

# Doncaster Ballyhoo

FOR LAURENTIAN WATERFRONT AND RECREATIONAL PROPERTY

Spring 1997

The Régie régionale de la Santé des Laurentides has decided that some of our long-term care facilities are no longer adequate, and they are studying plans which include the building of a large centre in Ste-Adele. The reasoning behind this include demographic projections suggesting that the need for long-term care will be greater in the future in Ste-Adele and that Ste-Agathe has too many places available. The Régie made four proposals with prices attached, suggesting that the most expensive route to follow would be to renovate the existing buildings and that the least expensive one would be to close them down and build a new building in Ste-Adele. The buildings that they envisage closing are the Mount Sinai Hospital, the Pavillon Grignon (beside Trinity Church on Préfontaine), the Foyer Ste-Agathe on Godon, and the few long-term beds currently in the Pavillon Joannette (the main hospital building) as well as the Manoir de la Pointe Bleue in Ste- Marguerite.

When their original announcement was made it caused a lot of reaction in Ste-Agathe. At the public hearings, it was impressive to see how many organisations came and presented their positions in favour of the Ste-Agathe community and it is sobering to realise how much it was needed. The Chambers of Commerce for Greater Ste-Agathe, St-Donat, St-Adolphe, St-Faustin-Lac Carré/Lac Supérieur, Arundel/Barkmere/Huberdeau/Montcalm, St-Jovite and Mont-Tremblant all got together and made one concerted appeal. The hospital administration was there, the towns were represented and our Heritage Committee also made a presentation. Most recommended that the Régie opt in favour of a scenario that would keep most of the beds in Ste- Agathe. Unfortunately, Mount Sinai Hospital may not be able to be saved in any case. The whole question seems to have come up in the first place because Mount Sinai Hospital was condemned as being too dangerous to be kept in service without major renovations. It is also felt that it is not practically located for long-term care beds. As most of the briefs underlined, our whole hospital installation would be threatened by such a move to Ste-Adele, and the quality of care available to all our residents, not only those in long-term care, would be compromised.

The day after the March 18<sup>th</sup> hearings, the Gazette carried a story which included a rumour that Pierre Péladeau has offered his Ste-Adele property for a long-term care facility. It struck us as an explanation for the Régie's apparent favouring of Ste-Adele. This man is held in such esteem for his business success that it could easily influence members of the Régie. However, land is available for the construction of such a facility right on the grounds of the existing hospital, and it is in many ways more suitable than Mr. Péladeau's site. Let us hope that good sense prevails in the deliberations of the Régie and that we will be able to preserve the quality of health care that our community has worked so hard to maintain.

*We really bit off a mouthful when we promised to deal with the project to merge the three Ste- Agathes. It is the subject of our 'What's it Worth' and its writing delayed publishing of this issue of the Ballyhoo for a month. Please share your reactions and your thoughts.*

The first phase of the study of Ste-Agathe's architectural history has been completed. Recommendations are being made to the municipal council to encourage making our architectural history a major theme in all future development and renovation. Specific recommendations pertaining to architectural details and historic buildings were also made. We hope soon to be able to publicly identify some of the older buildings along with their history, through the use of such tools as a walking tour booklet and historical markers on buildings of note. The city also plans to go ahead with the redevelopment of the downtown waterfront park and parking area, starting this spring, in an effort to make it more attractive and more easily accessible.

*We are hard at work on plans for this year's July 1<sup>st</sup> Canada Day celebrations and look forward to seeing you there again!*

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# The First European Settlers

There is no evidence of any settlement of Europeans, English or French, in the Ste-Agathe area prior to the small community that began with the Dufresnes and the Menards in 1849. There may have been camps for *coureurs de bois* and for lumberjacks, but nothing more. Loyalists and British veterans had been settling along the Ottawa Valley since the end of the American War of Independence, and they tended to move upstream along the tributaries. Thus the English towns of Lachute and Brownsburg a little further upstream along the North River from St. Andrew's, and the English townships that spread up the Red River towards Harrington and Arundel.

