

Anglo Activists:

English speakers and Quebec Social Movements since Confederation

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Introduction: plan

- Definitions
- Focus on working class activism :
 - Joe Beef
 - Lea Roback
 - Black Rock Group
- For each:
 - “In their own words” slides in orange
 - My reflections on language and activism
- Conclusions

Introduction: research questions

1. What was the nature of their activism?
2. Did language affect their activism? How?
3. What can historians and social actors learn from this?

Definitions

Anglophone

- Mother tongue or language of use/work

Activist

- “A doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.”
(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

JOE BEEF:
WORKINGMAN'S INNKEEPER

JOE BEEF
1835-1899

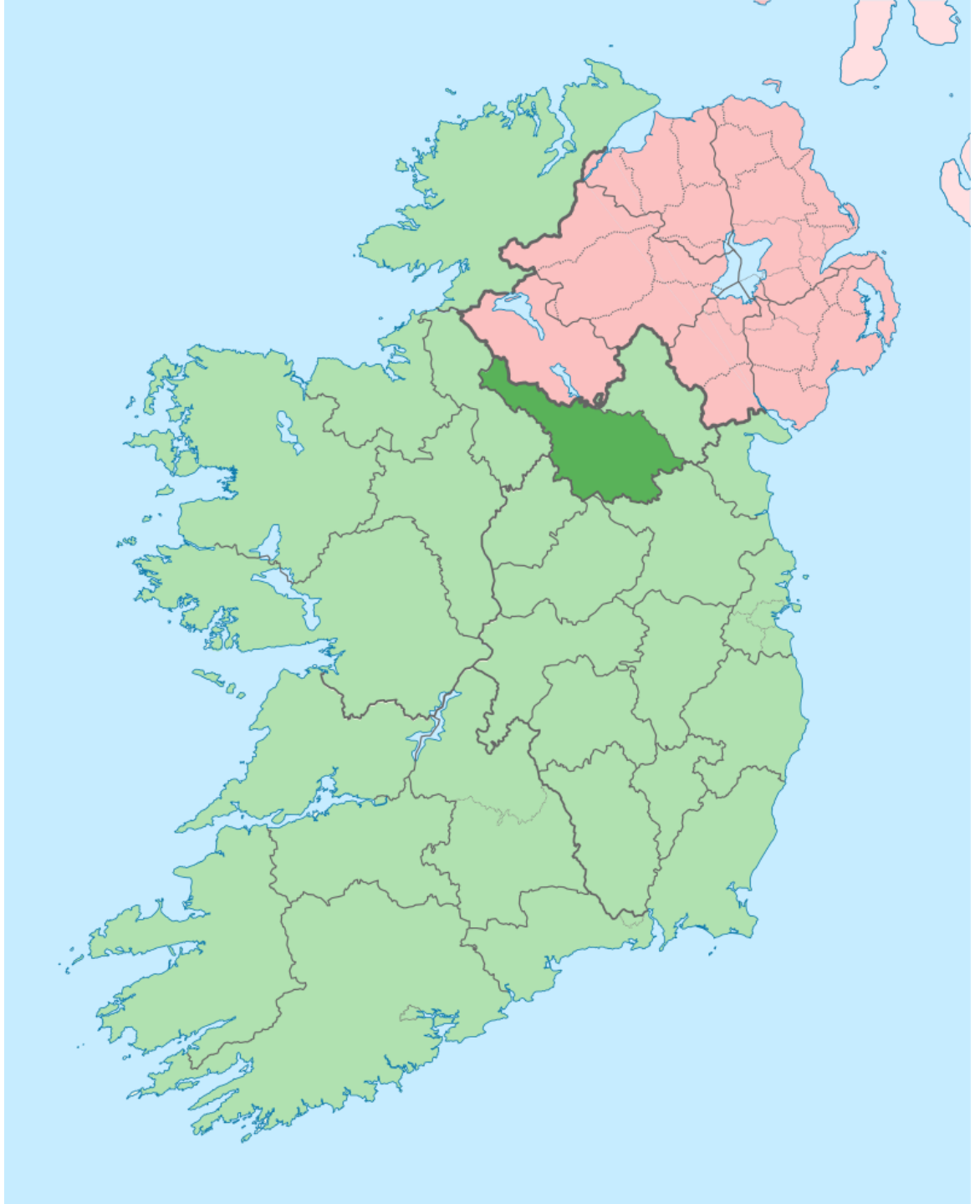


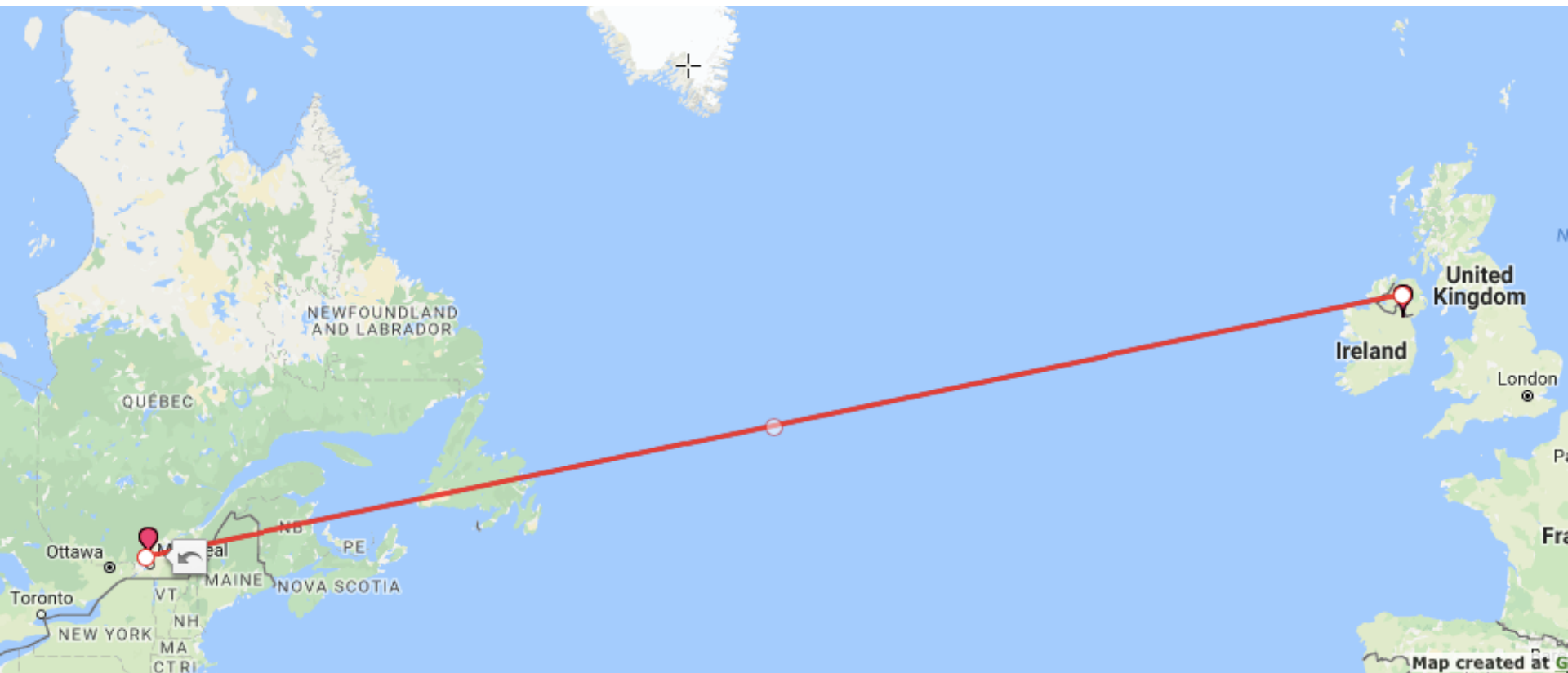
EARLY LIFE

Origins

- Born Charles McKiernan, 1835
- Catholic family
- From County Cavan, Ireland

County Cavan, Ireland





Cavan to Montreal: 4677 km

Career

- Artillery school at Woolwich (now in London)
- 10th Brigade of the Royal Artillery
- Quartermaster during the Crimean War (1853-1856)
 - Russia lost to an alliance of France, Britain, the Ottoman Turkish + Sardinia



Co. Cavan → London → Sevastopol

About his name

“Whenever his regiment was short of food, he had an unrivalled knack of somehow finding meat and provisions, hence his nickname Joe Beef”

Dictionary of Canadian Biography

Move to Quebec

- 1864:
 - His Brigade sent to Quebec City
 - In charge of military canteen there + later at Île Sainte-Hélène
- 1867: **Confederation**

Early life

- Some observations
 - International background can be seen as having set the stage: gave him **knowledge of varied economic and social conditions and cultural realities**

THE CANTEEN

Joe Beef's Canteen

- 1868:
 - Discharged from military
 - **Opened Joe Beef's Canteen**, Rue Saint-Claude
- 1875: moved canteen to Rue de la Commune
- The canteen was a bar + an inn



Joe Beef's Canteen:

- Rue Saint-Claude (1868)
- Rue de la Commune (1875)

