



# Royal Bank Letter

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## *In Praise of Montreal*

*At 350 years of age, the great metropolis on the St. Lawrence is celebrating a rich and colourful heritage. Its society is built on understanding, tolerance and generosity. As such, it represents a rare experiment in human relations. Its special spirit is more relevant than ever this year ...*

Montreal is not just any city. Its age alone sets it apart from most North American communities, which are mere pups compared. It is extraordinary in many respects: the second-largest French-speaking city in the world in the midst of an English-speaking continent; a great international seaport 1,600 kilometres from the nearest coast; a major land transportation centre on an island cut off from the mainland by broad and tumultuous stretches of river; a dense concentration of people and vehicles amid a maze of hills and valleys covered with traffic-snarling ice and snow for much of the year.

It is fitting that the chronicles of such an unlikely place should begin with a mystery. When Jacques Cartier first sailed up the St. Lawrence River from Quebec in October of 1534, he found a village of about 1,000 souls called Hochelaga. The Breton explorer was hospitably greeted by the natives, who took him up the mountain which he named Mont Réal. But when other Frenchmen returned to the spot a few years later, Hochelaga had disappeared.

Montreal's founding is similarly rooted in romance. The story goes that in 1639 a French rural tax collector named Jérôme Le Royer de La Dauversière was on his knees at mass when he heard a mystical voice instructing him to establish a medical mission in New France. He joined forces with a Parisian priest named Jacques Olier who had also received a mysterious command to found a mission on Montreal island. They organized a syndicate to launch an expedition led by a devout professional soldier named Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve.

Not the least remarkable feature of Montreal is the prominent role women have played in its history. At de Maisonneuve's side when his party of 45 landed on the island in May of 1642 was a 35-year-old nurse named Jeanne Mance, who presently opened the

Hôtel Dieu hospital, still very much a going concern. A draft of settlers from France in 1651 brought in Marguerite Bourgeoys, who started the settlement's first school in a converted stable and founded Congrégation de Notre Dame, the well-known teaching order. Later, Marie Marguerite d'Youville formed the charitable order called the Grey Nuns, setting Montreal on the road to becoming a manufacturing centre by putting the sisters into the business of sewing clothing, tents and sails.

In the meantime another legend was born. When a flood threatened to destroy his tiny colony, de Maisonneuve prayed for deliverance and the waters receded. In thanksgiving he planted a large wooden cross on Mount Royal. His gesture is commemorated today in the illuminated cross on the crest of the mountain. It is to Montreal what the Eiffel Tower is to Paris — the landmark by which the city is chiefly identified.

The formative years of Ville Marie de Montréal were ones of hardship and mortal peril. The French and their Algonquin and Huron allies were at war with the Iroquois. The *habitants* risked lethal ambush every time they strayed from the wooden stockade which enclosed their houses. Nevertheless, Ville Marie's population had climbed to about 3,000 at the end of the 17th century.

The crude habitation of a few years before was beginning to realize its destiny as a metropolis — a centre which controls activity in the hinterland. Missionaries, soldiers and traders used it as a base for expeditions after a truce was struck with the Iroquois. Place-names in the present metropolitan area have echoes over large parts of North America where explorers from New France sowed the seeds of settlement: La Salle, Joliet, Marquette, Duluth, Cadillac, etc. Their journeys gave their mother country



a claim on an immense swath of territory from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. The establishment of trading posts such as Detroit and Sault Ste. Marie launched Montreal on its career as a head office venue. From it, the remote branches of the fur trade were supervised, supplied and financed.

Montreal has always stood stage centre in Canadian affairs, never more so than in the British take-over of the country. Contrary to popular belief, the French regime did not end on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. It actually ended in Montreal almost a year later — on September 8, 1760. Then, the governor of New France, Marquis de Vaudreuil, surrendered his remaining 2,000 men to a much more powerful British force.

Accompanying the British were several hundred civilian businessmen engaged in supplying the army.

*But for religious tolerance, it might be an American city today*

The majority of the soldiers and traders were Protestants who for some time held services in Catholic churches with the blessing of the curés. The first non-Catholic place of

worship to be built was not a Protestant church, but a synagogue for Jewish traders. This was appropriate for a city which would one day contain Canada's largest Jewish population, and whose culture would be richly influenced by Jewish ways.

Religious tolerance is an abiding Montreal theme, with episodes of intolerance serving to emphasize the normal state of good will by contrasting with it. Had it not been for a British law guaranteeing Canadian Roman Catholics freedom of worship and other rights, Montreal might be an American city today. This was the Quebec Act, passed only months before Montreal was captured by a revolutionary American army in November, 1775.

The occupying army issued an appeal from George Washington to the *Canadiens* to "unite with us in an indissoluble union." The local folk rejected it mainly because they did not trust the Americans to respect their religion and civil laws. The great Benjamin Franklin made an arduous journey north to persuade them to join the United States, but, as one historian put it, they "gave him the cold shoulder." Commanded by the famous General Benedict Arnold, the Americans withdrew in June, 1776.

