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MONTREAL

Vers 1810

MONTRÉAL VERS 1810

La Brasserie Molson fut fondée en 1786. Notre gravure fait voir Montréal, environ 24 ans plus tard, alors que sa population n'était que de 12,000 habitants. Les réverbères étaient encore inconnus, les routes presque impraticables, et les moyens de communication malaisés et peu nombreux. Les fortifications commencèrent à être démantelées en 1805 et, à compter de cette date jusqu'en 1815, alors que cessèrent ces travaux, le trafic et les communications devinrent plus faciles.

En 1809, John Molson lance l'*Accommodation*, le premier bateau à vapeur qui transporta des passagers entre Montréal et Québec. On n'avait voyagé jusqu'alors que par la malle-poste ou de petits voiliers, et ce vapeur fut bientôt fort achalandé. Un deuxième, le *Swiftsure*, fut lancé par M. Molson en 1812. Il n'y avait qu'un petit débarcadère, au pied de la rue Saint-François-Xavier, à la Pointe-à-Callières.

Dès 1806, le commerce du bois était déjà très florissant; aussi voyait-on fréquemment de grands trains de bois passer Montréal à destination de Québec. Nombre de riches trafiquants et négociants habitaient hors des murs de la ville, dans les superbes demeures qu'ils avaient élevées, soit rue Dorchester, soit—plus au nord—au pied du Mont-Royal.

Simon McTavish bâtit une fort belle maison au haut des rues Peel et McTavish, sur le flanc de la montagne. Joseph Frobisher fit de même au haut de la Côte du Beaver Hall, et James McGill, désireux de fonder une université, légua à cette fin sa résidence de la rue Burnside et une somme de dix mille livres. Il est intéressant de rappeler que ces trois riches négociants en fourrures avaient épousé des Canadiennes françaises—McTavish, Mlle Marguerite Chaboillez, de l'excellente famille du même nom; Frobisher, Mlle Charlotte Jobert, fille d'un chirurgien distingué; et James McGill, Mme Desrivières (née Charlotte Guillemin), veuve d'un grand commerçant.

Les plus importants des trafiquants en fourrures du Nord-Ouest étaient membres du fameux Beaver Club qui, de 1808 à 1815, tint ses assises au *Coffee House* de Richard Dillon, au coin nord-ouest de la Place d'Armes, là où s'élève aujourd'hui l'immeuble de la Banque Canadienne Nationale. Il y avait 126 tavernes à Montréal en 1812, et chaque tavernier devait payer $10.00 pour sa patente.

Les rues Saint-Paul et Notre-Dame réunissaient la plupart des magasins, et nombre de petits marchands vivaient au-dessus de leurs boutiques.

Un palais de justice et une prison furent bâtis sur l'emplacement du Couvent des Jésuites. Enfin la Colonne de Nelson fut érigée en 1809.

THE McTAVISH HOUSE, ST. JEAN BAPTISTE STREET, MONTREAL

From a painting by H. Bunnett in the McCord Museum

Document(s) illisible(s)

lors du

microfilmage

MONTREAL ET SES ANTIQ...

Sept 1909

La rue St Jean-Baptiste a la distinction de compt... plus vieille maison de la Métropole. — Ce... meuble, construit en 1680 pour servir de demeure à Hubert Lacroix, est très bien conservé.

Montréal n'a pas la réputation de la vieille capitale provinciale pour les antiquités qu'elle peut contenir; n'empêche qu'il s'en trouve dans la métropole qui peuvent quelquefois rendre des points à celles que l'on voit à Québec.

Un reporter de la "Presse" a visité dernièrement une vieille maison de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste, qui n'a certainement pas de rivale parmi les contemporaines à Québec. La construction de cet immeuble remonte à près de deux cent trente ans. Ce fut en effet, que Hubert Lacroix, un des plus riches négociants qui faisaient alors

M. John Harper, qui travaille depuis près de cinquante ans dans la vieille maison construite par Hubert Lacroix

la traite de la pelleterie, la fit ériger pour lui-même. C'était alors une demeure somptueuse, dans laquelle on rencontrait tout le confort qu'il y avait, dans le temps, moyen de se procurer. Elle a un sous-sol élevé, un rez-de-chaussée et un étage à mansarde. Le sous-sol était réservé aux cuisines, ainsi qu'à la dépense. On y voyait encore, il y a quelques années, le foyer que reproduit notre vignette et les propriétaires actuels, la "National Drug and Chemical Company of Canada" ont conservé au reste de la maison son

CACHET D'ANTIQUITE

Au rez-de-chaussée se trouvent deux grandes salles où le premier habitant de la maison transigeait ses affaires, probablement, car elles ont toute l'apparence de vastes bureaux.

Dans une aile se prolongeant au-dessus d'un large passage ménagé pour donner accès au cours, il y a une autre grande pièce qui a dû servir de salle de danse. Dans chacune de ces pièces on voit des boiseries qui, malgré leur vétusté, ont conservé un air de grandeur qui manque souvent au travail du même genre que l'on fait dans nos maisons modernes. Les rampes des escaliers, les corniches, les portes sont des pièces massives, qui ont résisté aux attaques du temps. Elles sont en chêne solide, qui a probablement été coupé aux environs mêmes de la maison; car au temps où elle fut construite, la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste ne présentait pas l'apparence qu'elle a aujourd'hui. Les cheminées de l'appartement sont toutes rares et l'œuvre de bons sculpteurs; car, certains panneaux, bien conservés, prouvent qu'il y avait certainement des artistes dans ce métier alors. Les murs ressemblent aux murs des forts. Ils ont exactement

TROIS PIEDS D'EPAISSEUR

et sont faits de grosses pierres.

Du dehors, la présente une apparence sévère avec ses larges fenêtres grillagées comme des ouvertures de prison. La demeure était évidemment faite pour permettre à ses habitants de repousser les sauvages, quand il en était de l'attaquer. On a fait un tout neuf, mais afin de ne pas enlever à l'ancienne habitation son air d'antiquité, on l'a fait faire en ferblanc métal qui était le plus employé pour les couvertures il y a quelques cents ans. Il y a aussi une grande cave dans laquelle on aurait pu enfermer des provisions pour plusieurs années, si le besoin s'en était fait sentir. Mais il faut croire que celui qui a fait construire ce bâtiment, dans ancien temps, bien que très riche, n'était pas un épicurien, car on n'y voit aucune trace d'un endroit voûté où on mettait les vins et liqueurs. M. Ponthier, le surintendant de la compagnie, qui est aujourd'hui propriétaire de l'immeuble, a découvert, dans un coin de la cuisine, une petite ouverture secrète pratiquée dans le mur et par laquelle

M. Geo. Ponthier, F. C. S., directeur des "National Chemicals Works," qui occupent aujourd'hui la vieille maison de M. Hubert Lacroix.

on pouvait voir dans la cour quand les fenêtres étaient barricadées.

On croit que la maison actuelle n'est pas la première qui fut construite sur cet emplacement; car, en creusant dans la cave, on a trouvé de massives fondations, ce qui indique qu'un bâtiment un peu plus petit aurait été érigé au même endroit.

Dans son ensemble elle présente l'apparence

D'UN VIEUX CASTEL

dans la construction duquel on a voulu, tout en ménageant le confort, assurer la force qui le rendrait imprenable. Mal... quoiqu'en soient les... de la solidité, quelle... pu pénétrer... ...ge ou de feu qui... ...rains environnants... cadavres de plusieurs... Iroquois tués sous... ...tit château.

Depuis plusieurs années, alors qu'il en fut fait mention dans un guide de Montréal, les touristes qui passent dans notre ville ne manquent pas d'aller faire une visite à cette vieille maison qui porte le No 27 de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Un registre que l'on avait placé dans une des salles contient les noms des plus importants personnages des Etats-Unis et du Canada. Plusieurs gouverneurs généraux, y compris lord Grey, ont signé au livre qui aura une grande valeur dans quelques années à cause des autographes qu'il contient.

Il y a à peu près cinquante ans que le château de Hubert Lacroix ne sert plus de résidence; il a été converti, à cette date, en établissement industriel.

Récemment, la "National Drug & Chemical Company" en faisait l'acquisition et y installait ses laboratoires, qui sont uniques au Canada. Cette compagnie fabrique toutes les drogues que les pharmaciens étaient autrefois obligés d'importer des Etats-Unis ou d'Europe.

M. G. Ponthier, le surintendant des laboratoires, a été très aimable pour le représentant de la "Presse", à qui il a fait visiter la maison.

Nous avons cru oublier, avec cet article, la photographie de M. John Harper, qui a été depuis cinquante ans, intimement lié à l'histoire de cette maison. M. Harper a aussi fait des recherches et peut renseigner fort bien le visiteur sur l'histoire du petit château.

LA PRESSE

19-9-1909

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The House of Simon McTavish

No. 27 St. Jean Baptiste Street, Montreal

by

Ramsay Traquair, M.A. (Hon.), F.R.I.B.A.
and
G. A. Neilson

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November, 1933

MONTREAL
1933

THE HOUSE OF SIMON McTAVISH

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By

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REPRINTED FROM

THE JOURNAL, ROYAL ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF CANADA

NOVEMBER, 1933

THE McTAVISH HOUSE, ST. JEAN BAPTISTE STREET, MONTREAL

From a painting by H. Bunnett in the McCord Museum

THE HOUSE OF SIMON McTAVISH

No. 27 ST. JEAN BAPTISTE STREET, MONTREAL

BY RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A.(Hon.) F.R.I.B.A. AND G. A. NEILSON

IN 1786 Simon McTavish, the fur merchant of Montreal, leased from Richard Dobie, merchant, a new dwelling-house in St. Jean Baptiste Street for a period of seven years at the annual rental of £130. The lease, passed before Edward W. Gray, N.P. states that the house had not yet been lived in by any person and gives an inventory of the finishings. This gives the rooms as, on the first floor, kitchen, pantry and servants room, on the second, four rooms with two marble hearths and, on the third, five rooms with, in addition, stables, "necessary", ice-house and cellar.

In 1795 McTavish bought the house from Dobie. The deed of sale, signed by Joseph Frobisher on behalf of McTavish, gives some particulars. The lot consists of "a stone dwelling-house built in the English taste, stables and out-houses with an ice-house and a small garden." The ground on which they stood had been purchased by Dobie in small parts from four different owners, added to a lot owned by himself and then redivided. A plan showing the new boundaries and house is appended to the deed and this shows the house and lot very much as it is today.

On Simon McTavish's death in 1804 the house was left to his widow and seems to have been used as a dwelling-house until the end of the century. In 1885 Bunnett made a painting of it, in very minute detail, which is now in the McCord Museum. It was still practically unaltered in 1905 when Mr. D. Hardie and Mr. Roxburgh Smith measured and drew the details of the mantelpieces, stair and front door. About this time the property was acquired by the National Drug Company, for the purpose of a factory. The top floor was removed and an additional brick storey was added, with a flat roof. In 1931 all the fittings had gone excepting one fine mantelpiece on the principal floor and some fragments of the staircase and the

dad[redacted]nelling. These are now in the McCord Museum.

A survey of the buildings was made in 1930 by the students of the School of Architecture of McGill University. The restored drawings are based on this survey and on the old drawings by Messrs. Hardie and Smith.

The house was in three storeys, a half basement, referred to in the lease as the first floor, a principal or second floor and an attic or third floor. It is in two parts, the house proper to the west and the additional building which contained the stables to the east, separated from the house by the arched entry. The ice-house and "necessary" were in the back yard.

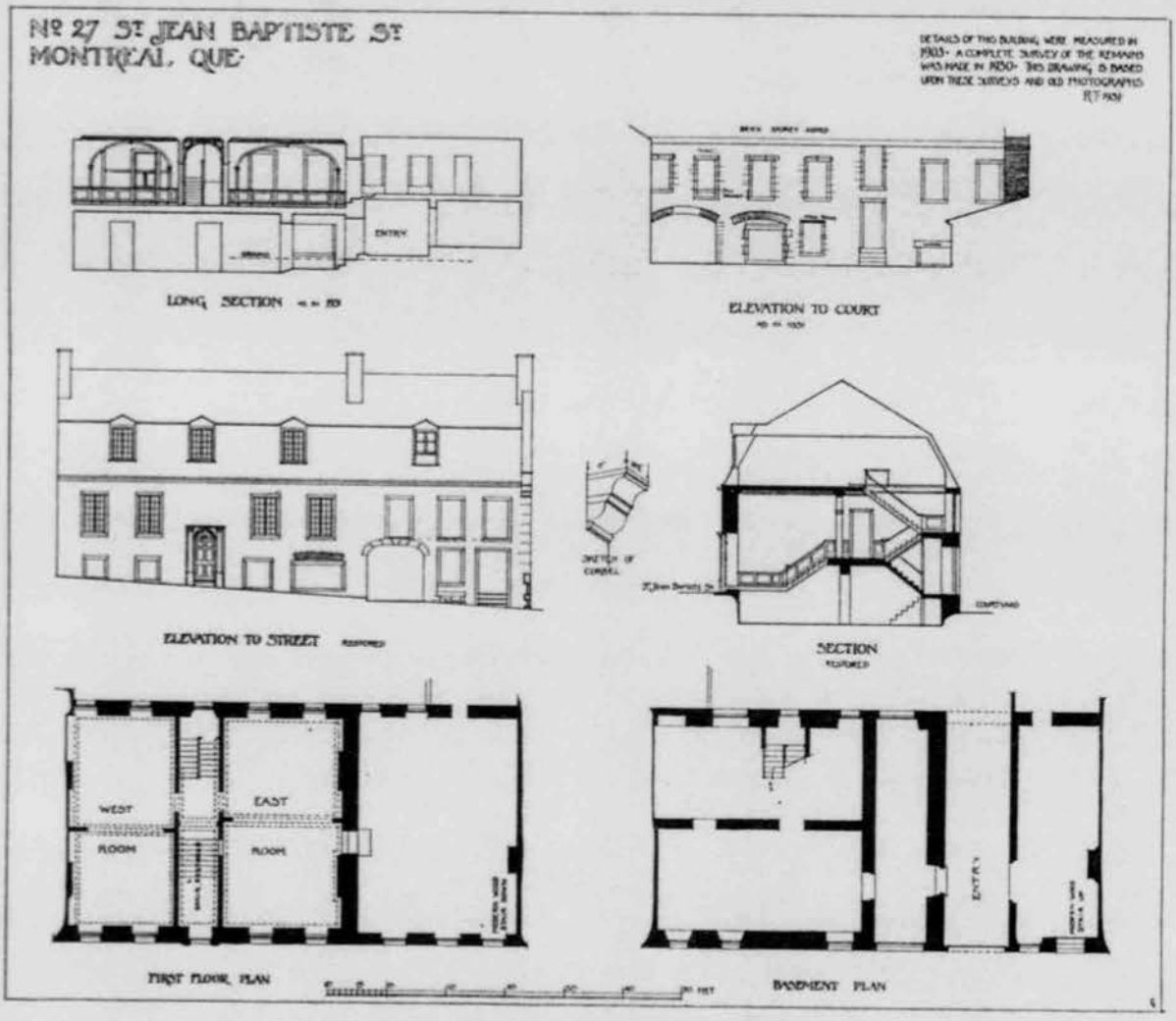
The front door had disappeared in 1931. Bunnett's painting and the old photographs show that it was in the centre of the street front. It had a semi-circular fanlight, with fluted doric pilasters and an architrave. It was measured by Mr. Roxburgh Smith.

From this door the principal floor must have been reached by a short flight of steps. The side walls of this staircase still remain but the stair itself has been removed.

