

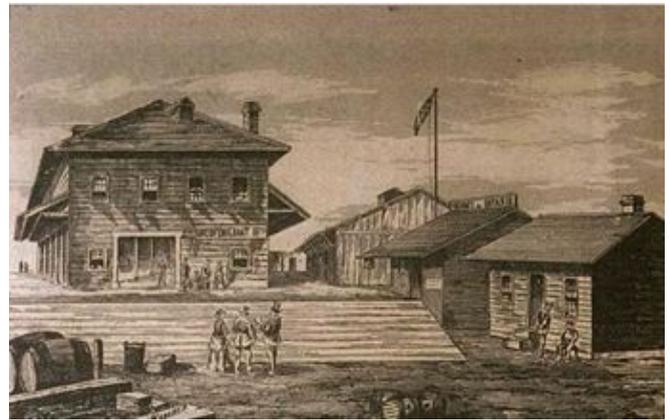
Chronicle
#3

HISTORICAL RALLY

THE PORT AND THE GREAT PANDEMICS
OF PAST CENTURIES

An even more terrible wave strikes Québec

Typhus, then also known as “ship fever”, reached Québec City intermittently since 1820. It was largely attributed to poor hygienic conditions, contaminated water and overcrowded passengers. Crossings took several weeks in those days. A perfect wave of all these conditions hit in 1847. To Dr. Douglas’ great discouragement, over 90,000 immigrants arrived while his hospital was already working at full capacity. From the arrival of the very first ship of the season, he already had 530 patients with a daily death toll of between 40 and 50.



Source: 1873 – Henri Julien, *Opinion publique*. Hall of Immigrants. BAQ

Eleven days later, 36 ships carrying nearly 12,600 were anchored around Grosse Île. Unable to receive and care for the sick, the boats became floating coffins. Despite the addition of shelters and tents, it was nearly impossible to segregate the healthy from those sick with dysentery. The year’s tally was gruesome. Of 400 ships inspected at Grosse Île, there were 3238 deaths, in addition to the thousands who died at sea.

In all, more than 10,000 people died in Canada during this catastrophic pandemic, with half of them dying during the crossing!

Still, hard-earned lessons were won from this sad episode. The buildings were reorganized to segregate the healthy and install them to the west of the island while the others were treated in the east after everything was cleaned and limed.

A few years later, armed with greater experience and more than one hundred buildings, the Grosse Île station responded to a new cholera outbreak that ultimately claimed only 65 victims. However, America was experiencing an economic crisis and the number of immigrants dropped sharply. In 1857, the British government withdrew its army from the island and turned it over to the Canadian government. The number of buildings on the island was reduced and Governor General, Sir Edmund Walker Head ordered that ships were to arrive directly in Québec City, thereby putting an end to Grosse Île’s activities.

Only an outcry from Québec City’s medical corps saved the Grosse Île station, which was now disorganized and barely open. In 1861, another wave of disease revived its usefulness, with the facilities treating nearly 700 people.



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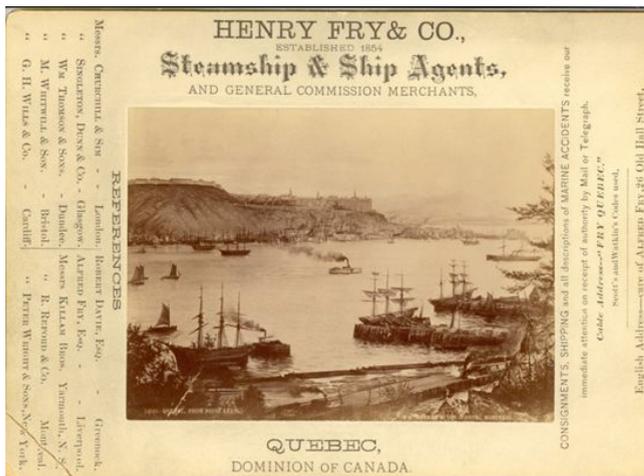
After 1861, the number of immigrants fell. However, encouraged by recruitment and propaganda efforts in Great Britain in the aftermath of Canada's Confederation in 1867, federal immigration agencies were set up in London, Liverpool, Londonderry and Bristol to recruit settlers for the Canadian provinces. The government also set up a reception policy for the destitute immigrants, who were very numerous in the late 1860s. The new railroads also spurred the growth of immigration by offering new arrivals free passage to Ontario and the west.

Despite the fears raised by this new epidemic, few among the 100,000 immigrants who made it up the Saint Lawrence died, with 1000 hospitalizations and only 75 deaths between 1866 and 1868.

Up till then, British colonial management supervised quarantine operations with its baggage of rushed decisions, improvisation and trial and error.

