

# **Beaurepaire-Beaconsfield-Baie-d'Urfé Historical Society**

**November 17<sup>th</sup> Presentation**

**Françoise Duguay  
Archaeologist**

## **Part I**

### **Caron Point, in Baie d'Urfé : History and Archaeology**

#### **Introduction**

What is archaeological research for ? Is it solely about finding things or is there something else driving the process ? If archaeology was about gathering objects, it could have stayed at the level at which colonial archaeology operated in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century: collecting treasures from other cultures and building museums to show them off. Well, that's not the way it works anymore, because there is much more to it than the mere appropriation of goods. It's about Culture, with a capital C, understanding it, rebuilding it and sharing it with the community. So, archaeology is all about context, not objects. Objects are nice, I agree, but they mean so much more in context.

Tonight we are going to share some of the knowledge gathered through the years. The focus will first be put on the archaeological site of Caron Point. The historical and archaeological data will show what was and, also, the evolution of human occupation until recent years. In the second part of the presentation, some problems will be identified, most of which have nothing to do with archaeology, since they arise from unsound management. Therefore, we will also start reflecting on what should be expected in the near future and what measures can be taken to insure the protection of archaeological resources in the West Island. Mixing past, present and future is not uncommon when it comes to archaeology, since archaeologists have a tendency to always add a fourth dimension in their vision : time perception. Time passing by, which allows us the liberty to look back at our roots and see where we come from, as individuals and communities.

#### **General setting**

The North Western tip of Montreal Island is located at the convergence of different rivers, waterways that were once used as canoe routes for transport (fig. 1; carte de localisation régionale):

the Saint. Lawrence and its enlargement Saint Louis Lake, from the Great Lakes;

des Prairies and Mille-Îles rivers, North of the Island of Montreal;

the Outaouais river, a traditional way to the North;

Châteauguay river, going South.

North American Indians have used these waterways to travel across the land. Their camps have left remnants that can be identified through stone tools and, sometimes, pottery. This is what we refer to as the prehistoric period. The oldest Indians sites in Quebec are linked to nomadic groups

that lived here 8 000 years ago. Others came, using other kind of tools and slightly different ways of life. In the Montreal area, the oldest known prehistoric sites date back 4 000 years. There could be some older ones, but no efforts were ever made to systematically find them, since archaeology is mainly done in reaction to development projects, these days.

When Cartier travelled to Montreal, in 1535, he encountered a large village, regrouping thousands of people : Hochelaga. The people who lived there relied on fishing, hunting and gathering, making tools from wood, bone, antler and stone and clothes from hides. They also made decorated unglazed pottery, for pots and pipes, but didn't use much metal. Fishing was done through satellite camps along the shores of the island, away from the village. They also grew corn, beans and squash, adding a new twist from their predecessors' ways : agriculture. It allowed them enough food to be able to regroup, in large numbers, at any time of year, instead of being nomadic. When Champlain came by, in 1608, he only found an abandoned village : the St. Lawrence Valley Iroquoians had left, probably chased out by another group. Some remains linked to the last part of the prehistoric period, called Woodland, were found in Baie d'Urfé : they date back around 1 000 – 1 500 years.

Trade routes also existed back then. They can be traced by the provenance of certain types of stones used to make tools. These stones can be of many kinds: quartz, quartzite, chert, all materials than can be worked to create a cutting, chopping or scraping edge. As for flint, it doesn't occur naturally in North America. European traders used the existing routes to their advantage, specialising the trade to furs. Pelts mainly came to Montreal from Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes regions. If you look at the map, you'll see that the West Island is in the thick of things for canoe routes, when coming down to unload furs in Ville-Marie.

The French, the British and the Dutch, got pretty involved in trade with North American Indians. The St. Lawrence being an important axis and Montreal being a big market for furs, trouble erupted to control this trade. Therefore, the Iroquois Wars of the XVIIth century included an economic component, since control over the trade routes and the fur market were part of the equation. Add to the mix the fact that government officials and many others were involved in smuggling activities, because higher prices were paid in Albany compared to Montreal, and you'll start seeing a glimpse of the larger picture ...

### **La mission sulpicienne de Saint-Louis-du-Haut-de-l'Île: historical context**

Ville-Marie was established in 1642, in what is now called Old Montreal. Its presence triggered the necessity to explore the land and to create outposts, for various reasons, including: territorial expansion of the population, insuring Ville-Marie's defence, missionary missions and fur trade / contraband activities (fig. 2 ; carte XVIIe). The mission established on Caron Point, in 1686, is an example of those XVIIth century outposts.

