

PRESS RELEASE

WHERE MONTRÉAL BEGAN

Pointe-à-Callière unveils a unique commemorative space, the site where Montréal was founded and a heritage legacy for the city's 375th anniversary

Montréal, May 17, 2017 – The city of Montréal and Pointe-à-Callière, the Montréal Archaeology and History Complex, are delighted to invite Montrealers to follow in the footsteps of the pioneers who founded their city and visit a unique commemorative space: the site where Montréal began.

The city's most important heritage legacy for Montréal's 375th anniversary, the new pavilion inaugurated today by Pointe-à-Callière is built atop remains and the very soil trod by Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, Jeanne Mance and some forty other pioneers who came here from France to found Montréal in 1642. With the showcasing of Fort Ville-Marie, the first settlement that housed the *Montréalistes*, the public is invited to visit a priceless site where they can enjoy moving encounters with a handful of men and women whose courage and determination continue to inspire Montrealers even today.

"The city of Montréal is pleased to offer this heritage legacy to Montrealers, an undeniably symbolic and memory-filled site, one where traces of our origins celebrate our history. I am touched to see evidence of the peace-seeking initiatives with the first occupants of this territory that still resonate in Montréal, a city that has made living well together one of its priorities. For our 375th anniversary, it was important to finally have a commemorative site dedicated to the memory of our founders, who were driven by hope for a better world. For are we not still motivated by those same values today? That's why I see a strong connection between the Montréal of yesteryear and our modern city," says Montréal Mayor Denis Coderre.

An exceptional discovery

The Museum had been looking for traces of Fort Ville-Marie since the remains of Montréal's first Roman Catholic cemetery (1643) had been found in 1989. But it was not until 1998 that an important step occurred, when the Pointe-à-Callière Foundation acquired the Townsend warehouse, located at 214 Place D'Youville, given the building's tremendous archaeological potential. In 2002, in partnership with the Université de Montréal, the Museum established Montréal's first urban Archaeological Field School, to search for remains of the fort. After 15 years of archaeological excavations and considerable research and analysis on this major site in Old Montréal, the archaeologists and historians assembled a collection of more than 300,000 artifacts and ecofacts, but more importantly they made an exceptional discovery: they found traces of Fort Ville-Marie, and were able to visualize where it stood on this point of land near the St. Lawrence. That discovery led to plans to showcase and build a new pavilion on the very site where Montréal was founded in May 1642.





"I want to sincerely thank the city of Montréal for allowing us to offer Montrealers the most important heritage legacy for and permanent reminder of Montréal's 375th anniversary! The enthusiasm that drove the first Montréalistes is palpable in this memory-filled site that whisks us back to the city's earliest days. This commemorative space is sure to give all Montrealers a sense of belonging and pride, as it makes Pointe-à-Callière more than ever before the museum of all Montrealers," notes Andrew Molson, Chair of the Board of the Museum.



A unique site paying tribute to the city's founders

With its architecture designed by the Dan Hanganu + Provencher Roy Associés Architectes consortium fitting seamlessly in the historic district, the new pavilion houses the *Where Montréal Began* exhibition, an eloquent tribute to the city's founders. As soon as visitors step into the exhibition hall, the museography by the Daily tous les jours studio reminds them of the religious motives behind the venture, as they watch a moving scene: the ceremony of the first Mass celebrating Montréal's founding. The scene is evoked by figurines representing the 49 pioneers, privileged witnesses to the colony's beginnings. A projection bathes the space in a hushed, mysterious atmosphere, recalling another significant moment in Montréal's history, when floodwaters rose suddenly and dramatically around the fort, and Maisonneuve vowed to plant a cross atop Mount Royal if the waters receded. He fulfilled his vow, erecting the cross on January 6, 1643... and its symbolic representation still stands on the mountain today.



A privilege to "walk" across the remains

The tour route is like a pilgrimage, leading visitors to literally "walk" above the remains of the site where Montréal was founded, thanks to the glass floor overlooking them. The floor protects the site and reveals its priceless nature, framing and showcasing the traces left by its inhabitants back when Montréal began. A virtual model of the fort shows visitors the layout of the first Montréal settlement. In an alcove, a sound and light installation pays tribute to the 49 founding pioneers, those men and women without whom Montréal could never have been born. Nearby, a palisade-display case presents period artifacts allowing visitors to imagine everyday life on the site, to learn about trade with the Indigenous people and to witness the pioneers' survival strategies. In the fort space, a large audiovisual projection literally transports visitors outside the palisade, into the natural surroundings at the time, when the forest and its creatures prevailed over the inhabited world. At the end of the route, visitors skip forward in time to revisit the symbolic importance of the Great Peace of Montréal treaty, signed on this very spot in 1701, between Governor Louis-Hector de Callière and delegates from 39 Indigenous Nations.



