

Unique log cabin attracts tourists from across the world

Leaders of the western world met on May 28-29 for the 1983 Williamsburg Economic Summit in the United States. Two years ago, they convened for the Ottawa Summit at the Château Montebello, an unusual building of red cedar logs and stone located on the Ottawa River at Montebello, Quebec, an hour's drive from Canada's capital.

The following excerpts describing the Château and its history are from an article by Brigitta Arnoti in *Habitat*, No. 2, 1982.

The Château Montebello draws return visitors from all parts of the world to its 270-square-kilometre private reserve of unspoiled forest, lakes and streams.

What makes this year-round family resort with its log buildings unique? Many reasons. Its size, its design, the magnificent riverfront setting, the record-setting speed of its completion in 1930, the particular technique of log building which was new to Canada, and the area's history. The resort is of such charm and enduring quality, that this landmark of the Outaouais region of Quebec has gained worldwide recognition.

The Château and related buildings, built of red cedar logs and natural stone, are located on the Ottawa River on a 60 hectare estate. The Log Château, Cedar Hall (the staff residence) and the 150-car garage (today housing a curling rink) were the first three buildings constructed in 1930 for the exclusive association, Lucerne-in-Quebec, which became the Seigniory Club the following year.

The log entrance gate, the swimming pool enclosed in a log building measuring 48-by-28-metres, and the boathouse, were built in 1931. Every structure on site is designed to enhance the natural environ-

ment. Even the 19 fire hydrants on the property are housed in little hand-hewn log cabins.

The history of the area

The history of the Château landholdings is as colourful and inspiring as its location. It dates back centuries to the days when Algonquin Indians roamed the forests which border the Ottawa River, a key artery of the fur trade and, in fact, the first trans-Canada highway. A stream of explorers (including Samuel de Champlain), voyageurs, Indians, missionaries, merchants, trappers and farmers paddled the Ottawa on their way to or from the interior.

The property on which the resort is built was bought by the Lucerne-in-Quebec association in 1929 and, the following year, the Lucerne-in-Quebec association decided to build the facilities for the use of some 150 association members and their families.

The construction of the buildings

The actual building of the facilities took place in record time with July 1, 1930, the sixty-third anniversary of Confederation, chosen for opening day. Excavation

began on March 15. The resort was constructed in four months making Canadian construction history.

Before construction could begin, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company had to build a 1.25 kilometre spur line from their Ottawa-Montreal route to bring supplies to the site. Altogether, 10 000 western red cedar logs were used for the first three buildings. If placed end to end, they would stretch a distance of almost 65 kilometres. For the roofs, 500 000 hand-split cedar shakes were ordered. They filled 17 railway box cars and were the largest order ever shipped across the continent for a single job. Other statistics include: 85 kilometres of plumbing and heating pipes, 843 toilet fixtures, 700 radiators, 7 600 sprinkler heads to be installed for fire protection, 65 kilometres of conduit and electric wiring, and special hand-wrought fixtures.

For all this activity, a construction village to house some 3 500 workers was erected in Montebello (population 1 000).

For this immense project, Victor Nymark was hired as master log builder and foreman. Nymark, who immigrated to Canada in 1924, had built his first log cabin in his native Finland when he was only 16 years old. A master of the Scandinavian technique for log building, he hired some 800 log builders.

Nymark and his crew applied the time-honoured Scandinavian technique of log building, where each log is carved to fit the log below. The Scandinavian method of construction, new to Canada at that time and a considerable improvement over the method used to construct pioneer cabins, has proved solid and sound, wind- and weather-tight, and provides good insulation in severe climates. In 1930, since chain saws were unavailable, the entire project was built with hand tools — axes and scribes.

Almost 1 000 drawings and diagrams were required for the first three buildings. Plans were rushed to completion as the buildings were constructed. In some cases, the builders worked so quickly, they did not receive plans until after the logs were in place. Everything was done in a mad dash, but turned out surprisingly well.

There were no serious accidents during construction, despite the weight and the average nine- to 12-metre length of the logs. In spite of the need for speed, highest standards were rigidly enforced from beginning to end.

The work of preparing the site was



The Château's various recreational amenities and creature comforts are enhanced by their spectacular setting.