The *Seigneurs* of Montreal were the Sulpicien priests (*les Messieurs de Saint-Sulpice*), who owned the land and conceded it through the *seigneurial* system enforced by French authorities. The first *fiefs* were localised along the shores of the Montreal Island and on other islands. Jacques LeBer, a merchant and a soldier, owned many properties in and around Montréal : a house in Ville-Marie, a farm on Nun's Island, a house and a warehouse in Lachine, as well as a

fort and a windmill at the tip of the island (Fort Senneville). Other examples : Perrot, then governor of Montréal, used a contraband trading post on Perrot island, to profit from furs. The explorer LaSalle had a *fief* in the parish of Lachine, at Fort Rémy, in what is now called Ville de LaSalle. There were also other settlements, among them : Fort Rolland, in Lachine, Fort La Présentation and Gentilly mission, in Dorval, Saint-Joachim village, in Pointe-Claire and, of course, Saint-Louis mission in Baie d'Urfé.

Not much is known about the Saint-Louis mission, since its presence is mentioned mostly in letters from Monsieur de Tronson, the Sulpicien Superior in Paris. His letters answered the ones sent from Montreal, which are kept in the archives in Paris, if they still exist. The mission was established in 1686, by Saturnin-Lascaris d'Urfé, a Sulpicien priest, on the East side of Caron Point (fig. 3 ; réserve des Sulpiciens). Its said objective was to convert Indian populations to Catholicism, so there must have been resident Indians there. A chapel was erected and the parish was named Saint-Louis-du-Haut-de-l'Île or du-Bout-de-l'Île. We also know there was a cemetery on Caron Point, needed because of the number of people killed in raids. Its presence was revealed by excavations done during the XIXth century, when building a house. The Iroquois attacks seem to have precipitated the mission's closure. The church registry was closed on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1687 ... 317 years ago, almost to the day.

There is a possibility that the mission was open for only a year and a half, while another suggests that the chapel may have been reused between 1703 and 1711, after a peace treaty was signed between the French and the Indians, in 1701 (*la grande Paix de Montréal*). No significant clue was ever found to prove either hypothesis, but it would make sense to have reused the chapel, while Ste. Anne's church was being built. Anyhow, after the mission is abandoned, part of Caron Point is not conceded right away: it's kept as a land *Réserve* by the Sulpicien priests. Another mission is established at l'île-aux-Tourtres and a new church is built in Ste. Anne (fig. 4 ; carte Bellin, 1744), at the beginning of the XVIIIth century (ca 1701-1703). The name St. Louis is then dropped, in favor of Sainte-Anne-du-Bout-de-l'île.

Part of Caron Point's land *Réserve* is kept by the Sulpiciens throughout the XVIIIth century (fig.5; carte 1755). It's finally sold circa 1825-1832 (fig. 6 ; carte 1832). Antoine Caron, a carpenter, also builds a house at the South West tip of the point, during the second half of the XIXth century. During the construction of this house, ca 1865, human remains were found on the point. Records from that period indicate that graves were then excavated and human remains transferred to Ste. Anne. There could still be some graves on Caron Point, though, since there are numerous examples of supposedly excavated cemeteries that weren't all excavated. If you've read the papers lately, you may have learned that quite a few XVIIth century graves were dug up by archaeologists, right in front of Notre-Dame church in Old Montreal, even if that cemetery was supposedly emptied and moved long ago.

During the XXth century, houses and summer cottages were built on Caron Point. No other construction project had disturbed the area, until construction started up again, in 2003. This sums up the sequence of events on Caron Point. A new historical study is currently underway and it may bring new clues on various details regarding human occupation at Caron Point. Let's now see what light archaeology can shed to the story.

## **The archaeological remains at Caron Point**

*Note : I'd like to mention something, even if no instructions were issued to do so. The archaeological site we are going to talk about is located on a private property. It would be appreciated if passersby would, like, pass by, instead of walking in without the owners' consent. So, until it's open to visitors, if ever that happens, please stay off the property.*

This site (fig 7 ; site BiFl-3) came to life in 1989, when part of a stone foundation was uncovered by the owner. He informed the Ministry of Culture and Communications right away, which is the right thing to do under the law (Cultural Property Act). The Ministry's archaeologist first needed an historical study, to know what could have been on Caron Point. The findings were the ones mentioned previously, about a XVIIth century mission in Baie d'Urfé and a Sulpicien land *Réserve* at Caron Point. This was interesting enough for the Ministry to mandate an archaeologist to conduct an exploratory survey of the building and it's adjacent surroundings. It was a very small intervention, low budget, but the date of the artefacts was in accord with the historical data: second half XVIIth century, early XVIIIth century. On top of it, there wasn't only one building, there was an entire archaeological complex buried underground. But I'm getting ahead of myself, as usual, so let's back paddle and go step by step.

