Vital Personalities of Quebec

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Throughout Quebec’s lengthy history, thousands of people have distinguished themselves for their valuable contributions to the province and to Canada. Some of the persons highlighted in this paper may be obvious to the reader, while others may be a surprise. After consulting a variety of sources about famous Quebecers, we selected people from many walks of life who made major contributions to Quebec and to Canada over the past 400 years. Criteria used in selecting these personalities are their contributions to society, leadership qualities, and background. Included are notables in the political, philanthropic, social, scientific, entertainment and economic arenas; all made history in their own unique ways. We have included a slave suspected of setting fire to a city, an astronaut, an inventor, an explorer, an icon of the entertainment industry, a world renowned author, politicians and business leaders who became household names. From that young man who accompanied Champlain on his earliest adventures in North America to an astronaut who journeyed into space, this group of famous Quebecers should pique the interest of all students, regardless of age.

Marie-Joseph Angelique
Slave and Arsonist

Many slaves resisted their enslavement through armed rebellions and in subtle ways such as slowing down their work and effort or spitting in the food they prepared for their hated masters. Marie-Joseph Angelique of Old Montreal rebelled in a way that destroyed this city in 1734 at the expense of her own life.¹

Marie-Joseph Angelique was born as a free person, later to be kidnapped and sold into slavery. She lived in New England for a time and was eventually
sold to a wealthy Montreal merchant at the age of twenty. Since the plantation system was not considered to be cost-effective in Montreal, most slaves worked as servants in the homes, yet all were still victims of the brutality of the slave system. Marie-Joseph Angelique lived with one master, was the mother of three small children, and had a white lover, but when her master died, his widow sold her to another slave-owner for gun powder. She and her lover ran off but were caught several weeks later. Her lover was jailed, but quickly returned to Marie-Joseph upon his release.²

Several days later in April 1734, Montreal burned at the hands of an arsonist. According to Burnett, “On that cold and windy night Montrealers ran through the streets screaming and yelling.”³ The wooden buildings, fanned by winds, caused the flames to spread quickly. “Fire!,” one of the most feared words in the French colony, echoed through the streets as nearly fifty buildings burned. Before the embers went out and the smoke blew away, a cry went out blaming Marie-Joseph. Questions will always remain: Was Marie-Joseph a scapegoat or an arsonist? Historians acknowledge that she had in fact threatened her master, planned to escape with her lover two months prior to the fire and caused a previous fire to cover their tracks leading away from Montreal.⁴

To quell further acts of rebellion, Marie-Joseph would set an example which might serve as a deterrent to others. She was put on trial, convicted, tortured, executed, and her body burned in public. Before any of this punishment was meted out, the judge demanded a full confession. After a hired interrogator, a black man himself, crushed her legs and knees, Marie-Joseph confessed. The
description of the aftermath of the fire is contained in Afua Copper’s recent bestseller *The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal*. Based on the Marie-Joseph’s confession, the novel retells the oldest slave narrative in the Americas. Marie-Joseph Angelique is a symbol of the evils of slavery, the oppressive treatment of women, and should not be forgotten.

**Joseph-Armand Bombardier – Inventor of a New Winter Sport**

One immediate response to the question “What is one of Canada’s greatest inventions?” would be the snowmobile. Joseph-Armand Bombardier contributed the machine which transformed the Canadian North and winter sports throughout the world. Born in 1907 in a small farming town near Montreal, Bombardier’s ancestors were among the early French settlers who came to Quebec in 1679. One, a soldier, helped Cadillac found the settlement of Detroit in 1701.

Although his parents had hoped Joseph-Armand would follow the Quebec custom for the eldest son to become a priest, he became an inventor. As a young child his spare time was spent creating toys of his imagination; using common items in his farm home, he built mechanical tractors, boats, and carriages. At one point he even persuaded an aunt to allow an engine to be attached to her spinning wheel-- a decision she likely regretted. As a youth he spent his hard earned coins at the local clock maker’s shop to buy his needed bits and pieces. To his father’s dismay, the young inventor loved to dismantle
and reassemble the family’s car and as a result the father gave him a wreck of a Model T, which was up and running in short order, thanks to Bombardier’s amazing skills. Frustrated, his father sent him to a seminary for his formal education, but Joseph-Armand was not impressed with their traditional education. When the lad returned home for winter break, he continued to work on a strange vehicle incorporating a sled with an engine. This was the first invention of a snow vehicle known to exist, but it was only the first of many versions built by Bombardier.

Since his career path was not in religious pursuits, nor medicine nor even farming like his father, Bombardier quit school at the age of 17 with his father’s blessing. The field of mechanics was his career of choice and what a wise choice it would be! He entered into an apprenticeship at a garage, then moved to Montreal where he took courses in mechanics while working during the day.

At the age of 19, Bombardier’s return marked the beginning of his adult occupation when he opened his own garage. Since many in Quebec had transferred from horse drawn wagons, buggies, and sleighs to cars, winter became problematic. The motorized vehicles had to be stored in barns, and horses again became the dominant mode of travel. Snowbound Joseph-Armand was frustrated by the lack of adequate travel, a reality which deepened when his young son died of peritonitis several years later when it was impossible to transport the two year old to the hospital. Joseph-Armand revisited that crude snow vehicle he built as a teenager and worked to improve it. Obstacles dogged Bombardier while he developed this history-altering machine, the snow-
mobile. One problem was the weight of automotive engine, another was building and installing ski tracks. Eventually he developed a track system using a toothed sprocket covered with a rubber and cotton track.

Bombardier decided to keep this patent rather than offer it for sale to one of the big automakers. Another decision he made was to continue his new company’s manufacturing focus in his home town, which eventually became the birthplace of the first snowmobiles. Named the B7 because this Bombardier snow vehicle held seven passengers, other versions followed as he continued to improve the basic design, never satisfied with the status quo.

Not only was Bombardier a great inventor, his marketing skills exceeded normal expectations for a young businessman. Quebec law mandated that roads be cleared during winter months which provided an opportunity for him to give demonstration rides throughout the Quebec countryside. Once passengers disembarked, they were ready to buy the new snow machine. While touring Canada, he wisely chose a parking spot near the local newspaper office. Needless to say, the snow machine became a hot topic in the press.4

According to Bombardier’s biographers, the original name of the new snow machine was to be “Ski-Dog.” Due to a typographical error, the Ski-Doo was born and there was no turning back. The Ski-Doo cost less than a $1000 and would be used as the vehicle of choice for trappers, forestry workers, miners, missionaries and others working in isolated areas. The other market was the newly developing winter sport enthusiasts, many of the baby boomers, who eagerly embraced this exciting winter activity. Many old enough to remember,
fondly recall their first Ski-Doo ride around the snowy countryside in the early 1960s. 5

Unfortunately Joseph-Armand Bombardier did not witness the international success of his ideas. He died in 1964 just short of his fifty seventh birthday, leaving a rich legacy of community contributions in addition to his obvious innovations and inventions. Bombardier, Inc. and Bombardier Recreational Products are world leaders in transportation, including Sea-Doo and Evinrude Motors for boats, regional and business jets as well as amphibious aircraft. They also lead in light rail, monorail systems, people movers, regional trains, and metro systems used around the world. Headquartered in Montreal, Bombardier’s companies’ 2007 revenues approached $17.5 billion. 6

Etienne Brule
Great Lakes Explorer

Every American over the age of six is well aware of the explorations of Christopher Columbus. What child does not know the year 1492? This well-known explorer received his honored place in history with forty U.S. cities bearing his name in twenty-six states plus countless other geographic sites. We even honor Columbus with a holiday. Yet few Americans have even heard of Etienne Brule; not one North American city bears his name.