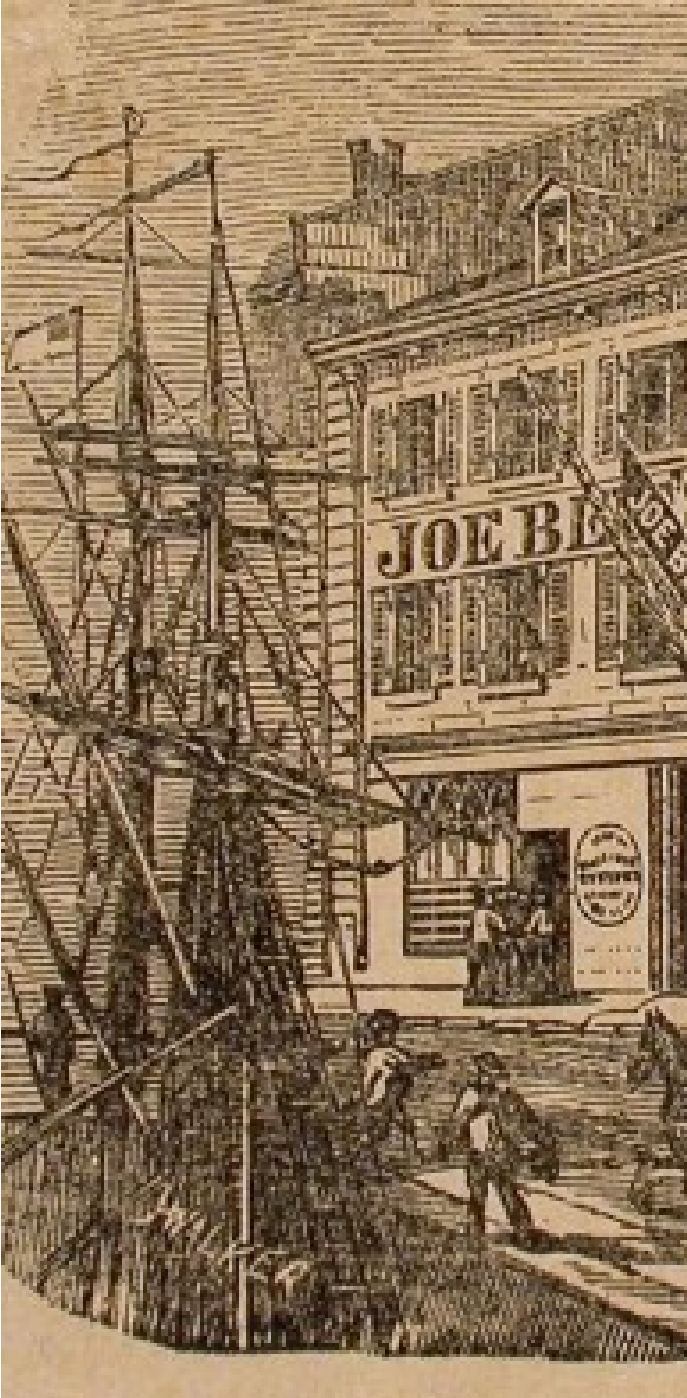


Nos. 4, 5, & 6, Common Street, Montreal

Joe Beef's Canteen, Rue de la Commune

At the port, “where ‘carters of cord wood,’ bricks, and hay jostled with longshoremen and sailors. There were also factories nearby which employed a large number of workers.”

*Dictionary of Canadian
Biography*



The canteen

- Some observations
 - Canteen location ensured him **knowledge of and access to workers living in difficult and precarious conditions**

CANTEEN CULTURE + POLITICS

“Rough” working-class culture

- Heavy drinking
- Menagerie of animals
- Music and rhyming talks



Joe Beef's Canteen, Montreal.

Take away the Beef and Beer from the British Army, and England is no more !

JOE BEEF'S ORIGINAL GENIOUSES

Citizens, we eat and drink in moderation ;
Our head, our toes, and our noses are our own,
And all we want is to be left alone !
We eat and drink what we like,
And let alone what we dislike !

In his own words: working class solidarity

“I never refuse a meal to a poor man. No matter who he is, whether English, French, Irish, Negro, Indian, or what religion he belongs to, he’s sure to get a free meal at my place if he can’t afford to pay for it.”

La Patrie March 24, 1882

Working class rights

“Inside the Canteen, the rights of the common man always triumphed.”

Peter DeLottinville, “Joe Beef of Montreal” p. 16.

Covered in the French language press



Ce que vous voyez est la fameuse Ourse Noire "JENNY DOUGALL," sans queue, seule capture des guerriers de la Rivière Rouge.

JOE BEEF.

23 Avril.—189

Le Canard, 25
April 1873

In his own words: language and class

*I must tell you that Kingston is dead, Quebec is
Dying and out of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto
hundreds are flying*

*In the country parts unless you can Parlez-vous, There
is nothing for you to do*

[...] So in the fall God help the Poor of Montreal.

“Joe Beef's Advice to Biddy, the Washerwoman”

La Minerve, 7 November 1873

Canteen culture + politics

- Some observations
 - Beef believed:
 - workers shared a culture and rights
 - language barriers = added challenge for English - speaking workers

ACTIVISM

Activism

Charity

- Collected money for Hôpital Notre-Dame + Montreal General Hospital
- Supported the Salvation Army

Activism

Social services

- Feeding and lodging the destitute
 - 300 clients a day for meals; 100+ beds upstairs
 - An employee searched streets the needy

Activism

Labour organizing

- The inn = informal centre for job seekers
- Support for 1877 Lachine Canal strikers
 - Irish and French workers demand better working conditions
 - Joe Beef provided free food, leadership, moral support

In his own words: Canal Strikers

Joe Beef speaking to 2,000 people assembled during the strike:

“No one can blame you for demanding the "Almighty Dollar" a day. The man who promises 90 cents a day and pays only 80 cents is no man at all. The labourer has his rights.”

Montreal Witness, 21 December 1877

Activism

- Some observations
 - Going beyond charity to recognizing and addressing structural causes and solutions to inequality:
 - **power disparities**
 - **workers' rights**
 - **organizing + acting for positive change**

THE HERITAGE OF JOE BEEF



Joe Beef
Restaurant,
Wellington Street,
Montreal

Entrées Croxetti, ragù d'agneau & menthe 14\$

Salade Joe Beef d'Aout 13\$

Saucisse de salami, mozzarella garnie 14\$

Croquetas di smoked meat (2C) 12\$

Terrine de volaille, foie gras & remoulade 14\$

Foie Gras Double Down 29\$ / 1/2 17\$

Soupe de maïs "au four" 13¢

Soupe de maïs au four 15¢
Jambon de Petite Bourgogne, truffe d'été 15¢

Cheval cru, artichauts, pecorino 16 \$

Fioli, radis, carottes, p.d.t., oeuf, tomate, fleur, palourde.