The end of the Revolutionary War brought an influx of American loyalists. They joined a burgeoning population of immigrants from England and Scotland

seeking their fortunes in the new world. One of the principal ways of making a fortune, particularly among the Scots, was fur trading. In the early 1790s the local traders banded together to form the legendary North West Company, with its enormous freighter canoes manned by hardy *voyageurs*.

Among the Scots who prospered in the fur trade was James McGill, whose benefactions established the city's first university. When McGill opened its doors in 1843, it had a ready-made medical faculty which had been operating in the Montreal General Hospital since 1822. The city would go on to achieve great eminence in the world of medicine. Some of its most illustrious citizens have been medical pioneers: Sir William Osler, Wilder Penfield, Hans Selye, Paul David, Jacques Genest, and (though he is remembered for other reasons) Norman Bethune.

Montreal's other three universities and associate seats of learning all have their areas of distinction. For example, École Polytechnique, the engineering school of Université de Montréal, is Canada's largest producer of engineers. And any listing of respected business schools in North America must include "HEC" — École des Hautes Études Commerciales — which has played a seminal role in the burgeoning commercial-industrial network known as "Quebec Inc." The National Theatre School and the unique Ecole du Cirque (a feeder of talent to the world-renowned Cirque du Soleil) bring the city distinction of a less earnest kind.

From its earliest days, Montreal has served as a hub for continental transportation. This role was strengthened in 1825 with the completion of the

*Montreal loses its status as Canada's capital*

Lachine Canal to bypass the rapids on the St. Lawrence which had blocked access to the southern Great Lakes. With a population exceeding 22,000, the little city then was booming.

Among the new buildings raised at around that time was Notre Dame Basilica, incorporating exquisite wood carvings by *Canadien* artisans. Its twin towers, added in the early 1840s, were the precursors of Montreal's lofty skyline; for many years they were the tallest structures in Canada.

In the latter 1840s a great wave of immigration came as a result of the potato famine in Ireland. Like New York and Boston, Montreal became a repository of Irish culture, now manifested in its St. Patrick's Day parade. The parade has evolved into a celebration of the city's multicultural character. Every year, thousands of participants of all ages and



ethnic origins march before crowds of hundreds of thousands. Montreal's Irish element is honoured in the shamrock on its flag, which also displays the symbols of Bourbon France, Scotland and England — the fleur de lys, thistle and rose.

For a number of years Montreal was the capital of Canada, then composed of the future Ontario and Quebec, and there was no reason to expect that it would not retain this status indefinitely. Then in 1849 an English-speaking mob, enraged by a bill which they claimed would reward the *Patriote* rebels of 1837-38, burned down the Parliament Buildings and stoned the governor-general. The seat of government was removed to prevent a recurrence of violence in what would continue to be a city subject to riots.

Still, records show Montreal in the latter 19th century to have been a pleasant and prosperous community. As the population multiplied, the city hummed with commercial and social activity. It was the industrial and financial powerhouse of a new nation bursting with natural riches. Fabulous personal fortunes were made and flaunted in magnificent mansions in "the golden square mile."

It was a civilized and gracious place, known for its tolerance. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the slave girl Little Eva finally finds a haven from persecution in Montreal. Many years later, the colour bar in professional baseball was broken when Jackie Robinson came to play for the Montreal Royals. His parent team, the Brooklyn Dodgers, sent him to the Canadian city because it was relatively free of the overt racial discrimination then practised in the United States.

Its reputation as "a good sports town" is of long standing. Montreal traditionally has adored its home-grown sporting heroes, such as the great weight-lifter Louis Cyr, whose statue now dominates a city square. In 1874 it hosted the first "American" football game between McGill and Harvard Universities. The next year, the world's first modern-style indoor ice hockey

*A passion for  
hockey leads  
to a riot*

game was played in the Victoria Skating Rink, marking the beginning of the passionate romance between Montrealers and hockey. Montreal must be the only place in the world where the suspension of a hockey player could start a riot, as happened in the case of Canadiens star Maurice Richard in 1955.

The early 20th century was the apogee of the railway age, and Montreal was the heart of the rail system in Canada. It was, and still is, the capital of two

vast transportation empires — Canadian Pacific and Canadian National, then composed of several different companies. The city still owes much of its economic importance to its position as an interchange point for rail, road, fresh-water and ocean-going shipping. It is Canada's largest container port, from whence cargo is transhipped by train or truck all over Canada and large parts of the United States.

For many years it was Canada's premier passenger port, where ocean liners landed multitudes of immigrants from Europe. Most went west, but enough stayed on to fuel an enormous increase in the population of Greater Montreal, which soared from 400,504 in 1911 to 818,577 in 1931. Long before the ocean passenger business died, Montreal had become the world capital of its successor, commercial aviation. It is the home of the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Air Transport Association, the former an organization of governments

and the latter of the world's major airlines. Greater Montreal is also a power in the aircraft manufacturing and aviation electronics industries.

