In Quebec

Imperial has been supplying oil energy to the region for 90 years

Last Aug. 5 when the temperature in Montreal was 77 degrees, 25 men set sail in the motor ship Imperial Bedford on a 2,700-mile voyage that brought them to the port of Resolute high in the Canadian Arctic and about 100 miles from the North Magnetic Pole. They unloaded a cargo of 106,000 barrels of fuel and headed back to Montreal, where they loaded up again and went right back to Resolute. Both trips took three weeks and, for the men aboard the Bedford it was like having two short winters in the middle of a Canadian summer, for sometimes the snow stays on the ground at Resolute all year long. It was on the ground in 1970 when the Imperial Acadia sailed to Resolute, the first voyage an Imperial ship had made to that far northern port. On that occasion the Acadia pushed her way into the harbor through broken floes of ice five feet thick, doing the job her designers envisioned when they gave her an ice-stiffened hull. The Bedford’s hull is stiffened for ice, too, and both ships can count on a shipping season at Resolute that lasts for six weeks—twice the time the harbor is open for ships with conventional hulls.

But what’s a ship operating out of Montreal doing so far north? The truth is, Resolute is part of Imperial Oil’s Quebec supply region which takes in Ottawa, parts of Labrador and the islands of the eastern Arctic as well as the province of Quebec. (Imperial also supplies the fuel for the boilers at the heavy water plant in Douglas Point, Ont., using a unit train that carries nothing else and makes the round trip from Imperial’s Montreal East refinery every three days with 20,000 barrels of oil.) Imperial has been supplying oil products in this vast region for 90 years, and today it is the largest supplier in the area.

Imperial began doing business in Quebec in 1881 in the person of a man named Edward Albert Hewitt who worked out of an office at 83 St. James St. West in Montreal. Hewitt worked for Samuel Rogers and Co., who were agents for Imperial products in Quebec at the time. Imperial took over the business in 1899. By that time the business had grown to the point where railroad shipments in earload lots couldn’t satisfy the demand and the company built a new warehouse at Côte St. Paul
where supplies could be received by water as well as rail. The office was in the Board of Trade building then, and Imperial was one of the victims when the building burned in 1900, destroying all the company's records.

The company went right on growing and by 1918 Imperial had two bulk plants in Montreal, main sub-stations in Quebec and Sherbrooke, and 88 smaller sub-stations throughout the province. It delivered its products by means of 176 tank wagons in summer and 176 sleds in winter, each drawn by a team of two horses. Of course, the company had to maintain stables for the horses, but their days were already numbered - Imperial had five motor tank wagons in its fleet in 1918, and three motor lorries.

The Imperial refinery at Montreal East was in its second year of operation then, processing Mexican crude oil. Its main product was asphalt, used to pave the roads to give a harder, cleaner surface for the increasing traffic they were being called upon to bear. Imperial's Montreal East refinery was the first refinery in Canada to make asphalt from crude oil, and it still makes more of it than...
any other refinery in Canada, although the number and diversity of products have increased enormously in 55 years. It now makes liquefied petroleum gas, naptha specialties, motor gasolines, aviation turbine fuel, tractor fuel, kerosene, stove oil, diesel fuel, light and heavy fuel oils and base stocks for lubricating oils. The capacity has gone up, too. When the refinery opened in 1916 its capacity was 4,000 barrels a day; today it’s 100,000.

Asphalt production reached 400 tons a day in 1920, double its production the year before. Ships began using oil for fuel instead of coal, and the Montreal East refinery provided it as well as illuminating oils, gasoline and other products. But it wasn’t all work for the people at the refinery. Imperial spearheaded the formation of the Montreal Industrial Hockey League in 1919. By 1922 it had so many applications the league had to form a second division of 25 teams. That was the year Imperial led the league and won the championship and the Falls Cup.

W hat kind of place is the Montreal East refinery to work in? It’s dynastic, in a sense. Take the Perreault family. Siméon Perreault got his job at the refinery in 1916, and worked until his retirement in 1946. By that time there were five more Perreaults on the payroll: Alfred, Aldéric, Simon, Ernest and René, all sons of Siméon. Three of them are retired now, but old Siméon’s grandson, Yves Perreault is still there, and two men who married into the Perreault family work there as well. Their combined length of service at the refinery is nearly 250 years.

While the Perreaults were increasing their numbers in the Montreal East refinery, Imperial was expanding, too. In 1926 it moved into a new three-storey office building at 1000 St. Patrick St. that had been designed by Ross and MacDonald, the architects who did Montreal’s Mount Royal Hotel and Toronto’s Union Station. It was a time when a little grandeur wasn’t out of place, so the building rejoiced in marble stairways with iron railings. There was room for 46 desks on the first floor ‘without crowding’ and another 60 desks and tables on the second. The basement had a kitchen and a dining room that could seat 80 people. It was hardly open before it became too small and the offices moved again, to a five-storey building on Sherbrooke St. West. Imperial outgrew that place even faster, and spilled over into a building next door. Today, the region offices are in the Esso building at Place Ville Marie, but Imperial still owns the place with the marble stairs on St. Patrick St. and uses it as the Montreal district office.