Brule was a remarkable, colorful personality who explored vast areas of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes regions. His life was a prime example of the adventurous and free Native lifestyle that many young French children were
accustomed to during the first century of the settlement of New France. Brule was the first white man to visit at least four of the Great Lakes, shoot the Lachine Rapids, view Rideau Falls, travel the great French fur trade route from the Ottawa River to Georgian Bay, and explore the Lake Simcoe region. He was also the first white man to discover the Toronto area, explore Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania, travel down the Susquehanna to Chesapeake Bay, and paddle the St. Mary’s rapids. These are impressive accomplishments, but formal honors eluded him for four centuries.

Etienne Brule should be regarded as one of the greatest explorers of North America, yet, in books on North American explorers, he often receives only a paragraph. There have been many explanations for this slight. One biographer of Champlain described Brule as, “Long a transgressor of laws of God and man he spent…a wretched life in vile intemperance such as no Christian should exhibit among heathen. He died by treachery.”¹ In the era of revisionist history, it may be time to re-examine Brule for his brave and laudable attributes.

French explorer turned pagan traitor, Brule accompanied Samuel de Champlain to the new settlement of Quebec City in 1608. At the age of 16, Brule was one of only eight survivors of that first deadly winter of cold, scurvy, and deprivation. In 1609 Champlain journeyed into the interior when Brule allegedly begged Champlain to allow him to live with the Algonquin, to learn their language and customs. Champlain agreed to exchange Brule for a young Native. In a sense, Brule became the first exchange student in North American history.
As a French ambassador to the Huron, he was to learn both the language and the culture of the natives, skills which assisted the French in establishing the lucrative fur trade route in the interior. Although there were perhaps dozens of “volunteers” for this duty, Brule is the only one to receive attention in Champlain’s journals, which referred to Brule as “my lad,” and he became the first documented explorer to blaze a trail using the waters of Quebec, which would become the super highway of the day.

Brule learned the language and the culture of the Huron as well. Although he was expected by his Catholic supporters to demonstrate the Catholic values to the Huron, the opposite became the reality of his experiences in the villages where he lived. In 1611, when Brule returned to Champlain’s Quebec City Habitation, Champlain was likely shocked at the transformation of his lad. Brule adopted the Huron hairstyle, similar to the famous “Mohawk,” and no longer wore the traditional French clothing but rather a simple loincloth. His feet were no longer in the stiff boots of the French but rather in comfortable moccasins made by Huron women.

What occurred during that fateful year in the forests of North America likely involved hunger, cold, insects, and hardships unimagined in the tiny village of Quebec along the St. Lawrence where he had formerly lived. His daily diet, when food was plentiful, consisted of fish, game, corn, and the fruits of the forests, much different from what he was accustomed to in the French community. Why did Brule request continued assignment in the interior? This was really a “no brainer” for this young man. If he returned to life in Quebec City,
he would be under the watchful eye of the priests, missionaries and Champlain. He might have become a farmer or perhaps a fur trader, but in either case, he would not be free to roam with the Natives. Whatever his motive, Brule returned to the interior with the Natives from 1611-1615.

During these years, Brule was the first white to explore the upper reaches of the fur trade route after having shot the rapids at the Huron village of LaChine. He reached Lake Huron while traveling with the natives of the same name. The Midland area, near Georgia Bay, became Brule’s home for the next twenty years. Since he traveled the eventual fur trade route, Brule was probably the first *coureur du bois* (backwoods adventurer) identified by historians.

When he returned to Quebec in 1616, he transformed into a “Native” adult in his early twenties, Champlain likely had a more difficult time even recognizing his lad. During the next few months, Brule taught the Jesuits the Native languages he had learned. Though he taught the priests how to communicate with their converts, Jesuit missionary Brebeuf wrote about him in an openly critical way in *Jesuit Relations*, stressing Brule’s uncredited acceptance of Indian lifestyles.

During the next five years, Brule journeyed with the Huron. He saw the shores of Lake Ontario when he travelled down the Humber River to what is now Toronto. He also “discovered” Lake Erie. Though he was never credited with the Niagara Falls discovery, how could the eager young explorer have bypassed them? In the early 1620s, Brule made a portage around rapids in the Ste. Mary’s River, accidentally discovering Lake Superior. As a result of his discoveries,
Brule became the first known European to know the lands of Michigan. Since Champlain's map of the Great Lakes region created in 1632 included Lake Michigan, Cranston claims that one might deduce Brule's visit also included the discovery of the fifth Great Lake.⁴ Although Brule assisted Father Sagard, who created a Huron dictionary, Sagard recorded that Brule suffered from an addiction to women, which, according to Rinella, did not bode well among the religious community.⁵

Many accused Brule of selling Champlain out to the English Kirke Brothers in 1629 and guiding them to Quebec City. Scorned by all because of the defeat of Champlain, Brule became a person without a French home. Later, Champlain returned to Quebec City, but Brule could not. Some historians, including Cranston’s question whether Brule was merely a scapegoat of French mismanagement.⁶

During the winter of 1632-1633, Brule disappeared from history. The next summer when the Jesuits learned that Brule disappeared, the Huron denied any responsibility. Champlain’s 1633 journal contained no record of Brule, thus the “Christopher Columbus” of the entire Great Lakes region became a footnote of history.

Roch Carrier
Quebec’s Most Widely Read Author

How could a boy living in a small Quebec village, so small it had no library, become over time the most widely read and loved author of the province? This same author penned the words found on the back of the Canadian five dollar bill:
“The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church and the skating rink—but our life was on the skating rink.”¹ For Roch Carrier, there has been an interesting journey of his own making from the small skating rink to international fame.

Carrier was born in Sainte-Justine, Quebec in 1937. He realized from an early age he wanted to become an author and used this small, quaint Quebec village as the setting for his amazing stories. Carrier’s educational career led him from his small village school to a university in Edmundston, New Brunswick, on to the University of Montreal, and finally to the University of Paris. Prior to his study at the Sorbonne, Carrier penned his first novel, a classic, La guerre, yes sir! in 1968. If translated the title would still be bilingual and is indicative of his sense of the conflict between the francophone and anglophone populations of Canada. Set in Quebec during the draft conflict of the Second World War, the book describes life in a village torn by the conscription issue and the English dominated government. Readers will find the villagers as interesting individuals coping with their dilemmas in very unique and sometimes humorous ways.