The exploratory dig was exclusively funded by the MCCQ (Montreal division), a very unusual situation, since the Ministry's policy is to act in joint ventures (50 / 50) with municipalities. Town of Baie d'Urfé refused to collaborate, but the Ministry went ahead anyway. Two members of Historical Societies, from Beaconsfield and Pointe-Claire, were hired for the fieldwork.

*(ad lib comments)*

- fig A-8 ;                    plan du site BiFl-3
- fig. A-9 ;                    plan des excavations archéologiques
- fig. A-10 ;                    coupe stratigraphique, inside main building
- fig. A-11 à A-14 ;            artefacts

Recommendations were made, to identify other components, find the site's true extent and to insure its preservation, but nothing was done by either the MCCQ or the Town of Baie d'Urfé. In the Fall of 2003, a house was built across the road from the known part of the site, without any archaeology being done (fig 7). The Historical Society sounded the alarm and the AAQ met with the director of the Heritage division of the MCCQ, as well as the archaeologist of the recently merged City of Montreal. Neither the City nor the Ministry batted an eyelash; construction work went on as scheduled.

A project for building another house on the point, in the Spring of 2004, had people from the Historical Society ready for battle, once again, as well as the AAQ. This time, it worked. The City of Montreal, through its Heritage division and the Heritage Council of Montreal, as well as

the Beaconsfield-Baie d'Urfé borough, pressured the MCCQ at the highest levels. A new archaeological project and another historical research were put together, funded through a partnership between the MCCQ, the borough (Urbanism division) and the City of Montreal's Heritage department (*développement économique et urbain* division). Archaeological activities went ahead in May, south west of the first dig, but in another setting than an exploratory survey: a salvage archaeology project, which is an unplanned reaction to the construction project. This project basically meant digging holes where construction work would be done, which is quite different from an archaeologically based survey, since the main purpose is to record the archaeological context before it's destroyed (fig. 15 ; plan des opérations 5, 6 et 7).

The new findings mainly illustrate another part of the occupation sequence of Caron Point: a XIXth century house foundation, most probably Antoine Caron's house, and artefacts relevant to that period. A tiny fragment of XVIIth century pottery was also collected and, on the last day (as usual ...), a previously excavated XVIIth century grave pit was identified ; the bones had, although, been removed during the XIXth century. Once again, historical and archaeological data were in correlation, which is always a good sign. Since the archaeological excavations were not meant to find the cemetery, per se, it was part luck and part scientific hypothesis to actually find a grave. Once again, recommendations were made, but to no avail; construction started, without any further archaeological investigation or supervision.

The next step was taken in the Fall of 2004, by Hydro-Québec. Hydro's procedure insures that archaeology should be done in all Heritage area, including known archaeological sites, before they can go on with a project. In this case, polls needed to be installed, to bring electricity to the new houses (fig. 16 ; opération 8). By promoting archaeology in such a way, Hydro's acting as an exemplary corporate citizen, since the letter of the law doesn't require it (don't tell anyone, okay ?). Yet another salvage archaeology project was put together and went ahead, in September 2004. In this case, excavations were restricted to areas where new polls were being installed.

The results showed that XVIIth century and XIXth century artefacts were present on the East side of Caron Point, while mid and second half XIXth century remains were excavated on the West Side of Caron Point Road. These findings corroborate the fact that the XVIIth century occupation was mostly clustered on the East side of the point, while their absence in the Southwest section reinforced the fact that the cemetery was located there: people didn't live in the cemetery, but in the main complex of the mission. The gap in the data relating to the XVIIIth century was also noted, since it follows the finding of the historical study and previous archaeological data. As for the XIXth century, the data were in concordance with the ones unearthed in the Spring of 2004, regarding Antoine Caron's location.

Besides the early dates involved, what makes the Caron Point site so distinctive? First, the whole occupation sequence and multiple components can be perceived through archaeology:

Prehistoric stone tools, from the Woodland period (found by residents);

A XVIIth century complex, including :

- at least 2 buildings, one with a raised stone foundation;

- a cemetery, south west of the main building;
- an open fireplace, which could also be an historic Indian tent;

A rural, second half XIXth century, house (now destroyed).