Among its other singularities, Montreal is the only Canadian city to be featured in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*. Samuel Butler's celebrated line, "O God! O Montreal!" refers to the prudery of the city's Victorian middle class. In later days it became notorious for the very reverse of prudery. A North American Paris with appropriately naughty Gallic attitudes, it was the definitive "wide open town," complete with gangsters. The vice has since been cleaned up, but that has detracted little from Montreal's raffish reputation and sophisticated *joie de vivre*. The active nightlife helps support the swarms of taxis which enliven the downtown scene.

Montrealers have always liked *un grand spectacle*. This explains why it has been the site of both a world's fair and the Olympic Games over the past 25 years. It also accounts for its multiplicity of festivals, headed by the mammoth summer jazz festival.

Many of these events, such as the film festival, have artistic themes, reflecting the city's growth as a cultural mecca. The Montreal Symphony Orchestra has lately been ranked among the world's top orchestras, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens has been critically acclaimed from England to China. Long ago, artists like Alfred Pellon, Paul-Emile Borduas and Jean-Paul Riopelle put Montreal on the map of the visual art world.

*A taste for  
nightlife and  
'grands spectacles'*





The metropolis of French-speaking Canada has long rivalled Paris as a prolific producer of French-language films and television programs. It is the headquarters city of the National Film Board, which has proved to be an incomparable trainer of film-makers, and of Radio-Canada, which has played a similar role in radio and TV. In popular music, Montreal over the past 30 years has been the cradle of an astonishing flowering of distinctive cultural expression, with a galaxy of *vedettes* ranging from Robert Charlebois and André Gagnon to Beau Dommage, Céline Dion and Roch Voisine. All have become as well-known in other French-speaking countries as they are in Quebec.

Montreal has always been in the forefront of Canadian literature both in French and English, prose and poetry. Not only has it been home to some of our finest writers, it has provided the setting for a great many books, not to mention films. Much of its appeal to writers emanates from its cosmopolitan atmosphere. Immigrants have brought new vitality to the city throughout the century, bolstering its well-deserved reputation for glamorous and charming women — and, of course, for gastronomy.

One of the prime attractions of the city is its endless variety: here you get a glimpse of Paris, there of New York, there of London, Rome, Lisbon, Athens. Yet as it heads towards the 21st century, Montreal is definitively itself.

Its climate helps to make it unique: among its peers, only Moscow must cope with such long, cold, stormy winters. Montrealers accordingly have developed one of the world's most extensive "indoor cities," a network of underground passages linking commercial and residential buildings for 24 kilometres and giving access to a vast variety of stores, hotels, cinemas, restaurants, and other amenities. It is tied together by a swift, smooth-running subway system. The Métro reaches 51 stations with some

50 kilometres of underground track.

With a population approaching 3 million, Metropolitan Montreal is approximately the 40th largest city in the world, roughly the size of Rome

and Washington. It is the ninth largest urban centre in North America, smaller than Chicago or Detroit, but bigger than Boston or Dallas. Though it lost its

position as Canada's largest metropolis to Toronto some years ago, it is nonetheless huge by Canadian standards. More people live in it than in all but three of the provinces: Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. It is over two-thirds French speaking, yet the number of English-speaking people it contains makes it the third-largest "English" city in Canada after Toronto and Vancouver.

In the past 20 years or so Montreal has fallen on bad times. Few cities have had to absorb such sweeping and rapid economic and social changes. As Canada's oldest industrialized area, it has suffered disproportionately from the rationalization imposed by the post-industrial age. There has been an exodus of English-speaking Montrealers to other parts of Canada, spurred by political uncertainty. On top of all that, it shares in other problems that beset North American cities in the late 20th

century — street crime, drugs, homelessness, a run-down infrastructure, a paucity of public funds.

Still, Canadians everywhere might achieve a clearer picture of it if they view in the perspective of cities in other countries. When international statisticians compile their "shopping baskets" of quality-of-life factors, Montreal consistently ranks among the world's very best places in which to live. As big cities go, it is remarkably safe and peaceful. Yet it has not achieved these virtues at the expense of dullness. Problems or no problems, it remains a constantly interesting place to be.

Those problems tend to be exaggerated in any event. Ethnic frictions look a lot more serious in print and on the television screen than they are in reality. On the level at which Montrealers of French, English, and other mother tongues live and work together, there is a degree of co-operation, mutual respect and amity that would be the envy of many places in a world wracked by communal strife.

The special spirit of Montreal is neatly summed up in its civic motto, *Concordia Salus*, which may be roughly translated as "health in harmony." That motto has never been more relevant than in this year, the 350th anniversary of the city and the 125th anniversary of the country of which it has always been so vital an element. Let us hope that *Concordia Salus* will never cease to describe the city it represents.

*It may have problems, but it's never dull*

*It remains one of the world's most liveable cities*