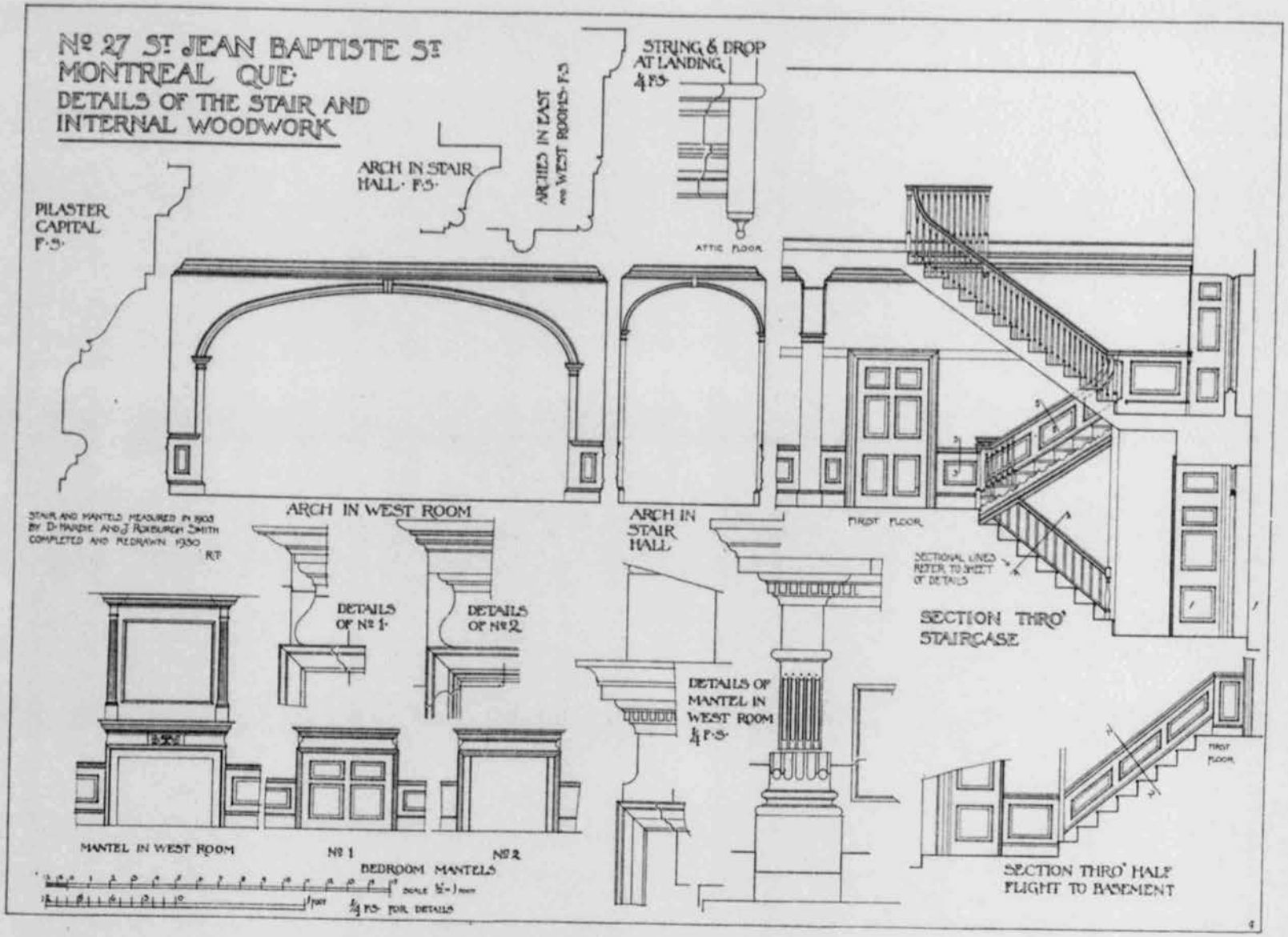
The basement shows no traces now of its original use but we know from the inventory that it contained the kitchen, servant's room and cellar. The large window next to the arch of the entry is not shown on Bunnett's picture and must be a later insertion.

On the principal floor the centre is occupied by the staircase and hall passage. On each side is a large double room, the front and back separated by elliptical arches. Each of these four divisions or rooms has a chimneybreast and fireplace. In the front east room the mantelpiece was still in position in 1930. It is a typical American "colonial" design of the late XVIII century "Adam" type —a cast iron grate with a yellow veined (jaune antique) marble surround; a delicately moulded frieze and mantelshelf with a carved central panel: at the sides tapered and fluted pilasters, above a large panel with side pilasters.

In 1905 the west room still retained an old mantelpiece of very similar design. This has now



PLANS AND ELEVATIONS OF THE McTAVISH HOUSE



DETAILS OF THE STAIR AND PANELLING

disappeared but fortunately the drawings have preserved a record of it. These mantelpieces correspond to the two marble hearths mentioned in the inventory. How the two other fireplaces were treated we do not know; the inventory mentions a Portland stone hearth with a small piece broken off on this floor.

The whole floor had a low panelled dado and a chair rail.

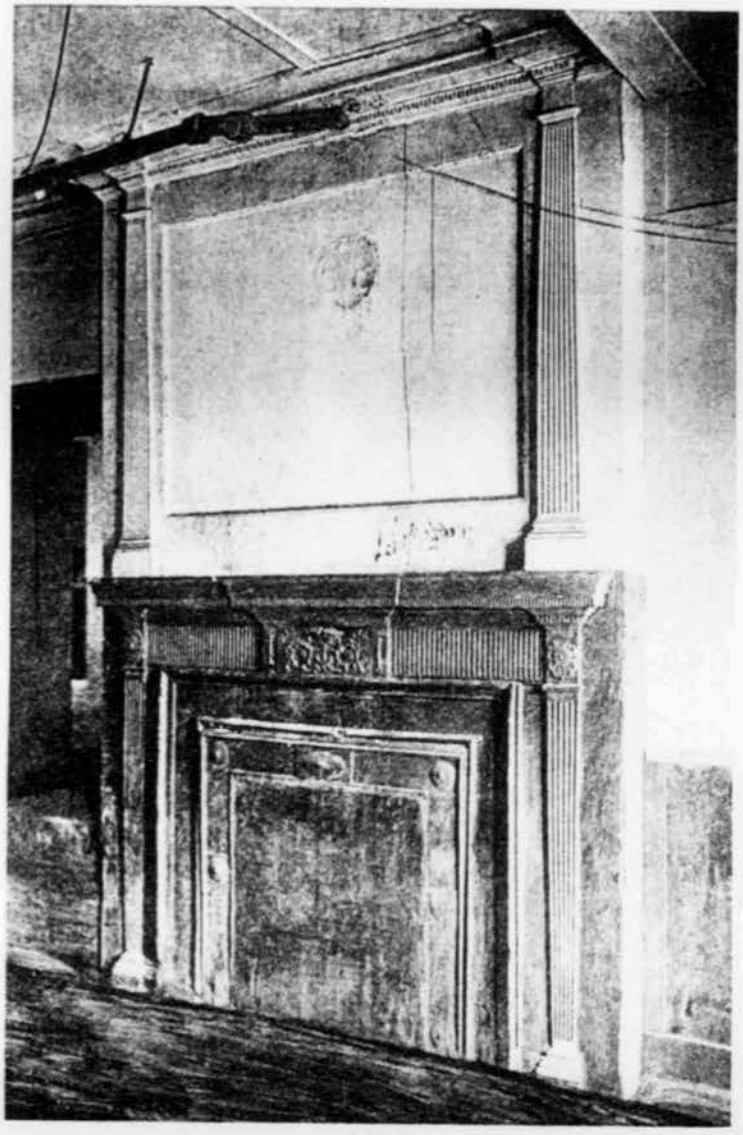
The general arrangement of the plan conforms to the English Georgian type with the central stair and double side rooms. The arrangement of the entrance door and stair is made necessary by the half basement. It should be compared with the somewhat similar arrangement in the "Fargues" house, No. 92 St. Peter Street, Quebec.

As the attic floor has completely disappeared it is fortunate that the old drawings include the staircase and two of the bedroom mantels. The photograph shows a part of the dado panelling and handrail, but the latter has been taken down and replaced during the alterations and the balusters are not in their original positions.

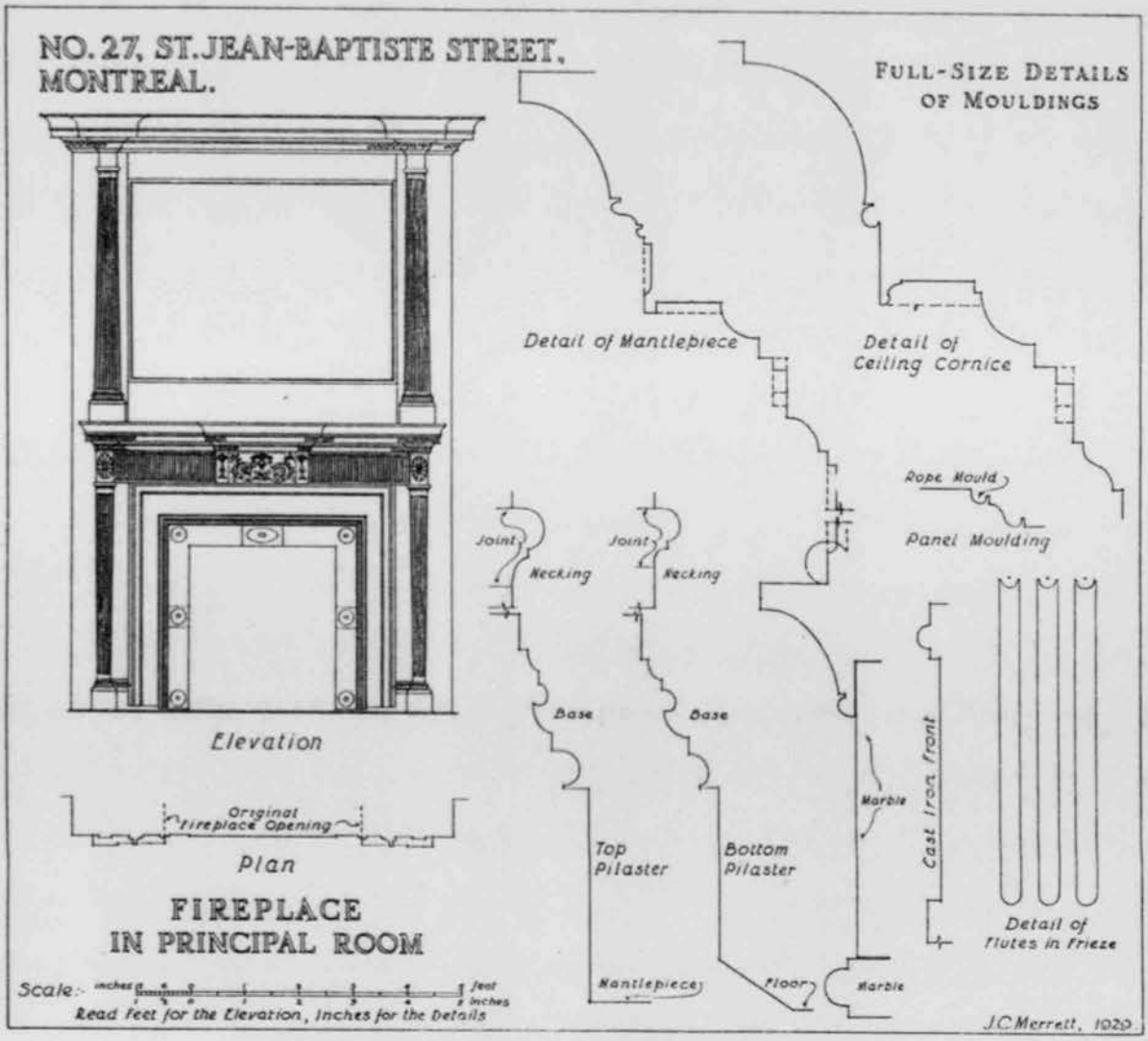
The annex to the east shows no trace of its original use, a coach-house and stables. It communicates with the east room of the principal floor by three steps down, since its floor is at a higher level so as to allow the entry to pass under.

The house is of interest as showing the town house of a wealthy citizen of Montreal in the end of the XVIII century. It should be compared with the much more elaborate and larger house at No. 92 St. Peter Street, Quebec. Quebec was evidently a much wealthier and more important place whilst Montreal was already beginning to show strong English influences.

The tradition of this house is American Colonial. It is indeed quite possible that the mantelpieces were imported for they are quite unlike anything



THE MANTELPIECE



DETAILS OF THE MANTELPIECE

that was being made at this time by the French-Canadian craftsmen. Though not a large house yet the planning of the principal rooms is very dignified and the details of the woodwork are irreproachably delicate.

We are indebted to Mr. E. Z. Massicotte, of Montreal, for the leases and other documents recording the history of the building. Mr. Massicotte was the first to investigate this and to point out the error of the older legend. We are also indebted to Mr. Roxburgh Smith for the loan of old drawings.

Documents consulted:

Lease passed before Edward W. Gray, N.P., in favour of Simon McTavish, merchant, by Richard Dobie, merchant. April 27, 1786.

Deed of sale dated 26 Feb., 1795. Richard Dobie, Esq., selling to Simon McTavish, Esq., a house and lot in Saint Jean Baptiste Street. From the minutes of J. G. Beek, N.P., in the judicial archives of Montreal.

Inventory of the real and personal estates of the late Simon McTavish, Esq., 20 Sept., 1804. No. 1798 of the minutes of J. G. Beek, N.P.

Will of Simon McTavish dated 2nd July, 1804.

Heroic Old Days Recalled

Exploits of Adventurous Band of Fur Trade Pioneers Live Again in Exhibits

mtl Star
20 juillet 1935

MEMORIES of that band of adventurers, who, over a century and a half ago, formed the North West Company, and their courageous voyageurs who daily risked their lives to provide transportation so that the fur trade could live, are revived at an exhibition of the "North Westers" in the

the late William Jennings Bryan, perennial candidate for the U.S. presidency, insisted up in the coinage value of gold and silver in U.S. money.

James, speaking at a Democrat rally at Port Washington, N. Y., called upon his audience to consider the achievements of his father's administration as "a democratic ball game" and to continue his father "at bat" on the strength of his accomplishments.

John, working as a day laborer without pay (so the money can go to someone else who needs it worse than he does) on a Government project at Knoxville, Tenn., laughs as he tells of going about Knoxville for two weeks without being recognized.

Senator Glass and His Bees

Senator Carter Glass of Virginia recently consumed a whole afternoon of the Senate's time with an humorous diatribe against Agricultural Adjustment Administration proposals to limit bee keeping and production of honey just as the wheat, corn, cotton, tobacco and other crops now are controlled. He said that, as a gentleman farmer owning a few hives of bees, he did not desire to risk having to go to jail because he did not know how to control the activity of his queen bees.

A Wisconsin woman wrote telling him that "cutting out all queen cells in your hives every ten days to two weeks during the season is a sure method of bee birth control."

The senator replied:

"To be entirely frank, I have no disposition to deprive my queen bees of the more abundant life that Prof. (Rexford) Tugwell (under secretary of agriculture) has contrived for

posts in the wilds, gives an insight into the way trade was carried on with the Indians. One bale of tobacco, one barrel of sugar, molasses, beads, powder, 20 barrels of high wine, and other goods were carried many miles upstream.

The original deed of admission of Allan McDonnell to the Company in 1816, which bears the signatures of all the partners, is of considerable interest. Among the signatures are those of Sir Alexander MacKenzie, Simon Fraser and John McLaughlin.

A set of duelling pistols brought to this country by Duncan McGillivray and loaned to the Museum by Mr. de Lery MacDonald, is a reminder of the days when gentlemen "settled" their disagreements at dawn.

OLD RESIDENCES

Pictures of old Montreal homes built by the fur traders, among them the McTavish Mansion between Peel and McTavish streets, and the country home of Hon. James McGill at Mansfield and Burnside place, are exhibited.

The minute book of the old Beaver Club, which was formed in 1785 by members of the company who had spent at least one winter in the Canadian West, tells a story of the social life of an earlier day. The club usually met every Wednesday evening in Dillon's Coffee House, Place d'Armes, but by the accounts shown as owing by members after an evening meeting, wine instead of coffee was the preferred beverage. A bill to James McGill for one evening ran to over $60, while A. N. McLeod's account was shown as more than $160.

Copies of early maps made by David Thompson and Peter Pond of the west, with the names of tribes of hostile Indians, unknown mountains and strange rivers, recall stirring days and the courage of those pioneers, who fought their way across the continent, in search of "trade."

finals, the Peter Pond map being one of the few reproductions, and the exhibition includes a number of books and a very good gallery of portraits.

A voyageur's outfit, ceinture flechee, hunting knife, firebag and all the rest of it, is assembled in one case. In another there is a handsome set of duelling pistols that once belonged to Duncan McGillivray. There is china of the period, and furniture, and whist counters of mother of pearl, bearing the cipher of John Ogilvy.

The exhibition has just opened and will be on view to the public until October 1.

PETER POND'S MAP SHOWN IN EXHIBITS

mtl Gazette

"The Nor'Westers — 1775-1821" Subject of Display at McCord Museum

22 juillet 1935

When Peter Pond made his map of the North West in 1785, he had so little regard for the immensities of the prairies that he squeezed the Great Lakes up against the Rocky Mountains. Not only that. He wrote along the Arctic coast words to the effect that the Eskimos said there was no land beyond; and in the south, in a corner that was probably where the State of Washington now is, he inscribed these sentences: "The Indians who occupy this part of the country are unknown to me. The Indians who make war against them say that they have seen amongst them people with long beards."

With all its idiosyncrasies, Peter Pond's map—or the reproduction of it—is one of the most interesting items in the current exhibition at the McCord National Museum. The show goes under the title, "The Nor'Westers—1775-1821," and is devoted to relics of the North West Company, the McGills and other fur traders of the times.

There is a deed of admission in favor of one Allan McDonnell, July, 1816, signed by Simon Fraser, Dr. John McLoughlin, William McGillivray and a string of other famous names; an engagement of a canoeman, a deposition concerning a coureur de bois who had deserted, several bills of lading. Students of Montreal history will be intrigued by the commercial journal of the firm of James and Andrew McGill, and there are letter books of such men as Frobisher and Thomas Blackwood, the latter kept at Michilimackinac in 1806 and 1807. The Beaver Club minute book is on hand and there are many papers concerning Col. William MacKay, one of the first volunteers in the War of 1812, who was rewarded by "The partners" who, in an elaborate rolling script, requested his acceptance of "two hundred guineas as a small testimony of their esteem."

