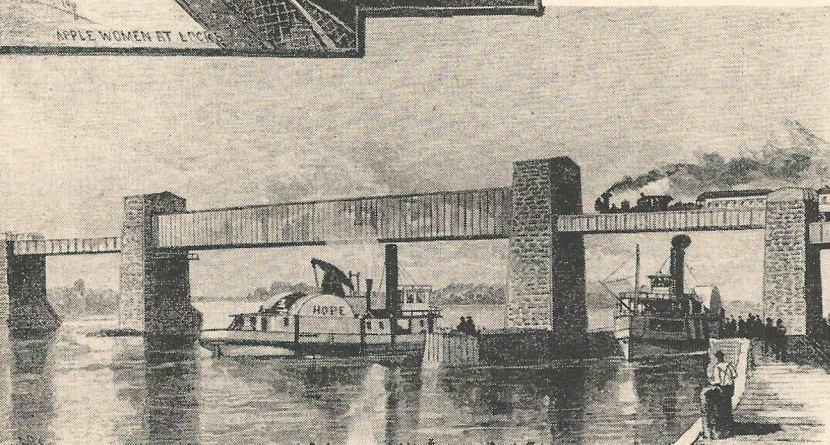
amount of hard drinking. It was a time of courtship, too, when engagements were made and pledges exchanged. The heart of many a Lakeshore girl was stolen by these laughing young giants, half-whalebone, half-steel, who danced and drank the night away and were still fresh and merry at the dawn. There was something attractive and childlike in the very superstitions of these strong men. For when we say a person is superstitious, is it not the same as saying that he has not yet lost the capacity for reverence and wonder? They were devout believers in the *loup garou*, the werewolf, which could be slain only by a silver bullet. They swore they had seen, or knew those who had seen, the *chasse galère*, the spectral hunt which swept through the sky on the wings of the storm, the shadowy hounds following hard on the traces of a phantom stag, urged on with view-halloo by desperate riders who were themselves but shades. As for the Wendigo, that truly terrifying creature of the imagination of men too much alone, they believed in its existence as though it were an article of faith. For those who travel the primeval wilderness, who seldom tread tilled ground mastered by man, have strange visions of the spirit world, which city folk and farmers never see.

The fame of Canadian voyageurs, many of whom were residents of the Lakeshore, was such that all explorers desired their company on their expeditions. Seven Canadian voyageurs accompanied Alexander Mackenzie on his expedition in 1792 to 1793. Simon Fraser, who crossed the Rocky Mountains and descended the dangerous Fraser River to its mouth, also had seven voyageurs with him. Sir John Franklin, on his first expedition in 1819 to 1822, was accompanied by 18 voyageurs. On his second expedition, Sir John descended the Mackenzie River to its mouth, retraced his steps to winter at Great Bear Lake, and returned down the Mackenzie River to the Arctic Sea in 1826. Sixteen Canadian voyageurs, engaged for three years at 1400 livres per annum, accompanied him on his travels. Let no one say that nothing noteworthy happened on the Lakeshore, for some of its residents were present at the very birth of Canada.

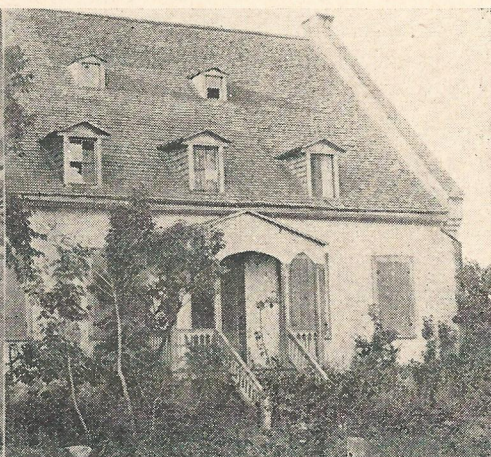
Simon Fraser, perhaps the greatest English resident of the Lakeshore, bought a property at Ste. Anne's from Gibard Correau, dit Lacoste. "He lived for many years in this building, which was afterwards a branch of the Bank of Montreal. The two adjacent grants were bought by Mr. Dawes, whose brewery was in Lachine, and his associate George Dowker, and by William Glendenning & William H. Hutton. About the same time, Mr. George McKinnon resided at Pointe Claire in a two-storey white house known as 'Willowbank'." They were among the first English to purchase estates on the Lakeshore. At a later date, Sir George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's



