

Doncaster Ballyhoo

FOR LAURENTIAN WATERFRONT AND RECREATIONAL PROPERTY

Number 27

Winter 2001-2002

Two new English publications are vying for our attention in the Laurentians. One, which has been around for several years, is the bilingual Tremblant Express. It is very focussed on Tremblant and Intrawest, and is worth picking up. It is generally available in grocery stores and dépanneurs. The other, called Main Street, is more of a classical wing-and-a-prayer community paper. It is the courageous effort of Jack Burger and is most solidly established in Lachute at this point, but he is appealing strongly for support in our region as well, and the advertisers seem to be responsive. Jack's vision is based on the observation that if the English-speaking population of the Laurentians were concentrated in one place it would constitute the second biggest town. He feels that the rest of the community would better respond to our interests and needs if we acted together. He wants our feedback and implication, and he especially wants to involve the second residence community. Main Street comes out monthly and we have copies at our office for anyone wishing to see it. You can also subscribe by sending your name, address and \$25.00 to Main Street, 369 St. Joseph Street, Brownsburg, QC J0V 1A0.

Margaret Adams, who recently became the community organiser for the Alliance Quebec Upper Laurentians Chapter, has brought with her a vision of an association designed for and dedicated to our local community needs. She encouraged Sheila and me to get involved, which we have done, on the basis that the organisation's primary role should be community development, not politics. Margaret suggested the name 'The Laurentianer' for the local organisation, and she is working on a project preparing a directory of English community services and organisations to be published early in the new year. She has also joined Sheila on the Canadian Club board and is writing a column in Main Street as a means of keeping in touch with the organisation's members. You can contact her at 819-321-3943 or look her up in Main Street.

Erik Wang has been working on the publication of a bilingual lexicon of medical phrases for use in the hospital. He has collected different brochures, several of which were prepared by Alliance Quebec in other districts, and has managed to organise a committee of bilingual nurses to confirm proper translation of the necessary phrases. He has the financial support of the Medical Foundation and hopes that the pamphlet will be available by late January. Erik Wang deserves our thanks and appreciation for getting things done.

Thanks again to the persistence and organisation of Erik Wang, the various panels that the Heritage Committee has erected around Ste. Agathe are in the process of being printed in an attractive pamphlet. It should be completed by the time you receive this newsletter and will be available at the information office and other locations. Sheila has translated them and Jean-François Bienvenue has integrated the English text into photo reproductions of the panels so you get the full effect. The Heritage Committee has absorbed the cost of the printing.

We take this opportunity to wish you Season's Greetings and we hope that you have the chance to holiday up north over the winter. For our part, our office will be closed for vacation from the 15th of January to the 4th of February. See you on the trails!

(819) 326-4963
www.doncaster.ca

Elizabeth Wand

"The Air is Like Champagne"*

The year was 1895 and the train to Ste. Agathe had been in operation for only three years. Elizabeth Wand, a nurse from New York City, a single American woman of the Victorian age, arrived in our small town and began to assess its potential as a health spa. She had read something about the area in Harper's Magazine and decided that it sounded like a great location to look after 'nervous wrecks and convalescents'. At age forty, she walked away from fifteen years of nursing and became a pioneer in a new country, with a new language, setting up a health retreat.

Not only had she identified what would become Ste. Agathe's vocation for the next fifty years, but she also initiated it, and, thirty years later, documented it for posterity. Her story, called Quisisana, is one of the best and most objective accounts that we have of Ste. Agathe in the late 1800's. Here is a short excerpt from her stay at a hotel, which she failed to identify: *Chicken Fricassee sounds good, but when the heads are left in---enough said, even if they are beautifully cleaned. When some of the guests spoke to mine host about it, he replied, "Good enough for me, good enough for you, you no lak, you go, plenty more come." The independence of the people is something to be admired. It is their country, wrestled from the wilds, hewed and made to blossom in their own way; if it doesn't suit you, go somewhere else.*

After only five days in Ste. Agathe, Wand left to visit doctors in Montreal. She offered her services for convalescing patients, but received little encouragement. Upon her return, she rented a small house, which rapidly filled up with guests. She describes them as convalescents, but says they arrived without forewarning. She was so encouraged that she decided to build a proper home for her work: *I evolved something new in the way of a house. When the framework was going up it caused a great sensation, it was octagon in shape and looked something like a cyclorama. The remarks made by passers-by were anything but flattering. I pursued the even tenor of my way, and when the veranda was added, both inside and outside were charming, and compliments were many.*

