

Doncaster Ballyhoo

FOR LAURENTIAN WATERFRONT AND RECREATIONAL PROPERTY

LATE AUTUMN 1996

We are hearing from many people who are planning to make the Laurentians their permanent home upon retirement. Ste. Agathe is the ideal central small town to service such a population. It has a variety of churches, a hospital, attractive architecture, a lovely waterfront and it has been a service-oriented community since the establishment of the first chest hospitals at the beginning of the century. It is time for us to contemplate what attributes need to be strengthened to help our region fulfill that vocation, and how we can best make ourselves heard.

Ste. Agathe business people and public employees have been struggling for some time with the task of trying to establish a common vision. It has always been with this view in mind that Sheila and I have worked to sensitise people to the value of our architectural heritage, to the recognition that, while St. Sauveur and Mont Tremblant may be tourist areas, Ste. Agathe is more service-oriented; its revenues come from its recreational communities and services such as the hospital. It does not need to develop a new clientele so much as to service the one that it already has. Our first responsibility is to recognise that our area is made up of many smaller communities and exists in two languages.

Canada Day has been helpful in demonstrating this perspective. This year again it was the best-attended summer event in Ste. Agathe. Despite the fact that it was on a Monday night, as many people came as last year. The reason for its success is that it was a bilingual event that appealed to members of all communities. Word went out to the lake associations and local organisations. Other events were rescheduled so that people could attend. Of course there is the sensitive issue of being Canadian in this post-referendum year, but the point is that all events, activities and services can have an appeal to a broad cross-section of our society. Good examples of this non-exclusivity are the Linear Park and the ski hills where everybody feels equally at home.

Events on their own do not make a community but are simply an expression of its health. What makes a community is a common vision and a concern for each other. We have had many discussions with people about the idea of creating some kind of formal association or foundation that could become the voice of the weekenders and retirees. Its purpose would be to participate in the community in a formal, visible way. It would need to function equally well in French and English. It would be seen as a local think-tank and a charity. Its purpose would not be political in any way, but would be simply to enable the recreational and retirement communities to have their presence felt.

One issue that you will be hearing about more in the next months is the proposed fusion of the three Ste. Agathes. The Provincial government intends to see it through. We have heard proponents for both sides of this idea. We all need to be informed of the real objectives and consequences of such a step. There are a lot of assumptions and misinformation circulating with the facts. We hope to be able to deal with it in detail in our next "What's it Worth" page.

Thanks for the enthusiastic support that we have received for this newsletter. Please don't hesitate to tell us how it can be improved. We are now starting to reduce the number that we print and want to make sure that it is getting to all the people who are reading it. Please confirm that there is an asterisk by your name on the envelope that this newsletter came in. If there is, it confirms that we know you wish to keep receiving it.

We'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a happy holiday season and a healthy winter, whether you spend it up north with us or in the southern sun.

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The End of the Pine Forest

In Dr. Grignon's *Album Historique de Ste. Agathe*, written in 1912 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the parish, he describes the first three colonists who homesteaded in our region. These three men, Narcisse and Olivier Ménard and their brother-in-law Jean-Baptiste Dufresne, had clearly responded to A.N. Morin's initiative in encouraging homesteading of the north country. Despite Morin's noble efforts with potatoes, however, the real economic mainstay would never be the farm, but rather, the pine tree, and these three men were well equipped to exploit it. The Ménard brothers were both over 6 feet tall, and their sister, Flavie, who married Dufresne, as well as their mother, were also big, sturdy people. The mother, the legendary "La Vieille Ménard", was close to six feet tall herself. They came, as Dr. Grignon describes them in 1912, determined to win a battle against the forest: "Ces soldats d'un nouveau genre... c'était des colons. Leur arme c'était la hache du défricheur."

Even though the forest was the fuel driving the motor of the economy, people did not see it that way. They saw the trees as something that had to be removed in order to farm. Catherine Parr Traill, the author of *Roughing It In the Bush*, sailing up the St. Lawrence in 1832 is quoted as having seen only "...a great portion of forest which it will take years of labour to remove." There was a massive drive to eliminate the forest to build ordered communities like those farms of European memory and the ones that had been built along the fertile shores of the St. Lawrence.

The Laurentian forests had suddenly become an important commodity because, during the Napoleonic wars, the French had tried to block access to the Baltic, forcing the English to look elsewhere for the large pines needed to rig their ships. Robert Hughes in *The Fatal Shore*, the story of Australia's founding, described one English ship: "The mainmast of a 74-gun first-rater was three feet thick at the base, and rose 108 feet from keelson to truck - a single tree, dead straight and flawlessly solid. Such a vessel needed some 22 masts and yards as well." The only wood that could satisfy was the pine. Aside from its slow taper and its size, its sap formed a binding resin that gave it an unusual flexibility.

