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At the Crossroads of Montreal's Birth: Pointe a Calliere

A contemporary museum which leads us back to Montreal's founding



By: Dan Laxer
Apr 21, 2011 - 11:02
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Potholes! They're everywhere. They pop up as the snow melts during that interim in Montreal between the end of winter and the start of spring, the asphalt torn asunder in the tug-o-war between warm and cold, exposing the dark underbelly of the city, wreaking

havoc with wheel alignment and car suspensions. But there are some spots, along Ste. Catherine Street, for example, where the asphalt has worn away to expose cobblestones and old streetcar tracks, and you realize that if you strip away the thin layers of modernization, history is laid bare, even if just a glimpse of it. Every rip in the pavement could be an ad for Montreal's [Pointe a Calliere Montreal Museum of Archeology and History](#).

The ghosts of Montreal's past linger in street names, town designations, parks, etc. De Maisonneuve Boulevard, Jeanne Mance Park, and Vimont, a part of Laval, just north of Montreal, for example, are all named for those who were present at a mass celebrating the founding of Montreal: [Father Barthelemy Vimont](#), [Sieur de Maisonneuve](#), and [Jeanne Mance](#). The mass was held on May 17, 1642 at a point toward the southern edge of the island where 2 rivers once met, the mighty St. Lawrence, and the Riviere St. Pierre, most of which is now underground. It was at that spot where Montreal's 3rd governor, Chevalier Louis Hector de Calliere, had a home.

It is on that same spot that the museum stands, opened on May 17, 1992 to mark the city's 350th anniversary.

Walking down into the depths of the museum takes you down into Montreal's history. Indeed, much of the building began as an archeological site, with many of the artefacts housed there found on the very spot where the museum is now.

If you hurry, you'll catch an exhibit called [St. Catherine Street Makes the Headlines!](#), which takes you down below the surface to the 19th century, then back up and out again to more modern times. Hockey fans keeping a close watch on the playoffs can see Jacques Plante's goalie mask, or learn about the end of the legendary Montreal Forum, where Plante, Rocket Richard, and so many others, played. That exhibit ends on Sunday.

Then, on May 18 a new exhibit opens [celebrating the history of wine](#).

You can see Montreal's first Custom House, or the city's first electric water pumping station, both incorporated into the museum complex, itself an architectural tour de force,

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a modern design that parodies its surroundings in the heart of Old Montreal, adjacent to the Old Port, where you'll find, and walk along, the same kind of cobblestones that peek out of the hustle and bustle that is Montreal.

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Pointe a Calliere

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ziggy101 said: On Apr 22, 2011 - 21:44

A very good piece of writing on a very educational place to see, for everyone.

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