Although La guerre, yes sir!, studied by students around the world has received critical acclaim, his most famous work is in children’s literature. Virtually every young child in Canada is familiar with his classic The Hockey Sweater, beginning with those words now found on the currency of Canada. It is a “humorous and bittersweet tale of Carrier’s childhood worship of his hero and hockey great, Maurice Richard. In this short story, readers learn of the hockey hero and his famous #9 Montreal Canadien sweater, which is also depicted on
the same five dollar bill. Carrier’s autobiographical children’s story recounts the daily routines and special problems of living in the rural Quebec francophone world of the 1940s. Students of all ages can relate to the little boy forced to wear the “wrong” sweater, that of the hated Toronto Maple Leafs, which Carrier’s mother had mistakenly purchased for him. He wrote this with humor and nostalgia, which adults love. Later Carrier wrote a book about his hero and hockey legend “Rocket” Richard, entitled Our Life with the Rocket. As recognition of the success of The Hockey Sweater, Maurice Richard honored Roch Carrier by presenting the infamous #9 sweater to the man who entertained children and adults who read the delightful bedtime story. Photos of that day indicate the sweater fit him well.²

During Carrier’s writing career, he wrote numerous other novels, short stories, poems, and essays and served as a playwright and screen writer. He won the Stephen Leacock Award for Humor for his work Prayers of a Very Wise Child, narrated by a seven year old boy. Quebec nationalism, the illusive Canadian identity and the conflict between English and French Canadians are common elements in much of his work. His style is varied and interesting. In his book The Man in the Closet, the reader is provided with a surprising ending; in his book The End there are no chapters.

Carrier taught literature, directed the French Department at the University of Montreal and coordinated the Canadian Studies program there as well. His work in the humanities did not end in these classrooms; he has been active as an
arts advocate in the Canada Council for the Arts, the *Theatre du Nouveau Monde* as well as the Canadian Film Development Corporation.

Ironically in 1999, Carrier became Canada’s fourth and final National Librarian. The little boy who grew up without a library to borrow books from had become the head librarian of the entire nation. During his tenure which lasted until 2004, he achieved many milestones, including the digitalization of the Canadian database which contains some of the most important treasures of the National Library, and increased access to these treasures to all Canadians, whether they live in Sainte-Justine or Dawson City. There is a library now in the Sainte-Justine community. Still another legacy of Roch Carrier was the merger of the National Library and the National Archives of Canada into the new Library and Archives of Canada, which eliminated the need for a National Librarian. This Quebec writer has stolen the hearts of so many Canadians. All who study this country and its beautiful literature must read the works of this Canadian writer.

**Sir George-Etienne Cartier**  
**Father of Confederation**

When Americans think of the Founding Fathers, we reflect on the greatness of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and the like. Canadians consider of John A. Macdonald from Ontario and George-Etienne Cartier of Quebec to be their men of great historical importance. These are not household names in North America, however.

Canadian historians maintain that George-Etienne Cartier was “one of the most influential politicians of his generation.”¹ When the leaders of British North
America met in Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island, they created the Canadian Confederation and built the foundation of a new nation—Canada.

Cartier’s family arrived in New France in the early 1700s, without any documented connection with the explorer, Jacques Cartier. His grandfather was a wealthy merchant in Quebec City; his father, a grain merchant near Montreal was involved in politics. It was in this wealthy and important family that George-Etienne Cartier developed his interest in public principles: Although home schooled by his mother at an early age, Cartier went on to train in a law office in Montreal after his college education ended. In 1835 at the age of 21, he began to practice law and developed an interest in the political struggles of Lower Canada.

He became involved with Louis Joseph Papineau, one of the leaders of the Patriotes who dominated local events only two years later. Due to his involvement in armed rebellions, he fled to the United States for a time. After living in exile in Vermont, he returned to Montreal where he again practiced law. Active in the responsible government movement, Cartier worked with John A. Macdonald in the Union Parliaments from 1857 until 1862.

Cartier, legal advisor in the formation of the Grand Trunk Railroad, naturally promoted government subsidies to pay for railroad construction. Other politicians desired funds for education, roads, and education. Together political leaders from East Canada and West Canada “organized a coalition …by the mid-1850s under the party banner of the Liberal Conservatives. Historian Scott See
claims that this party, the antecedent of the Progressive Conservatives, became the champion of colonial unification."⁶

Canada’s leaders envisioned a new nation with westward expansion. This new nation would become a reality after the Civil War south of the border but only after lengthy discussions. After their meetings in both Charlottetown and later Quebec, Macdonald and Cartier along with other political leaders from across British North America developed the philosophy of the British North America Act of 1867. This document was the constitution for Canada until Trudeau and Queen Elizabeth II reached agreement in 1982.

It was through Cartier’s efforts that Rupert’s Land was annexed by Canada, both Manitoba and British Columbia, became provinces of Canada and the railroad across the entire nation was built to unify the nation. When Parliament adopted the railroad bill, Cartier gave the exultant cry: “All aboard for the West!”⁷

On July 1, 1867, the official birthday of the Dominion of Canada, Cartier became part of the cabinet of John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada. Elected to Parliament, he served until 1872. Even after a stunning defeat in the election that year, he continued to serve as Macdonald’s right hand man until his death a year later. When Macdonald learned of Cartier’s death, “he burst into tears; incapable of continuing to speak, his right arm extended in a dramatic gesture toward the empty seat of one who had been his companion for nearly twenty years.”⁸
Leonard Cohen  
Musician Extraordinaire

Perhaps growing up fatherless played a part in Leonard’s thoughtful demeanor. His father had left a trust fund for him, which allowed him to pursue a career without financial worry. He attended McGill University, then moved on to law school, but left after only one semester. He went to Columbia University in New York, where he spent only a year. After receiving an arts scholarship from Canada’s Arts Council in 1959, he traveled extensively across Europe.

His first poetry Let’s Compare Mythologies was published in 1956 and was followed in 1961 with The Spice Box of Earth, then three years later Flowers for Hitler. In 1963, he wrote The Favorite Game, a novel about which he said: “They’re very unhappy people who have generally failed at an art they would like to excel in…I cringe before the tyranny of fact, but it is not autobiographical. I made it up.”¹ His second novel, Beautiful Losers, was published in 1966 amid mixed reviews. By 1984, he told an interviewer for CBC (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) that he turned to music because, “I always thought of myself as a singer and kind of got side-tracked to literature.”²

Cohen set the standard in North America for song writers and poets striving to reach what Cohen calls “the largest issues in human lives”³. Turning to music in 1967, he released his first album, “Songs of Leonard Cohen”, which included “So long, Marianne” (apparently after a Norwegian friend, Marianne Jenson), “Hey, that’s no way to say Goodbye”, “Suzanne” for his friend, Suzanne Verdal McAllister, which went on to be a big hit for Judy Collins, “Ain’t no cure for Love”, “Bird on a Wire”, “Everybody Knows” and “Hallelujah.”
In 1991, Cohen was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame for the greater recognition of artists and their music, and in 1993, received the Juno Award for the Male Vocalist of the year after his 11th album, “The Future”, and in 1994 he received another Juno Award for Songwriter of the Year. In 2003, he was awarded the Order of Canada, and in 2006 he was inducted into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame. As a tribute to Cohen’s stature, k.d.lang performed “Hallelujah” at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

At the age of 73, Cohen was inducted into the Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March 2008. A critic stated that he was probably the "most influential poet and songwriter of our time." Using themes of sexuality, religion, and isolation, his baritone voice evolved into a slow, thoughtful bass that brings an almost haunting sound to his poetry recitations or his songs. Admirers have said that if he had never recorded anything else after his first album, “Songs of Leonard Cohen” his influence would still be felt by generations to come, and his talent would be recognized for years.