Second, the site is mainly in natural conditions, meaning that clues can be seen by observing the topography. It's a big plus, when wanting to optimise the efficiency of an archaeology project.

Third, mixed French / North American Indian occupations are rarely found in the Montreal area, since traces have often been erased by multiple reoccupation.

Fourth, the site is almost in mint condition, preserved as a time capsule, since the mission was abandoned and that no village raised from the original cluster. Furthermore, stones lying around on the East side of the point prevented ploughing, during the XIXth century, so the context is still intact.

Sixth, it's never been dug by the ROM ...

Last, but not least : this type of site is very interesting, when wanting to inform a large public, since it's easy to relate to and that it's concrete evidence of what is written in history books. Life at the edge of an expanding colony: missionary priests, Indians, fur trade, Iroquois raiders, death. *Bref*, a great setting for cultural tourism. What more can one wish for?

Such access to the past is rarely found on the Island of Montreal, since urban development usually clouded previous traces of land use. The West Island presents very specific characteristics when it comes to archaeology, which will be the topic of the next segment, among other things.

Question period

-----

## Part II

### Archaeology in the West Island

(fig. 1; carte de localisation régionale)

For the sake of historical accuracy, regarding XVIIth century outposts and early XVIIIth century settlements, West means Verdun to des Prairies river, because events there are linked in the same expansion process. That territory is not all considered part of what is referred to as the West Island, but just humour me.

(fig. 17 et 18 ; sites connus et aires de potentiel archéologique pour le XVIIe siècle)

Up to now, not much has been done, archaeology wise, in the West Island. Two of the main, well preserved and known XVIIth century sites, LeBer's farm on Nuns Island and Fort Senneville, have been dug by the Royal Ontario Museum, in the late 1960's and early 1970's ... in true colonial fashion. Small exploratory projects were done in LaSalle, at St. Anges church, fort Cuillerier and the Fleming windmill (XIXth century). Larger scale projects have taken place in Lachine, at the LeBer house, and in the old part of Pointe-Claire.

Some further work has been done at the LeBer farm on Nun's Island, in a salvage archaeology context, in the 1990's. The remains of the farm itself are in very bad shape, since the ROM never bothered to fill in the site after they finished digging; weathering caused the stone walls to collapse. Some information was found outside the limits of the farm, relevant to prehistoric occupations: the skull of a child was recovered, as well as stone tools and pottery dated from the Woodland period. Further north, a prehistoric encampment was found, dating back 4 000 years. More archaeology work has also been done at Fort Senneville, in the process of giving a legal status to the fort and the windmill. It was found that the ROM hadn't finished excavating all the levels and that some data were still buried under the fill.

Did the results of those archaeology projects affect anybody's life ? The answer is no, of course. Why ? Because archaeological sites are mainly treated as a problem, not a plus, like they should. Why ... again ? Because of an outdated law, the Cultural Property Act, a Ministry (MCCQ) that's letting go of its powers as manager of Quebec's archaeological resources and also, lack of know how inside most municipal management structures.

Known archaeological sites aren't protected under the law (CPA), although their presence is recorded by the MCCQ, if they are not granted a legal status. How many of the previously mentioned archaeological sites are protected? (fig 19; liste des biens culturels à statut) Only one, the church site, in LaSalle. The two others are windmills (moulin banal in Pointe-Claire and moulin Fleming in LaSalle), in which case the structures were protected, but not the surrounding ground where the archaeological site is buried. Are potential archaeological sites protected? No.

Since the merger with Montreal, a special attention has been given to the whole island, instead of

focusing only on Old Montreal and surrounding *faubourgs*. All known archaeological sites were mapped and likely potential areas were also identified. This was made possible through efforts from the Heritage division and, specifically, the archaeology team at the central City of Montreal office (*développement économique et urbain*). Another factor was the great efforts made after the Montreal Summit, in 2000, to create a better setting for all Heritage resources on the Island of Montreal.

As you may have heard, the City of Montreal released a draft of its Policy regarding Heritage resources earlier this month. The Montreal Heritage Council and the City of Montreal's Heritage division played a big role in making this possible, as well as volunteer work from historical societies and professional associations (this HS and the AAQ included). Having such a policy is a huge step forward, since policies are what management is based on. Just about every Heritage pressure groups in Quebec and Canada have been asking for such policies, but nobody ever came through ... until now. A policy is not a law, but it can bring changes about, so it's a glimpse of hope to get a brighter setting.

