

Truth's Contributors.

LA SALLE'S HOMESTEAD AT LACHINE.

Where Was It?

BY JOHN FRASER, MONTREAL.

A question has arisen: Where is that block of land of 420 acres or the Lower Lachine Road which was reserved in 1666 by La Salle as a homestead for himself?

In 1834 I gave a full account of all I knew of the "Canadian Home of Robert de la Salle;" that letter was printed by most of the leading papers of Canada, setting forth that Champlain, when Governor of French Canada, established, between the years 1609 and 1615, three fur trading posts; one at Tadoussac, one at Three Rivers, the other at the head of the Lachine Rapids, the old Sault St. Louis. This post at Lachine was, for nearly fifty years, the most important trading post in the whole Colony.

This was about thirty years before the foundation of Montreal by Maisonneuve in 1642, and fully fifty years before the appearance of La Salle at Lachine; this post established by Champlain at the head of the Sault St. Louis was built upon the present Fraser homestead farm, on the very spot where the ruins of Fort Cuillerier now stand. These ruins of "Fort Cuillerier" were pointed to in that letter as being the ruins of La Salle's Home. Close by to these ruins stood the old English King's posts, the most celebrated military post in Canada during the war of 1812. This was the transferring post of navigation before the building of the Lachine Canal; every British soldier, every British regiment sailed westward in bateaux from this post and returned here at the end of the war; I gave a full account of this post and of every building on it at the time of its evacuation in 1836, in my "Sixth Summer Morning Walk Around Montreal." This is truly storied ground though now nearly forgotten and almost blotted out of local memory.

THE PRIMEVAL BEAUTY OF THIS RIVER FARM.

The writer is one of the very few now living, who can recall and picture in its primeval beauty that almost romantic river shore—for two miles upwards, from the foot of the La Salle Common to the Windmill point; embracing in these two short miles—the La Salle Common of 1666—the English Kings posts of 1812—the intended homestead of La Salle—the ruins of Fort Cuillerier—the site of Champlain's fur trading post of 1615—the old Penner farm—the St. Lawrence bridge, and the present Novitiate of the Fathers Oblats, built on the spot on which Fort Remy of 1659 stood, and be within the ground of the palisaded village of Lachine laid out by La Salle in 1666. There is not such two miles on the whole river of the noble St. Lawrence, from Gaspé to the mouth, as having in its scenery so many of the scenes of my early days. I love this spot and linger

1,000 feet would suffice for a monument! my offer, however, is still open. Will others who now pretend to take an interest in La Salle do something equivalent and purchase a lot of land near the old Windmill upon which to erect a monument?

This will be a sure test of their sincerity in the La Salle question.

A MONUMENT TO LA SALLE.

Canadians should bestir themselves and do something worthy the memory of La Salle. Lachine is the only place in Canada in which he had a home, and the present generation at Lachine appeared to take very little interest in his history until after my letter of 1834. La Salle is the brightest figure either in Canadian or American history; just fancy two and a quarter centuries ago, a young Frenchman, an adventurous youth, setting forth from Lachine in his bark canoe, on a voyage of discovery almost romantic, traversing, or rather, coasting, in his canoe, all of our great inland lakes, then over and through dense forests untrod before by civilized man down turbulent and unknown rivers even reaching the mouth of the great Mississippi. Where does history exhibit another such a character? Canada should be proud to do honour to her La Salle; and Canadians should vie with each other in paying a tribute of respect to his memory? Truly, La Salle has left his foot prints on the sands of Canada! Will Canadians allow them to be blotted out?

La Salle needs no monument along our river shore; no storied urn, nor animated bust, to perpetuate or to transmit to future generations the great deeds of his life. This whole Northern Continent of America bears unmistakable traces of his footprints. His discoveries and explorations were all made in the interest of old France—the land of his birth—the country he loved. Therefore, so long as the noble St. Lawrence winds its course seawards and our great inland lakes exist as feeders thereof, or the great and broad Mississippi rolls its mighty waters to the main; these river banks and those lake shores, if all else were mute, will ever silently testify to the memory of that youthful explorer, La Salle, who first trod or traced their far western or southern shores.

TRADITIONS OF OLD.