Lapin en escabeche, cidre-cerfeuil 15\$

Plats

Steak Joe Beef Monsieur 49\$

1/2 lapin farci comme en Ligurie 31\$

paghetti Homard-Lobster 1.516 49\$

Fétan de Gaspésie à la waterzooi 37\$

\$ Bar à Coquillages

Huîtres: Shippagan, NB } 50
Chatham, NB } 3 chg

Chasson, NB

South Lake, 1

Sawmill bay, CB 450

Oursin, QC 350¢
Chq

À côtes

frites, 8\$

légumes, belges 9\$

Tomates 'Steakhouse' 1'

gratin de ratatouille 10

pain,
beurre,
Moishe's
pickle
2.50

Desserts

Sundae Vacherin frambois

The menu at Joe Beef Restaurant

JOE BEEF

A COOKBOOK OF SORTS

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About the cookbook

“The form of living described within would be much more recognizable to the educated leisure class that makes up today’s ‘foodie’ universe than the original Joe Beef or his clientele...”

Ian Mosby

Heritage

Joe Beef Market

- Organizer: Point St. Charles Community Theatre = group in an old working class district of Montreal
- Features theatre, art, community groups; promotes social expression + exchange

Joe Beef Market 2013



Heritage of Joe Beef

- Some observations
 - The **Joe Beef Market seems to correspond** to the elements of Joe Beef and his activism that I'm presenting

Joe Beef Market 2013: QAHN was there!



LEA ROBACK:
INTERNATIONAL ACTIVIST

LEA ROBACK
1903-2000



JEWISH IN BEAUPORT

Jewish in Beauport, 1903-1019

- Born 1903 in Montreal
- Parents = Polish Jewish immigrants
- To Beauport age 6 months
 - =French speaking community near Quebec City
- Life at home:
 - Yiddish, English, French
 - Very open culture of reading, learning, communicating

In her own words: family culture

- “À ses neuf enfants, ma mère disait : ‘Ça c’est injuste, il faut faire quelque chose.’”

In her own words: family culture

- “J’ai appris, toute jeune, qu’il ne doit pas y avoir de barrières ethniques ou religieuses entre les travailleurs.”

Roback family in Beauport



Jewish in Beauport

- Some observations
 - Family: importance of **language**, culture, rights, action to help others, links to others as workers
 - These elements helped her **social integration** with neighbours and at school

YOUNG WORKING WOMAN

Young working woman, 1919-1922

- 1919: back to Montreal
- 1919: British American Dyeworks, Verdun
 - Working week: 54 hours/6 days

“This first experience of a working-class job had a profound effect on her.”

Louis Fournier, historian

Young working woman, 1919-1922

- 1922: His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal
 - French theatre repertoire

“Nous trois:” Lea + fellow workers, Montreal, 1923



In her own words: the French connection

“Au théâtre [His Majesty’s, Montreal], une madame Dax, qui faisait partie d’une troupe française, de Paris [...] me dit: ‘Dites donc, vous, pourquoi vous n’allez pas étudier en France, ça coûte moins cher qu’ici.’”

Young working woman

- Some observations
 - Knowledge of English and French allowed **economic opportunities and knowledge of varied economic conditions and cultural realities**

ADVENTURES ABROAD

Adventures abroad

- 1925 in Grenoble
 - Student in French + English tutor
- To 1929: sales clerk, New York City
 - In English, probably also Yiddish
- 1929: to Berlin
 - Learned German
 - University
 - Communist Party

été 1926 par théâtre
Edmond
G. Paris



Lea in
Paris, 1926

In her own words: English imperialism (c. 1925)

- “À Nice, deux Anglaises de classe moyenne arrivent et essaient tant bien que mal de baragouiner le français. Je les mets à l’aise en leur parlant anglais; elles me demandent d’où je viens.
- --Canada
- --Oh, she belongs to us!
- J’ai été si choquée au’à partir de ce moment-là, je disais aux touristes britanniques que j’étais américaine.”

In Germany



In her own words: encountering Nazis

At a Communist demonstration, c. 1929:

- “Avant qu’on puisse dire lapin, de jeunes voyous, de petits nazis, sont arrivés pour semer la pagaille dans la marche. Moi, j’étais juive, j’étais étrangère, alors un des camarades a dit: ‘Pars de suite [...] je viendrai te chercher.’”

Adventures abroad

- Some observations
 - Her language skills allowed her **to integrate politically, socially and economically**
 - She saw **links between language, ethnicity, culture and power**

COMMUNIST ACTIVISM IN MONTREAL

Communist activism, 1932-58

- In Montreal
 - Communist Party of Canada
 - Modern Bookshop
 - Fred Rose political campaign organizer
 - Union organizer:
 - International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union
 - RCA Victor

In her own words: why Rose Pesotta of the ILGWU hired her

“C’est elle qui m’a embauchée pour l’aider car elle ne parlait pas français et la majorité des midinettes étaient des Canadiennes françaises.”

International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union

Strike leader, 1937

- 5,000 on strike
- Result: better wages + conditions

“This strike was one of the first — and remains one of the most noteworthy — union struggles to improve working conditions for women in Canada.”

Canadian Encyclopedia

Lea Roback at a banquet of the
International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, late 1930s



In her own words: RCA Victor

“Les contremaîtres craient des ordres en anglais.
Toute la gérance était anglaise.”

Madeleine Parent: Roback = linkage by language



Communist activism

- Some observations
 - Her language skills allowed her **to organize workers and political campaigns in multi-lingual, multi-ethnic working-class environments**
 - She could **transmit politics and cultures** across the language divide to help solidify working-class solidarity

AN OLDER ACTIVIST, 1958-2000

An older activist, 1958-2000

- Montreal movements
 - Peace: Voice of Women / La voix des femmes
 - Anti-apartheid / anti-racism
 - Women's
 - Environmental

In her own words: anti-racism

- “Je ne suis pas gênée là-dessus; le racisme contre les Juifs, les Noirs, contre n’importe qui, je ne laisse pas passer.”