Most of the documents are orig-

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

The Gazette 21 January 1956

By EDGAR ANDREW COLLARD

WHEN A YALE PROFESSOR VISITED MONTREAL

Montreal had many American visitors in the 19th century. But it is curious that one of those who viewed Montreal most in the spirit of the artist should have been a scientist.

This visitor was Benjamin Silliman. And Benjamin Silliman was a very eminent scientist. He was professor of chemistry and mineralogy at Yale. Though his own researches may not have led to any important discoveries, he did much to promote science at Yale, including the science of medicine. He presided as professor of his department for more than half a century, becoming one of the grandly venerable figures of the college.

Prof. Silliman visited Montreal in the autumn of 1819, when 40 years of age. And the notes he wrote of his visit are now more like a sketch-book than a narrative, with some of the sketches being like rapid impressions in pencil, others with delicate water - colored tints.

This did not mean that his scientific observation was any the less acute. But he understood Montreal by impressions, as well as through analysis. And perhaps it is the impressions that are now the most vivid.

The artistic quality of his narrative is seen in his descriptions of the view from his room in the Mansion House. And the Mansion House, to be sure, commanded a magnificent view.

It had been the old residence of Sir John Johnson—the Loyalist who had abandoned his hereditary estates in the Mohawk Valley to come north to Canada to fight for the Crown against the forces of the Revolution. In 1817 this building was acquired by Hon. John Molson. He made it one of the grandest hotels in all North America. The chandelier of the ballroom alone cost more than £1,050, and guests dined with epicurean elegance.

Perhaps the finest feature of the Mansion House was its riverside terrace. The hotel stood between St. Paul Street and what is today Commissioners Street, so that it was almost at the water's brim. The terrace overlooked the river, running the whole length of the building, a distance of 144 feet. Those, like Prof. Silliman, who had rooms overlooking the terrace and river, found that the view was one of the chief pleasures of their Montreal visit.

On the evening of his arrival in Montreal, Prof. Silliman had dinner in the Mansion House at five o'clock. At his table he found a party of "very respectable men, apparently Englishmen." These gentlemen were free alike of the selfish indifference and the rude familiarity he had encountered at the public tables in other hotels. They observed in their manners and conversation "a correct medium."

That autumn evening the weather was mild and fine. He retired "at candle lighting" to his room. Through its bow windows he looked out upon the St. Lawrence. From the moment the sun had set, everything became silent on the shore, so that sometimes for an hour the murmuring of the St. Lawrence was the only sound to be heard. The moon moved majestically among black clouds, now gleaming over the water, now hiding its light.

Then could be heard the plaintive French Canadian boat-song. "In one instance," wrote Prof. Silliman, "it arose from a solitary voyager, floating in his light canoe, which occasionally appeared and disappeared on the sparkling river; and in its indistinct course seemed no larger than some sporting insect. In another instance a larger boat, with more numerous and less melodious voices, not indeed in perfect harmony, passed nearer to the shore, and gave additional life to the scene.

"A few moments after the moon broke out from a throne of dark clouds, and seemed to convert the whole expanse of water into one vast sheet of glittering silver, and in the very brightest spot, at the distance of more than a mile, again appeared a solitary boat, but too distant to admit of our hearing the song, with which the boatman was probably solacing his lonely course."

Even with the coming of daylight, the scene on the riverside, though no longer so poetic, was full of pictures of life and action, well worthy of an artist's sketch-book. Sailing-boats and steam-boats were to be seen, struggling against St. Mary's Current. From the terrace he watched the carts being driven so far into the river that the horses could scarce keep their feet. There the wood from the rafts could be easily loaded. Other carts had been driven into the river, and water-casks were being filled to supply the city.

Perhaps the most picturesque scene was the French Canadian women doing their washing on the river-bank. As Prof. Silliman wrote: "Sometimes the clothes are placed on boards in the river, and pounded; and at other times, the women dance on them, dashing the water about like ducks, and seemingly as much for frolic as for work."

Other glimpses of the French-Canadian life had gone into his sketch-book, as when he wrote of the habitants driving their little carts on the road between St. Johns and Montreal: "Almost every moment we met the cheerful looking peasants, driving their little carts (charettes), drawn by horses of a diminutive size. The men were generally standing up in the body of the cart, with their lighted pipes in their mouths, and wore red or blue sashes and long conical woollen caps of various colours."

To Prof. Silliman, Montreal looked like a town in continental Europe. Though the fields of the island spread out behind it, the city was crowded together, almost in medieval fashion, in a stretch about two miles along the waterfront, and did not extend backwards more than half a mile.

The shadows of its narrow streets, the heavy dignity of its stone walls, and its brilliant spires catching the light of the sun gave the traveller the sense that he had suddenly been carried away from North America and set down on another continent.

On his arrival, he wrote: "It required no powerful effort of the imagination to conceive that we were arrived in Europe. A town, compactly built of stone, without wood or brick, indicating permanency, and even a degree of antiquity, presenting some handsome public and private buildings, an active and numerous population, saluting the ear with two languages, but principally with the French — every thing seems foreign, and we easily feel that we are a great way from home."

If the city itself was interesting in its old-world massiveness, the countryside about it was charming in its "delicate beauty." The area between the city and the mountain was ideal for "country seats," for places where gentlemen might farm with elegance, using their wealth and taste to improve even on the abundant gifts of nature.

Prof. Silliman himself saw the remains of one such venture in gentlemanly elegance. He climbed the hill which Montrealers, he noted, called "the mountain." High up on the slope of the mountain he may well have been surprised to come upon a beautiful cylinder of lime-stone, standing on a pedestal and rising to a height of about 35 feet. He read the inscription. It marked the burial place of Simon McTavish, who had died 15 years before. And below the monument, Prof. Silliman found the mausoleum in which McTavish's bones lay.

It must have been strange to come upon a lonely tomb among the trees on the slope of the mountain. To a man of the professor's temperament, it must have lent a poetic quality to death itself.

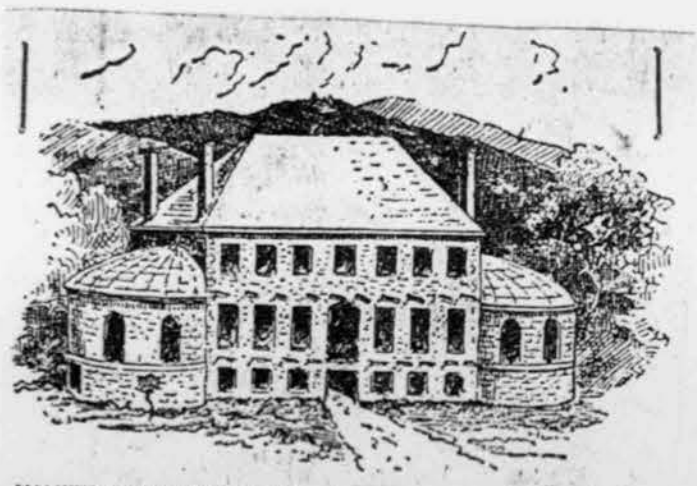
As a further reminder of the vanity of human wishes, he saw, a little lower down the slope of the mountain, the crumbling remains of the great mansion McTavish had been building at the time of his unexpected death. "It is now fast becoming a ruin," wrote Silliman, "although it is enclosed and roofed in, and the windows are built up with masonry. It would have been a superb home, if finished according to the original plan."

The name of Simon McTavish, the commanding figure in the old North West Company of fur-trading days, is preserved in Montreal in McTavish St. Though the old ruined mansion Prof. Silliman visited is now gone, and the tall monument with it, Simon McTavish still sleeps in his mausoleum on the slope of the mountain.

Long ago the executors of his estate covered it with a great mound of earth to protect it from vandals. But the hidden mausoleum remains, in an obscure corner just outside the stone wall that marks the western limit of Ravenscrag, the old home of Sir Hugh Allan (now the Allan Memorial Institute). Indeed if this wall had been built in a straight line, it may have necessitated the removal of the tomb. But the wall was indented at that point, and the resting-place of Simon McTavish continues inviolate.

Prof. Silliman was convinced that Mount Royal would offer Montrealers a magnificent parkland, if it were only properly opened up. He made his suggestion in these words: "Nothing is wanted to render the mountain of Montreal a charming place for pedestrian excursions, and for rural parties, but a little effort, and expense in cutting and clearing winding walks . . . a lodge or resting place on the mountain, constructed so as to be ornamental, would also be a desirable addition."

Perhaps it was this scientist from Yale, with his sense of the beautiful, who first saw the importance of making a park of the mountain. And if it was to be one of his students at Yale, Frederick Law Olmstead, who, as landscape architect, was to plan those "winding walks" on Mount Royal Park that Professor Silliman had recommended as early as 1819.



VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES: On the slope of Mount Royal, near the head of McTavish Street, stood the ruins of the house that Simon McTavish, the fur trader, had been building at the time of his unexpected death in 1804. These ruins were visited in 1819 by Prof. Benjamin Silliman of Yale, who also visited the nearby mausoleum in which McTavish had been buried. The ruined house is long since gone, but the mausoleum, hidden by earth, still remains. The story of Prof. Silliman's tour of Montreal is told in today's article.

Gazette – 21-1-1956

Rue St-Jean-Baptiste

Les vieilles pierres de Montréal... (2)

La demeure du millionnaire McTavish

On s'y entretuait à coups de rasoir et on y préconisait l'indépendance!

Nous sommes allés voir la demeure de Simon McTavish par une belle journée de printemps. Elle se trouve à l'actuel numéro 411 de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste, une des plus anciennes voies de Montréal, ouverte en 1684, dont le nom n'a pas changé depuis.

Il a fallu tout d'abord demander à deux ou trois camionneurs de déplacer leurs voitures, pour faire des photographies de l'extérieur, puis aller rencontrer des représentants des compagnies auxquelles appartient la maison pour obtenir l'autorisation de visiter l'intérieur. Dans l'une tout se passa fort bien ; on nous donna pour guide un employé de langue anglaise qui en connaissait tous les coins et recoins et racontait avec un évident plaisir leur petite histoire.

Un "non" catégorique

Dans l'autre compagnie, par contre, le gérant, un M. Moorhed, nous a reçus plutôt mal. Dans un anglais qui écorcherait les oreilles d'un gentleman de Londres ou de Manchester il déclara que personne ne photographierait ses entrepôts. C'était dirimant, tranché et on ne peut plus définitif. Attitude d'autant plus curieuse que dénuée de la politesse la plus élémentaire et parfaitement injustifiée en soi. La Compagnie en question, Florasynth Laboratories, ne s'occupe, en effet, ni de contrebande, ni de la fabrication de la bombe atomique et la publicité a fait depuis longtemps tomber dans le domaine public les secrets anodins de ses installations.

Photographie clandestine

Derrière mon dos quelqu'un murmura : "Ce n'est pas étonnant qu'on rencontre tant de séparatistes", et la scène avait d'autant plus de piquant qu'il s'agissait après tout de vieilles pierres ayant appartenu autrefois à un millionnaire écossais. McTavish nous aurait-il reçus de la même façon ? Je ne le crois pas, car en lisant ses lettres on a l'impression que cet homme hautain et despotique savait vivre et ne manquait pas de sens de l'humour. Quoi qu'il en soit, nous allâmes tout simplement sonner à la porte qui sert à la livraison des marchandises où un employé très content de nous rendre service s'empressa même d'enlever les caisses qui gênaient la visibilité.

Et voilà comment fut photographiée, à la sauvette et d'une façon presque clandestine, l'étroite ruelle ancienne qu'on enferma entre deux maisons.

Dans son ensemble la maison de Simon McTavish résiste victorieusement à l'usure des années et il serait possible de la restaurer de même que de redonner un certain lustre à la façade qui garde encore beaucoup de cachet. En tout cas l'importance de l'histoire de son propriétaire justifierait certainement le souci de mettre en valeur ce dernier vestige de son prestigieux passé.

Simple apprenti

Simon McTavish, originaire d'Ecosse arriva à New-York en 1764, à l'âge de treize ans. Au début il eut l'existence obscure et laborieuse d'un apprenti, mais à sa majorité il quitte son emploi pour se consacrer au commerce des fourrures. Il mène désormais une vie joyeuse à Albany et écrit à son ami William Edgar que les "vins sont bons en Amérique, les huîtres excellentes et les jeunes

filles très jolies", ce qui n'empêche pas qu'il souffre du mal du pays et demande avec insistance dans ses lettres qui s'est marié dernièrement dans son village natal, "qui a l'intention de le faire et de quoi parlent les dames à l'heure du thé..."

Très vite il s'aperçoit, cependant, que le commerce des pelleteries est plus avantageux au Canada et décide de s'établir à Montréal. Tout d'abord McTavish voyage et parcourt l'actuel territoire de la Saskatchewan, observe, réfléchi, juge et prépare les futures campagnes. Au cours de ses expéditions qui exigent de nombreux sacrifices sinon un réel héroïsme, il constate que les Indiens préfèrent vendre les fourrures aux Français qu'aux Anglais. Désormais toute la politique du futur magnat sera basée sur ce fait anodin en apparence qui aura une importance capitale dans la lutte qu'il livrera à la toute puissante compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson.

La lutte commence

Contrairement aux avis des contemporains Simon McTavish décide, en effet, de briser le monopole de la traite des fourrures au Canada. En 1784 il signe l'acte de la fondation de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest qu'il dirigera en maître absolu sans se soucier des autres actionnaires tels que Joseph Frobisher ou John Gregory. Il établit un circuit commercial nouveau qui s'étendra du Labrador jusqu'aux montagnes Rocheuses et du 49e parallèle jusqu'à l'Arctique. Toutes les expéditions partent de Montréal et doivent y revenir car McTavish veut que cette ville devienne le centre le plus célèbre du monde de la traite des fourrures. Il écrit au roi d'Angleterre dans ce sens et fait tout ce qui est en son pouvoir pour que les pelleteries vendues aux Européens soient chargées sur les bateaux à Montréal. La Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson est opposée à cette politique et tandis que les marchands de Londres commencent à manifester leur préférence à l'égard de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, on se bat sur les routes. Les employés et les officiers de la société rivale attaquent ceux de McTavish qui ne se gênent pas pour riposter. Comme, en outre, la majorité de ses trappeurs se recrute parmi des Français qui ont le sang chaud et le geste prompt, les bagarres sont sanglantes et se terminent souvent très mal pour les deux côtés.

Sciemment, cependant, Simon McTavish ignore ces incidents et refuse de discuter avec les concurrents, trop autoritaire pour céder la moindre parcelle du territoire qu'il considère comme son fief propre. Il est détesté et craint, mais dans sa résidence de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste se réunissent les personnalités les plus importantes de la ville.

Cendrillon

Les jolies demoiselles essaient de séduire ce célibataire endurci, mais il

semble insensible à leurs charmes et on dit généralement qu'il désire aller à Londres pour y trouver une épouse de naissance aristocratique.

Rares sont ceux, en effet, qui savent que quand la foule brillante quitte la maison du magnat de la fourrure on y reçoit en toute simplicité Charles Chaboillez et sa femme. Il n'y a rien de commun entre ces deux hommes, dont le premier est un riche Ecossais et le second un Canadien français gai et modeste qui s'efforce, en tant qu'employé de la Compagnie d'introduire des missionnaires dans les régions de l'Assiniboia, où il assure la direction du commerce des pelleteries. McTavish épousera pourtant sa fille, la jeune et belle Marguerite Chaboillez.

C'est presque l'histoire de Cendrillon que ce mariage du millionnaire, âgé de quarante-trois ans, avec cette aimable personne qui n'a ni dot, ni relations et à laquelle il offrira la seigneurie de Terrebonne, modeste cadeau de 25,000 livres sterling.

Pendant un certain temps l'atmosphère de la demeure de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste change et devient plus accueillante. On y donne encore de grandes réceptions, mais désormais c'est une ravissante maîtresse de maison qui reçoit les invités en compagnie d'un mari heureux dans lequel on ne reconnaît qu'à grande peine l'altier autocrate.

L'adversaire de taille

Mais McTavish continue à diriger ses hommes avec une main de fer et certains se révoltent. Il les ignore ou les juge sévèrement, selon leur rang et leur importance, tout en les oubliant d'autant plus aisément qu'il recrute sans difficulté des employés de valeur parmi le personnel de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson dont les affaires sont de moins en moins bonnes. Un seul de ses collaborateurs parviendra à l'humilier profondément : Alexandre Mackenzie.

Mackenzie oppose aux idées de Simon McTavish sa propre vision des choses qui a de nombreux partisans. Découvreur de la nouvelle route vers l'Ocan Pacifique il préconise l'union de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest avec celle de la Baie d'Hudson, considérant que les fourrures pourront alors être expédiées de la Baie d'Hudson, ou des abords du Pacifique, au lieu d'être transportées, à grands frais, par canots, jusqu'à Montréal. Pour McTavish l'idée d'une telle fusion est impensable sans dire qu'il désire favo-

riser la croissance de Montréal grâce au commerce des pelleteries.