(fig. 20 ; carte des défusions) As for the future, the demerger process will start in a little more than a year. It's therefore important to start thinking now, about what effect it may have on Heritage resources, if the plan is to drop the City of Montreal's Heritage Policy. On the other hand, doing archaeology the way it is done by the City of Montreal is probably not the best option, since it's far from expectations each of you have. From what I've gathered, citizens want to be incorporated in the archaeological process, which is a valid demand, and they want an easier access to archaeological data. Both reflect strong communal bonds. Is this perception wrong ?

The West Island's potential for archaeological sites is greater than anywhere else on the island, because of the way people settled here during the XXth century. Large properties with only one house, as well as agricultural activities and the care people took of visible remains, insured the safety of archaeological sites ... until recently. What we are now witnessing is a change in socio-economics and demographics, resulting in an out of control anarchist development. Large properties are being sold and resubdivided, to built many houses, and this is repeated over and over again. It wouldn't be a problem in a less sensitive area, but it is in the West Island.

Add to it that systematic archaeological surveys have never been done, since the sites were considered protected by the particular kind of land use, and you get an idea of what lies ahead : massive destruction of archaeological sites, without even knowing that they were there. Most prehistoric and XVIIth century sites can't be identified using a backhoe or a bulldozer, that's a basic fact. The information that archaeological sites can bring us comes from long hours of tedious work, both on the field and in the lab, so that the available data is understood and can be shared with all. When a handful of people are handed the right to destroy archaeological sites, they are given the right to destroy our collective past. It's happening as we speak, on Ste. Marie road, where XVIIIth century farms are being eradicated to packed as many houses as possible.

After fishing for information, a bleak picture emerged, regarding future archaeological resources management on the Island of Montreal:



The Montreal Heritage Council's mandate is valid only on the City of Montreal's territory. Since they are the ones implementing the Heritage Policy, guess what? The policy won't apply outside of the City of Montreal new limits, when the merger is out;

The management structure that covers the Island of Montreal won't be of any help either, since its mandate doesn't include Heritage resources. As a matter of fact, Heritage resources aren't even listed in the various fields of competency (fig. A-21 ; champs de compétences). The Council will manage roads, though, so if any salvage archaeology is needed, when installing new pipes, they should deal with it, but they don't have any on-hand archaeologist able to plan it;

One could always argue that, since municipalities will get to manage local cultural equipment, they should be in charge of archaeology and other Heritage resources. That was the reasoning on the City of Montreal's part, 15 years ago, which led to the creation of an archaeology unit embedded in its Heritage division. Here's the catch : their mandate covers only the City of Montreal's territory;

Ten years ago, the MCCQ had a team of 10 archaeologists to insure management of archaeological resources (sites, collections and permits), it now has 4 (only 1 in the Montreal office). Therefore, the MCCQ is: 1) turning its management powers to municipalities and 2) didn't change the CPA in accordance with this move, when it comes to archaeological resources. The result is that everybody's hands are tied, when trying to insure the protection of archaeological sites, especially when they are located on private properties. The Ministry does sign 50 / 50 partnerships with various types of management structures, if said structures can demonstrate that they have the will and the means to manage archaeological resources. That's the channel through which the Spring 2004 archaeology project was funded, since an agreement exists between the City of Montreal and the MCCQ;

Hydro-Québec and other large developers tend to respect known archaeological sites, but sites aren't recorded yet in the West Island. However, such guidelines don't apply to potential areas, even if well documented.

Archaeologists know that sites are plentiful and well preserved in the West Island, but the hard data has never been collected, due to unsound management from municipal authorities and the MCCQ. Their actions have mainly been reactions to specific development projects, especially when citizens got pissed enough to give them a piece of their mind. Otherwise, no global solution was ever proposed, besides salvage archaeology. What do you, the citizens, want: salvage archaeology, planned archaeology or no archaeology? Only you can answer this question. If what you want is sound management of Heritage resources and archaeology projects

serving the population needs, now is the time to say so, because later on much may be destroyed. You'll also have to inform your local elected officials of your opinion, otherwise nothing will be done.

Outside large urban areas, in small towns and villages, people got organised on a regional basis. This enabled sharing the cost of protecting archaeological resources and, by doing so, citizens took back the right to influence the kind of archaeology projects that were being put forward. Will the West Island's specificity be demonstrated by its lack of sound management regarding archaeological resources or by taking command of its huge archaeological potential? If promoting sound management regarding archaeology is your choice, many venues can be explored.

Thank you for your time.

Question period