

After the Plague

Louis and Josephine Move West



J.W. Graham

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Dear Jacob,

You asked me not to wait until your next birthday to send you "chapter two." Sorry. Life passes at a different pace at my age. But I am catching up. As you will remember, Dr. Louis Paré, my maternal great-grandfather—your paternal great-great-great-grandfather—served during the Northwest Resistance at the time of Louis Riel. The first story was more an introduction to the place, to Rupert's Land, with only a minor, if heroic, part played by our ancestor. After the battle was finished, the 65th Regiment was sent back to Montreal so they could resume their civilian lives. The regiment was not a regular army. It was a militia, that is, a body of citizens who organize themselves in case they are needed. They are volunteers. Governments rely upon them to make sure there are trained reserves in case of war.

Louis returned to his wife, Josephine Timmins, his five children, and his medical practice. Perhaps he would be able to tell his grandchildren about his adventures some day, sitting on the Paré family front porch in Lachine. That was his expectation.

It was not to be. In the few months he had been gone, Montreal and Lachine had been through a radical change. The city he came back to was not the one he had left. His life, and the lives of his family, would not proceed as planned. Before we

talk about that, though, let's allow him to enjoy his reunion with Josephine, his father, also called Louis, and his youngest child, my own grandfather Alphonse.

Happy Twelfth Birthday!

Grandma and Grandpa

Arrival

Monday morning, July 20, 1885, 9:35 a.m., under the dome of a blue sky.

*The train came to a metallic halt before the new Dalhousie Station, with its column-like windows extending to half-round lintels towering two storeys over the train cars. The station, completed the year before, was at the corner of Rue Notre-Dame and Rue Berri, just east of the docks in Montreal. The platform was filled with people, mostly women, many with babies in arms or in prams. Colourful bonnets and long dresses helped them forget the stench of the stale air that swelled up from the docks and the river below. A fanfare playing *La Canadienne* had been overwhelmed by the massive engine and the seven cars' arrival. No matter. No-one cared about anything other than seeing their men return. The city's dignitaries stood behind Colonel Stephenson as he gave the signal and his small company greeted the chaos of the morning with a salute of 15 resonating cannon shots.*

Surgeon Paré, the officers and the soldiers inside the train felt the reverberation of the cannon shots as the big train drew silent. The men crowded the exits of their train carriages. When the doors finally opened, the steam engine released its last vapours and the smell of burning coal floated into the thick, fetid air. Hands reached out as the soldiers disembarked, their arms and those of their loved ones found each other, pulling as though objects with their own volition, reuniting couples.

Louis, Dr. Paré, took his time. He thought of the contrast with the air that they had breathed, clean, invigorating and cool, on their months-long march along the Saskatchewan River. He thought of the calm, even authority of General Strange, a man equal to Big Bear, both cautious and careful to avoid casualties. No surprise the soldiers around him looked hardy, bronzed and healthy, in spite of the long rail ride home and their ripped and dishevelled uniforms.

Josephine, conscious of her baby who squirmed and twisted in his grandfather's arms, stood back with her father-in-law, glancing at the men, their hale faces contrasting with their torn, dirty uniforms, looking for Louis. The joy of the people on the platform welled into cries drowning all else. It was a release she well recognized in herself. The men had returned to a hell that they would soon discover. Couples hugged in an abandon of self-consciousness and little children rose in men's arms, held above the crowd, some smiling with pride, others crying in confusion.

Over the crowd and across the platform, Louis's and Josephine's eyes met. The authority of the doctor as he negotiated through the crowd communicated itself to Josephine to stay where she was. Louis's father spotted him then, and soon they were reunited. The baby had turned six months old the day before. Hugging Josephine and kissing little Alphonse first, Louis turned to embrace his father, stopping himself from asking questions as he saw the stress and somber undercurrents from both his father and his wife. Josephine marvelled once again at how similar the two

men were, admiring her husband's trim beard that he had taken the time to care for, even in his creased, smudged and damaged uniform. Alphonse had only smiled and snuggled closer to his grandfather. There was news. Louis didn't ask, but she could see he felt a tension that she knew all the women shared, released from it briefly in these moments of reunion. A doctor, he would find out soon enough.

"I'll be called back in a moment," Louis shouted over the noise as his father nodded.

"Yes." They would be marching to Notre Dame Basilica for a Te Deum Mass. "I left the carriage there this morning. We can follow the march on foot." A bugle sounded and Louis left to join the marshalling 65th Regiment.