Alexandre Mackenzie quitte la compagnie et part à Londres où il publie un volume intitulé "Voyages à l'Océan glacial arctique et l'Océan Pacifique". Ce récit du premier Européen qui ait abordé l'Océan Glacial obtient un immense succès et son auteur est promu chevalier, titre que le roi Georges ne songera pas à donner à McTavish pour lequel la distinction accordée à Mackenzie représente un affront personnel.

L'échec

Humilié, Simon McTavish décide d'étonner ses contemporains et d'accroître son prestige en construisant, au début de 1804, une demeure princière au pied de la Montagne. Mais il n'aura plus le temps de l'achever, car il mourra au cours de la même année et les travaux seront définitivement interrompus. Avec sa disparition, d'ailleurs, toute son oeuvre va se désagréger avec une rapidité surprenante.

La Compagnie du Nord-Ouest se fusionne avec sa rivale, la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, et l'établissement des communications entre l'Atlantique et le Pacifique s'opère au détriment de Montréal qui cesse dès lors d'être le grand centre du commerce des pelleteries comme le voulait McTavish.

Son fils entre au service de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, tandis que sa femme, la belle Marguerite, se remarie avec un Anglais du Kent, William Plenderleath. La famille n'ose pas habiter le château au pied de la Montagne qu'on dit hanté et la maison de la rue de Saint-Jean-Baptiste change de mains.

Une maison qui porte malheur

Très vite elle commencera à avoir une fort mauvaise réputation et un chroniqueur de l'époque écrira : "Ce qu'elle est, cette maison, je ne le dirais pas à une honnête femme." Un an plus tard les deux locataires qui l'occupent s'entretuent à coups de rasoir et personne ne veut plus l'habiter jusqu'au jour où le Club Saint-Jean-Baptiste décide d'y tenir ses réunions.

Cette société secrète fut fondée pour empêcher l'accomplissement de la Confédération canadienne et pour préconiser l'indépendance du Canada français. Elle avait des rites étranges semblables à ceux de certaines loges maçonniques et acceptait sans distinction toutes sortes de membres. Entre autres, des condamnés de droit commun, poursuivis par la justice américaine, réussirent à s'y faire admettre et la Société fut dissoute par le juge Courson pour des raisons qui ne relevaient pas uniquement de considérations politiques.

On commence alors à raconter dans le voisinage que la demeure de McTavish est maudite et longtemps elle attendra d'autres locataires ; finalement on y installe une usine. Le bruit des machines chassa les spectres, "mais nul n'osait s'en approcher à la tombée de la nuit sans faire le signe de la croix", au témoignage des contemporains.

Aujourd'hui des compagnies prospères occupent la maison de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste et la trépidante vie moderne a définitivement relégué dans l'ombre le souvenir de la sombre et attachante figure de Simon McTavish, un des premiers qui ait eu la vision de la plus grande ville française de l'Amérique du Nord. ●

Rue St-Jean Baptiste

SIMON McTAVISH HOUSE INVOLVED

The most historically significant building in the block Jean-Paul Parent wants to demolish for a pigeon-hole garage is the Simon McTavish House at 425 St. Jean Baptiste.

According to old records, Fur Merchant McTavish leased the dwelling in 1786 for a period of seven years at the annual rent of 130 pounds. He was the first tenant in the house which was owned by a Richard Dobie.

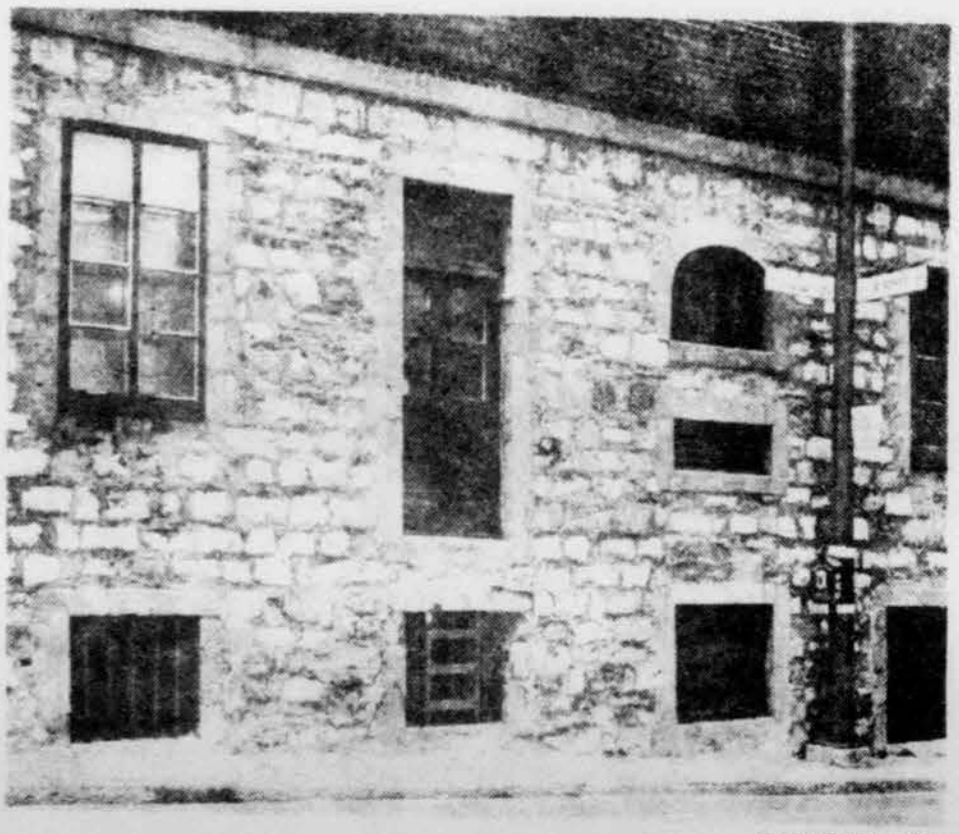
An article by Ramsay Traquair in the Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, dated 1933, states that McTavish bought the house from Dobie in 1795.

On McTavish's death in 1804, the house was left to his widow who lived in it until the end of the century. Bunnett painted it in detail in 1885, a painting that is now in the McCord Museum.

In the early 1900s, National Drug acquired the building for use as a factory and about this time the top floor was removed and a brick storey added.

As it stands today the old dwelling is considerably altered both inside and out. The front door disappeared in the early 1930s and the hearths and woodwork have been removed.

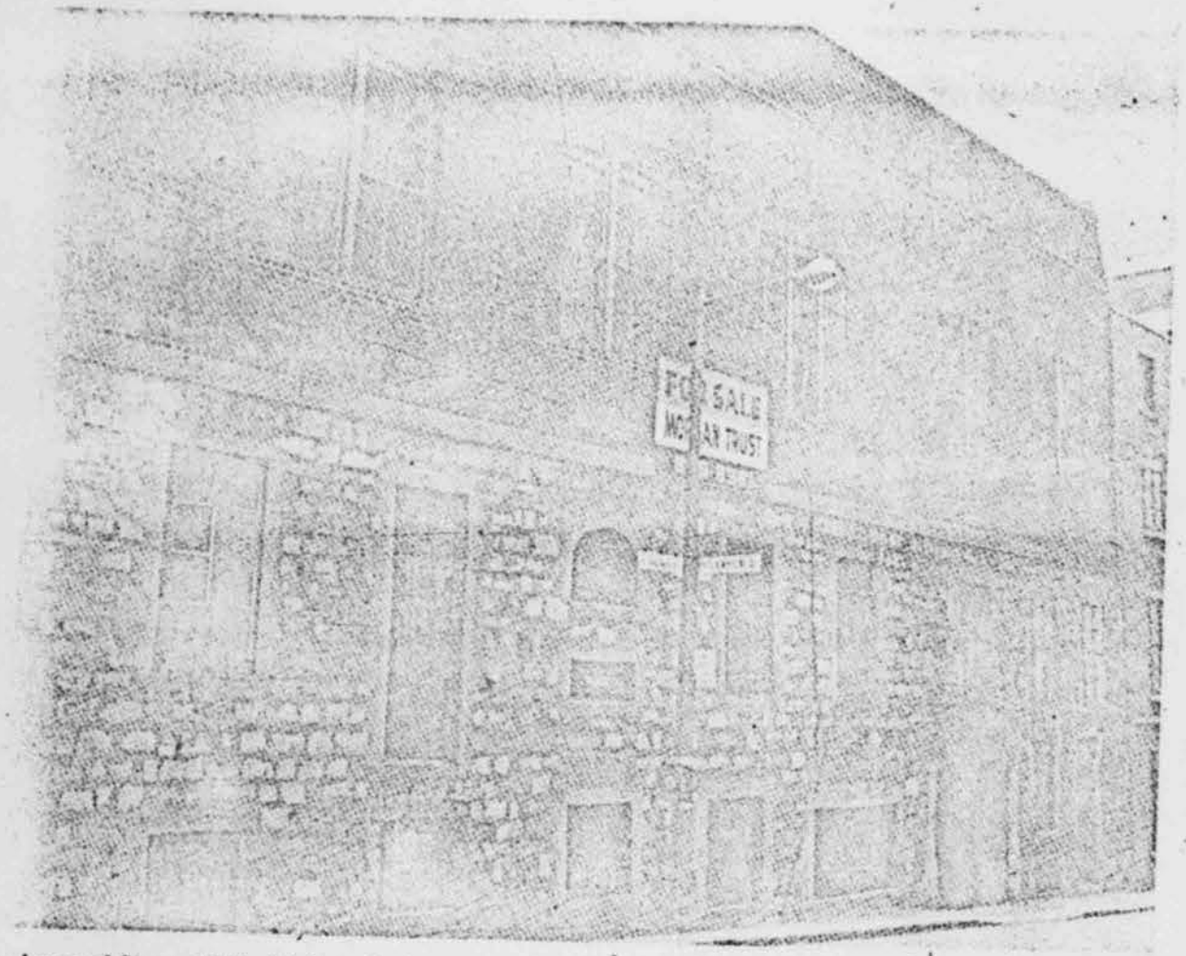
Mr. Parent said he was willing to co-operate with any firm, preferably one dealing in furs, in the restoration of the old building.



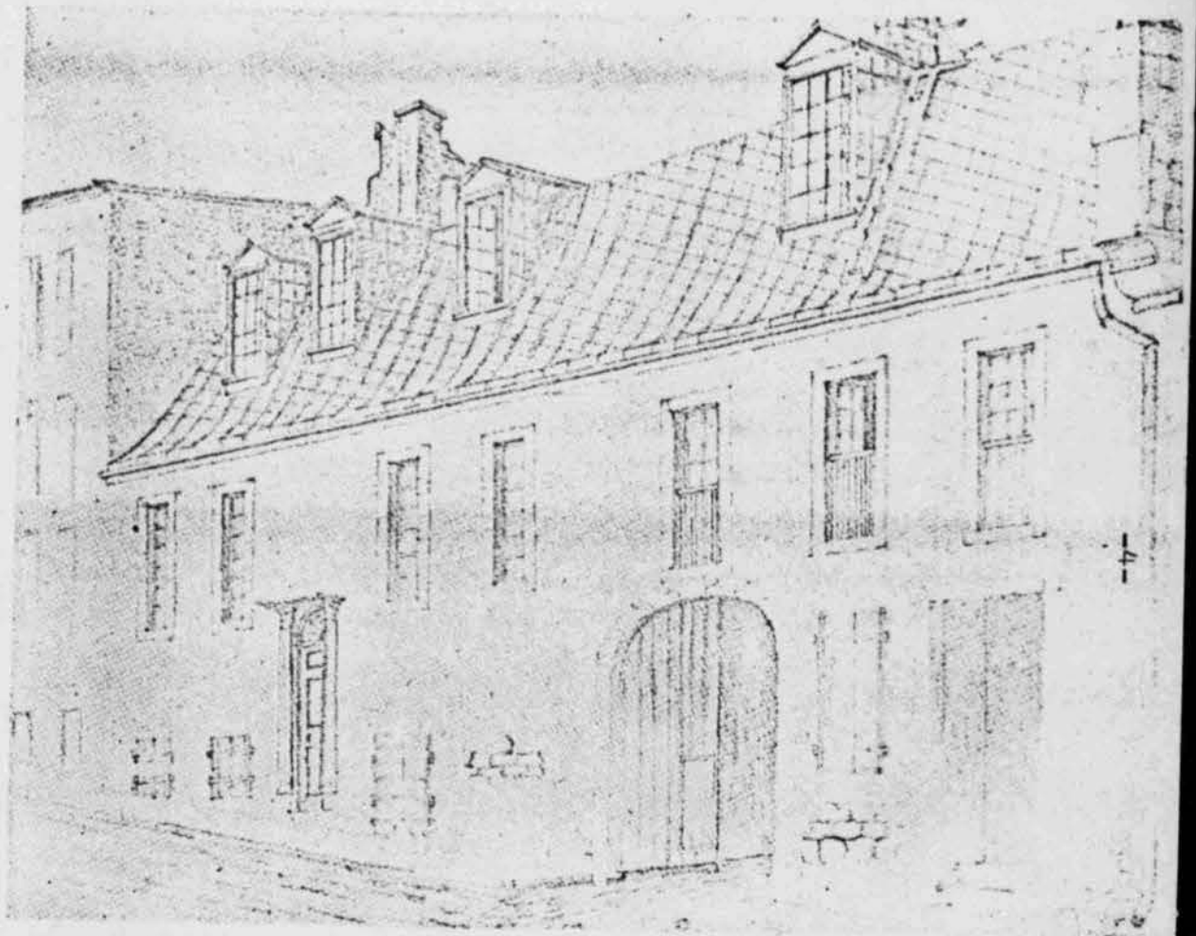
(Gazette Photo Service)

The House of Simon McTavish at 425 St. Jean Baptiste St.

Old Montreal 'fad' keeps rolling along



home of Simon McTavish has taken quite a beating since the drawing on the right was made, in the 19th century. An ambitious restorer could remove the brick addition, rebuild the earlier roof and ners, put back the front door, and fix up the windows — for starters. There's a courtyard that goes h it, although the garden wall has disappeared. Of the interior, there is virtually nothing left; just the basic structure and some interesting vaults in the basement.



The original house was built around 1635 by Janvier Lacroix. McTavish acquired it towards the end of the 18th century and spent a fortune fixing it up for his new French-Canadian wife. McTavish, head of the Northwest Company, partner of La Verendrye and McGill, and Montreal's first millionaire, entertained lavishly in this house. His neighbors, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, used to disapprove of the heavy traffic through this porte-cochere.

Achievements belie rumors of failure

By ERIC McLEAN

THERE'S a lot of carping to be heard about Old Montreal these days, and it is given an undue amount of space and time in the press and on the air. At the smarter cocktail parties you will hear people trying to justify their timidity about investing in the quarter: "The steam's gone out of the movement down there," they say. "It was just a fad that was given a boost by Expo. Those restaurants down there are having a hard time to keep afloat. And have you heard about all those people going out of business? My dear! Bankruptcies galore!"

Then, from another quarter, you hear the annual dirge of the Association of Proprietors of Old Montreal, a group that seems to have been formed primarily to fight the preservation law passed by Quebec five years ago. According to their spokesman, Léo Bernier, president of the association, taxes have risen unjustly; the city has ignored the need for a Metro exit on Place d'Armes; and the law classifying Old Montreal as an "Historic Ensemble" is unrealistic since many of the old buildings west of St-François-Xavier street are not all that old. According to Bernier, the value of real estate has been depressed or greatly-inhibited by the legislation, and the proprietors, in consequence, deserve some compensation in the form of tax relief, or subsidies, or both.

The cocktail sages are farthest off the mark. Eight years is rather a long time for a fad, particularly when it shows no sign of abating.

More move in

In the past year, more commercial projects were launched, and more residents moved into the quarter than in any other period since the movement began in 1961.

It is true that Old Montreal was given a boost during Expo. The records of the tourist bureau show that it was second only to Expo as a prime attraction of the city. But tourists don't restore buildings, and the brisk business enjoyed by restaurants and shops during the centennial was offset by the fact that the city was obliged to postpone a number of projects in the quarter because the funds were needed elsewhere.

As for bankruptcies, I have heard of only two, and these were almost predictable. The people involved jumped into costly schemes without sufficient funds and without any experience. They would have gone bankrupt on Mountain street.

An experienced restaurateur does not move to a new location without being reasonably certain of making a go of it. In 1960, there was one acceptable restaurant in the area defined as Old Montreal. Today it has the largest concentration of restaurants in the metropolitan area, with the exception of the centre of the city — say, Guy to University. Not all of them are good. Some of them are strong on atmosphere and weak on food. But they are miles ahead of the beanery-and Coke counters that serviced the area before the movement caught on.

ERIC McLEAN, The Star's music critic, is a pioneer in the development of Old Montreal. Eight years ago he bought and moved into the old Papineau house on Bon Secours street, becoming the first proprietor to live in his own house in the quarter in many years. He is also a member of the Viger Commission named by the city to make recommendations for the preservation and restoration of Old Montreal.