Marc Garneau
Astronaut

While many may think of those who toil in the fields near the St. Lawrence, others may recall the vital role of Marc Garneau who became Canada’s first man in space. Born in Quebec City in 1949, he must have looked to the sky above the Quebec countryside little realizing that he would one day look down on earth from this same sky. Garneau’s early education was in Quebec City, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and London. Garneau went on to the Royal Military College in
Kingston and returned to London, England to study at the Imperial College of Science of Technology. His early military career was spent in the Canadian navy where he eventually became an instructor at the fleet school in Halifax. While there, Garneau designed a simulator for use in training weapons officers, an experience proved very useful in later years.

Marc Garneau’s years as an astronaut spanned more than two decades. In 1983 the U.S. invited Canada to send astronauts to participate in space shuttle missions. When the call went across Canada, more than 4,000 Canadian citizens volunteered to become the first to go into space\(^1\) and at 35, Garneau became one of the first six Canadians selected for this honor from the vast pool in February 1984.

In less than a year he climbed aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger. On a CBC broadcast, Garneau gained the reputation as a national celebrity noted for his background as both a naval engineer and an electrical engineer with grace under pressure, social skills and credentials needed for a space hero. Although he was labeled a private person by the news network, the humble man would instantly be a hero to the Canadian people because he was the first Canadian to go into space.

His second mission in 1996 was aboard the Endeavor when he was in his late 40s. When he was over fifty he went on his third and last mission again on the same spacecraft; this time, he guided two other astronauts outside the shuttle. With almost seven hundred space hours, Garneau left the work of manning the missions and in 2001 became the Executive Vice President of the
Canadian Space Agency, originally formed in 1989. Within ten months, he became the President of the CSA.

When he resigned as the head of the CSA, Garneau’s reign as the premier Canadian astronaut ended four years later in 2005, when he retired to his home area of Quebec. According to the CTV, he turned to the political race rather than the space race in 2006 when he ran for public office. Lacking support from his Liberal Party, he was unsuccessful in his bid to become a Member of Canada’s Parliament. Regardless of this disappointment, astronaut Marc Garneau reached heights only a handful of Canadians have attained.

**Louis Hebert**

*An Early Settler of Quebec*

The small settlement around Quebec City began with Samuel de Champlain in the summer of 1608 but true permanent settlement began with the arrival of the Louis Hebert family in the summer of 1617. During the first nine years of Quebec City’s history, neither European women nor children were residents. With this first permanent family, New France could claim a brighter future that would continue for a century and a half.

The Herbert’s journey to North America began in March, 1617, and they arrived in Quebec City in the early spring of that year. This enabled the physician’s family to clear the land and erect a house. Their home, constructed of logs taken from their land seemed quite small yet housed the family of five. Hand made simple wooden furniture found its place near the hearth on a hand
made woolen rug. Typical of families of the era, they would awaken at dawn and work until darkness prevented further labor. Marie and their daughters made their clothing from the wool and constructed shoes or moccasins from hides brought by traders. Evidently, Hebert did bring some seeds from France for both food and medicines, which he planted that first summer. The family survived that first year, unlike many pioneers before them.

Hebert’s skills as an apothecary were in great demand since the small village suffered from disease and starvation. Also, he quickly gained the respect and friendship of Mi’kmaq Natives in the area, who added to his new world of agricultural and medicinal knowledge. The Mi’kmaq eagerly instructed their European friend in the uses of the plants, bark, berries, flowers, and roots native to the region for healing the sick and injured. Some of these medicinal herbs are still in use today.¹

At the time, Hebert was one of the few early settlers of Quebec City who showed interest in farming, since most were involved in the fur trade or religious activities. Vegetables such as peas, beans, cabbage, squash, melons, turnips, onions, beets, cucumbers, and green leafy vegetables grew well. Some grains also flourished in the St. Lawrence Valley such as wheat, barley, oats, hemp, flax and rye. According to the publication, Jesuit Relations², winter wheat did not fare as well as that sown in the spring. An acre of wheat typically yielded a dozen bushels of grain and was the staple food of New France. The Natives introduced Hebert to maize, since corn was not native to Europe. Hebert brought the first apple trees from Normandy but was pleased to discover many berry bushes, nut
trees and vineyards. They also provided for their family with cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry in addition to the abundant wildlife in the nearby wilderness, plus fish and eel from the rivers and streams.

In 1620, the same year that the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock, the Hebert family celebrated several vital events. The first European child was born to Louis’ daughter at Champlain’s Habitation. Although the mother did not long survive, the child did; there was permanence to the community. That same year Champlain gave Hebert the responsibility of administering justice in the new colony. As the King’s Attorney, he became even more involved with the official and complicated activities of Quebec City and New France. Still another major milestone soon occurred with the granting of the first seigneurie to Louis Hebert in 1623, in recognition of his contribution to the new colony. The seigneurial system was the restructured New French version of the feudal system in France. Rent no longer was paid but loyalty and military service to protect the community from hostile Natives were expectations. This first Hebert land grant included much of what is now in the heart of Old Quebec City in the upper city. He cleared the land for his homestead with grain fields, pasture, gardens and orchards to support his growing family.

Sadly, a year after the second land grant, Louis Hebert, then in his early fifties, died from a fall on the winter ice. Large-scale farming began when both oxen and plows worked the land along the St. Lawrence. Marie continued her work as an educator and friend to the Mi’kmaq and settlers until her death over twenty years later. Thus, the Hebert couple was the first to settle in New France.
and remain until their death. Without the efforts of the Hebert family, New France and Canada might have had a much different history.

Guy Laliberte
Icon of Entertainment

Children and adults alike love a circus. Quebec born and raised, Guy Laliberte gave all people, regardless of age, a new type of circus igniting the imagination of the world. Cirque du Soleil captured the hearts and minds of millions. How is this circus unique? How is it connected to the history of the province of Quebec? Who created this work of art?

For years, Canada has been home to the unique street performers known as buskers. Buskers have entertained tourists in large cities and small villages in Quebec throughout the summer months. One street performer emerged from the ranks of the festival of buskers, Guy Laliberte, born in Quebec City in 1959. The Laliberte Family fostered a love of entertainment and it perhaps is not surprising that Laliberte left home at the age of 14 and joined the circus.¹ When Laliberte was not even twenty years old, he journeyed to Europe and hitchhiked across the continent playing traditional Canadian music. He recalls spending his first night in London on a park bench with a backpack and the tools of his trade—an accordion, harmonica, Jew’s harp and spoons, his musical instruments and means of earning a living. He had little funds but continued on his quest to learn his trade as a busker.²
Ultimately he learned from the street performers in Paris, where he honed his basic skills of fire breathing and added the standby busker skill of stilt walking. It would have been fascinating to follow Laliberte’s journey that summer and observe his talent building experience. He did experience living with little comforts since he was in reality “unemployed.” Eventually he returned to Quebec province where he attempted to enter the more traditional workforce by working as a laborer at a hydroelectric dam, but in less than a week the workers went on strike and Labilerte was jobless. Laliberte then journeyed half way around the world to spend several years in the warm climate of Hawaii, where again he worked on improving his street performer skills. Sometime during this period, it occurred to him that there might be a market for this unique occupation. This idea further developed after Laliberte returned to the province of Quebec.