War was different then, full of honour and excitement. Casualties could be heavy, but often, as the last months had been for the 65th, most of their time in the Northwest Territories had involved long, predictable days of moving, marching in loose formation along the trails by

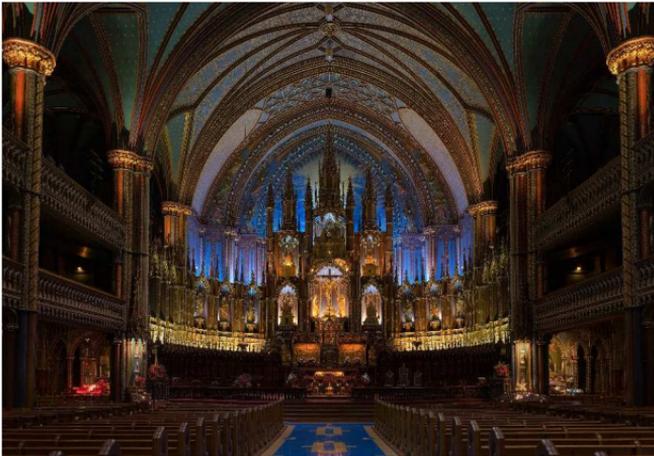
the river. Dealing with the Resistance, the part they would all remember best, had lasted only a few days. Now they were home.



Notre Dame Basilica, Montreal

2. Honouring the Troops

A Te Deum Mass is a great honour in the Catholic community. They are rare ceremonies used to mark events, like victories in war. The 65th Regiment was being honoured. This event was held at Notre Dame Basilica the day they arrived. It was the most important church in Montreal.



Notre Dame Basilica

It is hard to understand how important the Catholic Church was in those days. Quebec was governed as though by two parents. One was the elected government of men from the legal and business side who also ran the courts and land registries. The other was the Catholic Church. It was responsible for most everything

else. They ran the parishes centred around their churches, and they also ran the schools, the hospitals and the public registries of births, deaths and marriages.

Over the following days, the 65th Regiment was honoured at many receptions across Montreal, and Louis Paré was publicly thanked for his role. One such reception was organized by the Zouave veterans, the overseas forces raised by the Church a generation earlier to fight in an international war to protect the state property of the Catholic Church. At another reception, Lieutenant C.J. Doherty, one of the regiment's leaders, deplored the reporting of a Toronto journalist, Edmond Sheppard, criticizing the regiment for misbehaviour during its passage west to serve in ending the Resistance. His accusations were false, and they introduced a French-English conflict into the spirit of the volunteer forces. Doherty declared that Sheppard would now have to learn to defend himself against the lawyers who were suing him for defamation.

3. Catching Up with the News

Louis Paré saw his family again after the Te Deum Mass at Notre Dame Basilica, but only briefly. He was expected to stay with the officers until the next day to complete a debriefing and would follow along on his own on Tuesday.

The barracks were comfortable after his time away and the discomforts of the train ride back. Louis woke early the next morning. He went straight to the cafeteria where he found he was the first to arrive. His only company was some newspapers.

Louis's appetite for the news was greater than his desire for breakfast, and he began to read. Cholera, the disease that everyone had feared throughout the winter months, had not shown itself to be the largest medical threat, but smallpox was. Dr. Emmanuel Lachapelle, Louis's senior in the 65th Regiment, had ceded his place in the militia's Northwest service because he was involved with the efforts to contain smallpox. If it had not been for the first signs of smallpox in the spring, Louis may never even have gone

west with the militia. Dr. Lachapelle would have gone instead.

Now smallpox dominated the front pages of the newspapers.

Among the papers was *La Patrie*, the paper of Honoré Beaugrand, who had been elected mayor, the last major civic event before Louis's departure in April. Beaugrand had won on a promise to institute proper public health controls to stop cholera. Normally the spring thaw brought with it rotting garbage and sewage that threatened public health and caused the whole city to stink. It got worse every summer, but the wealthy just left for the countryside. Autumn froze it all up again.

Faced with smallpox, Beaugrand was promoting vaccinations and medical reporting of smallpox outbreaks while worrying about cholera. The Catholic Church, especially in Montreal, felt that vaccinations were an invasion of people's rights and medical reporting was an invasion of their privacy. Some people, even some priests, thought that kind of medical interference was a Protestant plot. Today, we would have called them anti-vaxxers. The Church was very powerful, and

the medical community needed it to support the vaccinations.

Beaugrand and his party feared an outbreak of cholera and now smallpox more than they feared the Church. Then there were those sowing doubt about the vaccination:

The Herald, May 19 1885

Vaccination and revaccination, whether from smallpox inoculation, horsegrease or human corruption has proved impotent to prevent or mitigate smallpox.

Vaccination has spread scrofula, syphilis, consumption and many other disgusting diseases...

--Dr. Alexander Milton Ross

Cholera is a bacterial infection that was one of the plagues that visited cities. It resulted mostly from poor public sanitation, contaminated drinking water and insufficient or no garbage collection; there was often offal and night soil (poo) dumped in back laneways, covered minimally with dirt. Garbage collectors, called scavengers at the time, would do what they could to cart stuff away, a dirty job. Winter mercifully froze the whole lot, but with spring rains it washed into the ground, contaminating the drinking water.

Solutions to these problems were

available, but fast-growing cities like Montreal in the late 1800s were piles of disorganized humanity. The leaders had to get people together and convince them to fight for the right means of solving the problem. Cholera had struck in the 1830s. Carriers of the bacteria contaminated ground water through the diarrhetic results of the illness. Their spread to drinking water led to broadening contamination. In 1885, though, cholera was not the problem. Smallpox was.

