

## **BEAUREPAIRE HERITAGE HOME**

**Francine Ranger-Smith**

This oil painting depicts the Beaufort heritage fieldstone house at 13 Thompson Point.

The painting is based on a black and white photograph by the famous photography studios of William Notman. The photograph is part of the *William Notman Collection* at the *McCord Museum of Canadian History*; it was taken in 1890 and was commissioned by Robert Reford, a wealthy Montrealer who owned the house.

### **William Notman (1826 - 1891)**

William Notman was an internationally known photographer. When he first started his business in 1856, he worked alone with one assistant to help carry the cumbersome camera, the portable dark tent and its equipment and the heavy glass plates.

With an ever increasing demand for his photography by the rich bourgeoisie of Montreal, he progressively increased his staff in the Montreal studio; in the mid 1870, he had 55 employees, most of them photographers who either worked in the Notman studios making portraits or worked on assignments in eastern Canada to take photos of famous people, views of towns, villages, steam boats, railways, landscapes, waterfalls and the activities of people. It became very prestigious for someone to have a personal photograph (many were commissioned to a size of 3 feet x 5 feet) taken by William Notman.

### **Robert Reford (1831 - 1913)**

From the time of his arrival in Montreal, Reford had bought and sold a lot of real estate. He owned a summer house in Beaufort on Thompson Point and in Metis sur Mer but he said that he had no time to use them because he rarely took vacations.

In 1851 for \$1500, he bought 3 farms in Ste Anne de Bellevue for the purpose of development. However, he changed his mind and created instead a 300-acre model farm. He imported Ayrshire cattle which he exhibited and sold across the continent. In 1904, he was tired of the increasing costs of the farm (estimated at \$120,000). He sold the farm to Sir William Christopher MacDonald; MacDonald gave the farm to McGill University to establish an agricultural college.

As a businessman, Robert Reford was one of the most successful of his generation. Although shipping was his passion, he took on many other revenue generating enterprises. He crossed the Atlantic more than 80 times to pursue his commercial interests. His assets grew steadily from \$112,000 in 1870 to \$608,000 in 1890 to \$1,8 million in 1905. When he died in 1914, his net worth was valued at \$2,651,609.

In 1845, Robert Reford's widowed mother emigrated with her family to Toronto from Belfast. After two years of schooling in Toronto, Reford became an apprentice clerk with a grocer at £10 per year. In 1852, with savings of £200, he opened a wholesale grocery business. In 1863, Reford with John Dillon bought an importing business; as part of the

agreement, Reford was to establish a Reford & Dillon grocery wholesale business in Montreal. Reford established this business and in 1870, became the Montreal agent for the Donaldson Shipping Line of Glasgow and bought shares in its growing fleet of steamers. His benefits were not only the profits from each vessel but also the commissions as an agent for the cargoes. His agency handled the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest number of vessels in the port of Montreal. In 1870, the agency had profits of about \$50,000/year.

Reford branched out into many other lines of business. In 1882, he bought a flour mill on the Lachine Canal and equipped it as a rice mill. He operated under the name of the Mount Royal Milling Co.; he imported rice from Burma and other parts of Asia and controlled the milling and sales of most of the rice in Canada. In 1885, he with a partner acquired timber mills in Quebec; they formed the York Lumber Co. and invested \$100,000 in machinery, dams and brickwork, mostly in the Gaspé Peninsula.

### **History of the property (1678 - 1891)**

#### *Jean Guenet*

In 1678, Jean Guenet was one of the early settlers and entrepreneurs in the French Colony. He started in the fur trading business and was granted a concession in Lasalle in 1672. Although Guenet was a merchant and an importer, he became controller of the domains of the King and the tax collector for the seigneurs of the Island of Mont Royal. In 1678, he acquired 120 arpents at Pointe Anaouy (the original Indian name) which he called Beau Repaire. It is thought that he built a log cabin house on the point.

#### *Amable Curot*

In 1769, Amable Curot gained full control of the Guenet farms. On the point of land that extended into the Lake, he built a mansion house in fieldstone that measured 65 feet by 38 feet.

#### *Pierre Vallée & Etienne Saint-Dessiers*

In 1780, six arpents of land and the fieldstone house were seized by the sheriff of the district of Montréal and sold at a public auction. These two merchants bought the property an auction..

#### *Olivier Berthelet*

#### *James Thompson*

In 1864, James Thompson acquired the land and farmed it during 25 years.

#### *Robert Reford*

In 1889, Robert Reford bought the Thompson Point house. Also, in 1851, he bought 3 farms in Ste Anne de Bellevue for the purpose of development.

#### *Jeremiah Cook and James Armstrong*

In 1891, Cook and Armstrong who were real estate developers bought the Thompson Point land and subdivided it into lots. To be successful in the sale of the lots, both investors signed an agreement with the Grand Trunk Railway to give a strip of land the

width of the farm to the railway with the purpose of building a platform for train passengers.

References

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