In her own words: justice and action

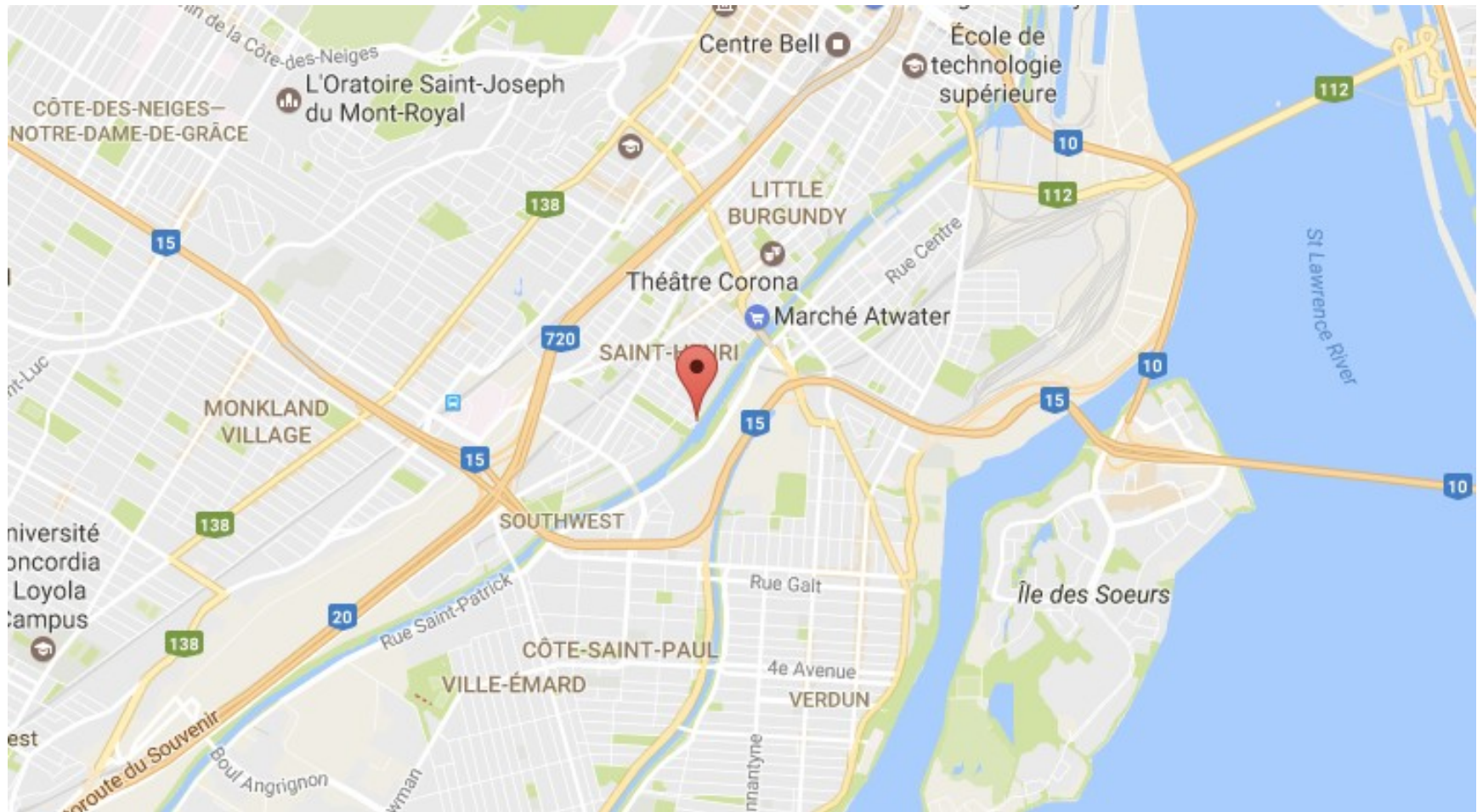


THE HERITAGE OF LEA ROBACK

Heritage

- Films, book of interviews, comic book
- Lea Roback Foundation – promotes education
- Centre Léa Roback - social inequality research
- Streets named in her memory