Eric McLean

It is hard to know how many of the members of the Association of Proprietors agree with their president. Each year someone presents a motion that the executive be re-elected, and it is seconded and passed without so much as a murmur. But I feel this is mainly because the members themselves are bewildered by the situation, and not one of them is prepared to offer a sensible alternative to Bernier's leadership.

Most of the people who have invested large amounts of money in restorations in the Bon Secours - Place Jacques-Cartier area are members of the association, but they do not endorse Bernier's negative attitude. Of course they would like to see some form of tax relief, and they would agree with the idea of a Metro exit on Place d'Armes, but they don't feel that these two causes are enough to justify the existence of such an association. In the five years since its foundation, the APOM has not put forward a single positive plan that would pool their resources in an effort to improve the quarter.

It is as though Bernier et alles were sitting back with their arms folded, saying to the city: "YOU wanted an historic quarter. So YOU restore it."

Sometimes when I am walking down Bon Secours street it is hard to remember what the quarter was like when I first moved into the Papineau house eight years ago. The sidewalk was much narrower (by two feet, three feet?) and was covered with asphalt, as was the street. There were two street lamps between Notre Dame street and the church, both throwing a depressing blue glare over the run-down buildings. My house belonged to the Hatton Fish Market next door.

And they had rented my ground floor to a man who ran a little restaurant that catered to the rubby-dubs of the area ("Les rubbineux" as they were known locally: both words are derived from rubbing alcohol). Before I moved in, the three upper floors of the house had been leased to a man who rented rooms. He could accommodate 40, and most of his clients also patronized the restaurant below. The two floors above the fish market were also operated as a rooming-house for derelicts, longshoremen, and people on relief.

Beyond the fish market was a wholesaler who dealt in dried fruits and nuts. Across the street from him was a wholesale butcher, with another rooming-house in the upper floor. Between this and the tumble-down Calvet house on the corner was a shed occupied by a barber, a real eccentric, who had a way with animals.

Turning the corner on St. Paul, you were confronted with the dying ruin of the Bonsecours Market. The dome had disappeared in a fire only 14 years before, and the façade was disfigured by a row of ugly sheds that ran the length of the building, on both St. Paul street and on Commissioners streets below. Place Jacques Cartier was little more than a parking lot, used mainly by the longshoremen and by the clients for the seedy night clubs that lined the square.

Depressing

The part of the quarter that lay west of St. Laurent was, if anything, even more depressing. The area had suffered badly from the big Dorchester street development which siphoned off more and more of the businesses in the old city. As buildings became deserted, proprietors were pulling them down to save on taxes or to create parking lots. The area from St. François-Xavier to St. Nicholas, below Notre Dame, was beginning to look like Berlin at the end of World War II. In the midst of that desolation stood the one example of restoration in the old quarter: the Robert Reford Company, steamship agents, who had fixed up the old Lotbinière house on St. Sacrement street, and occupied it as their office.

Strictly speaking, it was adaptation rather than restoration, but they had respected the basic structure of the house, and recognized its validity in a modern city. The man responsible for this admirable project was the president, Eric Reford, whose faith in the quarter has always been strong, and who has since acquired other properties along St. Sacrement, St. François-Xavier, and Hospital street, to be spruced up and adapted for modern occupancy.

Remember that in those days the quarter was not known as Old Montreal. If they referred to it at all, people used to call it the dock district, or the harbor area, and it was regarded as being dirty, dangerous, and rat-infested. Except for "dirty," it did not deserve these charges. It is true that after five in the evening it was totally deserted, except in my area with its rooming-houses. And, as for the rats, I think most of them were concentrated in my house, and I was quick to call in the controllers.

Checking with the city's sanitation department you will find that the area's rat-control record has been a very good one, even in those days: a record far higher than that of Westmount, for instance. Rats always go for the classier garbage, and they found pretty poor pickings in the old quarter. Besides, the numerous wholesale food merchants could not afford to have a rat problem, and their anti-vermin programs were carefully followed.

Consider the record of the short eight years following this description of the old quarter: Within a year, the city nominated the Viger Commission, an advisory body reporting to the City Planning Department. The members were people who had been active in restoration elsewhere in the province, or who had shown a real interest in the history of the province and the city. They have served voluntarily, meeting each month to consider the problems of the quarter. To give them the credit that they are usually denied by their imposed anonymity, here are a few of the things they recommended during their first year of existence:

They opposed the city's plan to build an elevated expressway along Commissioners street (that would have been the death blow to the quarter); they recommended the restoration of the Bonsecours Market building; they recommended the passage of a bylaw preventing the creation of any new parking lots, garages, or car-washes in the area; they recommended a modification of the city's charter that would create a protected area, including everything that had been within the old city walls (this was later amended by the city to exclude Craig street, St. James street, and the northern side of Notre Dame). Within this area, anything that was demolished, constructed, or modified, must first have the approval of the Viger Commission and the Commission of Historic Monuments in Quebec.

Recommendation

In the following year, and in every year since, the Viger Commission has urged the city to form a bureau which would concern itself exclusively with the old quarter, and which would have on its staff of professionals a full-time architect, an archivist, and an expert on real estate. It would serve not only as an information centre for prospective buyers, but would also act as an advisory service for proprietors.

The tourist who walks around Old Montreal these days would find it difficult to understand the attitude of Montrealers eight years ago. Since that time, some 20 buildings including most of Bonsecours street, have been restored through private initiative at a cost of more than $9,000,000. The city itself has spent some $3,000,000 on the Bonsecours Market restoration, and another million on the paving blocks, stone sidewalks, street furniture, and landscaping of Bonsecours street, part of St. Paul street, Place Jacques Cartier and Place Vauquelin. One official told me privately that the city is now committed to an annual budget for the old quarter of about $2,000,000.

All this is concentrated in the eastern part of Old Montreal, and to give another focus on activity, the next project on the city's books is the renovation of Youville square, an imaginative and far-sighted plan that should do a great deal to establish a balance of interest in the quarter.

I am not trying to play Pollyanna to Mr. Bernier's Cassandra. There are many problems that must be solved, and the western sector, from Youville square north to Notre Dame, is one of them. Not all these grand nineteenth century buildings lend themselves to conversion for dwellings or boutiques.

It seems to me that one of the highest priorities should be the public bureau. It should occupy an easily identified building in the quarter, and anyone should be able to go in and ask what there is that he can buy (the existing real estate offices are completely at sea.) It should also be possible to ask for advice about restoration or modification of buildings.

We don't even know what we have in Old Montreal.

Montreal financed a careful study of the area, and a sensible master plan was drawn up, including a large number of projects, some of which would be financed by the city, others which would be encouraged by the government.

But the city has stubbornly refused to publish this plan on the grounds that it is only "un instrument de travail — a working guide — for the City Planning Department, and not a project with official status.

This is welching, of course. The principles expressed in this master plan have already been endorsed by City Hall, even though the details may undergo a number of changes with the years.

Some statement of these principles, and an outline of some of the more immediate projects should be made public. It would have the effect not only of reassuring those who have already invested heavily in the quarter, but of encouraging new investment in the area.

Because there is no public information service for Old Montreal, the people who are interested in moving into the area consult those who are already there. I myself receive on an average four or five calls a week, mostly from people looking for living quarters.

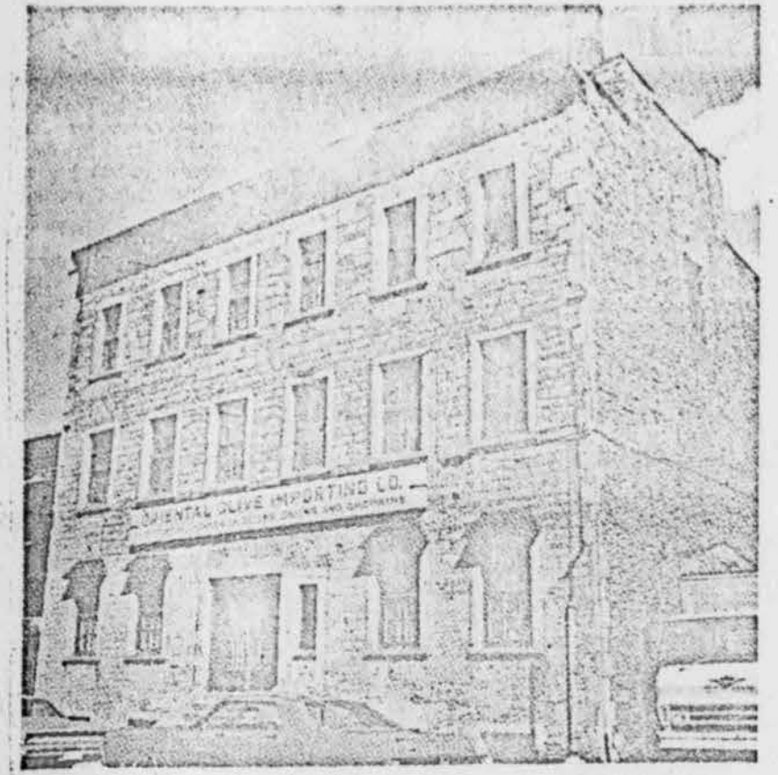
There is little I can tell them. I usually recommend that they walk around the area, and look carefully at the buildings that are for rent or for sale. But this isn't much help because there are a number of buildings that are available but which are advertised only through the established real estate lists. Besides, an incredible number of fine early buildings have been so mutilated that they are hardly recognizable: sloping roofs removed, windows widened, extra storeys added (see illustrations.)

I also suggest that they try to get a long lease — say, 10 years — at a reasonable rent, and dress the place up for themselves. Such an investment can be amortized over the period of the lease. There are more than a hundred people in the area who are already working on this scheme.

But I think the most important advice is that they should go into restoration because they like the house or building, and because they want to live or work in the area: NOT because they want to make money, which they might do, with luck.

The city has an admirable record, it seems to me, in the steps that have been taken to encourage a revival of Old Montreal. But if this quarter is to become a vital and attractive part of the community it will be largely through the initiative and interest of individuals, and not through government intervention in the form of handouts, or municipal development schemes. That, at least, has been the case in the more successful area restorations around the world.

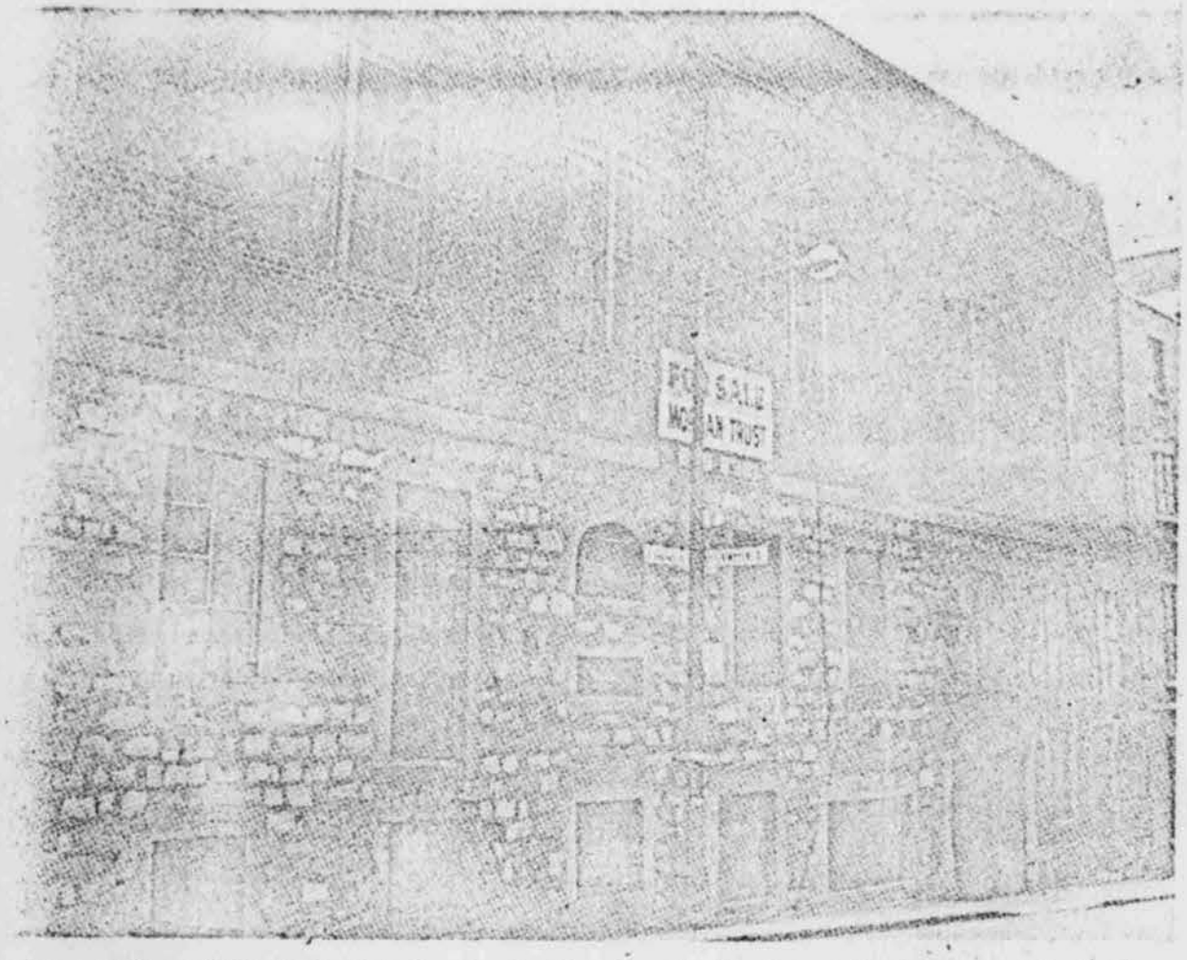
THE MONTREAL STAR, SATURDAY, MAY 31, 1969

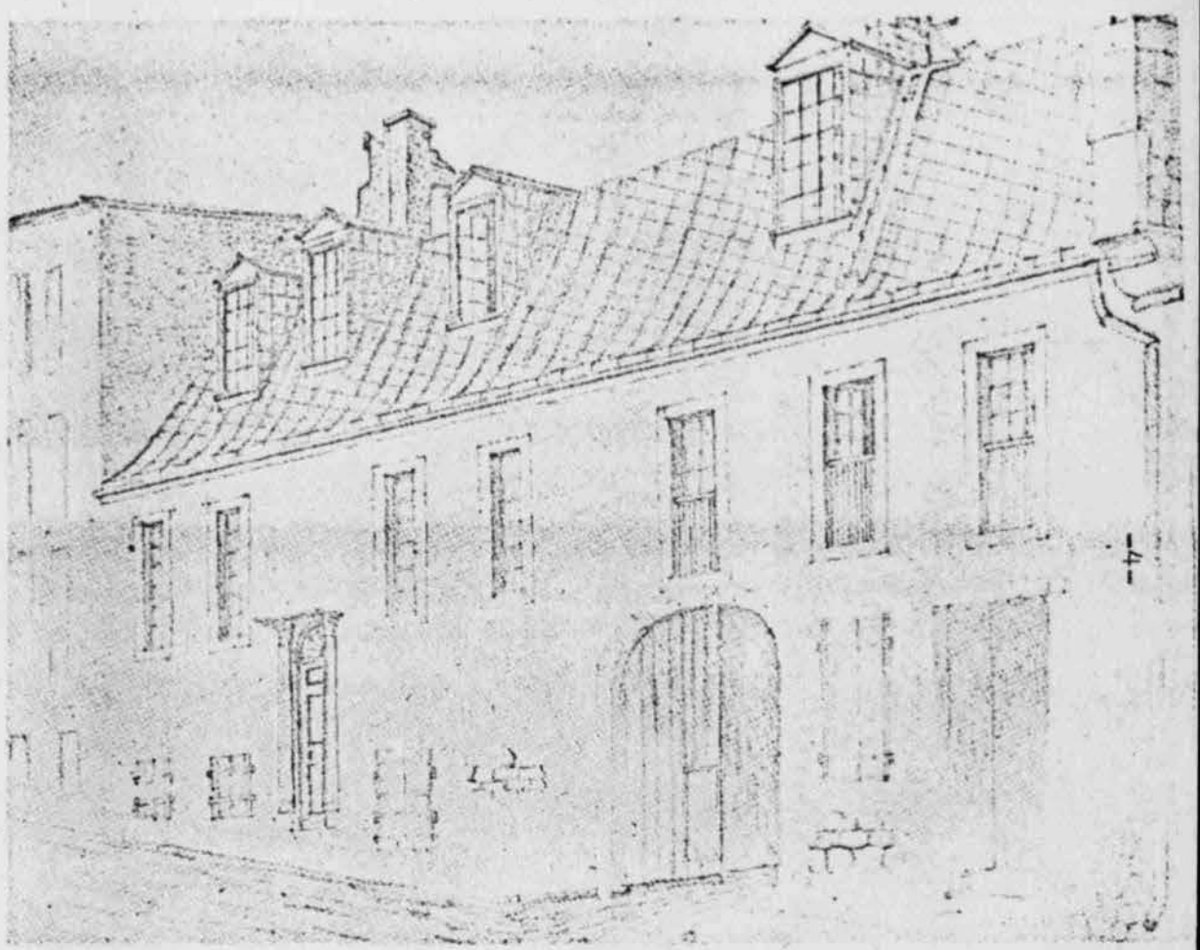


This building on Notre Dame street, just east of City Hall, was the home of the descendants of Hyacinthe de Beaujeu, the Hero of Monongahela, whose troops captured George Washington and sold him back to the British for a handsome fee — an incident that isn't given much space in American history books.

