

# WHERE MONTRÉAL BEGAN

## An exceptional archaeological and historical discovery



After years of research and thanks to archaeology, Pointe-à-Callière's archaeologists and historians have made an exceptional discovery that is a major contribution to our knowledge of Montréal's history: they are finally able to visualize the first Montréal settlement, Fort Ville-Marie, on the exact site where Montréal was founded on May 17, 1642, with the arrival of Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve and Jeanne Mance.

### A real first: a visualization of Fort Ville-Marie

The advances in knowledge thanks to archaeologists and historians now make it possible to confirm that Fort Ville-Marie measured about 2,500 square metres; it was rectangular in shape with four bastions made of wooden posts; and it was oriented parallel to the St. Lawrence River, largely on the Pointe à Callière site. In addition, we now have details about part of its inner layout. The fort was located on the Pointe à Callière site, which offered maximum protection for its inhabitants, with the St. Lawrence on one side and the Little River on the other. It was the most strategic spot for a settlement intended to house and protect the fledgling colony and welcome Indigenous visitors.



### Little written about Fort Ville-Marie

With the exception of a few brief allusions by 17<sup>th</sup>-century contemporaries, we have few documentary clues to the fort's appearance and location. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians have agreed that it was situated on a point of land formed where the St. Lawrence met the Little River, where Pointe-à-Callière, the Montréal Archaeology and History Complex, stands in Old Montréal today. Montréal's first Roman Catholic cemetery (1643–1654), unearthed by archaeologists and visible in the Museum, has always been assumed to suggest that the fort was located nearby. Yet there were no maps showing the fort's location, with the exception of a sketch attributed to Royal Engineer Jean Bourdon, dating from around 1647. There is no proof that the drawing can be definitely associated with Fort Ville-Marie, however. We do know that work on the fort, undertaken by Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve in 1642 after the Montréalistes arrived, continued from 1643 to 1646, under the expert guidance of military engineer Louis d'Ailleboust de Coulonge.

### Chronology of events

The chronology of events leading to this discovery dates back to the 1990s. The Museum had been looking for traces of Fort Ville-Marie since Ville-Marie's first Roman Catholic cemetery had been found in Old Montréal. An important step occurred in 1998, when the Pointe-à-Callière Foundation acquired the Townsend warehouse, a building with tremendous heritage potential located at 214 Place D'Youville. In 2002, Pointe-à-Callière managed to convince the Université de Montréal to establish Montréal's first urban Archaeological Field School, and search for remains of the fort.



After that, every spring until 2014 archaeological digs were carried out, leading to significant advances in knowledge about the site where Montréal was founded. The digs helped make it possible to visualize Fort Ville-Marie, and uncovered numerous remains along with some 300,000 artifacts and ecofacts forming a rich collection of national importance, shedding new light on 17<sup>th</sup>-century Montréal society. The Archaeological Field School received funding under the Agreement on the cultural development of Montréal, between the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec and the city of Montréal, as well as from the Museum Foundation. The Ethnoscop firm also conducted archaeological dig campaigns between 2014 and 2016. This discovery was therefore made possible by the archaeological dig campaigns conducted from 2002 to 2014 by Pointe-à-Callière's Archaeological Field School in partnership with the Université de Montréal, and in 2015 and 2016 by Ethnoscop inc.

#### **A vital clue**

For the Pointe-à-Callière teams, this exceptional discovery occurred when a key piece helping to visualize the fort as a whole was unearthed. A palisade found beneath the Place D'Youville sidewalk and square in 2015 allowed the archaeologists to identify the northwest bastion of Fort Ville-Marie. Another palisade associated with the fort's north curtain wall had already been found in an earlier dig season. Working from these two remains and their layout, historians, including André Charbonneau, an expert in the military heritage of New France, cross-referenced masses of data and analyzed them in the light of early 17<sup>th</sup>-century military engineering texts. In visualizing the fort, the experts also drew on other remains found on the site during Pointe-à-Callière's Archaeological Field School in partnership with the Université de Montréal, under the direction of Professors Brad Loewen and Christian Bélanger.

#### **Remains on the site where Montréal began**

The following remains, unearthed during the different archaeological dig campaigns, will be visible, described and contextualized in the new pavilion: an Indigenous fire pit predating Montréal's founding, a well dug by Jacques Archambault in 1658, the cellar of what may have been a guardhouse, some of the fort's palisades, the stone foundations of a metal-working shop – the oldest metallurgy site in New France found to date! –, part of a stone wall from Callière's residence and a wall separating its gardens from its yard.

Some 250 artifacts and objects found during the digs will also be displayed in an evocative setting in the new pavilion. Significant objects include a sundial etched into a piece of slate – the oldest ever found in North America – along with artifacts reflecting religious practices, tableware, munitions and gun parts, as well as trade goods. Indigenous objects found on the site also tell of the relations between the French and various nations, mainly the Algonquins, Hurons and Iroquois. ■