STE. ANNE
DE BELLEVUE



*Canal Lock
and Railway
Bridge, 1872*



*Thomas Moore
and house
where he wrote
"The Canadian
Boat Song"
1804. Now
occupied by
Bank of
Montreal.*

1956

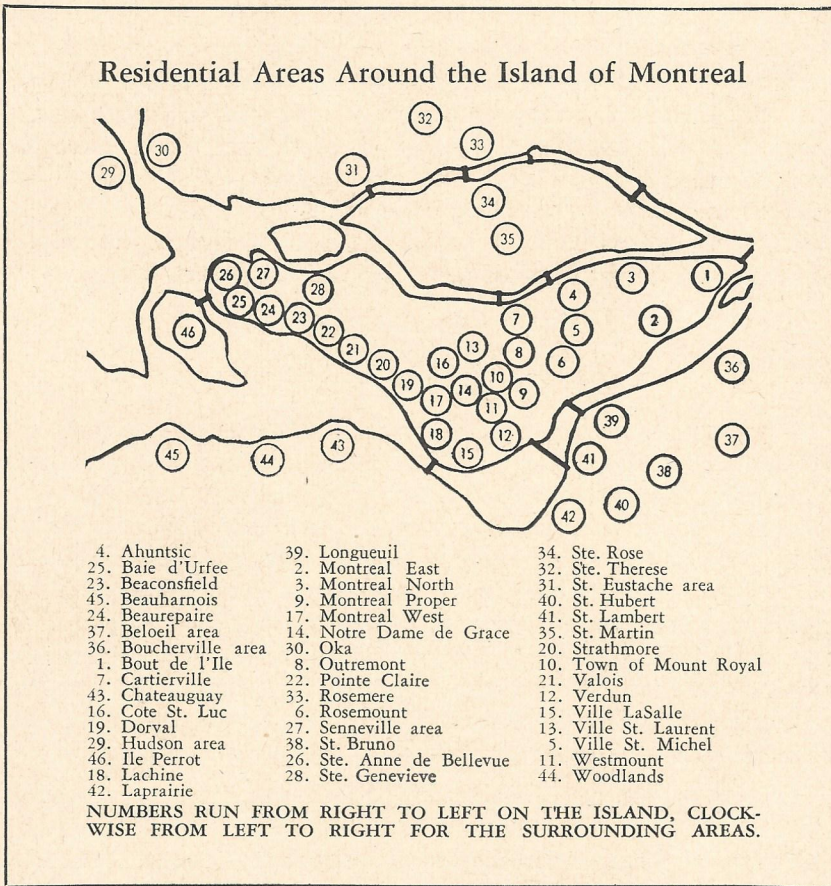


Bay Company, purchased Dorval Island, where he lived and entertained on a princely scale for many years. In his book, *An Overland Journey Around the World*, he notes proudly that the English residents of the Lakeshore had not gained one foot of ground by conquest, but had bought it fairly and squarely, and at high prices.

It was natural that the wealthy English residents of Montreal should wish to live near Lachine, the central hub of their business. Most of them also wished to live near the water and escape the summer heat, which they found very oppressive. Their key employees, for the same reason, bought along the Lakeshore as near the riverbank as their means would allow. This resulted in a unique pattern of town and country living on the Lakeshore, which has endured to the present day. The Wall Street broker does not expect to find one of his customers' men living within half a mile of him at New Rochelle. The New York business tycoon would be astounded if he heard that his chief accountant had just purchased an estate close to his at Newport News. It is probable that, after exchanging a long look with his secretary, he would tell her to call in the auditors. On the Lakeshore, such happenings are everyday events in a casual democratic pattern.