The impact of his Hawaii years can be seen in the symbol for *Cirque du Soleil*, the sun.²

In Quebec, he joined a troupe of stilt walkers. This group walked among the tourists on their stilts while others juggled, breathed fire, and played simple musical instruments, all for the loose change and loonies thrown into a hat on the street. Laliberte envisioned that such a group could be transformed from their non profit status and lead to profit. Little did he know the plan would land him as one of the richest Canadians in history.

In 2007 Guy Laliberte fulfilled a lifetime commitment to combat poverty when he created the ONE DROP Foundation. Safe water is a basic human right and key to human survival. One can survive only a few days without safe water.
This is the focus of the new foundation—one drop of safe water at a time. Laliberte’s dedication to giving back what he has been given is apparent in this foundation. Thus the same year he received the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year for Quebec, then Canada and finally the world. He previously received the Governor General’s Order of Canada, the highest honor bestowed on a Canadian. His home province of Quebec honored him with the *Ordre National du Quebec*, its highest distinction. He also was considered by *Time* magazine as one of the most influential people of the world in 2004.  

From the young lad who left home at age fourteen to the entertainment giant, Guy Laliberte has never lost his creativity. Over ten million people who see a *Cirque du Soleil* show each year can attest to that basic fact. In the adult entertainment Mecca, Las Vegas, approximately 5% of the visitors view a *Cirque du Soleil* show each night. Today over 4000 people are employed in close to twenty shows plus the state of the art training facilities in Montreal.  

Guy Laliberte truly believes that “Inside every adult there’s still a child that lingers. I think we tend to forget we were children before. We’re happiness merchants—giving people the opportunity to dream like children.”

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**Rene Levesque**  
*Founder of Parti Quebecois*

In a national poll conducted by *Maclean's* in 2004 Rene Levesque was on a list of the Greatest Canadians. A diminutive chain-smoker, Rene Levesque was born in 1922 in Cambellton, New Brunswick; he went to war during the years 1944–'45, not as a soldier, but as a correspondent and liaison officer for the
United States Army. He had had some previous journalism experience as a staff person for CHNC, a radio station in New Carlisle, Quebec, and at another station in Quebec City. He sent back frequent dispatches from London during the German bombardment, and moved with the army towards Berlin. When the concentration camp at Dachau was discovered, Levesque was deeply moved by what he saw. ²

From 1956 to 1960 Rene hosted the French language counterpart of a CBC radio news program. After helping to organize a union there during a producers’ strike he became a member of the Liberal Party, and in 1960 became a Member of the National Assembly (MNA) from the Montreal-Laurier district. He held many portfolios from 1960-1966; first Minister of Water Resources and Public Works, then Minister of Natural Resources, and the portfolio of Family and Social Welfare, as Quebec moved into the “Quiet Revolution”. ³

After 20 years of participation in politics, Levesque established the Parti Quebecois and by November 1976, he became Premier of Quebec. While Premier, he championed many causes including limiting political donations by individuals, banning of corporate contributions, and the Quebec Charter of the French Language. This became more popularly known as Bill 101. The new law made French the predominate language for education and all commerce and business in Quebec. Signs in windows had to use French in larger letters than in English.

By May of 1980, the Parti Quebecois’ Referendum Act came to fruition with the long awaited referendum on Quebec’s place in Canada, its sovereignty-
association plan. Levesque of course had argued for a Yes vote while the Non vote side was led by the Liberal Leader, Claude Ryan, Jean Chretien, and the Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau. With an 85% voter turnout the results were 40% Oui and 60% Non. Accepting the results, Levesque told his supporters to carry on the fight until next time.  

The Parti Quebecois won a majority again in 1981, but when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau suggested plans to patriate the Constitution all of the parties in the National Assembly rejected it while the other nine provinces embraced the idea. Levesque maintained that he had been duped by Trudeau and the other premiers when the PM called for a late night vote and left Levesque sleeping in a hotel in Hull.  

By 1984, Levesque stated that he would no longer fight for separatism, which led to much dissension in the PQ, and many disenchanted members left the party. However, in a special convention Levesque was reaffirmed as the official party leader in January 1985. By June of that year he resigned and returned to his first career of journalism and broadcasting.  

While hosting a dinner party on November 1, 1987, Rene Levesque suffered a massive heart attack. One historian wrote, “He changed the way we see ourselves, and the way Canadians see their country”. More than 100,000 people attended his funeral.  

Today Levesque is still remembered with reverence among many separatists; to many he is the modern Quebec’s “Father”. Many Quebecers say he was the best premier in Quebec for the last fifty years. Remembering his
death in an interview many years later, Jean Charest called Levesque a great patriot who led Quebec into the modern era. Rene Levesque’s best legacy, perhaps, is what he said after the separation vote in 1980. “...there’s a normal rendezvous with History that Quebec will hold, and I have confidence that we shall be there, together, to witness it”.  

James McGill  
Fur Trader and Merchant

When reviewing the early history of Quebec, the natural economic focus is the fur trade. This economic endeavor brought many immigrants to the banks of the St. Lawrence, where the fur trade lured the adventurous into the interior along other rivers and streams. One of the early fur traders was James McGill, who became one of the richest men of Quebec’s merchant class.

James McGill was born in Scotland in 1744, and attended Glasgow University. Prior to the age of twenty, McGill left Scotland to journey to the New World. In the early years after the Conquest of New France by the English, the French merchants and Canadian bourgeois were replaced by English and Highland Scots merchants. “The new merchants forged a commercial link with London,¹ enabling McGill to find work in the fur trade of Montreal.

The fur trade with its voyageurs who ventured into the wilderness intrigued this young man; he saw it's potential for great profit amid the incredible perils of the wilderness. According to Duckworth, his “first recorded fur trade adventure...was as an agent for William Grant, soon to become one of the most influential in Canada.”² From 1766 until the American Revolution, in the colonies
in the south, McGill worked as a fur trader. His winter experience was likely arduous, cold, and difficult, characterized by want and deprivation. He traveled the Ottawa River and followed the old fur trade route of New France to the Great Lakes into the interior of Wisconsin through Lake Superior.

With the coming of the American Revolution, James McGill eventually settled in Montreal, which became his headquarters and home until the end of his life. It was here that he became a member of a stock company of fur traders in 1775.3 His partner, Isaac Todd, and McGill would become the foremost fur merchants in what was then the British North American colony. McGill did not pursue the path of the infamous North West Company but plied the waters to the south west and the lower Great Lakes.4 It was in these waters and with the Native trappers that he made his fortune.