Our pine forest canopy was 15 storeys high in areas, and as early as 1805, English surveyors branded standing trees with the sign of the broad arrow, thereby claiming them for the Crown. Such trees could not be touched without proper authority, but when they were felled, a second selection was made and the straightest were floated down to Quebec.

The rest were left to rot or scavenged for other purposes. Once the war was over, a whole forest industry developed. There was a huge demand for squared logs until the middle of the 19th century and a way of life grew up around the industry. Men would cut through the winter and drag their logs to the rivers where they would be locked on top of the ice until the thaw. When the waters reached their spring high, the keylog was removed, and the logs would flow downstream, accompanied by teams of men who broke log-jams. Each log was marked with a bushmark identifying the company that owned it, and in wider waters these logs would be tied into cribs. At the St. Lawrence, 100 cribs would be bound together to make a raft. These rafts were huge. Bartlett's paintings shows them floating down the river with sails rigged on them and shelters built where the loggers lived for the months that the trip took.

A government study published in 1850 declared that there was enough timber in the Ottawa Valley to last 600 years. By that date, the demand for wood at the saw mills was beginning to outstrip the demand for squared logs, and communities began to develop around the mills. Potash, a fertilizer made from wood ashes, also became a major export as the communities grew and the farmers cleared the last vestiges of the forests. It took the ashes of 60 mature maple trees rendered down to make a quintal (approximately 100 pounds) of potash. This sold for hard currency, but the real benefit in the homesteader's mind was a cleared field.

By the mid-1860's, lumbering had reached its zenith and the homesteaders were discovering that underneath the canopy, the remaining soil would never sustain a way of life. Before he died last year, Ernest Piché, grandson of Nazaire Piché, described his grandfather's farm to me. Their farm was on the shore of Lac Brulé, and it was farmed from the 1860's. Nazaire acquired the farm from his partner, Boismenu. Each in his turn made his living by cutting and squaring logs during the winter and each tried to build up the farm in the summer. Boismenu died, still a young man, and Nazaire bought the farm. Within a few years, his wife died, and Nazaire married his late partner's widow. Together they reared eight children. For these children the forestry industry would already be a thing of the past. They saw themselves as farmers, but the farm was in fact a luxury that could not sustain itself once the forest was gone. The way of life that passed was that of the foresters, not of the farmers.

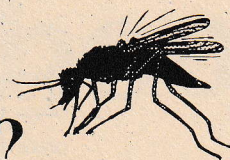
- A special thanks to Lyle Elder of the Argenteuil Historical Society.



WHAT'S IT WORTH?

or

WHAT'S THIS MOSQUITO SPRAY?



Several of our town councils are talking about a programme to spray a biodegradable, non-toxic organic substance which could eliminate 90% of the mosquitoes and black flies. Even though we are heading towards winter, it is probably the time to learn more about it, since decisions will be taken soon to start spraying in the spring. We contacted both the company, GDG Environnement Ltée and the Ministry of the Environment and we learned the following:

The insecticide used in the spraying is a biological pesticide called *Bacillus Thuringiensis*. It has been used in many forms in agriculture and tree farming and one variety (*Kurstaki*) was used on the spruce budworm a number of years ago. The variety used against mosquitoes and black flies is called *Israelensis*, or BT 14. It has been in use for years in other parts of the world, including Western Canada and the Adirondacks. In a copy of one study sent to us by the Ministry, 12 product names and 128 studies are listed. Repeatedly the research says that the pesticide is harmful only to the larval stage of the target species. It says that there is no effect on the food chain, since the creatures that feed on these larvae are not dependant on them as their sole food. No reduction is detected among their predators where the pesticide has been used, and the dead larvae are just as nutritious and non-toxic as the live ones. The pesticide, being a bacteria, is biodegradable and has no side effects on other species. While there is some evidence that the larvae develop a resistance to BT 14 over time, this resistance seems to disappear when the BT 14 is discontinued and the larvae intermix with unaffected larvae. Further, it is believed to be unlikely that resistance will develop if the pesticide is used in a controlled manner.

It sounds like a wonderful solution to our annual bug problem. It doesn't disrupt the food chain, it doesn't have toxic by-products, it only attacks the target species and it eliminates up to 90% of them. A welcome find, it would seem, for an area whose economy depends on recreational activity, but is there a downside?