Scotchmen, above all men, are very jealous of family traditions holding them nearly as sacred as Holy Writ. When this old homestead came into the possession of my grandfather in 1814, the traditions then handed down to him through the former French occupants, the Cuilleriers, the Lapromenades and others pointed out that on the site where then stood in 1814, and still stand the ruins of "Fort Cuillerier" was the very spot on which Champlain's Fur trading post of 1615 stood; and that these three farms of the present Fraser Estate, having a frontage on the Lower Lachine Road of nine acres by a depth of forty-six and two-third acres, making a block of 420 acres of land, bordering on and adjoining the La Salle Common of 200 acres, was the actual block of land of 420 acres which was reserved in 1666 by La Salle as a homestead for himself.

These three farms of 420 acres of the present Fraser Estate are still there intact, the common ground of 200 acres, adjoining these three farms, is still well known, and the ruins of the "Fort Cuillerier" built on the site of Champlain's Fur post, are still standing to mark the spot.

These three farms, I maintain, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, comprise the actual block of land of 420 acres selected in 1666 by La Salle as a homestead for himself.

There is not another block of land on the Lower Lachine Road, between the eastern boundary of the old English Kings posts, up to the present Windmill, a distance of about forty acres, fronting on the St. Lawrence, that can be pointed to as having any connection to be called "La Salle's intended homestead" except that block. It is a pity that La Salle should have lived in the intended homestead during his short life. He was merely pre-occupied with his little log cabin in the distance of a walk of

"La Salle set apart a Common, two hundred arpents in extent, for the use of the settlers on condition of the payment by each of five sous a year; He reserved 420 arpents for his own personal domain. He had traced out the circuit of a palisaded village and assigned to each settler half an arpent or about the third of an acre, within the enclosure."

These are facts, respecting the "Homestead and Common of La Salle" which cannot be disputed; and the "reserved homestead" must have been as well known to La Salle himself as the Common ground is now publicly known, and to a man of La Salle's taste for the beautiful, what more beautiful spot could he select than the nine acres of the Fraser Estate, adjoining the common, fronting on the St. Lawrence, a mile and a half above the Lachine Rapids? And on this spot, he it remembered, that fifty years before La Salle's day, there was a trading post, Champlain's the most important post in the whole Colony.

OLD LACHINE.

This is a neat little book of 76 pages, edited by D. Girouard, Q. C., having originated at the celebration of the two hundredth Anniversary of the Massacre of Lachine, of 4th August, 1689, containing valuable local information and will be a standard reference on all matters relating to "Old Lachine." I offer my humble congratulations to Mr. Girouard for his collected facts. I differ with him only on one point, a particular historical one, namely:—He has located La Salle's intended homestead of 420 acres as being in the rear of the present Novitiate of the Fathers Oblats, and behind the "palisaded village," which had a frontage of seven arpents by two in depth, being between the present "Cross Road" and the Windmill; I cannot accept this as the block of land of 420 acres which was reserved by La Salle in 1666, as a homestead for himself, for the reason that there is not, and there never was, in the parish of Lachine, a block of land of 420 acres between these two points. There must be some mistake in this.

THE PALISADED VILLAGE OF OLD LACHINE.

Between pages 4 and 5 of Mr. Girouard's book, there is a drawing made in March, 1689, of La Salle's palisaded village. This was made twenty years after La Salle had left. The principal buildings as shown inside the palisades, such as Fort Remy—the Chapel—the Barracks—the Windmill, etc., had no existence in La Salle's day—they were not built for several years later. Jean Millot's house, with its flag, is said to have been the log house erected by La Salle, but afterwards enlarged by Millot for the purposes of his trade.

Therefore, I maintain that La Salle's intended homestead of 420 acres, was not behind and in the rear of the novitiate of the Fathers Oblats, two acres back from the bank of the St. Lawrence. The land is not there, and I cannot believe that a man of La Salle's decided taste, would place the front of his homestead two acres back, shut out from the river bank, when he had a frontage of over a mile, the most beautiful on the bank of the St. Lawrence, to select from; and when we find there did exist at that time, and does exist at this day, a mile from the palisaded village, a block of land, the Fraser Estate, of 420 acres bordering on the La Salle Common, which tallies exactly with Parkman's account of the Homestead and the Common.

FORT CUILLERIE.