During the century from 1842 to 1942, French and English dwelt happily together on the Lakeshore. Both learned much of gracious living from one another. From the French the English learned the thrills of ice-boating, the joys of lacrosse, the pleasures of community figure skating at the great night fêtes in carnival time, and the comradeship of snow-shoe clubs. The French took up skiing, tennis and golf with zest, from their English friends. The formation of the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club, the premier boating club of Canada, gave new meaning to water sports on Lake St. Louis. The Montreal Hunt Club for a time held meets at the Lakeshore, the coverts around Dorval and the quarry at Pointe Claire being favorite spots, where good sport was certain. An English enthusiast, who hunted with the Club, wrote an article in *Blackwoods* under the name of "Chasseur," in which he called the country around Pointe Claire the "Oxfordshire of Canada"—high praise, indeed, from a hunting man! Another Englishman, however, after a day out with the Club over the same district was heard to murmur, "Deucedly ugly country to ride over." In the end, the meets were held across the St. Lawrence in less settled areas, out of consideration for the Lakeshore farmers and their crops.

The French and English children on the Lakeshore played together, grew up together, and formed life-long friendships. It was noteworthy that as late as 1942 nearly all the old English residents were bilingual. When they met their French friends on the street, in the



stores, or in the taverns, they greeted them in idiomatic, colloquial French. It was not the French of the colleges, or even of the schools. It was a fluent, clipped speech, the kind of French one learns in childhood, or not at all. It was note-worthy, too, that the English called their French friends not by their given names, but by their nicknames, a sure sign of close intimacy. This was a fine thing to see, which like much else worth preserving must be lost with the rapid influx of new residents. The population of Dorval, for instance, which was less than 3,000 in 1942, is now 15,000. As we count our new gains, we may be excused if we mourn a little for some of the things we must inevitably lose. It may be interesting to assess the basic traits of character which mingled to form a distinctive personality in the old residents of the Lakeshore, both French and English.

The first thing noticeable about them was their independence. They valued money highly and respected its power, but not for itself so

much as for the fact that it made them independent. There were definitely several things they would not do for money, and certain other things which they had spent their lives seeing that money did not do to them. For instance, they rarely went into, or stayed in, any business which demanded evening or overtime work. Like the Frenchman, they might have said, "During the day I work at my business; but in the evening I am serious." With the usual exceptions, which prove the rule, money was not their god. Their philosophy of life was well expressed by Horace two thousand years ago:

"The happy lot, the golden mean
To live contentedly between
The little and the great."

It was noticeable that when they met in the evening their talk was seldom of business. They talked of seeds, mulches, and gardening techniques, about their new boat, the day's fishing, their plans for their gardens. They loved their gardens, "the very school of peace." They were not restless men; this was one of the things they had refused to allow money to do to them. On the few evenings that they went into Montreal, it was to see a special movie, or to take out-of-town friends to a nightclub. Generally, when the desire came to them to go for a drive in their cars, they drove into the country, or up to the Laurentians. They were not lovers of the city, in the way New Yorkers are, although they worked there.

Year after year the offers made for their properties rise in value, until they have grown almost irresistible. But they have planted their feet on the Lakeshore and they are stubborn men. The percentage of those who are planting biennials again this year is in the high 90's. A man who plants biennials is a hard man to shift! He is not interested in quick turnover, or even in a guaranteed annual yield. It is going to cost a pretty penny to move the old residents from the Lakeshore! Meanwhile, they stand beleaguered in their trim homes, while streets full of split-level bungalows creep slowly towards them, like the advance patrols of an encircling army. A little disquieted, they look out over the old Lake St. Louis, to gain solace from its beautiful, changeless face. The water is still there; the sunsets are as grand as ever; the usual cool breeze blows inland from the lake. Perhaps they remember the words that George Barrow put into the mouth of the gypsy in *Lavengro*, when asked what there was left worth living for:

"Why there's sun, moon and stars, Brother,
All good things — but best of all
there's the wind on the heath."