The early fur trade involved economic transactions with the Natives of the region. They were the fur trappers searching for the fur bearing animals such as marten and mink. Although these fancy furs brought riches, the most prized fur was that of the beaver. This staple fur was ideal for making the beaver hats so popular in Europe at the time. The barbs of the fur were easily made into the felt which was then pressed into the special style top hat. Since the beaver are sedentary animals, once an area had been trapped out, the Natives had to move on to find more of the high-quality fur. The fur traders had to do the same each season. Thus, in his early years McGill's search for beaver furs drew him into the interior of North America.
Once the Natives trapped, skinned, and cured the beaver pelts in the off-season, they were equipped to meet with the white merchants during the summer months. The traders were armed with general trade goods such as guns, powder, the infamous wool blankets, alcohol, tobacco, pots, pans, traps, beads, other items new to the Native villages. Both sides were convinced they were getting the better end of the deal. Natives could not believe they were getting so many European goods for so few pelts; the Europeans were pleased with their profit as well. It seemed to be a deal made in heaven; McGill became one of the richest men in Montreal as a result of such shrewd bartering.

During the years between the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the wealthy McGill turned his attention to public service, which was unique among the fur merchants. He served as magistrate, councilor, was instrumental in the recommendation for an elected legislature for Lower Canada (Quebec), won a seat in that elected legislature and served three terms representing the West Ward of Montreal until the War of 1812. During the conflict with the United States in 1812, McGill led the defense of Montreal.

Throughout his years in Montreal, McGill became interested in the need for an educational system and as a concerned member of the legislative assembly, he supported the creation of a rigorous educational system in Lower Canada. As a father of step children and the adopted children of a friend, McGill knew the education needs of the youth of Montreal and Lower Canada. Upon his death in 1813, McGill willed a segment of his vast wealth to the founding of a college, which bore his name. Thus McGill College was
established in 1821, starting the course of the great institution of higher learning, which educated so many of the leaders of Canada.

John Molson Brewer

“A toque is a hat,
A chesterfield is a couch,
And it is pronounced Zed,
Not Zee…ZED!

Canada is the second largest land mass,
The 1st nation of hockey,
And the best part of North America.

My name is Joe…
And …I…AM…CANADIAN! “

A few years back, few could hear the “I am a Canadian” rant and not smile as they sipped their Molson’s Golden or Molson’s Ex Beer. The Rant seemed out of character for the typical Canadian who usually didn’t boast of his “Canadianess.”

John Molson was born three days after Christmas in 1763 in Moulton, England. In May 1782, John immigrated to Canada and quickly became active in the brewing business. He was not immediately successful due to the fact that the brewery season of 1783 –’84 dealt him a serious financial blow when the barley crops failed. However, with new backing and a keen business sense about the Loyalists’ demands for good beer, Molson worked harder than ever to develop a
brew that was universally liked. Soon business was so good that he couldn’t keep up with the demand. ²

By the start of the new century, Molson was successful enough to build his own steamship, *The Accommodation*, in Montreal. After completion, it plied the waters of the St. Lawrence on a regular basis. His second ship, *Swiftsure*, leased to England’s army in 1812, provided additional income. By 1815, Molson was in the legislative Assembly representing Montreal East, by 1816 he had built a luxury hotel, the Mansion House Hotel, and by 1822 had become co-owner of the Bank of Montreal when its charter of incorporation was received from England. While in the Assembly, Molson, primarily through private funds, was able to build the 200 bed Montreal General Hospital as well as Molson’s Royal Theatre. Also, by this time, Molson was expanding his markets to include London after his son, Thomas, exported more than 1600 gallons of beer to the city. With that sale, an international trade market had been created. Molson’s fortune increased with the addition of a fleet of steamships, the St. Lawrence Steamship Company. By 1826, the company had more privately owned ships than the United States. ³

By 1832, John had convinced the Assembly to build a railroad to connect the Hudson and the St. Lawrence Rivers. When it was completed in 1836, it had iron covered wooden rails and at times the metal would break and snap up into the railcars. These “snake heads”, though sudden and scary, seldom caused much damage. In spite of the primitive “stage coaches on rails” this became Canada’s first successful railroad, the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad.
Molson, however, never lived to see his railroad succeed as he had envisioned. He died on January 10, 1836 after developing a high fever probably related to the cholera epidemic that had recently swept through the Montreal region.⁴

**Emile Nelligan**  
Poet

An investigation of the famous writers of Quebec will undoubtedly turn up the story of Emile Nelligan, born in 1879. This poet spent virtually his entire life in his birthplace of Montreal. Although he entered the College Sainte-Marie, he quickly abandoned his formal education to devote his attention to writing poetry with a symbolic and romantic style, yet very haunting. Pryke and Soderland claim that he became one of the most influential members of the *Ecole Litteraire de Montreal* (Montreal Literary School) and was “known for a new vein of modernist, intimist poetry.”¹

His skill at reciting his poems at sessions of the *Ecole Litteraire de Montreal* contributed to his legendary fame.² He wrote 170 poems, sonnets, rondels, songs, and prose poems in his style which invoked sadness and pathos. Some of his work indicated a hallucinatory vision of the world. One such example was “Old Fantasist,” describing the view of an elderly woman regretting the decisions in her life. Still another which was translated by A.J.M. Smith was “The Ship of Gold,” depicting a golden façade hiding the evils of society. His poetry has appeared in several collections, critical editions, and his life has even the subject of theatrical work.
Nelligan wrote a treasure of work in his teens which even today evoke dramatic responses. This work has been studied at all levels of education. Some of his poetry is easily understood by students of his age when he wrote. Imagine some of the work of our current high school students surviving for over a century.

His career ended at the age of twenty at the turn of the last century when his parents institutionalized him. They felt he was exhausted, sick, and perhaps suicidal. More importantly they were concerned about his unusually close friendships with men. Due to their fears of his insanity, he lived in seclusion in insane asylums until his death over forty years later. He never wrote another work of literature yet his own life story could read as a romantic fable.

**Louis-Joseph Papineau Revolutionary**

During the late 1830s, Canada experienced some of the same widespread political unrest and reforms that the rest of the world encountered. Among Canadians, there was an awareness of the power of the common man. More governments began to define power in economic terms rather than by the conventional elite families. Canada experienced rebellions in 1837 which reflected the discontent of some in both Upper and Lower Canada. While Upper Canada [Ontario] experienced the short lived Yonge Street Rebellion lead by William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader in Lower Canada [Quebec] Louis-Joseph Papineau lasted longer.
Louis-Joseph Papineau went from lawyer, land owner, and politician to a rebel leader. Born in Montreal, Papineau grew up in a traditional peasant family of farmers along the St. Lawrence. At the age of only twenty-three he was elected to the assembly of Lower Canada in 1809; he devoted the next four decades of his life to the political issues of his home.²

He took his place in the Assembly when French Canadian nationalism marked the current issues of the day. English merchant and immigrant Loyalists from the new United States who ruled Quebec became the focus of nationalists such as Papineau. These nationalists formed a new political party, the *Parti Canadien*, and Papineau became an active member.

