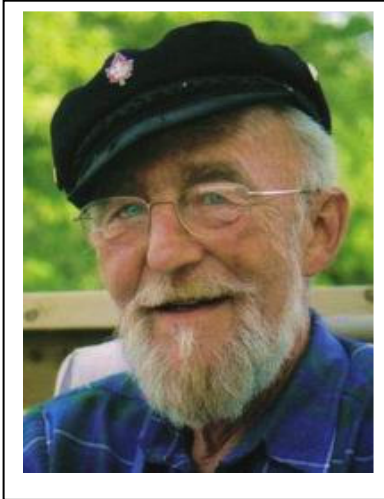


A New Resource Centre in Montreal



On various occasions I have referred readers to the Salle Gagnon, in the Montreal Municipal Library, for such things as the Drouin Microfilms. That is now history. The Salle Gagnon no longer exists, nor, for that matter, does the main branch of the Library.

The Province of Quebec has been working to assess its cultural resources and to plan their rationalization and optimization. As part of that process it took the bold and visionary step of integrating three major cultural facilities : The Main Branch of the Municipal Library, The Provincial Library, which had an outstanding research collection of books, pamphlets, etc., and the Provincial Archives.

The new institution, the 'Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec' will be a world class institution along the lines of 'la Grande Bibliothèque' of Paris. To date, the two libraries have been merged and the collections of the Salle Gagnon have been incorporated into the collections of the Montréal branch of the Archives. The integration of the Archives as a whole with the Library is slated for a little later in the year.

I was very nervous about the fate of the Salle Gagnon Collection, with which I enjoyed working, so I called Judicial Archivist, Evelyn Kolish, and arranged to meet with her and see, with my own eyes, how things were working out.

The visit was an experience in superlatives. Kolish explained that they were dedicated to becoming a 'centre of excellence' for archival research. They are well on their way to that goal.

The facility itself is beautiful and, in some respects, awesome. It comprises several buildings of different eras and styles and a modern storage block all joined into one well-articulated whole. Clearly the integration was done with the hand of a master. What a pleasure it will be to work in that facility.

The reading room (salle de consultation) is a separate but connected structure of enormous proportions. The main floor is well equipped with work stations that include outlets for laptops, etc.. On the third and fourth floors, stations also have a small side table to hold a box of archival documents at the right height for the comfort of the researcher. The ceiling is several storeys up with several glass-floored mezzanines. The overall effect is one of space and light.

There are other research rooms devoted to specific collections. The Drouin microfilms have their own room, with the films and reader-printers.

The collections themselves are easy to access, and, in the case of microfilms, are mostly self-serve.

The Archives holds over 18 kilometres of government records and private collections, including 8.5 kilometres of court records from 1642 to 1974, civil status (vital) records from 1635 to 1900 and notarial archives (critical in Quebec research) from 1648 to 1915. They have 8 million photographs, including aerial photos of thousands of family homesteads, 155,000 maps and plans, audio recordings, movies, and untold more.

In order to cope with the influx from the Salle Gagnon, the Archives added three new staff members and a fair number of microfilm readers and printers and they even have some that will produce digitized copy on a CD-ROM. So far there are seldom any problems of availability of a reader, when a researcher needs one.

This Archives is one of nine Regional Centres of Quebec's National Archives and its mandated area extends well beyond Montreal to areas on both the North and South shores of the St. Lawrence river.

If you want to research ancestors from Quebec, this is the place to go. It would be a very good idea to contact them first, (514) 873-3065, to arrange the visit and to let them know what you are looking for, so they can prepare for you. You could waste a lot of time going in cold. If you read French a bit, you can consult their catalogue on the Archives website at www.anq.gouv.qc.ca. Please note that the Montreal centre is closed on Mondays.

They are located at 535 Viger East and parking is sometimes a little tight. You can get an excellent map from your door to their door at: www.mapquest.com.

The facility is mostly wheelchair accessible but not via the front door. I would consider bringing my own lunch and they have a beautiful atrium area with cafeteria tables for just this purpose.

About ninety per cent of their clientele is genealogists and they clearly are doing their best to help us.