The Montreal area isn’t the only place you’ll find offices of Imperial Oil in the Quebec region. Imperial has offices in four cities—Montreal, Quebec, Sept-Iles and Chicoutimi—and 26 bulk plants scattered throughout the region. In addition there are 1,600 agents and dealers in the region, with their employees, ranging from Madame Eméry Marcoux at Mansonville on the Vermont border to Andrew Campbell, who is foreman for Imperial’s agent at Resolute on Cornwallis Island, where the Bedford went last summer. All told, Imperial provides a livelihood for about 20,000 people in the Quebec region.

Imperial communicates with them in their own language, as it does with all its shareholders, customers and employees. Consequently, Imperial requires that all its employees in the Quebec region who deal with the public be bilingual. For the most part, Imperial is a bilingual company in Quebec, although in certain circumstances only one language—English or French—is commonly used.

Many changes are reshaping modern Quebec, and among the most astonishing is its growth. Last year, Quebec used oil at the rate of about 480,000 barrels a day, and 20 per cent of that demand is met by Imperial. Meeting it hasn’t always been a simple matter. Imperial began delivering oil to Sept-Iles even before there was a wharf there to receive ships; Imperial had to build one. The first tanker arrived there in 1948 when the town had a population of about 1,200 and the only hotel had a single bathroom, with a toothbrush hanging on a chain for the convenience of travellers who didn’t bring one of their own. Sept-Iles has a population of 22,000 now and serves as the supply point for the vast natural resource developments of Labrador City and Schefferville as well as the hydro-electric station at Churchill Falls.

Every drop of the oil this region needs must be imported. Last year the Quebec region imported and consumed more than 180 million barrels of crude oil and oil products and paid something like $480 million for them over the year. There was a time when all of Canada was virtually as dependent on imported oil as Quebec is now, but that age ended with the discovery of the large oil deposits under the western plains. Quebec’s dependence on imports could end too, if the sedimentary rock areas under Canada’s Atlantic coastal shelf prove as productive as the oil explorers think they may
Until then, the Quebec region will continue to get its oil from South America, the Middle East and Africa by tanker up the St. Lawrence, and from Portland, Me., by a pipe line. It was built in 1941 to circumvent the submarines that preyed on tankers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and to ensure continuous supply when Montreal's port is frozen. In 1946 its builders—Standard Oil Co. (N.J.)—sold it to Imperial and other refiners in Montreal East.

Why can't Quebec use western Canadian oil? Briefly, because it would require a new pipe line that would be enormously expensive to build and operate, and would lie idle if oil were discovered off the east coast in commercial quantities.

Almost all the oil entering Quebec goes to the area around the city of Montreal East, a municipality that came into being on June 4, 1910 at the instigation of Joseph Versailles, who hoped to create a garden city far from the bustle of downtown Montreal. So much for foresight—Montreal East is one of the most highly industrialized municipalities in Canada today. People live there, of course, but a mention of the city evokes images of factories, not flowers. Imperial Oil helped Montreal East on its present course when it opened Quebec's first oil refinery there in 1916, much to the relief of the town. The first World War had brought construction of the garden city to a halt, and the concept seemed doomed to failure. The town was fighting for survival when Imperial applied for a refinery permit. And what began as a quiet refuge has become the hub of the greatest refining centre in Canada, with six refineries and six chemical plants as well as metal refineries, cement plants and other industries in the three neighbouring municipalities of Montreal East, Pointe-aux-Trembles and Ville d'Anjou.

Did that break Joseph Versailles' heart? Not at all—when the garden city concept failed he transferred his zeal to the search for industry. He was the town's first mayor, and he set a pattern of development that all subsequent administrations have followed. In the present mayor, Edouard Rivest, the town and industry are united—Rivest is a foreman at Imperial's Montreal East refinery, where he has worked for 45 years.

To maintain a harmonious relationship between an employer and a worker for 45 years is a record of consequence; to maintain a contract between customer and supplier for such a time is even rarer. But Imperial has on its books in Montreal records that are even longer. There is, for example, a Memorandum of Agreement dated June 29, 1914.
between M. B. Breen, Imperial's Quebec region assistant manager and F. Powell of the News Pulp and Paper Co. Ltd., covering a contract for oils and greases. The News Pulp and Paper Co. has since become St. Raymond Paper Ltd., but the agreement is still in effect after 57 years.

That ancient agreement implies a couple of things about Imperial's operations in the Quebec region. The first is the strength of the company's commercial relationships; St. Raymond Paper is just one example of a customer with a long and happy history of dealing with Imperial.

The other fact is the industrial nature of the customer. In the Quebec region the industrial uses of petroleum products are relatively more important than they are in any other region of Canada. Motor gasoline is Imperial's most important single product in Quebec, as it is everywhere else in Canada, but the other products - diesel fuels, bunker oils, home heating fuel oils, special oils and greases - make up a larger proportion of the total in Quebec than they do anywhere else.