Within ten years Papineau married and bought a *seigneury* [farm] from his father while continuing his role in the Assembly. By 1826, the *Parti Canadien*, now the *Patriote* Party had increased their power within their diverse following. It now included French-Canadian habitants, Irish farmers from the U.S. who settled in the Eastern Townships and English farmers as well. Shortly after, the *Patriotes* demanded political and economic reforms of the English controlled government, known as the *Château Clique*. As a reformer in the Assembly, Papineau was one of the fiercest opponents of the *Château Clique*, which was a group of wealthy families in Lower Canada and included such prominent members as James McGill and John Molson. Many, including Papineau, were attracted to the reform concepts of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Like them, he viewed farmers and small landowners as the natural founders of democracy in North America. It is likely that the harsh realities of the Canadian
geography contributed to his thoughts on equality, democracy and free trade with
the United States.

In the spring of 1837 over a thousand such reformers attended a rally near
Montreal to air their grievances against the English merchants and plot their line
of attack. Later that summer, dissenters boycotted British goods in an attempt to
force the reforms. The reformers near Montreal communicated their goals to
other Patriotes throughout the Quebec countryside. When words and boycotts
did not affect change, the members of the Patriote Party adopted the distinctive
clothing of the habitant as their garb—farmer pants, shirt, and the traditional sash
and toque. This would become the uniform of the rebellion forces of 1837.³

Although still a member of the Assembly, Papineau and the others held
little real power. Upon visiting England over a decade before, he had viewed first
hand the aristocratic nature of English society and the poverty of the masses.
Eventually, the educated, well traveled Papineau became the oratorical leader of
the reform movement rather than their military general. The first armed
confrontation took place in November of 1837 at Longueuil and also at St. Denis,
two small communities east of Montreal. The Patriotes managed to gain the
upper hand until the British reorganized their superior military. The rebels were ill
equipped with pitchforks and guns. The Catholic Church even opposed these
Patriote rebels and the insurrection was over in a matter of a days.⁴

Louis-Joseph Papineau had fled to the United States prior to the fighting;
a sign of dissent among the Patriotes. He did not support the revolt openly
advocated by the more radical members of the movement, but continued to
campaign for legal reforms through peaceful methods of change. At a meeting in Middlebury, Vermont, Papineau rejected a declaration of independence from Canada when no guarantee of seigneurial rights was included. Because of this, Papineau did not participate in the rebellious conflicts the following summer.

Finding himself unwanted in his homeland, Papineau traveled from the United States to Paris where he lived in poverty with his family for almost a decade working at the Bibliothèque Nationale. He ended his self-imposed exile in 1845 and returned to politics a short time later and became a member of the Assembly again in 1848. Papineau supported annexation to the U.S. and withdrew from politics and returned to his seigneury. He continued to live in the rural area of Quebec until his death in 1871 at the age of 84.5

Though Papineau was a leader of the Patriote movement, he was reluctant to lead them to the battlefront and success for the cause. If not for his efforts however, the movement toward creating the British North American Act and the Canadian Confederation might not have been realized in 1867.

**Mack Sennett**  
An Original Comedian

When one hears “He was called the King of Comedy,” do most think of a Quebecois born in the late 1800s? Likely not, but prior to Dan Ackroyd, Mike Myers, John Candy, Jim Carrey and Howie Mandell, another Canadian was the “King.” In fact, Sennett originated the entire style of comedy known as slapstick comedy.
Born in the Eastern Townships south of Montreal to Irish immigrants in 1880, Mikall Sennett wanted to become an opera singer. Alas, his parents moved him to Connecticut when he was only 17 and by the age of 22 he was working as a common laborer with no opera in sight. He had a chance meeting with fellow Canadian and vaudeville star, Marie Dressler, who wrote a letter of recommendation for him. The letter did not pan out except for a few burlesque and chorus boy parts but Mack, as he was now known as, would stay in New York City and became an actor.¹

Ironically one of his early roles was a unique portrayal of a policeman. This comedic style using the bumbling fool persona who could do little well one would become known throughout the world when he created his own studio. The world famous Keystone Kops would be the comedy genre and studio of a generation of Hollywood stars to come.

Sennett quickly made the transition to the newly developed moving picture from the stages of the Northeast. In 1908 he began some acting under the direction of D.W. Griffith in some Biograph films acting with fellow Canadian Mary Pickford and also Mabel Normand. By the age of thirty, Sennett was trying his hand at directing himself.² As a direct result of some gambling issues and the apparent lack of acting ability, Sennett co-founded the Keystone Film Company in 1912. He tried successfully to convince his bookies there was a great deal of money in movies, According to others, his partners were respectable producers with some Hollywood experience.³ What ever the legend, history was made with the formation of that studio.
Some of the most famous actors in history worked for a time in Sennett’s studio. Mabel Normand, Fatty Arbuckle, and even Charlie Chaplin, W.C. Fields and Bing Crosby were recruited by Sennett. Charlie Chaplin started in 35 comedies of the almost 150 films produced or directed by Sennett during 1914 alone. Sennett told Chaplin, “We have no scenario—we get an idea then follow the natural sequence of events until it leads up to a chase, which is the essence of our comedy.” What a comedy it was! The slapstick Keystone Kop chase scenes are classic. This was the improvisational style made so famous in more recent times with the Second City comedy routines.

Eventually the improvisational style lead to more scripted routines and more actors and actresses were discovered. Do we normally associate Gloria Swanson with comedy? To return the kindness shown by Marie Dressler, he brought her to Hollywood, as well. What an interesting discussion that must have been!

Sennett did not stop at forming a studio with some of the best actors and actresses; he became involved in the early land speculation of California. To sell his land to newcomers, he placed a huge sign on the hillside—“HOLLYWOODLAND.” Part of the sign fell down; the other part became known through out the world as “Hollywood.” Unfortunately with the advent of sound films, slapstick comedy did not fair well. When he fell on hard times, Mack Sennett was forced to retire to his native Canada by the mid-1930s. There he lived as a poor man but was not forgotten by those whose careers were launched by the King of Comedy. He received a special Oscar in 1937 in recognition of
the man “that master of fun, discoverer of stars…sympathetic, kindly, understanding, genius: Mack Sennett.”

Pierre Elliot Trudeau
Prime Minister

“Well, just watch me!” Who can forget the scene in Ottawa in 1970 when Trudeau stood on the steps of Parliament and snapped these words to a reporter? It was October of 1970, and the British Trade Commissioner, Richard Cross and the Quebec Labor Minister, Pierre Laporte had been kidnapped by a Quebec terrorist group, Front de Liberation du Que’be’c. Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act giving the military and the police the power to search without warrants. Many believed this action was too extreme when Trudeau put soldiers on the streets of Ottawa. The question asked by the reporter that prompted Trudeau’s biting answer was: “How far would you go with that?” (meaning helmeted soldiers enforcing the War Measures Act). “Well, just watch me!” Next, Trudeau turned and walked into Parliament, his trade mark, rose-in-the-lapel just a memory. A few days later Laporte was found dead, but Richard Cross was rescued.¹

Pierre Elliott Trudeau was born on October 18, 1919 in Montreal. His mother was fluent in English and French and spoke them both at home so young Pierre grew up comfortable with both languages. His father died when Pierre was in his teens. Young Pierre grew into a handsome young scholar who attended the London School of Economics, the Jean-de-Brebuf College, Harvard and McGill. He joined the Bar in 1944 after graduating with Honors. In 1965, he was
elected to the House of Commons and two years later he became the Justice Minister in Pearson’s Government. In these positions, while trying to change some of Canada’s abortion and homosexuality laws he advocated quite liberal ideas, including marrying a woman who was half his age.  