During these early days of the 1800's, the French-Canadians were under the influence not just of the disenfranchised seigneurs, but also of the Catholic Church, and the latter was much stronger. The Church's concerns were different from those of the seigneurs. It was less concerned with the well-being of the seigneurs' fiefs than with the strength of its own parishes. They perceived the English as a threat less because of their language than because they were Protestant. In the 1840's there was a large influx of Swiss Protestants, and their French-speaking Protestant congregations were a serious concern to the Church. Even though Serge Laurin in *Histoire des Laurentides* states that the proselytizing of these Protestant parishes had little influence, the Church perceived them apprehensively. They were one of the catalysts that brought about the systematic encouragement of Catholic settlement of the North River above St-Jerome and ultimately to Ste-Agathe. Laurin suggests that all the French-Canadian colonists who moved into this area were part of a conscious movement to "*assurer la survie de la 'race'*" but in fact there were too many conflicting forces at work in

French-Canadian society at that time to credit such an idea and such a high level of consciousness. After all, it was Maximilien Globensky who headed the thousands of French Loyalist forces in the battle against the *Patriotes* in St-Eustache and it was A.N. Morin who picked up the pieces and eliminated the seigneurial system afterwards. French society was clearly in flux and subject to the whims of the different power elites jockeying for control. It is fair, however, to credit the Church with a coherent plan to create as many Catholic parishes as possible and to try thereby to stem the advance of the Protestants.

From 1850, a rapid colonisation of the Ste-Agathe area began. The families that were arriving to homestead were French Catholic and they were coming from seigneuries and villages where opportunities did not exist. The system of tenant farming was falling apart. The new generation found that they could no longer simply divide the family holding and farm more intensively on smaller plots. At the same time, the power struggles and social collapse of the early part of the century had left the people leaderless except for the Church. The more ambitious were going to New England to work in factories and the more conservative were being lured northwest to places like ours by initiatives such as those undertaken by A. N. Morin. It was, in a way, a great winnowing. Those who chose to come to the Laurentian townships were determined to maintain the values of their parents, while the emigrants were disillusioned and determined to find a better life. As a result our towns were built by a selection of the most conservative and most loyal families that could be assembled. They were farmers for whom any other activity was just a distraction, something that kept them from their destinies on the soil. Paul Meunier is a good example. After successive crop

## The First European Settlers (continued)

failures in the 1860's, he abandoned his rocky fields on the shore of Lake Manitou and went to work as a lumberjack as far away as Michigan simply to raise some money so that he could come back to his fields and try again.

Among the pioneers of this small hamlet in its first generation was a doctor named Luc Eusèbe Larocque. He traveled in his early days to California where he is reported to have amassed a small fortune during the gold rush. When he acquired his property in Trout Lake, he was already the oldest practicing physician in St-Jerome. One imagines that he was a romantic who was struggling against the tide of change as were virtually all the pioneers of Ste-Agathe. He must have wanted to set up a seigneurie, for he acquired several farms, one of which was at Trout Lake and the other ran along the west side of rue Principale down to the water of Lac des Sables. Each summer, neglecting his practice, he came north to Ste-Agathe by horse and buggy and looked after the farmers to whom he'd let out his land. His wife refused to accompany him because she did not like the north, but he never gave up trying to change her mind. He'd write poems about the beauty of Trout Lake and send them to her hoping to soften her resistance. She, in reaction, painted landscapes inspired by his poetry to show him upon his return, but never accepted to come out herself.

Over the years, he got out onto the fields to help his farmers in their failing enterprise and did all he could to bolster the small colony. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, 1861, he deeded half of his northern farm to the '*Corporation Episcopale de Montréal*' in order to encourage the construction of a chapel and this land is the site of the current Catholic church. His name lives on in the

name of the street that runs behind the church and down to the water. Eventually his fortune was weakened and after his death his children had to sell the balance of the farm at a sacrifice price.

Many of today's families arrived during this period and the area experienced an initial healthy growth. The forest was removed in the form of lumber or potash and the first grain crops turned out well, but the willing farmers of the 1850's and 1860's were discovering that grain could not be grown in our soil. The crop flourished for a year or so, and then the soil was exhausted. Slowly the farmers were turning their fields over to cattle. Sadly, with our short seasons and rocky soil, it was very difficult to harvest enough hay to winter a herd, and the farms, instead of being the rich valley farms that these pioneers had left behind, were subsistence operations. Nevertheless, determined families stuck by their fields and the community maintained. The first generation that grew up without a memory of the rich seigneuries that their parents had left were a hardier breed and had a lesser legacy to leave to their children.

Meanwhile, Protestant colonisation was pushing its way up the fertile valley of the Red River and by 1856 the town of Arundel was created. This predates the town of Ste-Agathe by 6 years and added greatly to the sense of rivalry that the Catholic Church perceived as existing between these two communities. By the late 1860's this perceived rivalry had become nothing short of an obsession on the part of the Catholic Church and in 1868 the Church finally found a champion who could carry this mission forward. Antoine Labelle was named Curé of the Parish of St. Jérôme in 1868.