The de Beaujeu house had a sloping roof with chimneys and a high fire-break as shown in this 19th century drawing. The modernizers even removed the little classical porch and plugged up the doorway with glass brick. The present proprietors seem happy, but this is obviously a restoration project for the future.

Old Montreal 'fad' keeps rolling along





The home of Simon McTavish has taken quite a beating since the drawing on the right was made, in the 19th century. An ambitious restorer could remove the brick addition, rebuild the earlier roof and ...ners, put back the front door, and fix up the windows — for starters. There's a courtyard that goes ...h it, although the garden wall has disappeared. Of the interior, there is virtually nothing left; just the basic structure and some interesting vaults in the basement.

The original house was built around 1635 by Janvier Lacroix. McTavish acquired it towards the end of the 18th century and spent a fortune fixing it up for his new French-Canadian wife. McTavish, head of the Northwest Company, partner of La Verendrye and McGill, and Montreal's first millionaire, entertained lavishly in this house. His neighbors, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, used to disapprove of the heavy traffic through this porte-cochere.

Of Many Things . . .

by Edgar Andrew Collard

McTavish House

John Collins today has sketched the old house of Simon McTavish on the east side of St. Jean Baptiste Street, the little street that runs between Notre Dame and St. Paul, a short distance to the east of Place d'Armes.

The old house is not now what once it was. It is today little more than a warehouse. The sloping roof, and the four dormer windows of the top floor of the original structure are gone, replaced by a top floor in brick. But the building is of such rare historical interest that it deserves restoration; for few houses in Montreal have associations with a character so vivid, picturesque or important as Simon McTavish.

Simon McTavish was the richest man in Montreal in his day. A native of Inverness-shire in Scotland, he emigrated to America, where he soon entered the fur trade, establishing his headquarters in Montreal about 1775.

It was a time when competition was fierce. The Hudson's Bay Company held sway over the great northern region, while the traders in Montreal were all doing their best to claim some business as their own, competing not only with the Hudson's Bay Company, but with one another.

In 1779 McTavish led the movement to consolidate the traders in Montreal into a company of their own — a company whose pooled resources might rival that of the Hudson's Bay Company itself. In 1784, after a preliminary association, the North West Company was formed, with McTavish at its head.

Simon McTavish lived well in winter in his house in town — the old house still standing on St. Jean Baptiste Street. It was not only that his position as the head of the North West Company gave him the means of living well on the proceeds of the fur trade; it was also that his disposition favored good living.

He always seemed to have made the most of this world's pleasures. The letters of his bachelor days (and he was a bachelor till 43) abound with references to the joys of dinners and dances and "scandal". He was partial to "good Wine, good Oysters, & pretty Girls," and writes on one occasion that he is "always like a fish out of water when not in Love."

McTavish married in 1793. His bride was Marguerite Chaboillez, whose brother, Charles, later became a partner in the North West Company. The Chaboillez family was noted for the beauty of its women, and Marguerite seems to have been no exception. Simon McTavish and his wife set up their household in this old building on St. Jean Baptiste street, and here, presumably, were born their four children — William, Mary, Ann and Simon, jr.

In those days a house on St. Baptiste Street was wonderfully convenient. The city's northern limit was still the river along Craig Street, crossed by several wooden bridges, leading out to the open country which separated the city from the Mountain.

Simon McTavish could easily walk from his house on St. Baptiste Street to attend the wintertime dinner meetings of the Beaver Club at the Montreal Hotel on Place d'Armes (where the new building of La Banque Canadienne Nationale stands today); and he could easily have been assisted home when the long meetings were over.

Even in summer, the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street must have had its attractions. It was not hemmed in. Across the street were the grounds of the Congregation de Notre Dame, to the north, and those of the Hotel Dieu, to the south.

But, like the other wealthy fur traders in Montreal such as James McGill and Joseph Frobisher, Simon McTavish had two houses: a town house and country house. His country estate lay on the slope of Mount Royal. It would today be marked by Peel Street to the west, and a short distance beyond McTavish Street, to the east.

McTavish was building a mansion — like a French chateau — on his country estate, just below the present line of Pine Avenue. The building was far advanced; the roof was in place and work was about to begin on the interior.

But McTavish, while superintending the construction of this mansion in the country, fell ill. He died on July 6, 1804, at the age of 54. His great country house was never finished. It stood, a massive ruin, known for more than half a century as "McTavish's Haunted House."

In his will McTavish left to his widow his house on St. Jean Baptiste Street, together with an annuity of £1,200—a splendid income for those times. He did not forget the religious communities that had been his neighbors on the other side of St. Jean Baptiste Street. He left a £1,000 to the Congregation de Notre Dame and £1,000 to the sisters of the Hotel Dieu, "being convinced that the said communities are of great public benefit and deserving attention." His country estate was left to his oldest child, William, "and to his heirs male forever," but until William attained his majority, the country estate was to be held in trust for him by the executors.

Of Many Things . . .

by Edgar Andrew Collard

Auction sales

How well Simon McTavish, the rich head of the North West Company, had lived from the proceeds of the fur trade is seen in the advertisement for the auction sale when the contents of his house on St. Jean Baptiste Street — the old house that still stands — were being put up for sale.

This advertisement comes as a reminder that life in Canada in the pioneer days was not all rough and rugged. At the same time that the settlers on the frontier were living a life of desperate hardship, the rich merchants in the cities were living lives of luxury. The fur traders of Montreal were not suffering the disadvantages of colonial life. They could afford the best and they meant to have it, even if they had to send to England for it.

This auction sale of Simon McTavish's effects in 1805 is a catalogue of a very comfortable house indeed. And it ends with a list of his sleighs and carriages. The Phaeton would be a light four-wheeled open carriage; the gig, a light two-wheeled carriage. The carioles were small, low sleighs, carrying one or two passengers besides the driver; they are very swift, light and easy to manoeuvre. The "chair" was probably not a sedan chair but a literal translation of the French word for a carriage — the "chaise."

Here (with the original curiosities of spelling) is the advertisement for the contents of the McTavish town house on St. Jean Baptiste Street:

"BY AUCTION"

"Will be Sold by the Suscriber, on Wednesday next, 29th inst. at 10 o'clock in the forenoon at the house of Mrs. McTavish, going to England, all her most valuable furniture — consisting of

"FEATHER BEDS, mattresses, mahogany bed steads, chests of drawers, desks, a new piano forte, large dining tables, chairs, & c. setts of the most fashionable china, knives and forks in cases, a quantity of silver mugs, spoons, forks, servers, &c. &c. sophas, sconces, looking glasses, carpets, old Madeira, claret, Port, Burgundy, and other wines of the first qualities, in bottles; an elegant new Phaeton, carioles, gig and chair, several covered carioles, an excellent horse for a chair; &c. double and single stoves, with a great number of other articles.

"ALEXANDER HENRY"

Soon after McTavish's death, his widow married again. Her second husband was Lieut.-Colonel William Plenderleath, an officer in the British Army. They went to live in England. Probably none of McTavish's four children ever saw the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street again.

Though the house was built right against the sidewalk, after the fashion of the time, it had a court yard entered by carriage or sleigh through the arched gateway, still to be seen. In this court and garden the children of Simon McTavish must have played.

The ill fortune that had fallen upon Simon McTavish himself, when he died at 54 in the midst of building his house in the country, seemed to pursue his children. They died one after the other, while still in their youth.

In 1824 an advertisement appears for the sale of the McTavish house on St. Jean Baptiste Street. This old advertisement reads:

"SALE OF VALUABLE REAL ESTATE IN THIS CITY"

At Clamp's Coffee House on SATURDAY Evening the 4th December next will be Sold, positively without reserve, THAT dwelling House the residence of the late Simon McTavish, Esq. No. 2, St. Jean Baptiste Street, at present occupied by Mrs. Babuty,—It is pleasantly situated, having in front the Nuns' Garden, and it is built in the English taste, with commodious out Houses, &c. . . .

"HENRY and BETHUNE Auctioneers"

The phrase "built in the English taste" does not mean that it was built by McTavish himself. The house is actually a very old one, going back to the French regime.

It is not easy, in going down St. Jean Baptiste Street today, to picture the altered building as it was in McTavish's day, when it looked out over the Nuns' Garden. But within those old walls, McTavish, as the richest man in the city, lived his luxurious life. For as a visitor to Montreal at that time remarked, in noting the affluence of the fur traders: "People here are fond of good living and take care to want no luxury."

Of Many Things . . .

by Edgar Andrew Collard

Narrow escape

No Montrealer had more adventurous experiences in the Indian country than Alexander Henry, whose name appears as the auctioneer in charge of selling the contents of Simon McTavish's house on St. Jean Baptiste Street in 1805, and who (with his partner) sold the house itself in 1824.

Alexander Henry had adventures enough as a fur trader, but the most hair-raising of them all was at Fort Michilimackinac in 1763. There he had hidden in a garret while the Ojibway Indians searched for him.

"I could scarcely breathe," he would say, in telling his story; "but I thought that the throbbing of my heart occasioned a noise loud enough to betray me. The Indians walked in every direction about the garret, and one of them approached me so closely that at a particular moment, had he put forth his hand, he must have touched me. Still, I remained undiscovered."

Alexander Henry had been a young man of 23 when he went to Fort Michilimackinac as a trader. He did not suspect that the Ojibways, friendly to the British, were about to turn their support to the French. Under the leadership of Pontiac, they had secretly joined a vast conspiracy to drive the British out of the whole area from Lake Superior to the Mississippi.

On June 2, 1763 the Ojibways invited the officers of the garrison to come outside the fort to watch a game called "bag, gat, iway" — a form of lacrosse. Many of the officers, and traders, came out, suspecting nothing, and hoping for a change from the routines of a frontier post.

Alexander Henry did not go to see the match. A canoe was being prepared to take him to Montreal the next day, and he was spending his time in writing letters to his friends. Suddenly, he was startled by an Indian war cry, and "a noise of general confusion."

He hurried to the window. Through the gate of the fort, which had been left wide open, the Indians were streaming in. The people of the fort were being murdered before his eyes. The dead were mangled and scalped. The dying were writhing and shrieking.

Henry just had time enough to hide in a garret. The Ojibways killed everyone in the courtyard, and began to search the houses. He heard them on the stairs. In one corner he saw a heap of birch-bark vessels used in maple-sugar making. He crawled under them.

The Indians broke into the garret. They had tomahawks in their hands, blood was over their bodies. The garret was dark; Henry was dressed in dark clothes; the Indians, in their very excitement were, in a way, careless. "In a word," said Henry, "after taking several turns in the room, during which they told . . . how many they had killed, and how many scalps they had taken, they returned down stairs . . ."

At sunrise they were back again. This time Alexander Henry felt that hiding would be useless. He stood in full view as the Indians came into the garret. One of them, named Wenniway, he recognized. He was more than six feet tall. Charcoal and grease covered his entire body, with only a white spot, about two inches, encircling either eye.

Alexander Henry described what happened next: "This man, walking up to me, seized me, with one hand by the collar of the coat, while, in the other hand he held a large carving-knife, as if to plunge it into my breast; his eyes, meanwhile, were fixed steadfastly on mine.

"At length, after some seconds, of the most anxious suspense, he dropped his arm, saying, 'I won't kill you!' — To this he added, that he had been frequently engaged in wars against the English, and had brought away many scalps; that, on a certain occasion, he had lost a brother, whose name was Musinigon, and that I should be called after him.

"A reprieve, upon any terms, placed me among the living, and gave me the sustaining voice of hope . . ."

It did not prove easy for Winniway to grant the Englishman this sanctuary of brotherhood. They had no sooner come down into the courtyard than another Indian was ready to kill him:

"Wenniway desired the Indian to desist; but the latter pursued me round him, making several strokes at me with his knife, and foaming at the mouth, with rage at the repeated failure of his purpose."

But Alexander Henry's life was saved. After many anxieties and adventures, he reached Fort Niagara, where he was received with kindness by the commander, Sir William Johnson.

Despite his rugged life, Alexander Henry was to be seen walking the streets of Montreal, a vigorous old man, who defied the weight of his years. And old account of him written in 1824, the year of his death, says that "at last he sunk under no specific disease, but from a general decay of nature, in the 85th year of his age."

And the old account adds: "He seemed by nature in every way formed for the arduous duties of the life he had led."

Alexander Henry was in fact almost 85 years of age when he was auctioning Simon McTavish's old house on St. Jean Baptiste Street. This must have been one of the last business transactions of his life. Simon McTavish, though a far younger man, had already been in his tomb for 20 years.

Jim Stewart's Montreal

Historic site becomes car park

A BUILDING more than 150 years old, once the headquarters of the British army in the heart of Old Montreal, has been quietly demolished by its proprietors. Until a few weeks ago it stood on St. Jean Baptiste Street, just south of Notre Dame, as it had since 1818. When I walked by the other day it was gone. In its place was a broad strip of asphalt and a couple of billboards bearing one word — PARKING.

In my innocence, I had thought that buildings of historic interest, though they might be knocked down with abandon in other parts of the city, were adequately protected by law in Old Montreal. I also thought that the addition of new private parking lots was strictly forbidden there.

Theoretically, I was right. There are laws about demolition, construction and land use in Old Montreal. But in practice the laws are being ignored and evaded, and the Jacques Viger Commission, the city-appointed body that is supposed to supervise all development in that valued part of the city, is the first to admit it.

"We need laws with sharper teeth," says Superior Court Judge Kenneth Mackay, a member of the commission. "We can take an offender to municipal court, and if he's convicted he might get a small fine, but that's about all we can do."

Mackay is particularly upset about the St. Jean Baptiste Street demolition, and has written to the commission demanding that all possible procedures be taken against the owner, whom he identifies as Montreal businessman Heinrich Brummer.

Mackay says Brummer and associates own a large piece of the block on Notre Dame street and the eastern side of St. Jean Baptiste, down to and including the Simon McTavish House. McTavish, a Scottish fur trader and bon vivant in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, is often given the title of Montreal's first millionaire.

Brummer apparently has quite attractive plans for a restaurant and gardens on his property, which the Viger Commission approved. But Mackay says the Commission did not approve demolition of the former army headquarters building. It was to have been preserved, while another building of no special value between it and the McTavish House could be demolished.

"But he went ahead and demolished the whole works," says Mackay. "The trouble is, what can we do about it now?"

• • •

Spokesmen at the Viger Commission echo his sentiments.

"We don't have much power," said an information officer. "We try to be in contact with proprietors and get them to conform to the regulations, but we don't always get co-operation. We can go to court but that's a long and complicated procedure, and of course it doesn't bring back the demolished buildings."

The 20-member commission reports to the city's executive committee through the planning department. Its approval, as well as that of the city permits division, must be obtained for all applications for demolition or construction in Old Montreal. The area is also a specially designated historic district, under the city charter, which is a provincial law. The cultural affairs department however, which has much wider powers of preservation and protection, has not given blanket protection to Old Montreal. It has designated certain buildings for preservation, but any building not so designated has no more protection than the present city laws afford.

The city or the province, or both, will have to take much stronger action if Old Montreal is to retain its delightful flavor and its special role as the city's memory. According to the Viger Commission, the situation is getting worse, not better. In the past year, said the spokesman, the commission has become aware of several demolitions that were carried out with no demolition permit of any kind. Before that, as Old Montreal was being transformed into the pleasing, vibrant quarter we now know, there had been more co-operation from pirvate property owners.

"This is very difficult for us," said the spokesman. "We try to reason with proprietors, try to settle things amicably, but there is not much we can do. Maybe what we need is a citizens group to start making some noise about this."

Jim Stewart's Montreal

Hassle goes on over demolition

LAST WEEK I wrote about the unauthorized demolition of the 150-year-old building that was once headquarters for the British army in Old Montreal. That's true enough. I said the land had been converted to a parking lot, which is also true, as anyone who walks down St. Jean Baptiste Street can see.

Then I reported that the owner of the property is Heinrich Brummer and that, I have since learned, is not true. Brummer, a Montreal construction engineer and architect, has informed me that he sold the property in the spring of 1973, and had nothing to do with the demolition of the headquarters building. The purchaser and present owner is Joe's Steak House (Old Montreal) Ltd., which operates a restaurant on Notre Dame Street between St. Jean Baptiste and St. Gabriel.

Lilly Pollack, owner of the company, and widow of the man who started Joe's Steak House on Metcalfe Street, acknowledged to me that her firm had carried out demolition of the headquarters building just before last Christmas for reasons of public safety. She said the building was in a state of near collapse when she acquired it, and that it was being used by transients who often built fires inside to keep warm or to cook food.