“Trudeaumania” entered the lexicon of the world when on April 20, 1968 Trudeau became Canada’s 15th Prime Minister. His focus on change and bringing Canada into the twentieth century created a climate similar to the Kennedy era in the U.S. He ultimately served longer than anyone since John A. MacDonald. His government was the first majority government since 1958.  

Trudeau was young, the youngest Prime Minister in Canada’s history, single and not afraid to be somewhat boyish at times, driving his sports car around Ottawa. He was ambitious, energized, and not afraid to “live” while being Prime Minister. Many found this refreshing in politics. 

At times though, he could be all business. In 1973, when asked why he entered federal service he answered that he believed in federalism and did not want Quebec wouldn’t leave. 

He was Prime Minister from 1971 to 1979 when the Conservatives (Tories), led by Joe Clark, forced him from office. However, after 10 months Trudeau was back. His main goals at that time were to keep Quebec in Canada and to bring home the “Constitution”. The subsequent referendum vote on sovereignty was 60% to 40 %. Since 1867, The British North America Act had been on the books stating that Canada could not amend it without approval from Britain. Nine out of ten premiers agreed to an amending formula in 1981.
Quebec refused to sign because it felt it was losing power to maintain its culture and language. On April 17, 1982, Trudeau and Queen Elizabeth II signed the “Constitution Act” including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the lawn of Parliament Hill.  

Within two years, Trudeau announced his retirement. Compared by many to the charismatic, John F. Kennedy, Trudeau was always a gentleman, from the fresh-daily rose in his lapel to a voice whose volume did not carry the argument, but simple logic and plain facts convinced others. Pierre Elliott Trudeau died September 20, 2000, suffering from Parkinson’s disease and prostate cancer. He was 80 years old. Symbolic of his later years, many remember him paddling a canoe off “into the sunset”.  

Billy Two Rivers  
Professional Wrestler to Politician  

How could a Mohawk who became a world famous professional wrestler become a well respected politician in Quebec? This is the fascinating and true story of Billy Two Rivers of Kahnawake, Quebec, who is now a senior policy and political advisor to the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. He serves as an Elder for Aboriginal youth, instills pride and responsibility in his community, according to the sales catalogue of Moving Images Distribution which produced a film on his life.  

Born in Quebec, not far from Montreal, in 1935, Billy Two Rivers came to the attention of the professional Don Eagle who was recovering from a ring injury while in Kahnawake, the Mohawk Reserve. Billy was only fifteen when he played
for the local lacrosse team but was already well over six foot and weighed 180 pounds. Eagle only volunteered to drive the lacrosse team to games but instead discovered one of the most famous wrestlers in the history of the circuit, Billy. So impressed was Eagle, that he became his legal guardian. They went to Ohio, where Two Rivers trained. In 1952, Two Rivers started his career at age seventeen in Detroit. That first bout must have been a classic. Some of his friends in attendance were Detroit iron workers, which made Two Rivers a bit nervous. He recently recalled, “Now I was really shaking and when I went to pull off my…entrance, I caught my toe on the top rope and landed face-first on the canvas. I must have looked like a frizzly chicken with his feathers scattered all over the place.”

Billy Two River’s career would span more than two decades. During his early years he wrestled in the U.S. and Canada. By the fall of 1959, he had an opportunity to wrestle either in the Prairie Provinces or Britain. A coin toss determined that the next six years would be spent abroad traveling and wrestling around the world, with summers spent back in Kahnawake playing lacrosse. Before he left for Europe he was one of the first wrestlers on television. By the time this match was broadcast, he was already away from North America. He wrestled in at least six nations in Europe, plus African bouts, and on his Asian tour, was in the rings of Japan, Korea and Singapore.

In 1970 Billy Two Rivers joined the Grand Pix Wrestling Federation. He enjoyed working back on his home territory. In the mid 1970s he went into the
ring for the final time at age 42. At times he and other professional wrestlers were larger than life to the millions of fans around the world.

When Two Rivers returned to Kahnawake, he got involved in politics of nationalism sweeping the province of Quebec and the Native Reserves of the Mohawk. He was elected to the Mohawk Council for twenty years. Two Rivers was a leader of the Mohawks during some of the most controversial days of the Kahnawake Reserve history, including the 1990 Mohawk blockade of Montreal’s Mercier Bridge in what was known as the Oka Crisis.4

Since 1998 he has been a political advisor to Phil Fontaine, who was the Grand Chief of First Nations. He is concentrating on business ventures and has even starred in the film Black Robe where he also served as a consultant. His political expertise and his world travels have lead him to become vocal in such areas as nuclear waste management5 and Indigenous People’s Contributions to Understanding Global Environmental Change.6

When sitting in a room today with Billy Two Rivers, one can only imagine his power he had in the ring but one never doubts his power within his Native community.

Questions for Use in Secondary Social Studies Classes

1. What facts in the sordid story of Marie-Joseph Angelique suggest that she was innocent of burning Montreal? Guilty of the crime?

2. In what ways did Bombardier’s invention of the snowmobile change peoples’ lives?
3. Despite his many discoveries of the Great Lakes region, Etienne Brule is regarded by historians as a mere footnote in history. Why did this happen?

4. Describe the unique features of Roch Carrier’s children’s book, The Hockey Sweater, which made it one of the most popular books for children ever published in Canada.

5. Desmond Morton, author of A Short History of Canada, claims that Sir George-Etienne Cartier urged, cajoled, and maneuvered his fellow French-Canadians into Confederation. What was the major benefit Cartier believed that Confederation would bring to French Canada?

6. Which Quebec songwriter-poet had his music performed at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia? Explain why this is such a surprising honor for this artist.

7. What important skills did Louis Hebert and his family possess, which enabled them to survive their early years in Quebec’s wilderness?

8. Cite Marc Garneau’s major achievements as an astronaut. Why are they important milestones in his career?

9. Time Magazine identified Guy Laliberte as one of the world’s most influential people. What did he do to merit this honor?

10. Rene Levesque was a successful advocate of Bill 101, the Quebec Charter of the French Language. Describe how Bill 101 affected Quebec’s schools and businesses?

11. James McGill is well known for his financial successes as a Quebec businessman, yet he was also known as a far-sighted philanthropist. Which of his philanthropic projects has had a lasting impact in the field of education?

12. According to Pryke and Soderland, the poet Emile Nelligan is known for “a new vein of modernist, intimist poetry.” Explain what this means.
13. In what ways did the political philosophies of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson influence the revolutionary activities of Louis-Joseph Papineau?

14. List several actors whom Mack Sennett recruited to his Hollywood studio before they became famous.

15. “Well, just watch me.” Explain how this statement snapped by Pierre Elliot Trudeau to a reporter, defines “Trudeaumania.”

16. Billy Two Rivers was a successful world traveler, professional wrestler, lacrosse player and movie consultant. In what other arena did he excel?

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