Another great outlet for petroleum products in the Quebec region is ships. Of Canada's five busiest ports, three are located in Quebec, and in terms of cargo loaded and unloaded, the busiest port in all Canada in 1970 was Sept-Îles. Vancouver was second, and Montreal third. Refueling those ships is big business - Imperial alone sold $6 million gallons of marine products last year, valued at $9 million. To fill the needs of the ships in Montreal harbor, Imperial operates two refueling barges named the Imperial Lachine and the Imperial Verdun, each of which has a capacity of 230,000 gallons. You'd think that would be enough to fill anybody's tanks, but it isn't. The Empress of Canada needs a fill-up every three weeks during the navigation season, and it takes 250,000 gallons each time. The barge makes two trips for the Empress of Canada. The only other passenger liner to visit Montreal regularly, the Russian Alexander Pushckin, refuels in Russia.

When the Royal yacht Britannia was in Montreal for Expo 67, the Imperial barges refueled her twice; first on June 28 the Imperial Lachine pumped 68,000 gallons of intermediate Naval fuel aboard her, and on July 3 the Imperial Verdun delivered another 22,500 gallons. Both barges had been scrubbed and painted for Expo, and the crews wore brand new uniforms. The only man who boarded the Britannia, a marketing gauger whose name is Roy Lavigne, was complimented on the service.
The use of oil as a home heating fuel is greater in Quebec, too, than in any other region of Canada, and the number of independent agents who supply this market is correspondingly large. No other home heating fuel is so widely available. Natural gas was discovered at Trois Rivières nearly a century ago and used to light the streets there in 1887, but gas is virtually unknown in the Quebec region market outside the Montreal area which gets its supplies by pipe line from western Canada. The most widely available fuel in the Quebec region is oil.

And as the great new industries and developments of Quebec establish themselves in once-remote areas, the dependence on oil as a home heating fuel increases. One example of this trend can be seen in Sept-Iles where a thousand new houses are to be completed by the end of this year, all of them oil-heated. Forty miles west at Port Cartier the building of a half-billion-dollar pulp mill will create a similar demand for new houses.

These great industrial developments themselves are potential customers for Imperial’s industrial products. Indeed, the greater a customer’s requirements are, the more likely he is to turn to Imperial because the company is the largest of the oil companies operating in the region. Imperial is the supplier of all the oil products that are going into the $950 million power development at Churchill Falls in central Labrador - 37 million gallons of it, virtually the lifeblood of the immense project. An even bigger project was announced recently by the Quebec government - the $6 billion James Bay hydro-electric development, an undertaking that will require oil products in amounts that will make the Churchill Falls job look puny. On projects of this kind, the oil terminal is usually the first facility built, since everything else depends on the availability of fuel. And other industrial projects are announced or already under construction: Raynon- rier’s $500 million pulp mill and Quebec Cartier Mining Company’s $300 million development at Port Cartier; the Montreal subway’s $430 million extension; the Iron Ore Company of Canada’s new $150 million plant at Sept-Iles and its $140 million expansion at Labrador City; the new $400 million international airport at Ste. Scolastique; the $290 million extension of the Trans-Canada Highway through Montreal; and a host of smaller projects whose total cost will reach hundreds of millions. All of them are prospects for Imperial’s industrial salesmen.

With markets like that it’s a pity that the Quebec region has so far failed to yield oil of its own. It is possible oil could occur in the rocks underlying parts of Quebec, particularly the lowlands of the St. Lawrence valley, Aniscott Island, and the shores of James Bay. To date, however, millions have been spent searching for it without success. Some 250 exploratory wells have been drilled in the Quebec region, but none of them has found oil in commercial amounts. Imperial has been part of this activity for more than a quarter of a century - first on the Gaspé peninsula, then in the St. Lawrence valley where it explored 600,000 acres of land between Laprairie and Levis in the 1950s, and finally on Aniscott Island. The company drilled 15 wells in these areas, without success.

Imperial is not drilling for oil in Quebec at present, but it is prospecting for minerals, continuing a search that has gone on since 1967. The company was active all summer, sampling streams in the Eastern Townships for evidence of copper. In the area north of Trois Rivières Imperial drilled a nickel-copper prospect. It conducted airborne surveys north of Lac St. Jean and drilled a nickel-copper prospect there. Crews drilled copper-nickel prospects in Ungava and the area northeast of Val-d’Or last summer, and other prospecting teams were active. A significant discovery in the search for base metals could be as important to the economy of the Quebec region as the discovery of oil, and appears to be a more likely possibility.

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n the meantime, Imperial continues to operate as a force in the Quebec economy, not only in the $180 million in gross plant and equipment currently invested by Imperial and its subsidiaries in the region, but in its general day-to-day operations. For example, last August Imperial announced the construction of facilities at the Montreal East refinery to remove sulfur from products and to further control refinery sulfur emissions to improve air quality. The facilities will cost $5 million to construct and will increase the refinery’s annual operating costs by $1,500,000 bringing the yearly costs to well over $16 million.

Of course, it works both ways, as a writer pointed out in an article about the Montreal East refinery 43 years ago, in the Imperial Oil Review. 'As Quebec grows,' he wrote, 'so will Montreal refinery grow, keeping pace with an ever-increasing demand for Imperial products. That is the future we look at.'

