

ALL ABORAD! CONSERVATION AND RE-DEVELOPMENT IN MONTREAL: CONFLICTING PATTERNS

This paper will present the conservation efforts as well as the constraints facing Parks Canada, - the Canadian Government Agency dealing with built heritage -, in the conservation of an industrial landscape in transformation. The Lachine canal is a national historic site situated in the booming urban context of Montréal (*fig. 1*). The success enjoyed by the re-development of the canal's industrial corridor and the closing of a number of industrial complexes gives an opportunity to promoters to invest heavily and develop this urban sector, sometimes at the expense of its heritage. A good example of what is at stake is the fate that awaits the railway and energy infrastructures along the Lachine canal. In short, this presentation will focus on issues dealing with the will to conserve the industrial heritage of an urban area and the challenges presented by the re-development of the surrounding urban area in a booming real-estate context. The paper is divided in two major parts, first, I will talk about the role played by energy and transportation in the canal's history and after that, I will address the dynamics of preserving industrial, railway and energy heritage resources within the corridor.

The major role played by energy and transportation in the canal's history

The Lachine canal, 14 kilometres long, cuts through the southwestern portion of the island of Montréal. It is an artificial waterway built initially to bypass the Lachine rapids on the St. Lawrence River. But once the canal was built between 1821 and 1824, and inaugurated in 1825, products of every kind could be shipped to the large interior markets of Canada and the United States as well as to the rest of the world. The first in a series of upstream canals, the canal represents one of the milestones in the history of transportation in Canada.

With the creation of hydraulic sites, major manufacturers chose to establish their plants near the water lots in order to profit from the availability of cheap power. Because of its sizeable energy output, the canal came to be known as "Little Lowell", as the corridor favourably compared to this well-known American industrial site in Massachusetts. To the canal's hydraulic complex were added, in the 1850's, steam-powered manufacturing plants which at first were very limited, but which, within 30 years, became the dominant features of the industrial landscape of the corridor. So much so, that the canal became known as "Smoky Valley". By the turn of the 20th century, thermoelectricity gained in popularity within the industries of the corridor, in part due to the presence of various manufacturers of electrical appliances along the canal. Between the two world wars, the canal's manufacturing plants resorted more and more to hydroelectricity. All told, more than 600, and possibly up to 1,000 companies, came into existence along the Lachine Canal between 1840 and 1940, making a wide range of products¹.

Amongst the various economical advantages of the canal were the transportation infrastructures available: in addition to a maritime terminal, the canal was also the hub of

¹ Yvon Desloges et Alain Gelly, *The Lachine Canal. Riding the Waves of Industrial and Urban Development 1860-1950*, Québec, Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2002, 215 p.

train transportation within the country. Thus the establishment of the Grand Trunk Railway shops in Point St. Charles, the country's first major railroad company, had considerable consequences on the canal's industrial profile: it motivated the establishment of railcar and spike manufacturers amongst others. Locomotives and trains built of iron and steel had to resist the rigours of the North American climate and had to be painted, thus initiating the establishment of various paint companies. Examples such as these could be multiplied but suffice it to say that rolling stock was one of the three major areas of production within this industrial corridor, which is unique in Canada, as much for its diversity as for its size. These examples, also demonstrate the importance of energy and transportation in the canal's history.

I will now address

Parks Canada's efforts at conserving a National historic site within a multi-owner context

Recognized for its heritage value in Canada and throughout North America, the Lachine canal is embedded within the limits of one of the country's major cities, Montréal. It was declared a national historic site in 1929 (*fig. 2*). Commercial navigation ceased with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. The site has been managed by Parks Canada since 1978, which includes among its objectives to protect the canal's maritime, energy, railway and industrial heritage. In order to do so, Parks Canada has had to deal with the complexity of its own commemoration program, the exorbitant costs of conservation and restoration projects, the number of jurisdictions involved and the popularity of the site – over 700 000 visitors yearly. Parks Canada recently undertook a vast stabilization and valorization program which enabled it to safeguard some of the tangible features of the corridor's history, including the hydraulic infrastructures and part of Montréal's first hydroelectric distribution line.

But as Parks Canada does not own the entire corridor, but rather a very thin margin on both sides of the canal, it is not the only actor involved in the south-western district of Montréal Island. While Parks Canada's mission is to preserve the commemorative integrity of the site and to promote its values, not everyone shares this focus.

In order to help you understand, I would like to present very briefly Parks Canada's mandate, the legal obligations pertaining to the management of a national historic site and a brief definition of commemorative integrity. Unchanged for three-quarters of a century, the responsibility of Parks Canada is to protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and to foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations. For a number of years now, Parks Canada has been offering a memorable experience to visitors in its natural parks and historic sites network, including the 40 sites associated with industrial heritage. However, a very important fact to underline is that a designation as a Canadian national historic site does not impose any legal obligation onto the owner or owners of the site. Finally, commemorative integrity is defined as the health and wholeness of a national historic site. It is achieved when the resources that symbolize or represent the site's

importance are not impaired or under threat, the reasons for the site's national significance are effectively communicated to the public and the site's heritage values are respected in all decisions and actions affecting the site

While Parks Canada manages the Lachine canal and provides interpretation services, it does not own all of the cultural resources associated with the site. For example, Parks Canada owns the waterway and reserve lands alongside the canal but shares with other governmental departments the management of cultural resources associated with the waterway and hydraulic energy. In the case of the industrial complexes built between 1846 and 1946, Parks Canada does not own any except for a coal crane and a few industrial and maritime artefacts. As for the industrial complexes themselves, their management rests with either the companies operating the plants or the owners of the newly converted residential complexes (*fig. 3*). In the case of resources associated with power generation and distribution, most of the hydraulic facilities are managed by Parks Canada whereas the electricity lines are generally owned by the province of Quebec. The railway infrastructures are owned by private sector companies.