Rue Léa Roback, Montreal



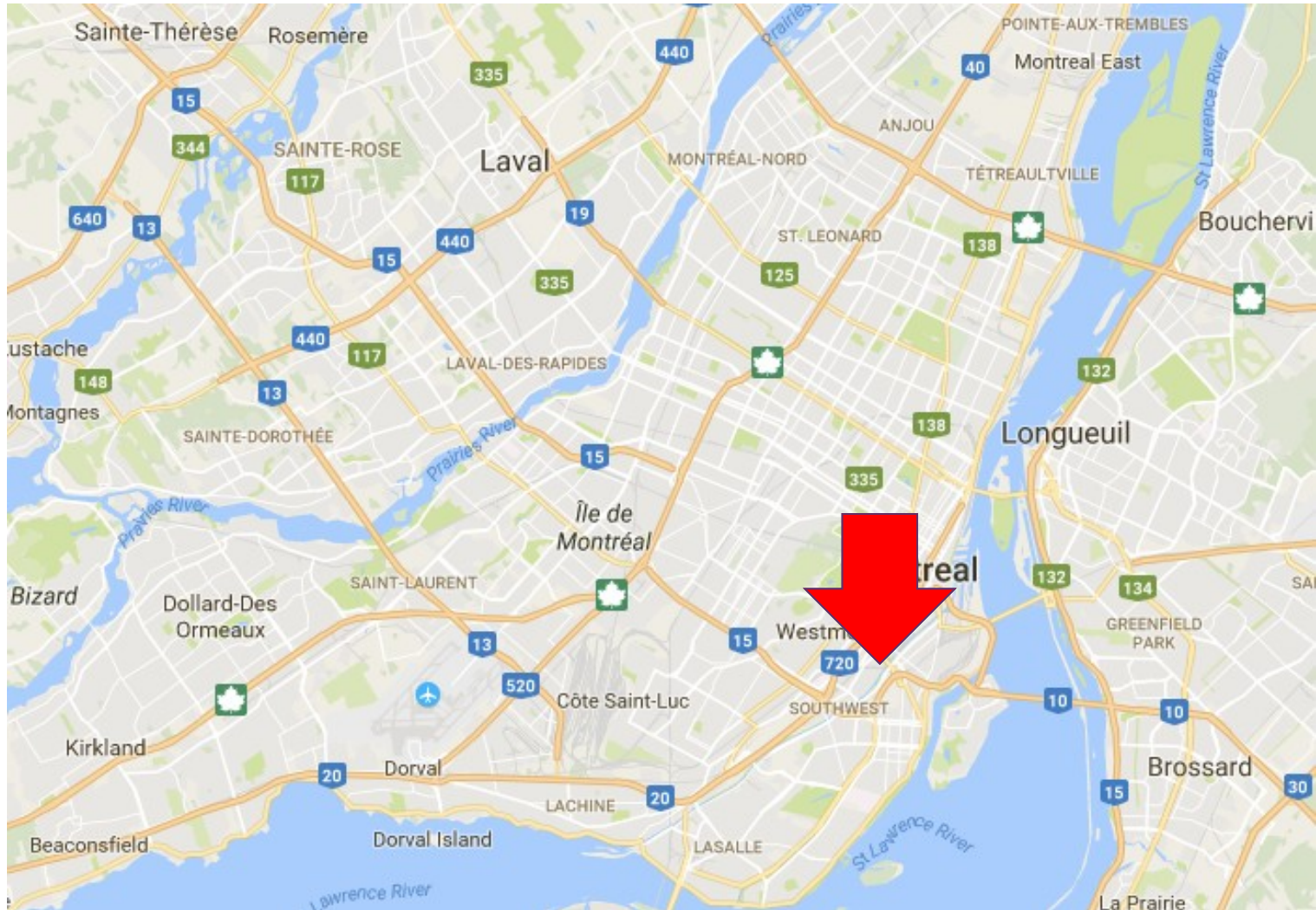
BLACK ROCK GROUP: ARTIST-ACTIVISTS IN VERDUN + THE POINT

Black Rock Group

These are preliminary reflections: historical sources are scarce

DEFINING THE GROUP

Where: Verdun + Point St. Charles



Source: Google maps

When/what

- 1981- founded

“What has emerged is not easy to classify; the group acts as **a focus for working class, Verdun cultural and political activities** [....] This group is based upon a singular community of interest which includes many, many varying points of view and attitudes.”

Richard Flint, *McGill Daily*, July 28, 1982 p.1 + 6

Who: partial list??

- Adams, Danny
- Arkinson, Linda
- Beriault, Georges
- Bowman, Martin
- Bradley, John
- Calder, Nelson
- Callahan, Kevin
- **Fennario, David**
- Filip, Raymond
- German, Kevin
- Salmela, John
- Salmela, Sheila
- Sorley, Jimmy
- Wilcox, Keith

In their own words: defining the group

“These [Verdun working class] people were interested in building some sort of centre that would give expression culturally and politically to some of our aspirations and thoughts.”

“Culture in the sense that it’s a way of life rather than big historical artifacts like compositions, ballets etcetera.”

John Bradley + Nelson Calder, *McGill Daily*, July 28, 1982 p. 6.

In their own words: defining the Group

“We have a formation which is amorphous, it’s very difficult to group together people who have no basic goals sometimes because their own class has dictated that there is no light at the end of the tunnel.”

Danny Adams, *McGill Daily* July 28, 1982 p.7

Defining the Group

Some observations

- Focus on **English-language Verdun/Point working class culture**
- To repeat Richard Flint: the Group was “**not easy to classify** [... and] includes many, many varying points of view and attitudes.”

POLITICS

Class solidarity

Claimed common
interest with the
Francophone
working class



In their own words: class solidarity

“The French working class recognize [...] that in fact the English working class were never recognized as an entity—shadows of the same kind of phenomenon that was the basis for Quebec nationalism.”

John Salmela, *McGill Daily* July 28, 1982 p. 7.

Language

- Defined selves as English working class
- Distinguished themselves from wealthy and middle-class Anglophones

In their own words: language

“It’s not like Alliance Québec’s sort of thing where guys are pissed off, ‘Gee, we’re not going to get a job here, if we don’t get a job we’re going to go to Toronto [....] These [Verdun working class] people here can’t go to Toronto, they never wanted to go to Toronto [...] We want to stay here.”

John Salmela, *McGill Daily* July 28, 1982 p. 6,7.