It still is.
THE MAGDALEN ISLANDS

They just may have the most beautiful beaches in the whole world

by Harry Bruce/ photos by Ron Cole

Remembering the day I came upon the great, corroded and haunted wreckage of a 800-foot ocean freighter, remembering the purity of the ocean's other litter all along the reaches of that same magic beach, remembering the clatter of the surf, and the crows and the gulls and the wind in my ears; remembering that I walked for at least eight miles and rolled over naked in the breakers, and never met anyone, not even a man I could call Friday; and remembering that, except among the flotsam, I saw no evidence that there were people anywhere in the whole world; remembering how luxuriously tropical were the dunes of that afternoon, I am inclined to wonder: ‘Was I really in Canada?’ For that matter, was I in any place that exists outside my own elaborate and sandy daydreams?

The questions are rhetorical, but the strange magnificence of that beach justifies rhetoric. The fact is, I was on a beach in the middle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I was only half an hour by air from Charlottetown. I was aboard the Magdalen Islands, and, one day soon, I’m going back there to taste their sweet and eerie shores all over again. In the length of my life, I have managed to explore beaches in Mexico, Southern California, Southern France, Antigua, on the Adriatic coast of Italy, and along the Baltic coast of Denmark. None of them were as good as the beaches of the
Magdalen Islands. Not in the wealth of their sand which, on the Magdalen, is so fine and so crystalline the islanders export it to mainland glass manufacturers. Not in the generosity of their width, nor the flashing green beauty of their grassy dunes, nor the length of their loneliness, nor the quality of the ocean’s blue. The main chunk of the Magdalen is roughly 70 miles from end to end; it has at least 76 miles of flawless sand beach. That’s ocean beach. It doesn’t include the saltwater frontage along the massive lagoons—those havens for waterfowl and for human clam-diggers that split the Magdalen throughout most of their length.

Behind some of the beaches there are hard flats of white sand, hundreds of yards wide, and you can drive your car off the ferry from Prince Edward Island and out to the shore and for miles along these plains, and then your car just stop, pitch your tent beside the surf, exploit the infinity of driftwood for your bonfires, be by yourself and forget whatever it is that you go to beaches to forget.

The Magdalen are 90 miles from Newfoundland, 160 miles from Gaspé, Que., and 60 miles from the Cape Breton highlands. They’re hardly more than long parallel bars of sand and three knobby collections of dramatic little mountains, clumps of scrubby spruce, sloping fields, and intricately sea-sculptured cliffs of soft red sandstone. The stone is so soft that, if you happen to rub against it, it will stain your clothes; it’s so red that, a couple of hundred years ago, the Magdalen used it to make red paint. The islands’ land area is about 59,000 acres and most of the 13,500 people live on the little mountains.

For beachcombers, for hikers, cyclists, campers, or for people who just like to motor slowly through strange places, the Magdalen are quite possibly the most enchanting and surprising corner of all Canada. And yet few Canadians know much more about them than the fact that they have something to do with the annual seal hunt. The seals gather only a few miles offshore, sometimes within walking distance on the moving ice and, during the last penniless weeks of every winter for generations past, the hunt has helped to tide-over the families of the Magdalen Islands till the fishing season begins again.

Jacques Cartier reached the Magdalen in 1534 and the first white Madelinots were probably Basque and French fishermen, but the great bulk of the current population descends from the Acadian French who fled British authority in Nova Scotia during the 1750s. "The people here are what’s left of the real Acadians," says Paul Delaney, Delaney’s, at 25, is the Imperial Oil agent on the Magdalen. He’s also president of the Chamber of Commerce. On his father’s side (his father was the previous Imperial Oil agent) Delaney’s own descent is Irish but, although he is bilingual, his language, his pride of place, and all his plans for the future are those of a loyal man of the Magdalen. "We have been out here by ourselves for a very long time. We have kept our language, our accents."

For centuries, geography isolated the people of the Magdalen Islands not only from the main stream of life in the western world but even from one another. On Entry Island—a magnificently lonely slab of red cliffs, deep green forest, and bright white houses—there are about 50 families. They depend on an irregular ferry service to bring them supplies from the outside world and, now and then, to get them out for a visit somewhere. They are all English-speaking, and they have been on the island for a very long time.

On the Magdalen as a whole, the French outnumber the English—mostly descendants of Cape Breton families of Scottish ancestry—by roughly 13 to one.

Almost all the French-speaking Madelinots are descendants of people who arrived there to escape what they regarded as British persecution. Their forefathers were political and religious refugees. They came because the Magdalen were one place where no one would prevent them from maintaining the men and women that they wanted to be. They were peace-ful farmers who abandoned the richest land in Nova Scotia to come to a place where, almost overnight, they would have to learn the mysterious and hazardous arts of fishing for a living.

The Magdalen provided a place of refuge, a retreat from an international power struggle, an escape from the terrible realities of the outside world: a promised land. And anyone who tries to learn more about the Magdalen than the fact that the natives kill seals may make the pleasing discovery that the early Acadians...
hunch about the islands was correct. They have always exerted on men a strong attraction as a place of refuge. A forebear of one of Delaney’s truck drivers was a fisherman from France who just decided he’d like to hide in the little forests of the Magdalen till his ship went home for good; and the islands are full of other stories about families that are there today solely because some sailor gazed at those hills and beaches a couple of centuries ago and decided they looked an awful lot better than his captain’s ugly face.