Exposure to it does generate antibodies and it is recommended that exposure should be avoided if you have an auto-immune deficiency. While there is no evidence that it contaminates groundwater or waterways, both the Canadian and United States governments forbid its usage around drinking water. It is even recommended that no water be drawn from a reservoir during a spraying programme.

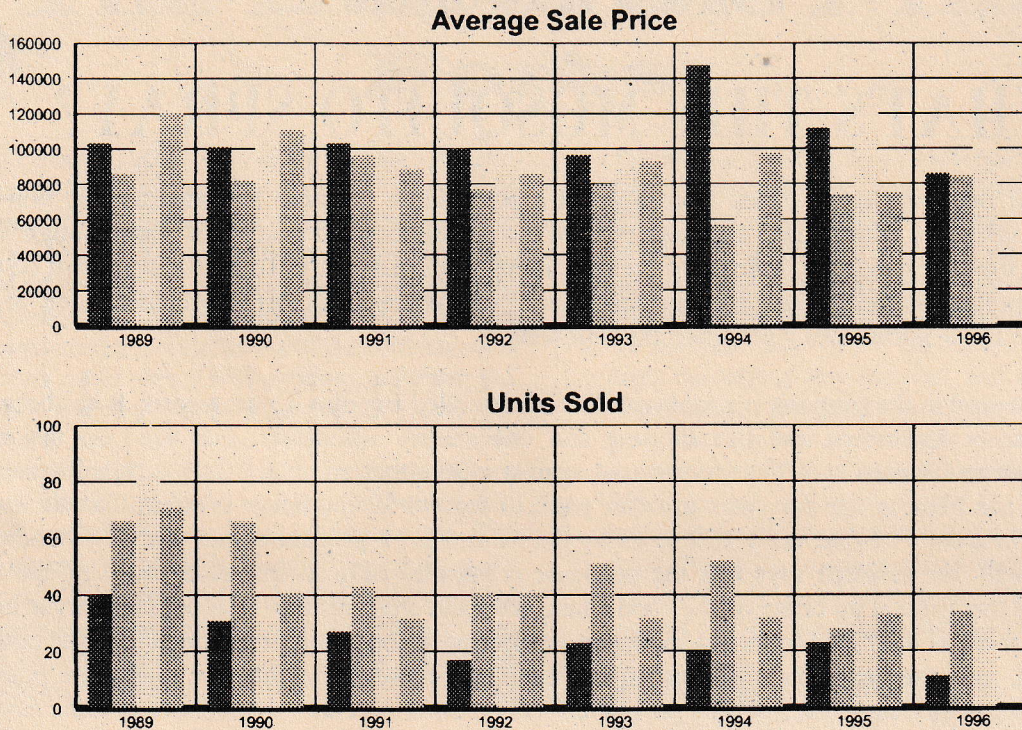
There is a warning in the notice prepared for Health and Social Services and for the Public Health offices, dated June 1995, that despite the large numbers of studies done, there is still not enough known about the consequences of playing around in our environment. It says that, while mosquitoes do pose a mild risk to our health, it is minor and does not justify intervention. It goes on to say that viral encephalitis is an example of a disease carried by mosquitoes that can be very easily controlled with BT 14, should the need arise, and that it would be tragic if misuse or overuse were to render this substance ineffective by the time we really need it.

It would appear that there is little risk to our environment in using this wonderful stuff. Then again, there is none involved in not using it. Of course our track-record in estimating environmental risks isn't very good. It will be interesting to see what decision we make in our area. Each of us has a say. We only have to contact our municipal council and express our opinions.

References:

- *Le bacillus thuringiensis israelensis et le contrôle des insectes piqueurs au Québec, Mars 1994*
- *Avis de santé publique sur l'utilisation du pesticide biologique bacillus thuringiensis en milieu forestier, agricole et urbain, Juin 1995*
- *L'insecticide bacillus thuringiensis et la santé publique, Avril 1996*

MARKET TRENDS



Despite all we have heard about how dramatically prices have dropped since 1988 and 1989, the graphs do not seem to reflect this. The simple explanation is that it is not really true. While there were a few high-priced sales in 1988 and '89, they were statistical anomalies in our sample area. An examination on the price graph in 1995 and '96 would suggest that the market is erratic and unstable. This, too, is not correct. The real explanation in both cases is that the volume of sales has dropped since 1989 and as a result we are working with a much smaller sampling now than we had access to then. The low volume of sales seems to be the significant force that affects the prices. This fall, we have seen an increase in activity. While prices remain low, we may have a larger sample to study by the spring, and more sales should encourage higher prices.

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