The protection and conservation of these industrial cultural resources - built, archaeological and landscape heritage - necessitate a coordination of various players and their specific interests. Moreover, sensitizing the various managements to the importance of safeguarding significant resources and taking them into consideration when urban plans are developed require extensive lobbying.

Economic interests versus heritage conservation

Since it started its revitalization project in 1997, an investment of over 40 million dollars, Parks Canada has reopened the canal to small craft navigation and recreational boating. Even though this project was limited to the waterway and its immediate surroundings, it gave the impetus to the redevelopment of the south-western portion of the island of Montréal. The industrial wasteland suddenly became attractive to various promoters, a cause of some concern for the commemorative future of the heritage site. The same year, the city of Montréal presented its strategic orientations for the development of the canal; which could best be summed up thus: "to develop the site's touristic potential, to safeguard its heritage and to realize urban projects which would enhance private development".² This vision met with some resistance from social pressure groups in south-west Montréal who pleaded for the safeguarding of existing manufacturing plants (*fig. 4*) in order to maintain jobs and communities in a milieu already hard-hit by deindustrialization. As for the restart of manufacturing production within abandoned plants (*fig. 5*), this was not a viable option, since earlier tries had proved unsuccessful.

As soon as the revitalization project started, promoters started recycling abandoned industrial plants into residential units (*fig. 6*) and even pressured some plants to close their operations. Up until now more than a 1000 apartments have popped up along the

² Gilles Sénécal et Gildas Michel, Le réaménagement de la zone du canal de Lachine à Montréal. Un grand projet sous tension» dans Gilles Sénécal et al., *Grands projets urbains et requalification*, Presses de l'Université du Québec et Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002, p. 164. (Coll. Géographie 22)

canal. Most of these are situated in the eastern part of the canal with a few appearing in the westerly end at Lachine. From a landscape conservation point of view, the linear characteristic of the industrial corridor has not been greatly altered. However, according to two sociologists, when industrial plants are converted into luxury apartments, promoters introduce a gentrification process into what were, until now, popular wards, thus irreparably changing the corridor's original character.

On the one hand, the structural shell of the plants is maintained and the usable buildings are given a facelift, many of which have been abandoned for a number of years. On the other, the character of the place is lost with the emergence of a condominium lifestyle, and so is the memory of the workers and their hard-fought battles to gain better wages and working conditions.

I will now talk about how to

Reconcile private and public interests: the case of the railways and energy infrastructures

“All these apartment conversion efforts must necessarily lead to a reflection upon the viability of ancient industrial plants established near the urban core”, wrote sociologists Gilles Sénécal and Gildas Michel.³ This viability is less than certain, as since 1995, at least 15 industrial complexes of the forty in operation along the Lachine canal, some as old as 100 years, have shut down their operations. Amongst these are the Grand Trunk Railway shops, one of the kingpins of the whole industrial corridor. Built in 1854, this huge industrial complex (*fig. 7*), or rather this industrial city, played a major role in the expansion of the industrial corridor, manufacturing rolling stock for the whole country and attracting satellite companies and suppliers. Since the plant's closure in 2002, the complex is waiting for a new life. But even though this plant is located within the designated boundaries of the national historic site, its owners, the Alstom group, are not bound to safeguard the oldest existing plant alongside the canal. This is a major issue and Parks Canada takes every opportunity to communicate to the various promoters and the different levels of government the importance of safeguarding and promoting the commemorative integrity of this major cultural resource.

In this case, the railway installations are closely intertwined with the canal's infrastructure and with the urban texture of the city. For this reason, Parks Canada had the only railway bridge in its possession, a double arm swing bridge built in 1912, pivoted on its embankment, thus preserving it while allowing navigation. In order to maintain the commemorative integrity of the bridges and railways, Parks Canada carries on its efforts to sensitize owners of private railway companies. Very recently, one of these companies had advised Parks Canada of its intention to demolish a tracking tower through which was directed all the incoming railway traffic into the centre of Montreal (*fig. 8*). The tower, still in its original form and shape, had kept all of its equipment until recently when it was transferred to a railway museum. Parks Canada has engaged in extensive lobbying in order to keep the tower standing and to avoid a repetition of a

³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

1990's situation whereby a railway bridge over the canal had been demolished. For the time being no definitive option regarding the tower has been chosen.

As for the energy infrastructures, Parks Canada has gone a long way to promote and present the hydraulic system of locks and intakes. In order to conserve a distinguishing element of the Belt Line, a electrical line, Parks Canada had one of the pylons dismantled, as it was under threat of destruction. Moreover, through its efforts several pylons have been kept standing while negotiations for their stewardship are ongoing.

As a conclusion, one might say that the revitalization of the Lachine canal has entailed a huge urban renewal of industrial wasteland in which the objectives of the various stakeholders are not always on the same wavelength. Heritage protection inevitably has to compete with economic profit in an urban environment (*fig. 9*). The positive results that we see today, though the work is far from over, convince us that we must continue to strive for the conservation of the resources that make up the tangible memory of the Lachine canal corridor - the crucible of the industrialization of Canada.

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Workshop 16. Energy supply lines, communication networks and industrial infrastructures.