It was only after Confederation in 1867 that the Canadian government drafted its own immigration and settlement policy, requiring the establishment of a reliable and effective quarantine service.

In 1873, the Canadian government dissolved Québec's Trinity House. Its responsibility to maintain order in the port was transferred to the Quebec Harbour Commission (QHC) in 1875. During this period, The Pointe-à-Carcy wharf was built on the newly-opened Louise Basin. Between 1870 and 1890, the QHC added a great wharf, unique in North America, ensuring for Québec a major share of Canada's foreign trade. During the same period, Canada's immigration officers expanded the port's immigration facilities to accommodate the growing numbers of arrivals. Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, inaugurated the expansion and the work in the interior basin by laying the cornerstone to the pier that still bears her name. These new facilities, however, did not stem the increasing traffic to Montréal.

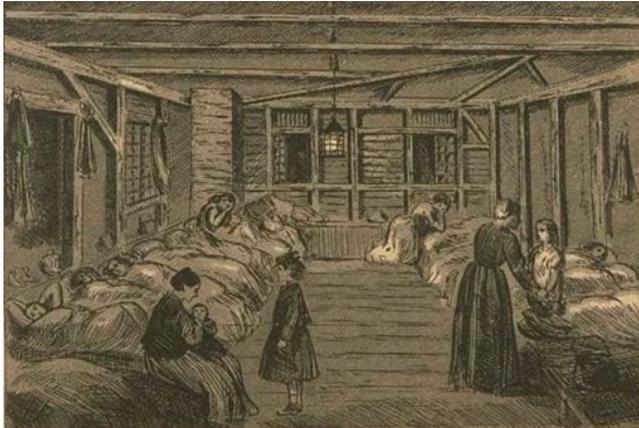


Cardboard Photograph, apparently used for a Henry Fry & Co. advertisement. The picture shows the Port of Québec viewed from Pointe-Lévy. Many sailboats and some steamships were moored on the Lévis and Québec banks. (Photo produced by W.M. Notman & Son.)

After Dr. Douglas died in 1864, Dr. Anthony Von Iffland took over. He readied the station for a new wave of Asian cholera from Europe in 1865. He even managed to have a large sanatorium and another wharf built.

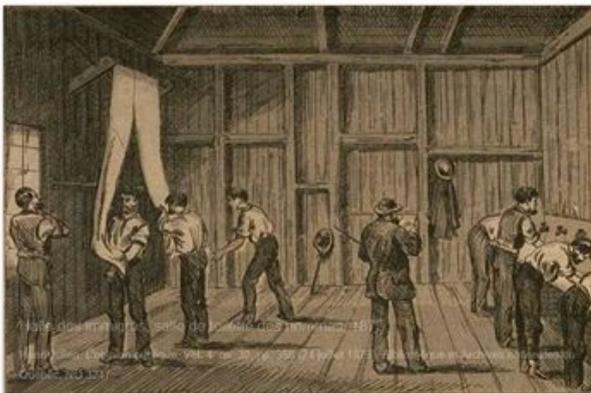


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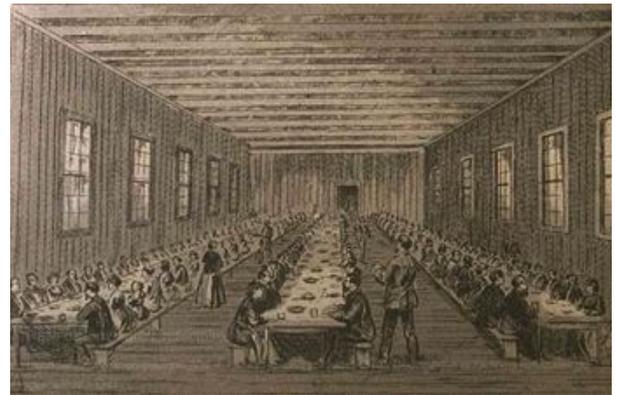


Source: 1873 – Henri Julien, *Opinion publique*. Immigration Hall; Women's dormitory, BAQ

In 1878, immigrants to Old Capital crossed by steamship, now only 12 days' seafaring from Great Britain. This was a major innovation for the Grosse Île quarantine station. The improved accommodations and food on these more modern ships meant that immigrants arrived faster and healthier. This allowed officials to implement new measures for protecting the population.



Source: 1873 – Henri Julien, *Opinion publique*. Immigration Hall; Men's bathroom, BAQ



Source: 1873 – Henri Julien, *Opinion publique*. Immigration Hall, Dining room, BAQ

You are now able to answer questions 5, 6 and 7 of the Quiz, to be eligible for the draw.

A VIP arrives at Grosse Île: : Learn more about this person in our next chronicle.