# What's it Worth?

or

## Is the Whole Greater Than the Sum of the Parts?

**K**ey words to look for in the debate over the merging of the three Ste-Agathes are "*regroupement*" and "*fusion*". The idea of putting the three municipalities back together has been around for some time. During each of the last three Ste-Agathe-des-Monts municipal elections it has been discussed. The three were once all a part of the parish of Ste-Agathe. It was created on January 1, 1863 when the area was officially recognised as a region distinct from Ste-Adele. Shortly after its creation, parts of the townships of Howard, Doncaster and Wexford were annexed to the new municipality. Originally named after the lake, it was called alternately Lac des Sables and Canton Beresford, but since it included parts of Morin and present-day Ivry, its name was officially changed to the less specific Municipality of the Parish of Ste-Agathe-des-Monts on March 25, 1885.

In 1896 the Municipal Corporation of Ste-Agathe (La municipalité du village de Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts) broke away from the Parish and comprised only parts of the second, third and fourth ranges of Beresford (those parts that surround the lake). Subsequently Ivry broke away in 1912, Val David in 1921 and Ste-Agathe-South in 1964. In each case the new municipalities were set up to simplify and localise administration. Today, the argument in favour of fusion is based on the provincial government's costs and on the need for co-ordinated urban planning and sharing of services.

While seventy percent of Quebecers live in 8.5% of the towns, forty-three percent of the municipalities have less than 1000 people. More importantly to the government, the smaller the municipality, the greater the percentage of its budget is paid by the provincial government. On average, the province funds 4.75% of municipal budgets. For centres of 10,000 people and more, the cost is 2.3% and dropping. The figures climb above 33.3% for villages and parishes of less than 1000. At the same time, costs of the urban infrastructure are borne by the taxpayers in the towns even though the residents of the villages and parishes that surround them benefit from the services. The obvious examples of this in Ste-Agathe are the schools and churches. There are five public schools and seven congregations that hold property in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts. As well, the hospital, sports arena and information offices as well as the government buildings and post office are in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts. While the costs of these commonly used services and their road networks are subject to negotiated understandings between the municipal councils, there is no enforcement possible should the negotiations be judged unfair by one of the parties.

As an example of an issue crying out for co-ordinated planning, there is a large excavation to the west of the main road running through Ste-Agathe-South which is intended for a super mall. Should such a mall be built, Ste-Agathe-des-Monts will not be consulted. It is clear that the scale of the project would have a major impact on the latter municipality and its infrastructures, yet it will run the risk of losing its commercial district. Should the towns be fused, a mall of this scale could be evaluated in terms of its impact on the ability of the whole region to withstand it and equitable tax distribution would be possible.

Ste-Agathe-des-Monts business owners have been encouraging the renovation and restoration of their buildings with a common theme of respect for our architectural history. The city has commissioned a large study to encourage this initiative and hopes to be able to provide guidance to property owners who wish to develop this theme. It has already encouraged a new respect for our history and our architecture. Ste-Agathe-South, by contrast, owns the major artery of entry to the city and is the location of most of the fast-food outlets and service stations.

## What's it worth? (continued)

On November 14, 1996, all three municipalities were invited to present briefs to the *Commission de consultation sur le regroupement*. Predictably, the brief presented by Ste-Agathe-des-Monts toed the line while the other two voiced objections. In Ste-Agathe-North the council was only eleven days old and can be forgiven for not having developed clear arguments other than to point out that Ivry should also be involved in the discussions. The government listened at least to that point and in early March added Ivry to the list. Ste-Agathe-South's main thrust was that Ste-Agathe-des-Mont's collective agreements are out of control and that it should get its own fiscal affairs in order before the discussion can progress further.

The Commission has identified 416 municipalities in the province that it feels should be merged. Of these, 32 are in the Laurentians and the projection is that they would become 14 municipalities. At this stage, the government has offered to pay for the cost of a study for any municipality that accepts to undertake it before January 1, 1999. Should a municipality not wish to do the study in cooperation with the Commission, it will still receive half the cost for a study of the town's own choosing. The municipalities that merge before this date will receive a per capita grant of \$100. This is an existing programme with a provision that they would receive only half that amount if they merge after that date.