The house can be found at 173 Tour du Lac, at the corner of Victoria. Wand sold it to R. Wilson-Smith, the mayor of Montreal, for his own use, and it operates today under the name *Auberge de la Tour du Lac*. Wand found it too small for her rapidly expanding clientele and built a more appropriate house somewhat further up the hill. This new building has not survived, or at least, we haven't found it. There is a picture of it in her book showing a one-and-a-half storey house with a sloped roof, large balconies and both a round dormer and shed dormer on the second storey. She named it Quisisana, translated as 'here is health' in her book. The new house had electricity, hot and cold water and a fireplace. Business continued to improve and she soon gave in to pressure from her clients to stay open all winter. Believing that the secret to healing was to keep her guests active and outdoors, she persisted: *The air being so dry, we didn't feel the cold, although the temperature at times registered forty below zero, but during the daytime with the sun shining brightly we donned our snowshoes and skimmed over the frozen snow... We dressed ourselves warmly and defied Jack Frost or, ordering the horses and providing ourselves with hot soapstones for our feet, and with our rugs wrapped around us, we drove for miles over the well-beaten roads made hard by the logging teams.*

During the seven years that she operated in Ste. Agathe, the town burgeoned around her. It was rapidly becoming a popular holiday destination and was gathering increasing importance as a regional centre. Hotels sprang up, the Anglican Church was built, the first Jewish religious services began and the lumber industry developed into wood manufacturing to supply the boom. Soon even the outlying farms and lakes were being rapidly converted into country retreats, and in 1899, Dr. Richer's tuberculosis sanitarium opened on the hill above what today is the Autoroute near Chemin de la Montagne, climbing up to Trout Lake.

Sadly, Wand's vision of Ste. Agathe as a centre for convalescence failed to take into account how the tuberculosis sanitarium would influence her own clients: *Seven years have passed in Ste. Agathe, the sanitarium for tubercular patients has opened, and Ste. Agathe will vie with Saranac in its treatment of those afflicted with this scourge. Needless to say that this now affected my work, and I found a serious decline in the number of my guests, although we were quite a distance from the sanitarium.* She had just taken a mortgage to improve her property, but her family in New York had endured setbacks, obliging her to return there for the winter: *When I returned in the spring, and called on the man who held the mortgage, saying that I was going up to the mountains, he said, "There is nothing belonging to you there, I have sold everything." I made enquiries, but the bitter truth was revealed and I found myself stripped of all I possessed. I consulted a lawyer, but possession is nine points of the law; I had lost everything.*

Elizabeth Wand returned to New York, where she worked as a nurse and looked after her ailing father. When she next returned to Ste. Agathe in 1925, she wrote her memoirs from which I have quoted so liberally.

* This phrase, used many times in publicity related to Ste. Agathe, is credited to Wand.

- Italicised sections copied verbatim from Quisisana, by Elizabeth Wand, privately published in 1925.

What's it Worth?

To the Weskarini Algonquians, Manatonga Soutana (Mont Tremblant), was a central geological feature. Their mythology warned that if we upset the natural order, the great Manitou would cause the mountain to tremble. Dr. Laviolette foresaw the importance of the mountain when he pushed for the creation of a reserve to protect the fresh air around his tuberculosis sanitarium in 1894. In 1902, controversy raged about the low rent that a private club paid for exclusive usage of significant piece of land bordering Lac Tremblant. Somehow Dr. Richer, a pioneer in tuberculosis treatment, was never offered the reserved Tremblant land for a sanitarium, so in 1899 he built his in Ste. Agathe.

A government bill created Mont Tremblant Park in 1895 to guarantee the pure air for a sanitarium that was never built, but there were others who may have envisaged it more as a park to protect nature, or perhaps simply wished to protect their private interests. The elevations of the railroad stations suggest that Ste. Agathe was the highest point in the mountains. Its station was 1214 feet above sea level, while St. Jovite's was only 690 feet and Ste. Adèle's was at 660 feet. Ste. Agathe also had a small village that was on a lake, a very attractive feature, with its open farmland radiating out into the hills. Mont Tremblant, despite its 3175-foot summit, was away from the railroad corridor in the wild environs of the park. Ste. Agathe grew; Mont Tremblant slept.