Politics

Some observations:

- In their analysis, **being working class:**
 - **Linked them to Francophone working class, within limits**
 - **Divided them from Westmount + Alliance Quebec**
- In my view, the language issue was complex:
 - **Divided them from Francophone working class, within limits**
 - **Linked them to Westmount + Alliance Quebec but unequally + uneasily**

ACTIVISM

Club + cultural centre



1982- opened at 5365 Lasalle Blvd., Verdun

Demonstrations

- Christmas 1981- “We’re not cheap”:
 - Protest of of Westmount “paternalism” in giving Christmas turkeys to Verduners
 - Involved delivering a rotting turkey

In their own words: “We’re not cheap” demonstration, 1981

“We went to Westmount with a sign saying we’ve been feeding Westmount for years and years out of the exploitation of Verdun workers, high prices, high rents, crummy conditions, low wages and all the rest of it.”

Nelson Calder, *McGill Daily*, July 28, 1982 p. 6.

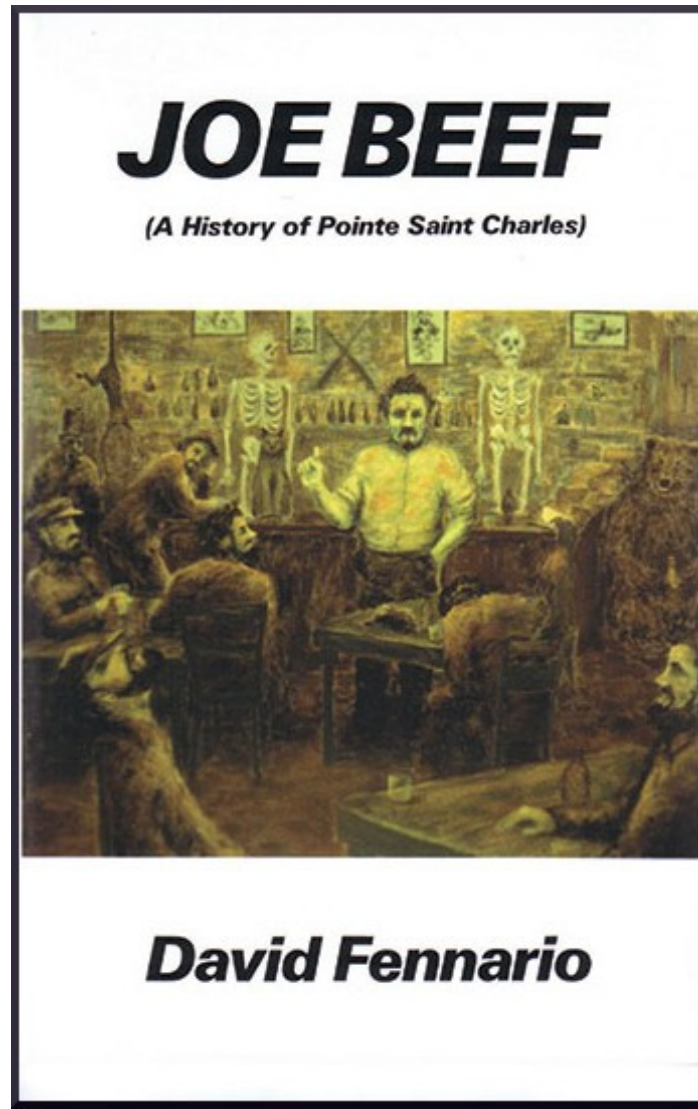
Demonstrations: “Les maudits blokes,” May Day 1982



Theatre + other events

- Produced David Fennario's play *Joe Beef* (1984).

Publication of
the play, 1991,
Talon Books



Review of Fennario's *Nothing to Lose*

“Fennario [...] ce peut être, pour les Québécois francophones, [...] de réaliser qu’il existe, en parallèle avec la condition ouvrière dans Hochelaga, par exemple, un prolétariat anglophone [...] dans le secteur de Pointe-St-Charles.”

Jean-Paul Brousseau, *La Presse*, 12 Sept. **1980**

Publishing

Black Rock Manifesto, 1981.

“It speaks for those who would stay in Quebec, accepting the responsibility and the challenge of creating and transforming their world.”

Nick Auf der Maur, *Montreal Gazette* Nov. 13, 1981.