Many more did not arrive by choice, but decided the place looked pretty good anyway. The founders of many of the best families on the Magdalen Islands were washed ashore with the rest of the wreckage. The grandfather of Mrs. Philippe Beauschesne – Mr. Beauschesne is a government fisheries official and proprietor of a little newspaper in Grindstone – was the French-Canadian captain of a ship that went down at the Magdalens late in the 19th century. Capt. Augustin Le Bourdais was about 6½ feet tall and, apparently, had a constitution to match his frame. He was the sole survivor of the wreck. He crawled ashore in mid-winter, chewed at the roots of grass he dug out of the snow with his hands, and just lay there for days, freezing up. Some men of the Magdalens finally found him, dragged him to shelter, and immediately decided they’d have to amputate both legs above the knees. The best tool for the job that they could find was a big fish knife. He landed a job as the federal government’s first wireless operator on the Magdalens, married a local girl named Emilienne Renaud, and raised a whole bunch of kids. Perhaps no people get more homesick than the natives of beautiful islands who leave them to make their living somewhere else, and the pull of the Magdalens is strongest of all on its own expatriates. Just as there are more Irish in North America than there are in Ireland, there are more

Near Old Harry Head the beaches give way to sandstone sculptured by weather

Magdalen Islanders and descendants of Magdalen Islanders and in-laws of Magdalen Islanders in the Verdon district of Montreal than there are on the islands themselves and, sometimes, it seems as though they’re all trying to get home at once. I flew to the Magdalens from Charlottetown on a Friday evening in July. Every seat in the plane was filled with the homeward-bound, and hundreds upon hundreds of grinning, cheering, jiggling, crying Madelinots swarmed in and around the tiny, steaming airport lobby to welcome them back. There are two return flights a day, and Eastern Provincial Airways has little trouble getting solid bookings for the outbound legs as well. The Magdalens are not a rich part of the world but, at the same time, few of their people are so poor they cannot put together $112 for a return flight to Montreal to stay with friends or sisters or sons. As far back as July, Madelinots were reserving their seats on the Montreal flights for the Christmas season.

The misty beauty of the islands and, in summer, the languid life that the beaches seem to promise contrast with strange spurt of furious activity among the islanders. The spurt, however, are strange only until you realize that they are a reality of the fishing industry, and it’s hard to imagine anyone anywhere in the world that are so dependent for their survival on catching fish as the Madelinots are. Ports, like air fields, are lifelong magnets to all islanders; and, when a big load of fish comes in at night, the piers seethes with car headlights, families greeting the fishermen who’ve come home, and men at work. Men and women leave their houses and stream down to jobs in the packing and refrigeration plants, and sometimes the work goes on all night. You catch fish when and where you can; you clean them, pack them and freeze them right away. The fishing industry has cycles of its own and they have little to do with working from nine to five. When the season is open, the lobster fishermen may work from four in the morning till nine at night, every day for three months.

Each year this skinny little archipelago lands roughly half the tonnage of all the fish caught in Quebec. Its location is strategic, particularly in bad weather.

Big draggers from the Gaspé
right on the finish line of an old harness-racing track.

The shipwreck that I found on the beach was evidence of the grisly side of the islands' relationship to the sea. She was very close to 600 feet long. Birds squealed among the ribs of her cavernous hold, sand lay in little dunes on her lowest decks, and grass grew amidships. Her guts were twisted and complex, and there was a magnificence in her rotting. Huge pieces of her upper-deck housing lay a couple of hundred feet inland but the main section of wreckage still looked very much like a ship. I spent a couple of extremely happy hours with her, and figured she was so rusty she must have been there for at least 50 years. Later, I consulted my handy shipwreck map (50 cents, available at Father Frédéric Landry's fascinating little museum at Havre-Aubert), and it informed me that the ship was the Corfu Island and she'd run aground only eight years ago. The map shows where more than 180 other ships have gone down on the Magdalen Islands, most of them in the past century. As a graveyard of the Atlantic, the Magdalen Islands rival Sable Island.

Shipwrecks, bodies on beaches, the spookiness of the more distant stretches of sand, the unceasing wind and the way it whips and whistles and echoes through the caverns in the cliffs, these conspired with the superstitions and the simple religious convictions of the early Acadians to produce ghost stories and creepy legends that the older Madellinots still remember hearing from their parents. Small islands have always inspired such yarns among their people but, even among islands, the Magdalen Islands seem to be exceptionally rich in stories of hideous apparitions, fiends that walk by night, dwarfs, sirens, harlots, buried treasure, and the frightful sounds of tormented souls.

Newfoundland, and all the way round to the south shore of Nova Scotia, can sell their catch on the Magdalen Islands without fighting heavy seas all the way home. They can refuel there and quickly move back out to the fishing banks. (A big chunk of Paul Delaney's business, as the Imperial Oil agent on the Magdalen, is the sale of fuel to the fishing fleets.)

