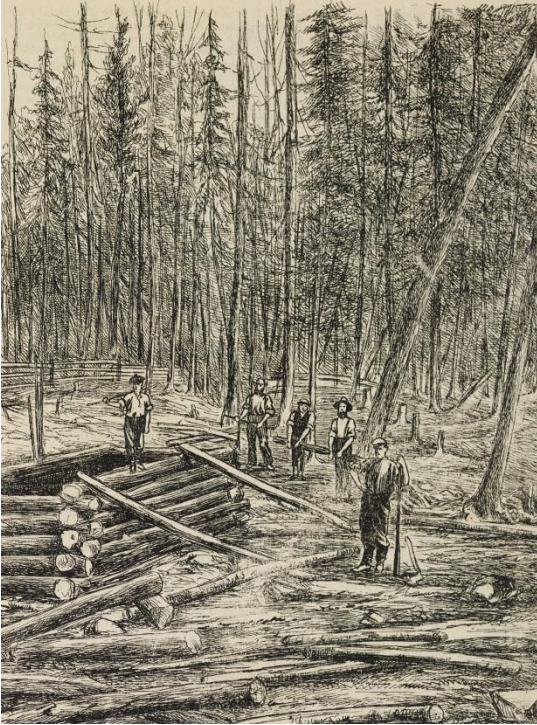




## Difficult beginnings



*Construction of a first shelter, upon the arrival of a settler on his land.*

*Source: L'Opinion publique, December 11, 1879.  
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.*

Standing beside Lac Moore, this beautiful house of squared pine logs reminds us of the first settlers, those hardy folk who witnessed the birth of this land in the shadow of Mont Tremblant. The house also calls to mind the ingenuity and exceedingly hard work of the men and women who put down roots here.

It was in the last quarter of the 19th century that the colonization of the valleys of the Diable and the Rouge rivers began, thanks to the work of the legendary parish priest of Saint-Jérôme, Antoine Labelle. This man, nicknamed “king of the north”, wanted to stop the massive exodus of French-Canadians, who were leaving Québec in the thousands to work in the New England spinning mills. The parishes of Saint-Faustin and Saint-Jovite (Mont-Tremblant) were the first founded by this tireless promoter of the “conquest of the soil”.

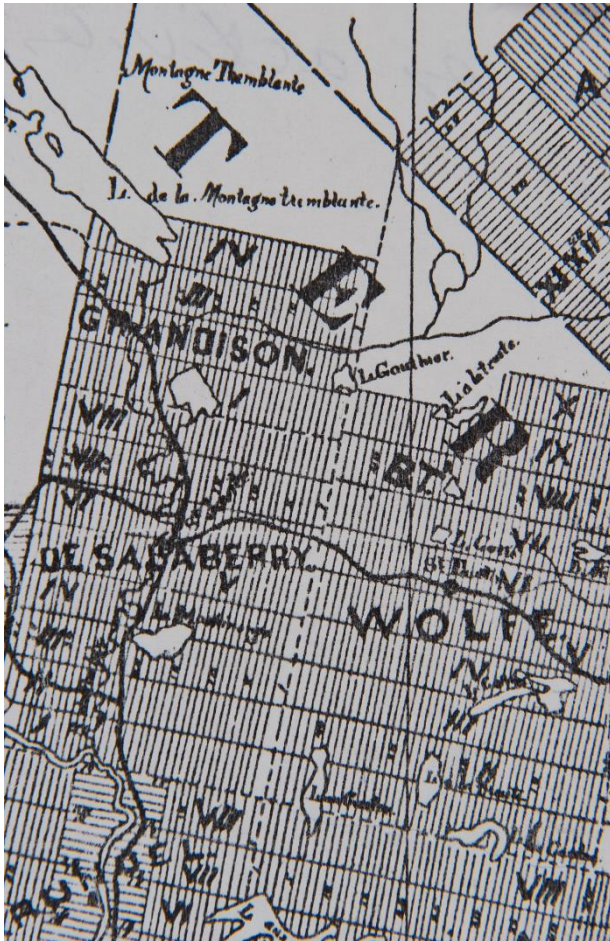
The texts that come down to us from these times draw a dramatic portrait of the life of the pioneers—a life of endless misery and deprivation. Armed with an axe and a few provisions, the settlers pushed on into the forest until they reached the 60-hectare lot that they had chosen in the townships of De Salaberry or Grandison. After building a primitive log shelter, the settlers worked from dawn till dusk to fell the trees, one by one. Alone in a forest so dense that they had to raise their heads even to see a patch of sky, they faced voracious mosquitoes, hunger, fear, and the extreme fatigue of days without rest or respite.

At a cost of superhuman effort, they managed to create a small clearing in the forest and sow their first square of oats, buckwheat or peas. Then one day, at long last, they would invite the neighbours to a day of labour and, working together, would raise and fit together the first log house—a real house, with windows, a floor and a woodstove. The settler’s family had just passed a turning point in the endless battle that created the fabric of their daily life.



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### The log house, then and now



On this section of an old map one can observe the horizontal layout of the rangs, or ranges, subdivided vertically by lots of 100 acres (60 hectares).

Source: Archives of the chancellery of the Archbishop of Montréal, record of the Société de colonisation du diocèse de Montréal.

As soon as they had the means, the settlers rushed to cover the exterior and interior walls of their homes with wood or plaster. In the 1970s, one began to see in Québec log houses where the logs were visible, and which were then numbered and dismantled on their original site to be reassembled elsewhere. This is what happened to this house, rebuilt in 1980 in Mont-Tremblant; dated 1860, it was originally the post office in Saint-André-Avellin, in the Outaouais region of Québec.



Detail of a *queue d'aronde* construction technique, which means "in the form of a swallow's tail".

Source: Danielle Soucy photo

### "Small insects which cause us such suffering"

The sucking and biting insects swarming in the forest were among the most difficult obstacles faced by the settlers. As evidence, here is part of a letter (translated) written to a priest by the wife of a settler, in 1882.

*Please allow me, in spite of my poor education, to tell you about the sad state in which we all find ourselves, living so far away in these mountains, in spite of the great courage with which we have all cleared our lots [...] my grandchildren suffer greatly because of the flies and mosquitoes and the biting midges, which are tiny insects that cause us to*





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*suffer day and night [...] many horses die [...] and sheep, the cow no longer gives milk to feed our grandchildren, since the beginning of June when all the men stopped clearing their land, they cannot enter the woods, the flies and mosquitoes and biting midges pierce our eyes [...].*

Extract of a letter from Prospère Guay, taken from *De la chute aux Iroquois à Labelle*, by Richard Lagrange, *Comité des fêtes du centenaire de Labelle*, 1980.

Research and writing: Danielle Soucy



*A family of settlers of Labelle, in front of their cabin of round logs.*

*Source: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Photographer unknown.*