The city and the Jacques Viger Commission, which supervises development in Old Montreal, did not issue any demolition permit "but we thought it had to come down because of the fire hazard and the danger," she said. "I feel we have done the right thing in removing a danger to people's lives."

The cultural affairs department, she says, has approved a plaque to be posted at the site, indicating the history of the building that once stood there. The lots have been paved and are in use for parking, though the addition of new private parking lots in Old Montreal is supposed to be severely restricted and in most cases forbidden. Lilly Pollack says she has been asked by the city to put some shrubs around the site.

"I want to make Old Montreal beautiful," she says, "and you will see my new place will be beautiful when it is open." The steak house is proceeding with expansion, having acquired another building fronting on St. Gabriel.

Brummer says he submitted plans to the Viger Commission which would have preserved the headquarters building and the Simon McTavish House, while allowing demolition of a decrepit building between them. His plans included a restaurant, museum, gardens and cinema. He says the Viger Commission and the cultural affairs department approved the plans, but didn't come up with the subsidies he expected. So he sold the property in question, except for the McTavish House, where he says he plans a museum if the government will co-operate in the financing.

The main point of this whole involved story is not really who owns what and who demolished what. The main point is that what happened on St. Jean Baptiste Street is happening elsewhere in Old Montreal, by the Viger Commission's own admission. In one of the most valued parts of the city, laws governing demolition, construction and land use are being ignored and evaded. The penalties for infractions are ludicrously light, and preventive measures ludicrously inadequate. These are matters the city and provinicial governments could easily do something about. They have the authority. It seems they just don't have the will.

Maison Simon McTavish (ancienne)
Act: vacant
427-429, rue St-Jean-Baptiste
vis-à-vis Le Royer

CUM - Planification
Film #138
Automne 1977

Les siècles superposés

LE PATRIMOINE

Alain Duhamel

DEUX cas de mise en valeur des murs anciens de l'arrondissement historique de Montréal soulignent toute la difficulté de réconcilier deux projets dans le même quartier, l'un urbain, l'autre patrimonial.

Le premier a pour objet la viabilisation d'un quartier déserté, le second a pour objet son caractère historique négligé. L'un et l'autre s'inscrivent dans le programme de la Ville de Montréal et du ministère des Affaires culturelles sur la mise en valeur du Vieux-Montréal et du patrimoine montréalais. Selon que les autorités et les entrepreneurs insistent sur l'un ou l'autre projet, les compromis varient avec des résultats inégaux.

En 1981, la Ville de Montréal a accordé aux Restaurants unis d'Amérique une subvention de 15,700$ pour la «restauration et le recyclage» d'un bâtiment situé 411-425, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Il s'agit de la maison Simon McTavish, marchand d'origine écossaise qui fit fortune dans le commerce des fourrures, entre 1775 et 1804. A l'origine, cette maison, croit-on, avait été construite vers 1635 par Janvier Lacroix. On peut encore apercevoir ses murs en pierre et le tracé d'un toit mansard sous un étage à toit plat recouvert de stuc.

«Il eut été souhaitable que sa restauration intégrale soit encore possible de nos jours, mais tel n'est plus le cas depuis que l'intérieur fut complètement dépouillé par d'anciens propriétaires de toutes ses boiseries, manteaux de cheminées, huisseries et plafonds ornementés, et qu'un étage de maçonnerie est venu remplacer les toitures mansardées originelles, rendant ainsi l'entreprise de reconstitution inabordable», dit-on dans un document du Service d'urbanisme. «Le requérant a plutôt pris le seul parti possible, celui d'aménager le bâti existant en exprimant le mieux possible le caractère particulier des maçonneries provenant de la maison McTavish tout en tirant profit de l'espace disponible à l'étage, tel qu'il est déjà transformé.»

Le résultat ne paraît guère heureux. Il laisse l'impression d'une absence totale d'imagination et d'effort dans le but de restituer, ne serait-ce qu'en partie, la volumétrie d'un bâtiment. Avec un tel exemple à l'égard d'un bâtiment dont la signification historique ne faisait aucun doute, quel parti prendra-t-on lorsque viendra le temps de réaliser une insertion pour combler l'énorme vide créé par des démolitions sur le côté est de la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste?

A l'angle des rues Saint-Amable et Saint-Vincent, un autre cas pose le même problème. Il s'agit de l'entrepôt de la Canada Packers érigé sur les murs d'une maison en pierre faisant front sur la rue Saint-Amable. La ville de Montréal se propose de donner son accord à un projet de recyclage en habitation sans même qu'il ne soit tenté de réhabiliter la maison ancienne en son caractère historique, ne serait-ce que pour accentuer le caractère particulier de la rue Saint-Amable. L'histoire de cette maison de pierre n'est pas encore bien connue, mais on sait cependant qu'elle était là en 1847 lorsque Denis-Benjamin Viger en est le propriétaire.

Dans le Vieux-Montréal, les siècles se superposent les uns sur les autres. L'arrondissement est en quelque sorte une ville française, en partie arasée, sur laquelle s'est construite une ville anglaise, au XIXe siècle, au moment où Montréal, ville portuaire, se transformait en capitale des affaires et de la finance. De quartier résidentiel et commercial qu'il était, le Vieux-Montréal devenait un quartier portuaire dans lequel les fonctions d'entreposage des marchandises occupaient tout l'espace disponible, dans et sur les vieux murs.

Les promeneurs peuvent s'imaginer facilement l'évolution du Vieux-Montréal en lisant dans les murs dénudés par les nombreuses démolitions. Un mur pignon en pierre sert de base à un mur de brique construit par-dessus. En front de la rue, on a placardé une nouvelle façade au goût de l'époque.

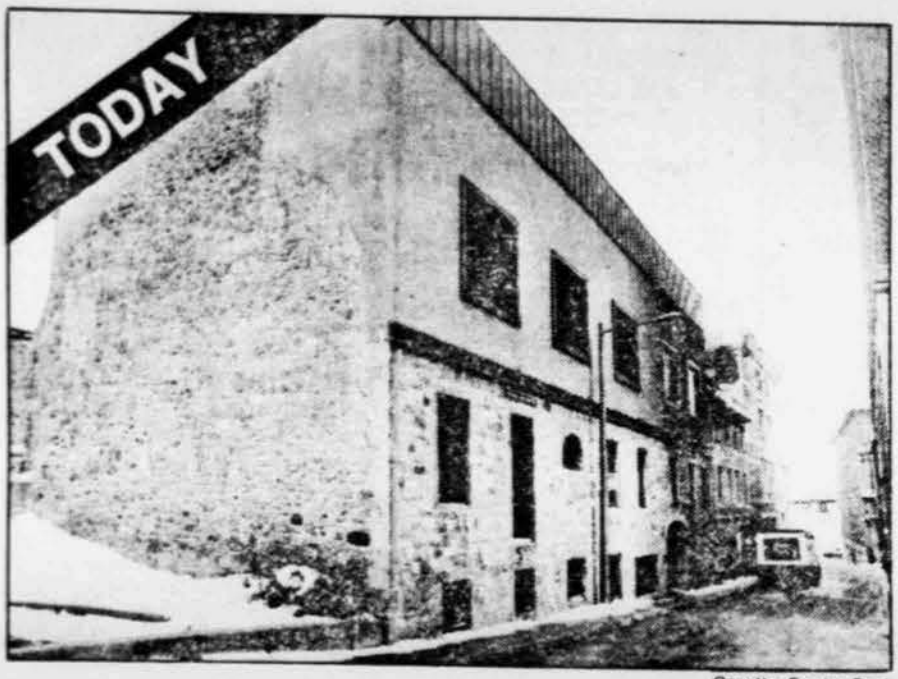
C'est une chose que de recycler un entrepôt construit d'un seul tenant au siècle dernier comme on peut le voir rue Le Royer ou rue Saint-Pierre. C'est une autre affaire que de mettre en valeur un immeuble qui n'est, historiquement, que la somme de plusieurs bâtiments d'âge différent.

Le projet urbain, pour ne pas mettre en péril la rentabilité d'une entreprise, nous conduit à des résultats aussi peu heureux que ceux obtenus à la maison McTavish, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Le projet patrimonial conduit, lui, à la reconstitution du volume de la maison ancienne sur ses murs actuels en faisant disparaître les additions survenues depuis. Ne pourrait-on penser que, par une effort d'imagination, on parviendrait à respecter le caractère historique du quartier, particulièrement important dans ce secteur, et la vie nouvelle à laquelle il aspire, précisément et justement à cause de son histoire?

L'effort d'imagination réclamée ici serait plus facile à faire si le ministère des Affaires culturelles et la ville de Montréal avaient adopté des principes de base dans leurs interventions sur le bâti ancien dont l'une des caractéristiques les plus originales tient dans ses siècles superposés.

La maison McTavish, sur la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

Le Devoir, lundi 14 juin 1982



Gazette, Gordon Beck

Fur trader and nuns were uneasy neighbors

Simon McTavish was already a wealthy man when he built a house on St. Jean-Baptiste St. in Old Montreal. He had made his fortune in the fur trade and grew richer still after becoming a founding partner in the Northwest Company in 1784.

His house, seen above looking south on St. Jean-Baptiste toward the harbor, also dates from the 1780s. Nearby on St. Paul St. was the Northwest Company warehouse.

McTavish's house was described as "pleasantly situated having in front of it the nuns' Garden . . ." The nuns in question were from the Congregation of Notre Dame whose convent was across the street.

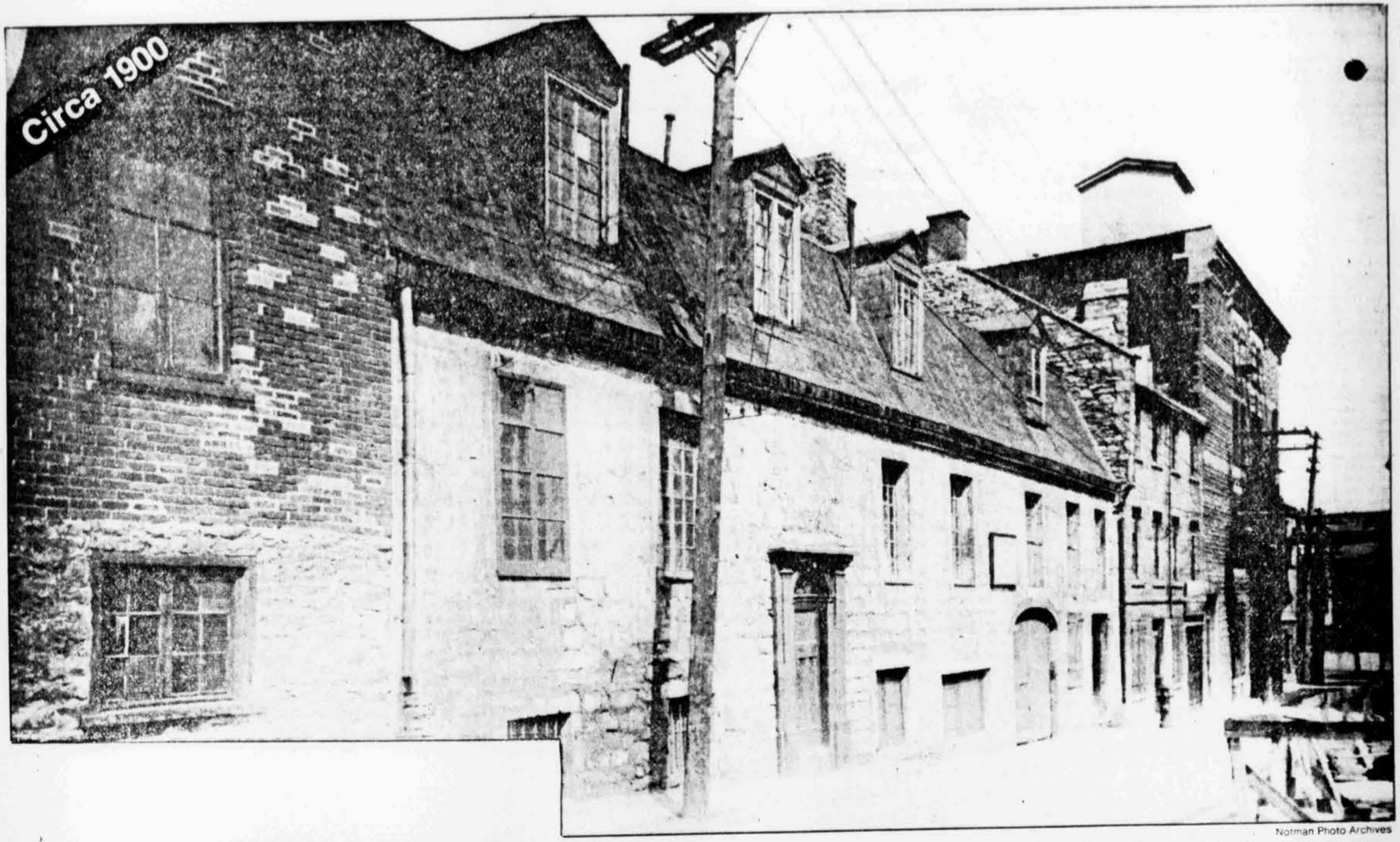
The fur trader and the nuns were not always the best of neighbors. McTavish, a bachelor known for his revels at the time he moved to St. Jean-Baptiste St., was sometimes taken to task by the sisters who complained about the "frivolous traffic" that passed through his door.

Presumably when he married Marie Marguerite Chaboillez in 1793, St. Jean-Baptiste became a quieter street. The house was renovated with a music library and a cellar of imported wines being added.

McTavish began building a larger house in the country near the top of the street that today bear's his name. But he died in 1804 before the house was finished. It fell into ruin without ever being occupied, and was said to be haunted.

Meanwhile, his house in town had been left to his widow. Much altered, it still stands in St. Jean-Baptiste St.

The Gazette, Montreal, Saturday, January 25, 1986



Notman Photo Archives

Looking south on St. Jean-Baptiste St. from near Notre Dame: house belonged to Simon McTavish.

The Gazette, Montreal, Saturday, January 25, 1986

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RENDEZ VOUS 92

MONTRÉAL, SON HISTOIRE ET SON ARCHITECTURE

La maison Simon McTavish

La maison de Simon McTavish, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste, est un éloquent exemple d'une rénovation qui ne rend pas justice aux vieilles pierres de l'édifice.

GUY PINARD

La démolition de bâtiments laisse de profondes cicatrices dans la trame immobilière d'une rue et transforme radicalement son visage.

La rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste en est une bonne illustration. À la fin du XVIII[e] siècle, cette rue bourdonnait d'activités. Sur le versant ouest s'élevait la maison-mère des Soeurs de la Congrégation Notre-Dame. Du côté est se trouvaient divers établissements, dont la magnifique propriété de Simon McTavish, considéré par certains comme l'homme d'affaires le plus important de la seconde moitié du XVIII[e] siècle.

Ouverte en 1684 sous le règne du magistrat Jean-Baptiste Migeon de Bransat, dont elle perpétue la mémoire, cette rue était à l'époque le premier lien entre les rues Notre-Dame et Saint-Paul à l'est de la rue Saint-Joseph (aujourd'hui Saint-Sulpice) puisque la rue de la Côte-Saint-Lambert (aujourd'hui Saint-Laurent) s'arrêtait à la rue Notre-Dame. Il fallut attendre à 1912 avant que le boulevard Saint-Laurent ne soit prolongé jusqu'à la rue des Commissaires (aujourd'hui rue de la Commune), au détriment des installations de la communauté religieuse évidemment.

Au fil des ans, on retrouvait, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste, des établissements et des personnes qui ont laissé leur marque sur l'histoire de Montréal, comme les ateliers d'imprimerie de John Jones, où furent publiés les premiers exemplaires de *La Minerve*, le 9 novembre 1826; James McGill et son fils John (ils habitèrent un temps la maison Simon McTavish); les bureaux de la compagnie d'omnibus « Red Line », qui assurait le service entre Montréal et Québec (le Voyageur du temps quoi!); l'Académie de danse de Mme Hill; une salle de danse; l'apothicaire Romuald Trudeau, seul pharmacien canadien-français du temps, futur président de la Banque Jacques-Cartier (future Banque Provinciale) et de la Société-Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal; de petites entreprises d'ébénisterie et de produits chimiques et pharmaceutiques; des maisons de pension; une société secrète, le Club Saint-Jean-Baptiste, fondée vers 1865 par Ludger Labelle et Médéric Lanctôt, qui aurait elle aussi utilisé la maison McTavish; et bien sûr le commerçant de fourrures Simon McTavish.

Un homme d'affaires habile

Simon McTavish naquit vers 1750 dans le Strath Errick, en Écosse. Issu d'une famille pauvre, il était le fils de John McTavish of Gartbeg, qui était lieutenant dans le 78[e] régiment de Highlanders. En 1763, au moment de la signature du traité de Paris, son père était cantonné à Louisbourg.

Une fois son père démobilisé, Simon McTavish partit pour New York en 1764. C'est là qu'il s'initia à l'art difficile du commerce.

Les premières traces de sa toute première compagnie remontent à 1771, et dès lors, il entreprit d'étendre le territoire de son commerce de pelleteries. On le retrouva donc à Détroit, New York et Albany notamment, puis à Montréal en 1775.

Fondée en 1779, la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest — future grande rivale de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson fondée en 1670 — regroupait, outre McTavish, les frères Benjamin et Joseph Frobisher, James McGill, Isaac Todd et plusieurs autres, propiétaires de huit entreprises au total. William McGillivray, neveu de McTavish, joua également un rôle de premier plan dans le succès de ce consortium.

Pour McTavish, 1787 fut une année charnière. La mort de Benjamin Frobisher lui permit de se hisser à la tête du consortium et de fusionner sa firme et celle des Frobisher pour former la McTavish, Frobisher et Cie. Cette compagnie détenait 7 des 20 actions du consortium.

La présence de deux grandes sociétés comme la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest et la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson engendra de nombreux problèmes, notamment celui des territoires de chasse de plus en plus éloignés à cause du dépeuplement des bêtes à fourrure à proximité. Ainsi, de 1764 à 1786, on avait exporté, du seul port de Québec, pas moins de 10 258 350 peaux, dont 2 556 236 peaux de castor.

Fondation d'une 3[e] compagnie

La situation se compliqua encore à partir de 1798 avec la fondation par John Ogilvie de la Nouvelle Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, surnommée la « XY Company ». Malgré des dépenses de quelque £70 000 pour tenter de supplanter sa rivale quasi homonyme, cette compagnie ne vivota que jusqu'en 1804, alors qu'elle fusionna avec la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest. Cette fusion concrétisée, McTavish contrôlait désormais 75 des 100 actions de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest (laquelle sera à son tour absorbée par la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson en 1821, après la mort de Mctavish).

Outre ses intérêts dans la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, McTavish possédait une terre maraichère de 11 500 acres dont il tirait d'intéressants profits. Il avait également acquis, pour une somme de £25 000, la seigneurie de Terrebonne, où il exploitait un magasin, deux moulins à farine, une boulangerie et une scierie. Et en 1799, il racheta le domaine ancestral des McTavish, à Dunardary, dans l'Argyllshire, en Écosse.

Sur le plan de la vie publique, McTavish joua un rôle effacé. Ses seules implications furent la milice (il avait le grade de lieutenant à son départ en 1794), deux mandats de trois ans comme juge de paix, et une participation à la section montréalaise de la Société d'agriculture.

McTavish épousa, en octobre 1793, Marie-Marguerite Chaboillez, fille âgée de 18 ans du marchand de fourrures Charles-Jean-Baptiste Chaboillez. Le couple eut quatre enfants mais tous moururent avant la vingtaine.

En 1803, McTavish fit mettre en chantier une imposante demeure de quatre paliers, au sommet de la rue qui porte actuellement son nom. Mais miné par le chagrin que lui occasionna le refus de sa femme de rentrer d'Angleterre avec ses enfants, McTavish mourut le 6 juillet 1804, laissant une fortune de plus de £125 000.

La maison resta inachevée. Un dessin de James Duncan tracé en 1830 montre d'ailleurs la maison barricadée. Après

qu'on l'eût crue hantée pendant des années, elle fut finalement démolie en 1867.

La chaine des titres

La maison McTavish ne fut pas la première construite sur le terrain qu'elle occupe aujourd'hui. Les « aveux et dénombrements » témoignent de la présence en 1731 de la maison en bois de Catherine Desermont, et de la maison en pierre de Bertrand Truteau.

Charles Cabazié fut le premier propriétaire du terrain, qu'il céda à Bertrand Truteau en 1713. Truteau et sa succession furent propriétaires jusqu'en 1780, alors que Françoise Truteau, épouse d'Urbain Texier, céda le terrain « avec la mesure d'une maison incendiée » à Charles Dobie, pour « 3 500 anciens chelins ».

Dobie vendit la propriété le 26 février 1795 à Simon McTavish (représenté par Joseph Frobisher lors de la signature du contrat), son locataire depuis près de neuf ans. La signature eut lieu chez le notaire J.G. Beck.

La succession McTavish conserva la maison jusqu'en 1835 alors qu'elle la céda à la (John) McDowell, (James) Holmes and Co., qui la revendit la même année à John Donegani, propriétaire de 1835 à 1858. La chaine des titres contient deux autres propriétaires marquants, soit Étienne Guy, de 1858 à 1880 (sa succession la conserva ensuite jusqu'en 1908); et la National Drug and Chemical Co. of Canada Ltd. (1908 à 1940).

La maison originale

La maison originale fut construite entre le 3 juillet 1780, date à laquelle Dame Truteau vendit « la mesure d'une maison incendiée » au spéculateur immobilier Richard Dobie, et le 27 avril 1786, date à laquelle Dobie loua à Simon McTavish, chez le notaire Edward W. Gray, « une nouvelle maison non encore occupée... avec toutes les dépendances... et commodités ». Il ne fait pas de doute que la maison a été construite entre ces deux dates, mais comme elle n'avait pas été occupée au moment de la signature du bail de location, on peut présumer que la construction était très récente, probablement vers 1785. La découverte du marché de construction aurait permis d'éclaircir ce point et de découvrir le nom de l'architecte.

Conçue dans le style georgien, la maison originale mesurait 80 pieds de façade sur 40 pieds de profondeur. Elle comportait un sous-sol/rez-de-chaussée (à cause de la dénivellation de la rue), un étage principal et des combles sous un toit mansardé à recouvrement métallique, percé de trois cheminées et de quatre lucarnes à l'avant comme à l'arrière. Ses murs furent érigés en pierre de taille rustique liée par un mortier abondant.

La maison comprenait deux parties jouxtées mais différentes du point de vue structurel. La résidence (partie de gauche) présentait cinq travées verticales, une pour la porte principale, et quatre délimitées par des fenêtres symétriques. Les trois lucarnes étaient disposées symétriquement entre les fenêtres. Une cheminée marquait la limite de la « résidence » au centre.

La partie « dépendances » (à droite) comportait la porte cochère voûtée à arc surbaissé, et deux travées délimitées par les fenêtres symétriques (seule la lucarne du toit étant asymétrique). Cette partie abritait une remise, les logements des domestiques et les écuries du côté de la cour intérieure, au fond de laquelle se trouvaient la glacière et les latrines.

De style georgien

Typiquement georgienne, la porte d'entrée principale à carreaux rectangulaires surmontée d'une imposte semi-circulaire segmentée, était encadrée d'un architrave et de deux pilastres striés de style dorique qui supportaient l'architrave. Seul manquait le fronton triangulaire habituel.

Notons que le style georgien proposait des proportions massives, des murs lisses et la sobriété dans les détails. Il a été popularisé par l'architecte Robert Adam avant d'être exporté en Amérique, où il était souvent associé à la bourgeoisie.

On aura remarque que le mur nord, construit en moellons après la démolition du bâtiment adjacent, ne comporte aucune fenêtre puisqu'il s'agissait d'un mur mitoyen. Ce mur est délimité par une chaine d'angle harpée en pierre de taille.

L'observateur notera que le bâtiment a évidemment subi d'importantes transformations au fil des ans. La porte principale a été murée (on peut reconnaitre son alignement grâce à une fenêtre cintrée) en 1931, la fenestration a été grandement modifiée au point de vue dimensions, et le toit mansardé a été remplacé, vraisemblablement entre 1915 et 1920, alors que la National Drug occupait l'édifice, par un étage en brique surmonté d'un toit plat. Le mur de brique a été recouvert d'un parement moderne.

L'intérieur est évidemment méconnaissable. Le couloir venant de la porte principale donnait sur des pièces séparées par des arches elliptiques, autre marque distinctive du style georgien. Sont disparues les arches elliptiques des pièces et du corridor de l'entrée, les moulures des plafonds, les plinthes et les lambris des salles, les rampes d'escalier, les portes à panneaux, les manteaux de cheminée de style « Adam américanisé » et combien d'autres choses encore. En fait, les planchers et toutes les structures intérieures d'antan ont disparu.

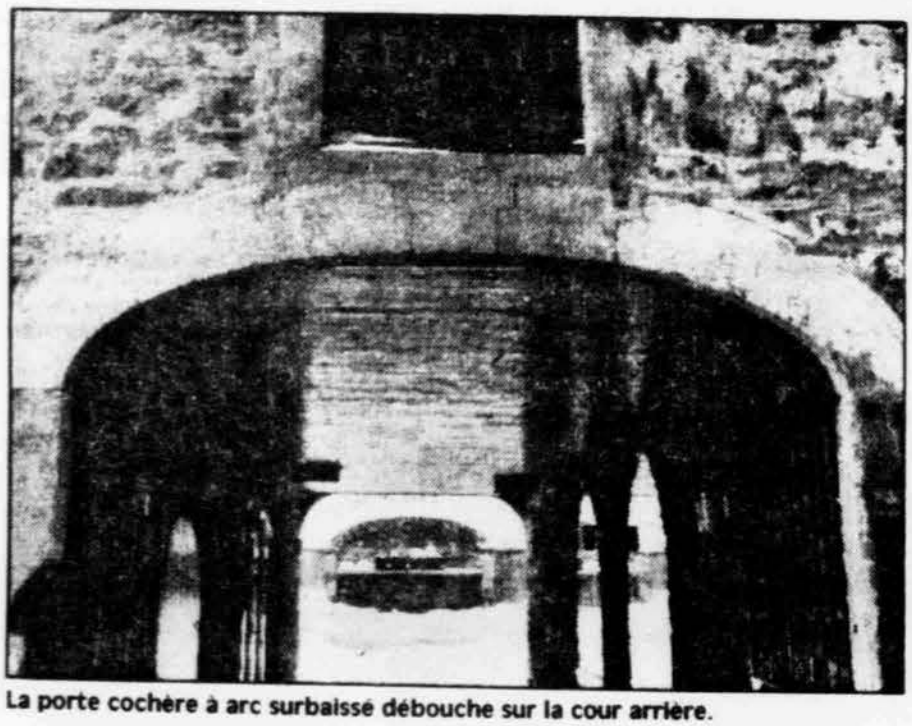
Un exemple à ne pas suivre

N'était-ce du caractère historique de cet édifice, ce dernier serait presque sans intérêt, étant donné les transformations radicales qu'on lui a fait subir au fil des ans et qui ont complètement modifié son apparence, tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur.

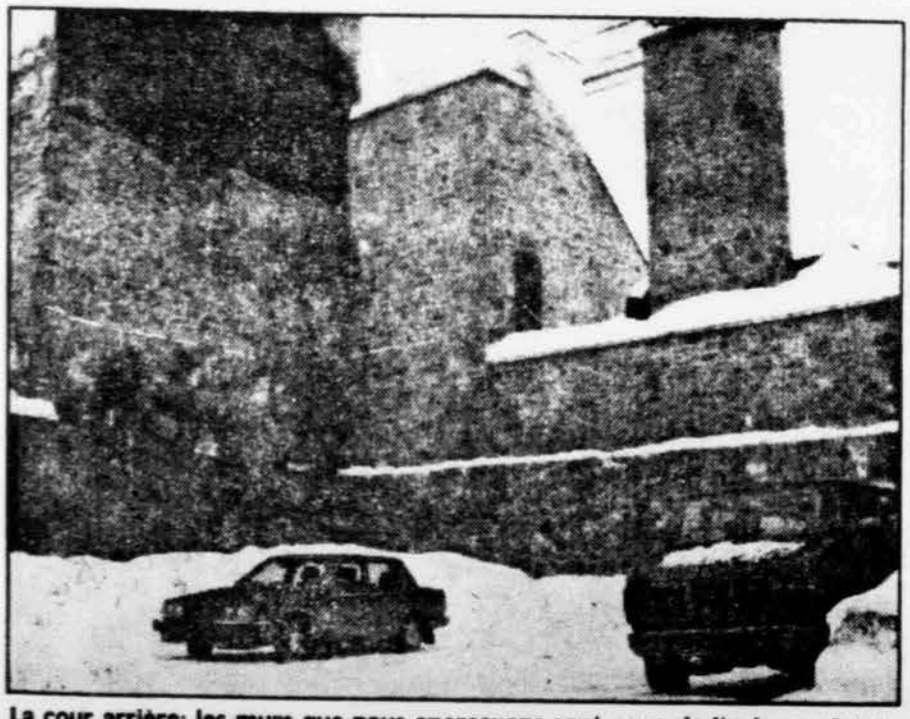
La rénovation récente n'a rien fait pour améliorer la situation. En consacrant les transformations subies au cours du XX[e] siècle, les responsables de cette rénovation ont raté une belle occasion de redonner au bâtiment, au moins à l'extérieur, son apparence d'antan !

Sources : Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec, Direction générale du patrimoine, Service de l'inventaire des biens culturels : *Maison McTavish*, par Diane Lapierre — McGill University Publications : *The House of Simon McTavish*, par Ramsay Traquair et G.A. Neilson — *Les cahiers des dix* — Université Laval : *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada* — Association canadienne des automobilistes : *Héritage du Canada* — Centre d'études en enseignement du Canada inc. : *Horizon Canada*

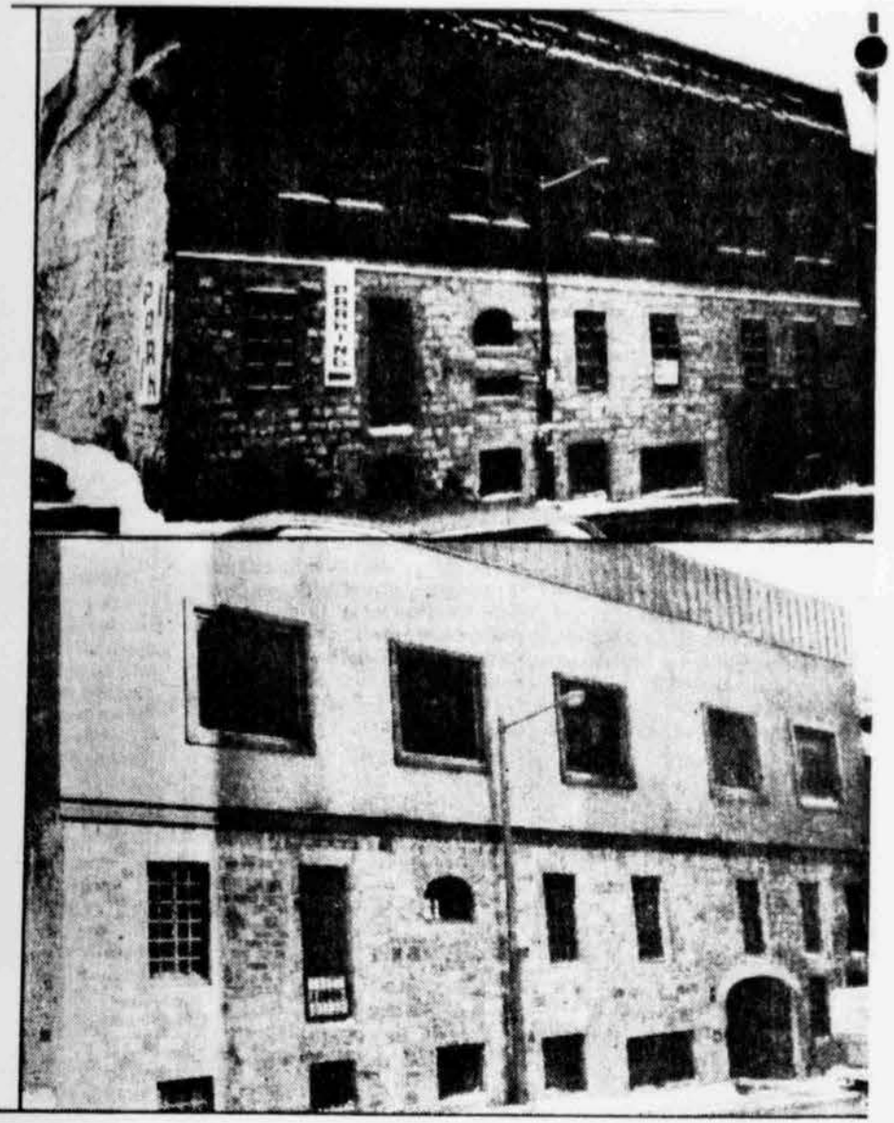
Nom : maison Simon McTavish.
Adresse : 411, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste.
Métro : station Place-d'Armes, direction rue Notre-Dame, puis vers l'est jusqu'à la rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste.



La porte cochère à arc surbaissé débouche sur la cour arrière.



La cour arrière; les murs que nous apercevons sont ceux de l'auberge Saint-Gabriel, sur la rue du même nom.



Ces photos montrent le même bâtiment à quatre époques du même bâtiment : 1885, d'après une peinture de H. Bunnett; 1910, en regardant vers la rue Notre-Dame (au fond); 1979, avant la rénovation (à remarquer, la partie supérieure en brique); et aujourd'hui, après la rénovation.

PHOTOS MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES CULTURELLES et LUC PERRAULT, LA PRESSE