In their own words: Manifesto

BLACK ROCK MANIFESTO

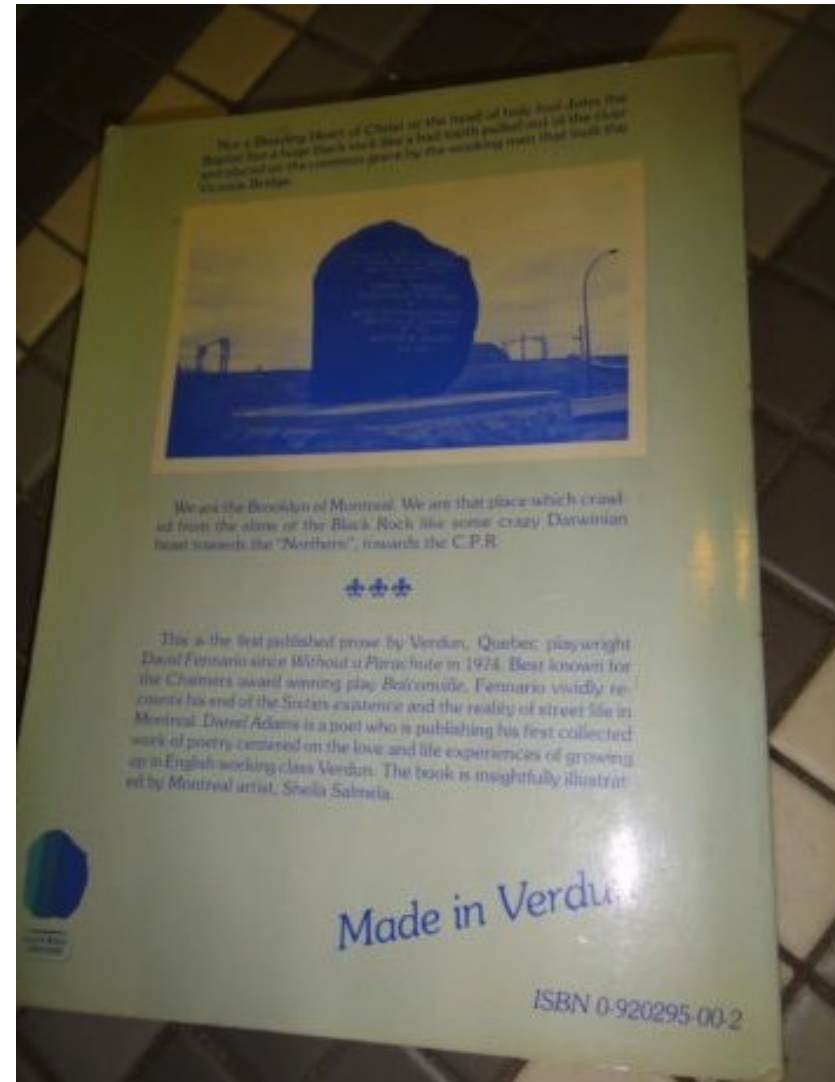
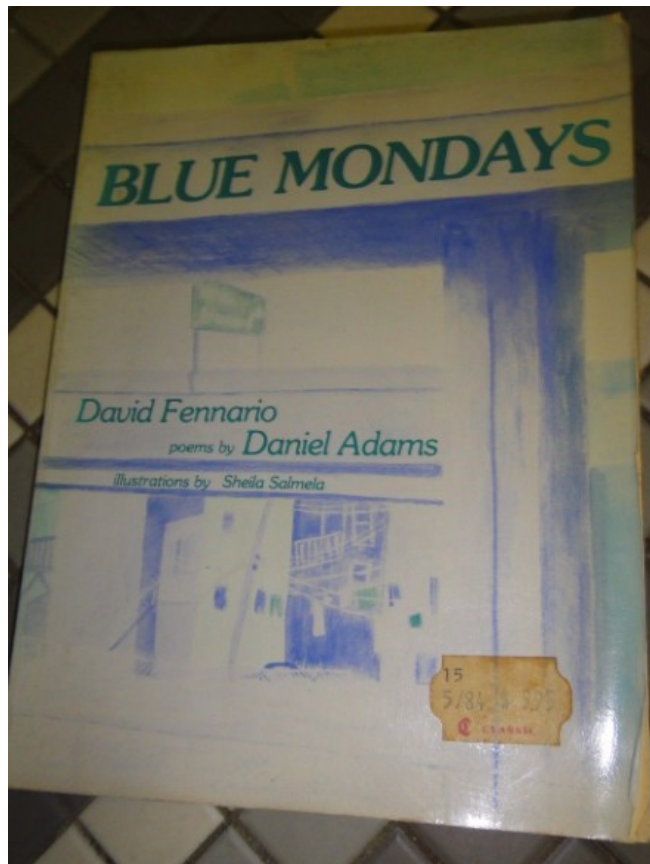
The Black Rock memorial stone in the traditionally Anglo working class district of Pointe Saint-Charles in Montréal, honoring the 6,000 immigrants that died of typhoid fever in 1847.

Not a Bleeding Heart of Christ or the head of holy fool John the Baptist but a huge black rock like a bad tooth pulled out of the river and placed on the common grave by the working men that built the Victoria Bridge.



Publishing

- *Blue Mondays*, 1984.



Activism

Some observations:

- Activism based on **art and protest** expressing **English working class realities** in Quebec

WHAT BECAME OF THE GROUP

Group challenges

Members mentioned challenges including:

- No clear goals
- Organizational weakness

In their own words: Black Rock Group development

“There’s an affinity group that is built up but what utility it has culturally or politically is to be seen by the amount of work people will put into it.”

John Bradley, *McGill Daily*, July 28, 1982 p. 7.

What happened to the group?

???

My plan – learn more through interviews + research

Post-group pursuits

- Plays (writing, acting, translating)
- Creative writing
- Poetry
- Teaching
- Community organizing
- Housing activism

CONCLUSIONS: ANGLO ACTIVISTS

Conclusions

I said I would present

1. What was the nature of their activism?



Conclusions

2. Did language affect their activism?

Yes. It affected their experience, understanding + analysis of:

- Social, economic + political integration
- Varied economic conditions and cultural realities
- Links between language, ethnicity, culture and power
 - **Beef + Roback: access + awareness**
 - **Black Rock Group: exclusion + empathy**

Conclusions

Also: language affected capacities to organize workers and political campaigns in multi-lingual, multi-ethnic working-class environments

- **Beef + Roback: “bridges” for class solidarity**
- **Black Rock Group: expression could express politics and culture of Anglophone working class to others, both Anglophone + Francophone**

Conclusions

3. What can historians and social actors learn from this?

Language is a useful category to consider in looking at the history of activism in post-Confederation Quebec.

It helps us understand:

- Who the activists were
- Details + realities of their thinking and acting
- Aspects of power in Quebec society, economy + politics