

The Birth of a Village

After an expedition in 1870, Curé Labelle wrote, "From the summit of the highest mountain in Wolfe, I spied the township of Salaberry, which forms a beautiful plain. One could believe oneself to be in one of our beautiful seigneuries".

In fact, in the centre of the township, a recent forest fire had denuded a large part of some slightly hilly land, which was bordered by a river and two streams with waterfalls. It was the ideal place to position the centre of the Grand-Brûlé ("big burn") mission, for which Curé Samuel Ouimet selected the name Saint-Jovite in 1879.

But colonization of this area was already underway. Starting in 1862, the Hamilton brothers' worksite was established at the junction of the Diable and Rouge Rivers, drawing its quota of loggers every year. When the wood had been cut and gathered, the company gave the colonists the land to be cleared. As a result, the pioneers slowly established themselves in the plain, on their respective lots. Once the land had been cleared of stumps and the house built, the family moved here hoping that the land would be fertile.

So this large valley began to be settled. But Curé Labelle dreamed of a village on the soil of Grand-Brûlé, and began a campaign to tell of the area's assets. Bit by bit, two lines of homes took shape, with their sheds, stables and kitchen gardens behind them. Sawmills and flour mills sprang up along the streams. The young hamlet thus had the materials needed to build its buildings and a facility to mill its grain. Still thanks to these streams, electric power was soon added, becoming another element favouring growth of the village.

Every village needed a cemetery in which to place the deceased. As a result, the villagers set aside this place, opposite the spot where the church was to be built. The space, however, soon became too small. The parish priest, along with his parishioners, decided in 1893 to move the cemetery to a larger space... which was well chosen, because it is still in use today. The relocation was a delicate matter: every grave was dug out by hand and the bones placed in a bag labelled with the name of the deceased. The bags were then placed in a tumbrel which would serve, for the time-being, as a hearse. Horses pulled the tumbrel with the bodies, which were then placed in their new graves, carefully identified by a cross of wood or iron made by the family of the deceased.

It was decided that a school for boys would be built on the former site of the cemetery. Following an unfortunate incident, however, (see box), the place became virtually accursed. It was said to be inhabited by souls disturbed in their rest, and it was abandoned.

The land was rehabilitated in 1900 and was converted into a park.

Its facilities included a handsome wooden kiosk and a cedar fence bordering the road, to which carters would tie their horses. On Sunday, after Mass, parishioners would gather on the space in front of the church or in the park to talk with each other and share the news. During this time, the kiosk and park would fill with children running, shouting and laughing. Playtime was a welcome break for the youngsters, who had just spent close to two hours being quiet and still.

In 1970, in response to a pressing new social need, the parish corporation handed over this land in the heart of the village so that a residence could be built for old people and those experiencing a loss of independence.

During this century (1870 - 1970), the parish underwent considerable development and the pioneers, with their large families, populated it in record time, thus contributing to ensuring French descendants in the region.

The parish became a large town and now bears the name of the Ville de Mont-Tremblant.

An “ominous” discovery

On the land left vacant when the cemetery was moved, it was planned that a school for boys be built. Digging was begun for a sewer. During this process, to the great consternation of the parish priest, the workers unearthed several bones. There was incredulity, indignation, anger and more on the part of some parishioners. Curé Samuel Ouimet quickly wrote to his bishop: “A bad person, goaded by another more educated and more beastly, threatens to have me explain my conduct before a Court of Law!”¹ Fearing eventual lawsuits, he expressly asked his bishop for written permission to dig up these bodies, as well as obtaining an order from the Court.

The incident caused such a furor that the choice of site of the future school was changed.

¹ *Extract of a letter dated November 14, 1893.*

Research and writing: Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC, heritage society

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Legend: A tumbrel is a box mounted on two wheels, used to transport materials, and emptied by tipping. In the beginning, the tumbrel was pulled by an ox, then later by a horse. Later, and when the farmer had more money, it was pulled by a tractor. The tumbrel is still used by farmers.

Source: *website spi-maurice.com [www.spi-maurice.com]*



Legend: At the back of the park, a fire hall was built for volunteer firefighters, with a tall tower from which firehoses were hung to dry. When the alarm bell rang, villagers ran to help those in need and put out the fire. It was a matter of mutual assistance.

Source: *collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC*



Legend: Kiosk in the park, built around 1900.

Source: *collection of Léon Joubert*



Legend: View of the village of Saint-Jovite around 1889.

Source: *collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC*