

TREASURES BENEATH THE CITY

The remarkable history of the archaeological site of St Anne's Market and the Parliament of the Province of Canada

In Old Montréal, between McGill and Saint-Pierre streets, on Place D'Youville, Pointe-à-Callière—in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Communications and the City of Montréal—carried out one of the largest archaeological digs in Canada from 2010 to 2017, unearthing an invaluable heritage site: the remains of St Anne's Market (1834-1844), which was transformed into the Parliament of the Province of Canada (1844-1849). Some 350,000 artifacts were dug up, witnesses to a little known yet critical period of Canadian history, at a time when Montréal was the capital of Canada!

Here are a few fragments of a story that continues to astonish us!



Porcelain stoneware commemorative pitchers bearing the likenesses of British parliamentarian Richard Cobden and Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, in 1846.

These two pitchers commemorate an important political and economic event in the British Empire: the repeal, in 1846, of preferential tariffs on grain imports to Great Britain. Canadian wheat merchants and producers bore the brunt of the withdrawal of this commercial privilege with the homeland, causing a major economic crisis in Canada and unleashing the wrath of the mercantile elite. Who would have dared bring these pitchers, commemorating an event many local politicians reviled, into the Canadian Parliament? It remains a mystery... Made in England, these pitchers commemorating the abolition of the Corn Laws were found in the remains of the central body of the Parliament building.



Cuprous "Legislative Assembly Canada" postal stamp; envelope stamped "Legislative Assembly Canada" (March 10, 1849). Parliament of the Province of Canada, 1844-1849.

This postal stamp was found in the area where the office of the court clerk of the Legislative Assembly was located. It is likely one of the first seals issued by the government of the Province of Canada, in early 1849. The seal was used by parliamentarians, who had the privilege of stamping their correspondence free of charge. It may have been made by John Sheffield's firm, in Birmingham, official supplier to the British Royal Mail.

The Leroux dit Cardinal Family

André Leroux dit Cardinal, chief messenger of the Legislative Assembly, moved along with his family into the Montréal parliament building in 1844. Through archaeological findings, we now know that their living quarters were in the former cellar of the building's central body. On the evening of the fire at the Parliament (April 25, 1849), the family quickly left the building, taking with them just a family portrait and a knife. Some 170 years later, the home's contents were found in the ruins of the Parliament.



Fine European porcelain stoup, found in the Parliament's central bay, where the home of the Leroux dit Cardinal family was located. The back of the stoup bears an enigmatic signature... "Ler"... oux perhaps? The plausible hypothesis is that this stoup belonged to the Leroux family.

Scottish immigrant James Charters opened his butcher shop in Stall N° 22 on the ground floor of St Anne's Market on July 1st, 1834. Five generations of Charters continued the family business in Montréal... until 1981! This jug belongs to the family's heirs, a precious material witness of this long family history.



Fine white earthenware, marked "James Charters 1843." The pitcher was a gift on the occasion of his 70th birthday. Dan Charters Collection.

Bringing the long-gone St Anne’s Market and Parliament back to life

Working with historian Alan Stewart and 3D artist Guy Lessard (Architruc), Pointe-à-Callière a bold 3D modelling project, based on archival documents and archaeological data found during the digs, breathing new life into this monumental building that marked the urban landscape of Montréal—capital city—in the 19th century.



Rendering – Top: the Parliament; bottom left: the Assembly; bottom right: the library. (Guy Lessard, Architruc © Pointe-à-Callière)

Under Place D’Youville, A historic site of national importance to preserve

The remains of the Parliament are right beneath our feet, preserved intact, since 1849.

Key Dates: St Anne’s Market and the Parliament

- 1832-1834: Underground vaulting of the Little River and above-ground construction of St Anne’s Market, Montréal’s first indoor market.
- 1844: St Anne’s Market is transformed into the Parliament of the Province of Canada.
- 1848: Lord Elgin fully recognizes the principle of responsible government. After English, French becomes the 2nd official language recognized by the government.
- 1849: Tory rioters protest the law indemnifying the victims of the Rebellions of 1837-1838. They set fire to the building, resulting in a total loss.
- 1851: St Anne’s Market is rebuilt over the ruins of the market/parliament. It was finally demolished in 1901, making way for a parking lot.

The safeguarding and development of the tangible and intangible heritage of the exceptional archaeological site of St Anne’s Market and the Parliament of the Province of Canada are a duty of remembrance of the men and women who came before us.