“As they explore the site where Montréal began, visitors will have a sense of emotion and admiration when they realize the challenges met by those courageous individuals who came here to found a city in an unknown land. Today we are turning the spotlight on a human adventure filled with resilience and courage. Most importantly, we are pleased to give Montrealers back the site where their city was founded and to make Pointe-à-Callière a tourist attraction even more anchored in its mission of bringing visitors to know and appreciate the Montréal of yesterday and today,” adds Francine Lelièvre, Executive Director of Pointe-à-Callière.

Witnesses from yesterday and today

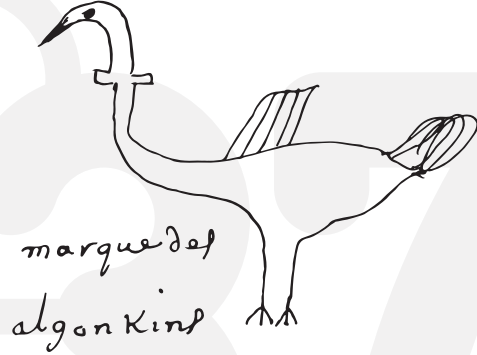
A majestic 630-kg bronze bell cast in France is installed on the pavilion roof, where it will remind us of the everyday experiences of the first Montrealers in the colony’s earliest days. A bell hung in the fort, where it tolled to strike the hour, acknowledge births and deaths and rally the inhabitants. Wishing to maintain another tradition, the Museum is also leaving a mark of the present day in the “new” Fort Ville-Marie with a “time capsule” displayed in a showcase. These texts, paying tribute to the founders or their ancestors, are signed by descendants of the first Montrealers, Indigenous people and religious communities, as well as by the Montréal Mayor and Museum management.



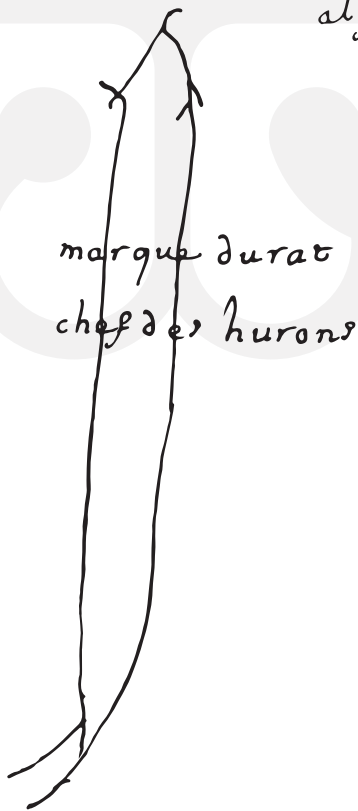
A collector of Montréal memories

To get from the Museum’s main building to the Fort Ville-Marie – Quebecor Pavilion, and for the first time in Montréal, visitors will make their way through a monumental collector sewer. The Little River, which once ran alongside Fort Ville-Marie, was channelled into a vaulted collector sewer in 1832, a feat of engineering at the time. Now, along with the monument, visitors will be able to admire a light installation by Moment Factory. The *Memory Collector* reflects archival images, decomposing them into light particles and projecting them onto the stone walls of the collector sewer, in a sound environment specially designed by the Montréal firm.

At the eastern end of the collector, visitors will also be able to see an image of Montréal’s first stone bridge, the Franchère Bridge, built in 1809 across the Little River, and remains of which were found during the archaeological digs in 2015. A National Film Board (NFB) film, *Un jour sur le pont Franchère*, uses a holographic video projection to show an accelerated view of 24 hours of life on the bridge, as it would have been in its day.



marque de l'
Algonquin



marque de l'
chef des Hurons



haronhiataka
chef duault.

Complex planning and development, and unavoidable conservation issues

Showcasing these unique memory-filled sites required innovative solutions on the part of solid multidisciplinary teams, given the many issues raised by the highly complex work. These included the conservation challenges in working on a fragile 17th-century archaeological site, along with the need to refurbish a 19th-century collector sewer and underground crypt and to erect a pavilion between existing buildings, all in a historic district. The teams had to rely on R&D in designing, creating, producing and installing a glass floor and ventilation system specially designed to maintain stable environmental conditions and humidity levels, while allowing a large number of visitors to “walk above the remains.” The historic sites also had to be consolidated and protected from the risk of dessication, crumbling and mould, along with the impact of the water table, which rises and falls throughout the year.

Key partners

Pointe-à-Callière wishes to thank the city of Montréal, which provided project funding, the Direction de la Culture et du Patrimoine and the Ville-Marie Borough, with which the Museum carried out the redevelopment work. The Museum also wishes to salute the exceptional support of its staff and the many teams of professionals that contributed to the entire project. Special thanks go to the Parks Canada Agency, which contributed to conserving the remains of the site where Montréal began, to the NFB for collaborating on the installation evoking the Franchère Bridge, and to IBM. Finally, the Museum wishes to thank the donors who contributed to the Pointe-à-Callière Foundation’s major fundraising campaign, including Quebecor, the company whose name the new pavilion bears. ■



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