Between pages 16 and 17 of Mr. Girouard's book a correct picture is given of old "Fort Cuillerie" as it stands to-day on the Fraser homestead. This is, without question, one of the most interesting spots in all Canada. It was the spot, in 1609, that Champlain came to disembark in an Indian canoe to have a talk with the old Sault St. Louis, the present Lachine Rapids. This is the first spot of smooth water from which a canoe could shoot out to reach the channel of the river above the rapids. It was here, fifty years before La Salle's day, that Champlain's Fur trading post was established, and between the year 1673 and 1676, Cuillerier converted that old Fur post into a Fort, constructed of wood, and later on, between 1689 and 1713, the present stone building, now named "Fort Cuillerie" was constructed and used as a Trading post by the Cuilleriers. This must have been an important place in 1689, because Vaudreuil on his return from the Massacre of Lachine rested here with his 500 men on his way back to Montreal. This spot was famous thirty years before Maisonneuve's day.

NEARLY THREE CENTURIES AGO.

Imagination fondly stoops to trace and to draw a picture of those far-off days, when Champlain stood at the foot of the present Fraser hill, at the head of that once beautiful little bay, now destroyed, by the Water Works Basin, which stretched down to the eastern boundary of the English Kings post; surrounded by his escort band of wild Iroquois, with their canoes hauled up on the quiet shore beneath the shade of the far spreading primeval elms, ready to embark, to sail down the Sault St. Louis, the Lachine Rapids. There was not a foundation stone then laid in this great City of Montreal.

This spot should be held sacred by Canadians for all time. Fancy Champlain's feelings as he embarked in his canoe to be paddled out to reach the channel of the river leading down through the centre of the great rapids. The excitement and the novelty of the sail would almost make them forget or be oblivious of the danger. I place this sketch before some young rising artist or painter of this day to revise it on canvas.

LA SALLE AND MILLOT.

La Salle was seigneur of Lachine and the founder of the palisaded village consisting of 14 acres, say "seven acres front by two in depth," being between the present "Cross Road" and the "Windmill." To this palisaded village La Salle transferred the fur trading business which had been carried on for about fifty years, at Champlain's Fur post on the Fraser Estate, about one mile from the palisaded village. It appears from all we can gather that La Salle was not a man of "business or of trade," and that Jean Millot, a trader of Ville Marie, Montreal, was the leading spirit of trade in La Salle's Village and that he afterwards purchased La Salle's rights to the village, etc., as we shall hereafter show.

But it is a singular fact, that after La Salle had left and the attempt by Millot to establish the fur trade in the palisaded village had failed, that Rene Cuillerier, between the years 1673 and 1676, re-established the fur business at Champlain's old post, and the Cuilleriers and their successors carried on an extensive business there for nearly a century after La Salle's day, in that old building now standing on the Fraser estate, and known at the present day as the ruins of "Fort Cuillerie."

La Salle became restless in 1659 to get off; to do this he required money for his outfit of men, canoes, etc. Millot had the money; and Millot wanted to secure the trade of the village to himself, therefore La Salle proposed to sell his interests, which Millot accepted. La Salle then conveyed to Jean Millot by deed passed before Basset, Notary of Ville Marie, on the 3rd February, 1669, a block of land of 420 acres, "seven acres front by sixty deep." This block, as per page 73 of Mr. Girouard's book, is shown to be behind the palisaded village and in rear of the present Novitiate of the Fathers Oblats and between the "Cross Road" and the "Windmill."

This sale is the only foundation for Mr. Girouard to locate La Salle's intended homestead as he has done. Now, I maintain—the land is not there, was never there; and there is not and there never was a block of land in the whole Parish of Lachine having a depth of "sixty acres" the cadastral plan of Lachine, taking in all the little lots on the river bank, shows only about 360 acres of land behind the Novitiate, while the two adjoining farms, Belanger's on the east and Reed's to the west, have only a depth of 30 acres each. Where then are those farms having a depth of "sixty acres"? Where, may I ask, are they to be found in the parish of Lachine?

I have tried to unravel this sale of "Seven acres front by sixty deep" and I have consulted others who know the ground and have come to the following conclusions:—

La Salle had preserved 420 acres for his homestead. Millot knew this, but Millot considered the land bordering on and around the village as of more value to him, in the event of the village extending and becoming a town than the same amount of land a mile distant would be; therefore, I suppose, he would reason in this way with La Salle:—you are leaving and it makes no difference to you, to grant me the land close by the village instead of that block a mile distant.

I cannot, in any other way, account for that deed of land; La Salle had the power as Seigneur and it made no difference to him where he granted it, so long as he got the money and Millot was satisfied; the Seminary and Millot,

AND THE LA COMMON. On Canadian history, page 7, we find;