



A church spire is seen through the windows of the Palais des congrès de Montréal in downtown Montreal. Churches formed the centrepiece of urban Montreal. TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

# Parishes and the patchwork of Montreal

By ARNAUD CAMU  
Epoch Times Staff

MONTREAL—It's funny how a city's nickname can indeed suit it well. The city of Montreal is at times referred to as the ville aux cent clochers (the hundred-bell-tower city). Up until a few decades ago the Catholic church played a very important role in the largest French-speaking city in North America.

Montreal's layout says a lot about it. Drive around the city's older quarters and you'll see a church, an elementary school, a park, and most likely a grocery store gathered close together.

"It stems from the people's desire to unite around the school, around the church, around the stores. We call that a parish," describes Father Hamelin from Côte-des-Neiges, a parish in central Montreal that has now become one of Canada's most multicultural areas.

"It allows people to stay at the same place, to have services at arm's length instead of obtaining them elsewhere, like downtown," Fr. Hamelin said.

"It creates a little community. The parish becomes a community where all possible services are offered. People get to know each other more. They meet at church, they meet at the school's parents meetings, they meet at the pharmacy, at the bank."

Other factors also helped cement relationships between people, explains Mrs. Trudeau, who grew up in the years before WWII in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, a parish just down the road from Côte-des-Neiges.

"As my parish was mostly composed of French speakers, we had a lot of friends around. I felt that I lived there, and that it was my way of living. There were a whole lot of games organized in schools and we would play for the parish."

Up until the 1970s, although

Montreal was Canada's largest city, it had the feel of a village rather than a big urban centre.

"We had a village's mentality while remaining in town, while remaining in Montreal. Each parish had all the services. They were all pretty much autonomous. [...] People would stay there. They did not have to go out. They would go to town only when they needed to shop," said Fr. Hamelin.

"We were proud of our neighborhood and we didn't feel the need to go elsewhere," Mrs. Trudeau said. "[We would not go out] often because we had our friends around and our parents. We would rarely go out. Sometimes, when I was a bit older, I would go to the movie theatre, but we would rarely go far from home."

This feeling of belonging and community also translated into after-class activities such as sports.

"The school-church link being very strong, once school was over the kids would stay in the school-

yard and have fun. Teachers and religion would take care of them, be there with them. It created a big family," said Fr. Hamelin.

With hockey being the national sport, each schoolyard usually had its own ice rink, and each parish would organize its own team, said Mrs. Trudeau.

With the decrease in religious practice in the province of Quebec and significantly fewer people attending Sunday mass, some of the old churches have been renovated into condos, and hockey teams are now formed at the municipal district level instead of at the parish level.

Yet as you drive around Montreal's older residential areas today, you will stumble upon an architectural pattern that endured the changes in social trends, habits and ideals: the same old church, alongside the same elementary school and the same park, all witnesses that the times they are a-changing.

# B.C. beachcombers struggle to stay afloat

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"The incentive for us to do it is really not there any more because [Gulf Log] has been paying us an artificially low price and this makes it very unviable economically to recover a lot of the wood," says long-time beachcomber Norbert Kaysser.

The problem, says Kaysser, is that Gulf Log, which is run by the forest industry and marine insurance companies, has focused on recovering lost logs "at the lowest possible price," paying a small fee rather than the market value of the wood.

"In many instances, many of us are getting nothing or next to nothing for logs that are a valuable commodity. And it's not necessarily the lower grade logs that we get paid almost nothing for, it's quite often very higher grade logs, but we get almost nothing because of the pay structure. It's absolutely incredible if you really understand what is going on."

A request for an interview with Gulf Log was refused. On its website, the company says salvaged logs are generally of lower value than fresh green timber, mainly because some mills refuse salvaged logs. The mills are worried about hitting metal that may be stuck in them, or the logs can be damaged by insects or impregnated with sand.

The fact that the forest industry is currently experiencing the worst timber market in decades is not helping matters. But Kaysser is one of the lucky ones. He's been in the game for 38 years, his boat is paid for, and he has established "very good contacts in the industry."

"Still, even for me it's very difficult right now," he says. "But for someone who might be interested to start out in this business like I did all those years ago, they would have absolutely no chance."

There is also a cost to retrieving stray logs: \$250 per year to renew the necessary permit, a yearly criminal record check costing about \$50, and sorting fees of \$8.50 per cubic metre of salvaged wood. On top of that there's fuel and costly boat maintenance.

"We're providing a service and yet we have to pay the sorting costs out of our share of the proceeds which is very unfair because there are many grades and types of logs that we lose money on. Gulf Log would actually charge us if we brought them there because the sorting fees are more than we would get for them. So some of the logs—it doesn't pay us to even pick them up," Kaysser says.

Beachcombers and environmentalists concerned about the situation on the Fraser River have tried for years to bring about change and achieve higher payouts for salvaged logs. A legal challenge to the constitutionality of the log salvage system brought by a beachcomber in 2005 was dismissed.