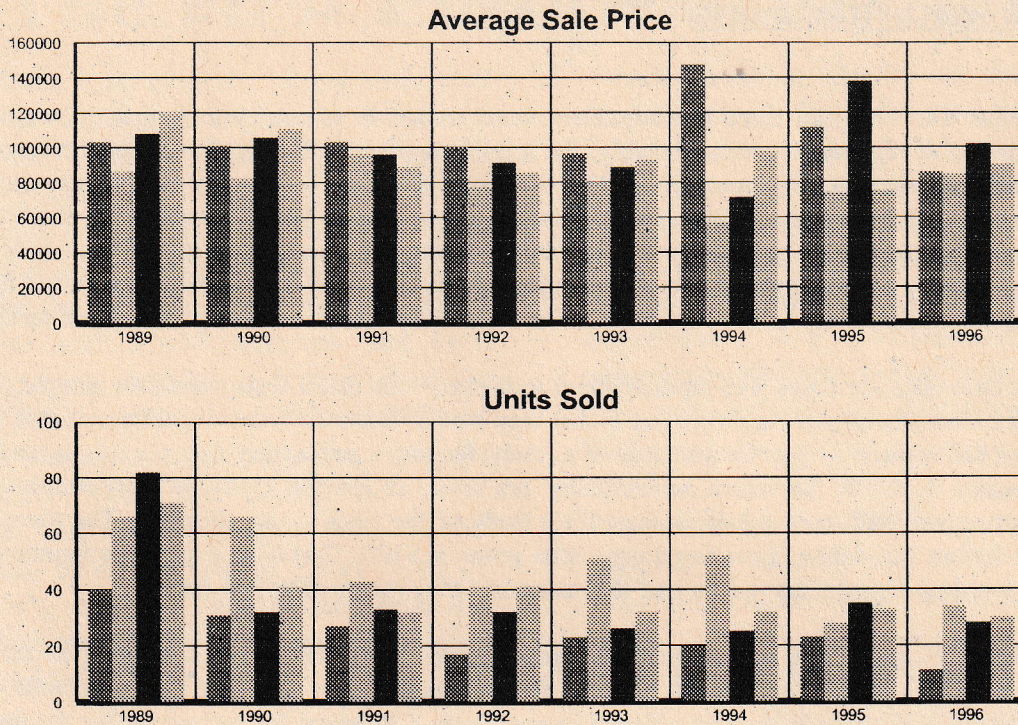
There is another grant that assures merged municipalities the same financial support as they would otherwise have had. It will continue for between five and eight years. As well, thirty-six million dollars will be ready to help those towns that succeed in presenting a proposal for merger within the deadline to combine their infrastructures, provided that the merger takes place.

Over all, the Commission has been mandated to offer incentives, but it is hard to imagine that incentives will succeed. As Mayor Circé of Ste-Agathe-South pointed out, if his administration had gone into an election campaign favouring this issue last fall, they would have been swept from office.

It is difficult at this point to take an informed position. While the merger rules are very flexible, even allowing for each existing municipality to remain responsible for its own debts, priorities like those pertaining to collective agreements with employees and even the choice of experts to undertake the study stand in the way. Most of the public reaction has been concerned with unfounded fears of the urbanisation of rural areas, with a favourite bugaboo being that sidewalks aren't needed in Lac Quenouilles. These are neighbourhood issues, and even the densely populated areas of Ste-Agathe-des-Monts cannot be obliged to have sidewalks if the neighbourhood concerned votes down the initiative. Even the current municipality cannot oblige residents of a neighbourhood to accept modifications to the infrastructure if the residents object. What needs to be defined is what the nature of the different neighbourhoods would be after merger. These and other criteria need to be examined in the course of the study. For example, the committee is acknowledging that where a bilingual municipality is being forced to merge, thereby losing its non-French majority, it will be protected anyway. Since English-speaking property owners form such a significant proportion of our recreational homes, we as taxpayers should be asking our councillors to try to obtain bilingual recognition for certain neighbourhoods, if not the whole municipality. This is not far-fetched. I feel it would happen if enough of us make our feelings known. Some of the towns are just waiting for this kind of pressure from the taxpayers. For example St-Adolphe is sending out its information bilingually even though it does not have the official status, and both Ste-Agathe-des-Monts and Val David offer English communication as an option on their telephone systems.

As long as the government limits the Commission's power to that of incentives, it is improbable that fusion will ever succeed. Should it decide that the mergers will be forced on the towns by a certain date, then perhaps the municipalities will work seriously together to make the best deal in an inevitable merger. It is only the will of the provincial government that can determine the outcome.

# MARKET TRENDS



Most of the transactions reported in the most recent quarter shown in the above graphs were principal residences. Almost twenty-five percent of them were sales by banks, or between banks and the CMHC. The average price of recreational properties is generally higher than that of principal residences, and generally where one quarter shows a much higher average sale price it can be attributed to the sale of one recreational property. When the number of sales is down around 20 to 25, a couple of sales like this can skew the graph. It is hard for us to differentiate between principal and secondary residences, but we can conclude that a rise in the average price is a sign of a greater number of trades in the secondary residences.

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