The islands are dense with evidence of the people's dependence for their survival on the sea. Along the coasts, there are the smelly and ancient shacks for smoking herring; there are the little canneries; the refrigeration plants; the yellow wooden boxes for packing, among many other creatures. 'Choice Canadian Blotters'; the piles of rusty anchors among the wild flowers. And even inland which is never more than a couple of miles from some shore, you see boats abandoned in the fields, a dory full of flowers on someone's front lawn; boys selling buckets of clams at the roadside; and old fishing nets that the kids have rigged up as backstoppers for softball, or goals for soccer and lacrosse. Almost everywhere, in every condition of age, in every degree of order and disorder, you'll find the piles of lobster traps. I found one great shabby wigwam of lobster pots

Sunset finds the fishing boats swinging at anchor in the harbor of Etang-du-Nord, their bows all pointed into the wind.
To cite just one of these stories: A dead black man was washed ashore more than a century ago. The Madelinots had never seen black people, and they assumed he was not a Christian. They denied him a Christian burial in a cemetery, and just put him under as he was in a little sand dune near the shore. But, after that, over and over again, they'd see a strange light in the sky above the burial ground, and, quaking with fear, they'd return to the horrible spot on the beach and find a black hand, or shoulder, or a leg, or the whole head sticking out of the sand. Finally, they made a coffin and planted the corpse very deep but, although the body never again appeared on the surface of the dune, a restless and ceaseless swirling of wind haunted the spot for generations. Horses shivered with fear when they passed by, wheels mysteriously fell off carts and buggies, and axes broke for no apparent reason.

As late as 1954, road-builders for the Quebec government found that the winds were so shifty and crazy at Pointe au Loup where the black man was believed to be buried that the sand kept submerging the roadbed, and they had to swerve the route well away from the place. Older Madelinots believed the man was a Catholic, and that his soul craves a Christian burial.

(A variation of the story says the source of the trouble was not just one black man, but a whole shipload of drowned Negro slaves.) Even before I'd heard the story, the beach at Pointe au Loup had struck me as a place of awesome and almost frightening loneliness.

Although the fact of the ocean rules the folklore and the economy and the future of the Madelains, the countryside and the little mountains have fascinations of their own. Most of the hills lost all their trees to the settlers of centuries ago, and they were never able to fight their way back through the salt breeze that endlessly comb the islands. The hills are now so neat and grassy that, from great distances,
you can see horses and cows silhouetted against the sky. The animals have a knack for posing on the horizon and, quite frequently, you'll see a solitary tent up there, too. The hills swim in daisies, buttercups, clover, and other wild flowers of white, yellow and many purples, and people who drive by boat say that miles out to sea they could smell the sweetness of the hills.

The wooden houses wear the bright, familiar colors of rural homes in French Canada, but there is something very odd about them. They are not in rows. The population increased down through the centuries and as land passed from parents to children the parcels of land shrank. Nowadays, most landowners sit on only about 15 acres per family, and each man who built a house made it face the view that he liked best. The result is that even in the few little conglomerations that pass for towns, the houses face in about 360 different directions. They are as random as the hillside cattle, as aimless as the wild flowers, as indecipherable in their arrangement as the stars in the sky. They, too, have a knack for posing on horizons.

The view from the higher hills is painfully beautiful. The crazy houses tumble toward the sea like a spilled box of children's blocks; the mountains and the red cliffs of other islands hover above the ocean and there is an odd precision about them, as though they were illustrations on the inside cover of an old book of fairy tales; the beaches, foreshortened, shimmer and twist and snake their way into the smoky distance; and the pressure of the sea is half of everything in sight.

HOW TO GET THERE
By air: Eastern Provincial Airways flies twice a day to the Madelains' Islands from Charlottetown at 8:10 a.m. and 6:25 p.m. for $30 return. There are daily connecting flights from Montreal (leaves 3:30 p.m.) for $62 return to Charlottetown, and a flight each day leaving Moncton at 6:45 a.m. for $54 return to Charlottetown. EPA also flies from Halifax to Charlottetown daily at 10 a.m. for $30 return.

Air Gaspé also flies to the islands each weekday, leaving Gaspé at 2 p.m. Eastern time and arriving on the Madelains at 6:50 p.m. Atlantic time after a stopover at Gaspé. The fare is $120 return, and this flight will stop at Rimouski and Mont-Joli on request.

Cows graze above Grindstone's harbor where a new dock was built last summer. At right is the curling rink.
Happiness is a new address

And for reasons nobody understands, everybody moves on May 1 in Montreal

by Carl Dubuc / drawings by Jacques Gagnier

Last May 1, a man in Montreal moved home and home for the 21st time in 25 years. His name is a secret of the Economic Research Bureau of Montreal, but thousands of others are on their 10th and 12th move. And tens of thousands of others can pride themselves on having chalked up at least a good half-dozen.

On May 1 — and the three or four days before and after — Montreal is a city given to a grand annual moving madness, a kind of spring rite. There's not another city in North America, probably not in the entire world, where so many families move all at the same time. This strange migration is peculiar to Montreal, and it's huge. Strangers are struck by its size and irrationality. But Montrealers themselves seem hardly to be aware of it.

They know it happens and they expect problems hiring moving vans but nobody seems to take time out to complain about it. Naturally not. They're all too busy moving. And as moving has become a kind of habit, they don't even trouble to think about it let alone try to come up with any facts and figures to describe it.

And where there are statistics, they are wildly contradictory. Various organizations directly or indirectly concerned with moving - Montreal's assessment and finance departments, Bell Canada, Hydro-Quebec, the Quebec Trucking Association, the Montreal Economic Research Bureau — have data on the matter. Some put the number at 100,000 moves, others say 75,000, and still others go as high as 125,000!

