

WHERE MONTRÉAL BEGAN

The first sewer becomes a *Memory Collector*

By the 19th century, the Little River, which separated the Pointe-à-Callière from the city, had become an open sewer that carried the city's wastewater to the St. Lawrence. By covering over this channelled river in 1832, and turning it into a collector sewer for rainwater and wastewater, engineers of the day successfully followed the increasingly common practice in London, Paris, Philadelphia and Boston of transforming natural water courses that were now sewers into underground drainage systems. And so a major feat of engineering and architecture was born in Montréal, the collector sewer built of cut stone between 1832 and 1838.

Montréal was an innovator at the time: the size and design quality of the cut stone tunnel was unrivalled in the modern world until the mid-19th century. It was possible to build roads, parks, parking lots and more above these former water courses now turned into new urban surfaces. That is precisely what happened in Place D'Youville.

The sewer channelled the Little River underground and collected rainwater and wastewater right up until 1989. At that point it was decommissioned and the water was diverted to the network of interceptor sewers ringing Montréal Island, leading to the Rivière-des-Prairies treatment plant. The portion of the collector sewer beneath Pointe-à-Callière, between the Éperon building and Place Royale, was integrated into the Museum in 1992 as a way of showcasing its interest, uniqueness and historic role in the city.

In 2017, a newly refurbished 100-metre section of the collector sewer between the Museum's main building and the new pavilion is being opened. Visitors will be able to walk through this underground infrastructure toward Fort Ville-Marie, the first settlement that housed Montréal's founders in 1642.

They will enjoy a multisensory experience thanks to the *Memory Collector*, where they can stroll through light projections on the stone walls of the sewer collector, in a specially designed sound environment. The *Memory Collector* reflects archival images, turning them into light particles and projecting them onto the sewer walls. To respect the spirit of the site and showcase this monument, the installation designed by Moment Factory plunges visitors into a mysterious underground world and leads them to a magical space imbued with history and emotion. ■