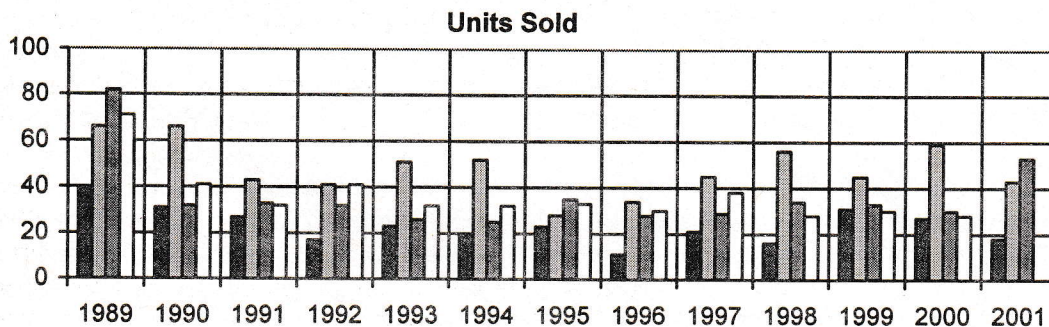
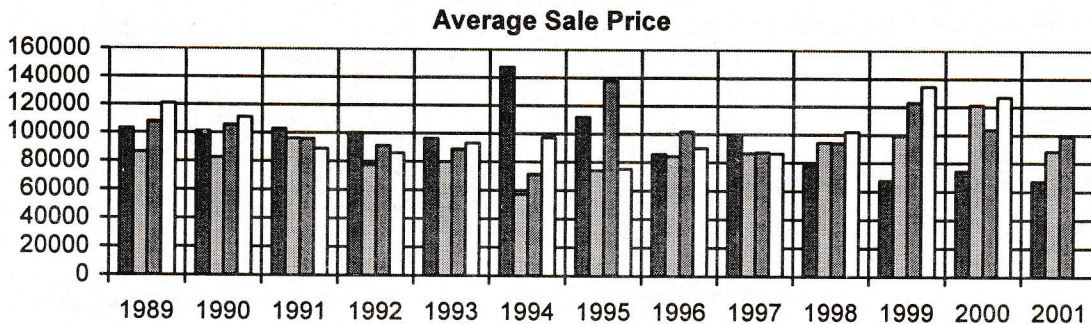
Joe Ryan saw the potential of the mountain in 1938 and determined to make it into an international ski resort. With his American sense of fair play, his inherited fortune and his capricious personality, he cajoled the smaller resort owners into cooperation, and soon Mont Tremblant became the most important ski resort in Eastern North America. During this same period, Ste. Agathe became one of the major tuberculosis treatment centres in Canada, easily holding its dominant position against a mere winter resort.

By the early 1950s Joe Ryan was dead, his money gone, and tuberculosis was cured. Slowly the area drifted into the economic doldrums. In Ste. Agathe, the treatment centres began to close, and Tremblant limped along under less inspired management. The smaller hills fended for themselves, but many did not make it, and soon the inns, first in Ste. Agathe, and eventually in Mont Tremblant, closed up, burnt down or changed hands. Serge Dubois, in a presentation to the Canadian Club last winter in Ste. Agathe, described how the Dubois family lost Villa Bellevue in 1991 after 79 years of family ownership, simply as a result of the lack of cooperation of the Tremblant management. Gray Rocks went through a bankruptcy shortly afterwards. Sadly, at around the same time, rescue was arriving, too late, in the form of Intrawest.

During that long period of economic difficulty, our image of the Laurentians developed. The background community of vacation homes slowly moved closer to centre-stage simply because of the vacuum left there. 'Up North' took on a special connotation. Cottages were easy to find and could be rented for years on end, but were a serious financial risk to buy as the Montreal population waxed and waned. By the mid-nineties, the huge government and private investments in Tremblant were beginning to be felt, while Ste. Agathe, with its regional hospital, began to recover as a community offering services, if not night-life, to its stable vacation home population. Today, Intrawest has added as many new units in Tremblant as exist in all of Ste. Agathe, and it intends to double that number with its next phases. Ste. Agathe is benefiting from the more stable economic environment that Tremblant has fostered. As importantly, there is a trend away from urban centres, and aging vacation homeowners are retiring and becoming full-time residents. Already those of us who have lived here for years, seeing Ste. Agathe as the tired old regional centre, are feeling the presence of a new, larger centre to the north. Instead of our remote lakes in the woods, we are seeing ourselves in a service community in the shadow of a giant resort. We are in the middle of a twenty-year period that is changing the nature of our region. From a real estate point of view, the values will rise, but many of us will pine for the bucolic, peaceful 'up north' of our youth.

Sources- Mont Tremblant: Following the Dream by Louise Arbique; Serge Dubois presentation to the Canadian Club, January 2001; Tremblant Express; previous issues of the Ballyhoo.

MARKET TRENDS



While the total activity does not reflect the strength and volume of 1989, there is a definite upwards tendency in both price and numbers. This same trend may continue through the fourth quarter reflecting a market shift back towards real estate, probably in reaction to the poor performance of fixed-income investments and the stock market, and to some extent, due to a somewhat counter-intuitive reaction to September 11th. While it usually declines in the autumn, this year the rate of new inquiries has increased.

If you would like back issues of the Doncaster Ballyhoo, give us a call or drop by. We will happily add the names of your friends or neighbours to our list if they would like to receive their own copy. Please let us know if you change your address. Having an accurate mailing list helps us keep our costs (and waste) down.

IMMEUBLES
Doncaster inc.
REALTIES
chartered real estate broker

150 rue Principale
 Ste-Agathe-des-Monts, QC
 Canada J8C 1K3
Tel: (819) 326-4963
Fax: (819) 326-8829
info@doncaster.ca

www.doncaster.ca

Owned and operated
since 1985 by:
Joe Graham
 chartered real estate agent
Sheila Eskenazi
 affiliated real estate agent

Publications mail agreement no:
 No convention Poste-publications :
 40632001

Our office is open six days a week, closed Tuesdays.
 (Not intended to solicit properties currently listed for sale)