Why such widely-varying estimates? Any way you look at it, such a massive shift in the population is of major importance; it affects the entire economy of a city, not to mention its image and its future. To draw any conclusions about the implications and consequences of this kind of moving on the grand scale, the whole thing would have to be studied very carefully. However, that's not done and there are reasons. But before coming to them, an explanation may help the outsider to understand how the number of moves on May 1 reaches such fantastic figures: 125,000— even 50,000 — is a huge number.

To understand it you must take three facts into consideration. In the first place, 75 per cent of Montrealers are tenants, as against only 25 per cent who are owners. (In a city like Toronto, for example, the opposite is the case. Secondly, in Montreal, there are some 400,000 dwellings (600,000 for the Montreal urban community). And, finally, the vast majority of leases inexorably terminate on May 1 whether their term is for one, two or three years.

There's a story told that all this started as the result of an old French legal custom that forbade landlords from throwing delinquent tenants into the street during the winter — a legend that doesn't explain a similar mini-mass-move that takes place just as inexorably on Oct. 1.

These factors indicate something quite particular to Montrealers — they are not sentimentally attached to where they live. They're an easily floating population. Tenants and landlords like change. They prefer a short-term lease: tenants, because it allows them to find a better place if they're not happy with their present accommodation or with their landlords; and landlords, except in certain cases coming under the Rental Control Board, because it gives them the chance to get rid of undesirable tenants and to increase rents at regular intervals.

But there are масс of other reasons that motivate tenants to change their place of abode. The family multiplies and the moment arrives when three children can't sleep in the same bedroom, or the parents are tired of having one on a sofa in the living room or a corner of the dining room. A raise in salary has come along and more luxurious accommodation is now the order of the day — with a balcony and an imitation garden. Or perhaps simply, a change of air is preferred.

People seldom move because they can't stand their neighbors any more. In Montreal, you don't know your neighbors. You can spend three years in the same little part of the city without being able to identify a single neighbor. No, people move because another street seems more appealing or because another apartment building looks more spacious.

And there are more mundane reasons for moving. For example, the landlord just simply refuses to repair the apartment and you're not the divvying yourself type. So you're reduced by the glittering promises of another landlord, who promises a completely redecorated apartment, whatever that means — even though you suspect the walls will be tinted with cheap paints that won't stand a single washing.

But, in the great majority of cases, families move because it has become a habit. The custom is so strong that the renewal of a lease — always possible, mind you — is completely foreign to them and has never become part of tradition. And in Montreal, there's a choice the whole year round. There are nearly always 30,000 empty apartments, not to mention the tens of thousands of other ones that are or will be free when the game of musical chairs begins on May 1.

Curiously enough a move rarely takes a familiar closer to the husband's work, because it's the wife who makes the decision. Another curious fact is that people don't very often move into a completely new district. Generally, they move around on the same south-north axis. There's no explanation for this, but the fact is the average Montrealer usually moves only a few streets away. One year he'll migrate a few streets to the north, then two or three years later, he'll be on the move again, still farther to the north by a few streets — and so on.

This is really why the north of the city has developed so fantastically. Once the cycle is commenced, it's very seldom broken by an adventurous sally to the east or west, or by a disjointed return to the south.
The result is that when a Montrealer moves, he changes his horrid old place, but the move doesn't really get him very far.

There are few Montrealers who have not moved at least two or three times during their lifetimes. But this moving sickness, this migratory urge, really only affects the inhabitants of the city of Montreal itself, those in the east and the north who don't have a lot of money in their pockets.

Let's take the Montrealers who are non-owners. For the record, Montreal's population is between 1,325,000 and 1,408,000, but the Montreal Urban Community numbers 2,100,000 and Metropolitan Montreal, 2,700,000. It's in the independent cities within the limits of Montreal and in the suburbs where you find the large proportion of homeoweners who stay put. Then a migration towards the suburbs and once a family is established there, the chains move not take place any more.

Those who interest me are the incorrigible migrants, the inveterate moving offenders who, taken together, add up, less rather than more exactly, to what: 50,000/75,000/100,000 and even more annually? It seems impossible to make any rational count of those elusive people, although it would be nice to have a figure with some kind of accuracy. It's maddening to have to say that each year in May there are maybe 50,000, maybe 100,000 Montrealers or families who move. Such imprecision is ridiculous.

A move implies all sorts of arrangements, readjustments and shifts. What are they, how do people cope with them, and, finally, how do they escape both analysis and any serious attempt to consider them?

First, there are the two municipal departments - of finance and assessment - whose job it is to readjust water and busines taxes and everything else to do with financial matters. These departments give figure of around 50,000 readjustments per year, without going more precise. This figure doesn't really mean very much, because it's clearly impossible to state exactly how many landlords pay the water tax for their tenants and how many increase (or lower) their rents to compensate.

Hydro-Quebec? No official figures - guesses range from 35,000 to 65,000. There are so many tenants who move without giving notice to Hydro-Quebec that it finds itself in the difficult and painful position of making revisions on a year-round basis. Why take the time to calculate and break down the total fact and figures when no one ever asks for them? And then too, sometimes it's the landlords who pay the electricity. So the resultant figures would be even more unbelievable.