"In many ways, it's an industry in danger," says Mitch Anderson, general manager of Western Log Sort and Salvage Co-operative, a beachcomber-run company he spearheaded to compete with Gulf Log.

But Anderson believes things can be turned around, and he considers it a triumph in itself that the government, after deliberating for 18 months, granted a permit for the co-op in 2006, the only other such permit issued since Gulf Log started up in 1954.

Anderson wants to give beachcombers a fighting chance by providing a choice in where they deliver the wood, paying them a better price and not charging a sorting fee. This in turn, he says, would put more wood back in the marketplace and reduce the environmental impact on the Fraser.

"It's not all doom and gloom at all," says Anderson. "This project, in particular this license, is a unique

opportunity to improve a very vexing situation and also bring in some more open market and competitive behaviour to the forest industry on the coast in general."

Western Log was in the process of scaling up operations when the bottom fell out of the market about a year ago. It is currently in a holding pattern until market conditions improve. However, the small company is managing to stay afloat while many businesses related to the forest industry are going under.

Art Paul, president of Perma-nent Pole, used wood from Western Log in the construction of a new visitors' information centre

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at the Peace Arch border crossing that is currently being built in preparation for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics.

The salvaged logs are prominently displayed and are a key architectural feature of the building, which is scheduled to open in the spring.

"In this particular project the wood has gone to what I would have to say is an ideal application for the reuse of salvaged wood. It's not only putting salvaged wood to very good use but it's also going to contribute measurably in getting LEED certification for that project," says Paul.

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is an internationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of green buildings. "It's a significant public relations plum," says Paul, who is also on the board of the Log Homes Manufacturers Association.

Anderson says log salvaging is a "green job" because beachcombers work to keep the Fraser clear of stray logs that not only damage the river environment but also pose an ever-present, potentially fatal danger to boaters.

The Canadian Coast Guard documented 60 incidents in B.C. waters between 1999 and 2003 in which vessels collided with renegade logs and required assistance or rescue. In 2004, a fishing boat off Tsawwassen capsized after hitting a deadhead. Deadheads are logs that are mostly submerged, with one end protruding above the surface of the water.

What concerns environmentalists and boaters is that if beachcombers don't pick up the stray logs, nobody does, as the forest companies are not interested in going after them.

Anderson believes that through innovative marketing, salvaged wood can be put to good use while at the same time helping the environment and providing local jobs. While a number of hurdles have to be overcome, one of which is finding a market for the lower grade wood, he is optimistic that Western Log can thrive and grow after the current slump is over.

"Once we start selling a significant amount of wood the co-op is going to have a significant amount of revenue and we can use that to scale up our operations, and we look forward to that day. Our challenge right now is just trying to help beachcombers and get them paid more for their work."

# Canada to budget for large but short-term deficits

OTTAWA (Reuters)—The Conservative government plans to budget for large, but temporary, budget deficits to try to rescue the ailing economy, a top aide to Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on Wednesday.

"We're prepared to run large short-term deficits in order to support our economic recovery package," the aide told reporters as the minority government prepared its January 27 annual budget.

He also said the Conservatives, which must rely on the support of one of the three opposition parties to stay in power, were less inclined than before to make noneconomic issues matters of confidence that could topple the government.

"Our primary focus is the economy and the secondary matters are exactly that, secondary to the economy," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The expectation of Canadians is that the government and the opposition parties will put their focus on economic issues."

The Conservatives were re-elected with a strengthened minority in Parliament in October but came within a whisker of being toppled last month over the government's fall economic statement.

The opposition was angered by the government's attempt, now withdrawn, to end public subsidies for the parties and complained that the fall statement should have contained immediate fiscal stimulus.

Canada is the only member of the Group of Seven leading indus-

trialized nations still to be running a budget surplus and the government has signalled since the election that it would go into deficit in the fiscal year starting April 1.

The Harper aide said the key was to make sure that government stimulus measures would result in only short-term deficits. However, he said the global economic turmoil made it impossible to predict how long the deficits would last.

"Getting into long-term projections is a bit foolish at this time," he said.

After last month's high-stakes brinkmanship by both the government and the opposition, the guessing on Parliament Hill now is that the main opposition Liberal Party will block any attempt to bring the government down.

But there will be a string of confidence votes in the wake of the Throne Speech, the government's broad policy statement, to be delivered on the afternoon of January 26, as well as after the budget, presented the following afternoon.

The new Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, has opened the door to compromise, refusing to commit to bring down the government over a budget he has not yet seen.

The Liberals had signed an agreement on December 1 with the leftist New Democratic Party and the separatist Bloc Quebecois to try to bring the Conservatives down and install a Liberal-NDP coalition. That agreement remains, on paper, but Ignatieff has since distanced himself from it.

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Log boom on the Fraser River. Thousands of cubic metres of stray logs are clogging marshes in the Fraser River estuary, damaging bird habitat and impacting migrating salmon. MITCH ANDERSON