Bell Canada? In principle, they could give a fairly accurate figure about moves and they do indeed give one (900) for Montreal. But that's as far as they'll go. A host of subscribers who don't move away from the district keep the same telephone numbers. The readjustments are made at the exchange office. There are certainly people who request that their telephone be moved or that one or two more be installed, but that's done later. Here again, no statistics.

There remains the Quebec Trucking Association. They say they've never thought of compiling statistics. And the Transportation Board, which the truckers come under? They also confess ignorance. They do say that there are 100 trucking companies in Montreal, of which half are authorized to make moves. Certain companies have only one or two trucks, others have a dozen of 20 to 40 - and none makes reports.

And even if the companies did give figures, they wouldn't bear any resemblance to the total figure. A large number of families move themselves with trailers or rented trucks.

There's the Rental Control Board, but it doesn't deal with all cases. At any rate, when questioned on all aspects of the thing, it all could say was that the problems are growing.

Electoral lists? They're never up to date nor are they revised annually. In Montreal, nobody knows who's who or even wants to know. No one has them officially - wherever anyone else lives. In fact, the only way to determine how many people move on May 1 is to go knocking from door to door.

Finally, the very approximate figures given, with a certain reliance, by Bell Canada and Hydro-Quebec, are not necessarily for the telephone own, but have been acquired from the Economic Research Bureau of Montreal. Not very hopefully, the bureau tries to get a little order into these scattered statistics that come to it from all over the place. The estimate of 125,000 cases, accompanied by an extreme shrewd, from the Research Bureau, which is still trying to cope with the statistical implication of the creation of the Montreal Urban Communities in 1970. Actually, it's entirely probable that figures with no real value are exchanged and which, more often than not, are based on estimates made with both eyes firmly closed.

In face of all this, you would think the Montrealer should say Montreal is in chaos, crowds of trucks filling the streets, people shouting, babies crying, tempers fraying.

But it's not like that at all. The great migration takes place with easy calm, in harmony and in an astonishingly relaxed atmosphere. Everyone doesn't go moving every day with a suite. Traffic doesn't get blocked and the always inevitable havoc is kept to a minimum. And you see a get-truck swallowing furniture, everybody is looking on. Small dramas here and there of course - one family arrives in its new electric motor and another has had time to leave. But everything eventually disentangles itself.

Children are moved separately, usually in the back of the truck. There's never been a single child lost during a Montreal move. Dogs, cats, birds in cages arrive at their destination without incident or accidents, following along the heels of their masters or chained in their arms. Montrealers don't cry at the thought of long day.

After all, why should there be tragedies? Montreal has been moving on move for 50 years and more. That's plenty of time to get used to it and to have fallen into a rhythm full of sweet serenity.

Trucks work almost day and night for four or five days around moving day - and as slowly as possible, it seems. The hydro company doesn't have problems in most places. The apartment people are moving into, because the service is already there. Bell calls on some 300 specialists from all over the country and they are always with a strict time table and given ample time to forestall any major difficulties. Once the ar- rangements have been made, the telephone can be installed on two days' notice. Montrealers, like all Canadians, are telephone maniacs. A move is certainly not going to make them want to move in to advise the phone com- panies in plenty of time, so the telephone will be in its right place with the right number.

It wouldn't be right to claim that these massive moves don't cause problems, but the problems are of a minor nature, and they come later. First, it costs a lot of money to change accom- modation. Perhaps, but does saving money bring happiness? In Montreal, on May 1, happiness is a common virtue.

The problem that appears to be the most serious concern children. If it seems unfair to take a child from his school and enroll him elsewhere just a month and a half before the end of the school year, we must forget that in the great majority of cases, when the move takes place, the parents haven't changed their district. The school remains the same. In other cases, the child doesn't suffer any traumatic experience. After all, he comes from a race that is always on the move. Besides, his new school has become more familiar to the whole thing and is all ready to receive him. What the child loses by leaving his friends and teachers is compensated for by the interest he creates and the curiosity he arouses.

In short, Montreal has such a long tradition of en masse moves that everything goes along with a most unlikely flexibility, and the moving of the house- hold distorts as few things as possible.

It's probably because of all this that the tensile approaches made to prov- incial authorities to remedy this situation have still not brought results and are perhaps doomed to defeat. In May 1963, the Civil Code Revision Act submitted to Quebec a report recommend- ing, among other things, that leases be prolonged for an undetermined period. A tenancy could, by giving notice to the landlord, ask that his lease exceed the expiration date of May 1 by three months or more. The landlord would have the same privilege.

Obviously, the risk here would be that everyone would agree on a prolonga- tion of three months, which would solve the problem of school children, but would bring the date to August 1, which time nearly all the trucks are busy full time in the port of Montreal.

But, according to the report, five years from now in one way or another, notices will be given at intervals throughout the year and will no longer be for a particular date. And so would be broken Mon- treal's tradition of moving on May 1.

The report goes phooing on, which means that it will either be forgotten or that a favorable decision won't be seen on the horizon. After all, a custom is a custom, to be held and cherished. Especially when you're the only one in the world who has it.
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