Variolation



Smallpox-infected child.

Early solutions for dealing with the disease were called variolation. They would transfer a small amount of the infection of another human—who would pay for the right. A family who had a sick child would sell a contaminated rag that had been tied around the pustules. The buyer would tie it around the arm of another healthy child, after making a scratch in their skin.

Smallpox was a viral disease. Bacteria are living organisms that can cohabit in the environment. We depend upon bacteria. They comprise a huge part of our bodies and work together to keep us, and everything, going. Each bacterium is an individual life.

Viruses are more like a bit of random code waiting for a place they can "live" briefly, replicating and spreading through organisms such as people.

Montreal's smallpox reports were becoming known to the medical community before Louis left for the West with the 65th Regiment in April, but the early stories were generally reassurances and denials. Also, smallpox had a vaccine. It was completely controllable. Edward Jenner, a British doctor, had discovered a century before that infection with the much milder cowpox led to immunization. He noticed that the milkmaids, the women who milked cows, had minor sores on their hands that resembled smallpox pustules, but they did not get the disease. Smallpox, which could prove fatal in 30% of cases without vaccination, was pretty much under control—as long as people got vaccinated.

Over the next days, Louis spent time exploring the stories he had missed. Dr. Lachapelle, who had stayed to help deal with the smallpox vaccinations, had a lot of news to share. Louis discovered that in mid-May, when Riel had surrendered and weeks before General Strange had ordered the heroic rescue of the injured soldier Lemay, the stories in Montreal were much more horrifying than anything the soldiers had experienced. Stories in the papers described the massive failure of the scavengers. Children were playing ankle-deep in wet muck in some streets, and the smells wafting across neighbourhoods pushed investigators back. Reports of smallpox were increasing, and the city council could not wrestle the problem under control. Ominously, in early May, the first smallpox vaccinations had caused bacterial infections in children and had to be stopped. The investigating physician declared it wasn't the vaccination but the weather. In those times, people believed that low-lying, humid areas carried a miasma, a mist, that caused disease. Given the profound stench of the littered streets in the poorer neighbourhoods, the explanation seemed reasonable. Later assessments were that the

unsanitary conditions of the children who had been vaccinated were the cause. Today, cleanliness and sanitation are taken for granted compared to how things were in Montreal at that time.

The decision to stop the vaccinations played into the hands of those people who believed vaccinating was wrong. Both English and French, these people played upon the reluctance to take the vaccination in June, when the weather was improving and the scavengers were slowly catching up.

As June passed, more people refused to get vaccinated or to send their sick to a special hospital that had been set up to receive them. Houses were quarantined with signs telling people to stay away from these sick families, but some of the sick fled quarantine, spreading the disease. There were a few stories, also, of tenants being evicted from their homes because someone in the family was sick. The landlords were afraid they would contaminate the neighbours. A child, covered in the pustules caused by the disease, was found wandering alone down one street.

Plagues and Consequences

Galileo Galilee, the first person in Europe to train a telescope on the sky and declare that the Earth was not the centre of the universe, lived under plague restrictions at his home in Florence for two years (1575–77) between his 11th and 13th birthdays. It struck again when he was looking through that telescope and writing his paper about it. Had the plague not happened on that occasion, the Vatican censors would have suppressed the paper. Lockdowns meant to control the plague forced the Church to rely upon their local editors in Pisa.

A few outspoken people were convinced that the vaccinations were causing the epidemic. If they had known their history, they would have known that Montrealers had been vaccinated against smallpox fifty years earlier, stopping the spread of the disease. They probably would have dismissed it, though. A part of this was what you could call the Jonah syndrome, in which a prophet is listened to, causing the people to change their ways. The prophet had done his job. But when no disaster struck, the prophet lost credibility (see appendix).

In this case, though, there were prophets on both sides, as well as people who took advantage of other people's fear.

Le Monde: La picotte diminue tous les jours dans les quartiers où l'on fait de l'eau minérale de St-Léon.

Another ad: Sirop d'enfant de Dr. Coderre, along with a photo suggesting, but not saying, that it can cure smallpox.

DEATH THE VACCINATOR.



4. Life in the Year of Smallpox

Soon Louis was back in his medical practice. There would have been precautions to take regarding smallpox, the main one simply to confirm that everyone was vaccinated. His name is not noted as one of the principal players in the fight against the disease, but as the summer rolled around to autumn, the city was polarizing around smallpox, and his friend Dr. Lachapelle became a target of people who were violently protesting, essentially against science. Like we saw and continue to see during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people put their personal freedom ahead of the need to think as a community. Thinking as a community means knowing that, while we each have names and identities that seem separate from everything and everyone else, we are a part of a body of humans living among similar bodies of other beings—plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi (the mould and mushroom families) and co-habiting with other strange things, like viruses. We all share the same air, the same water and the same sunshine. Thinking as a community means that we really don't know where each of us stops and the others begin—there seems to be no

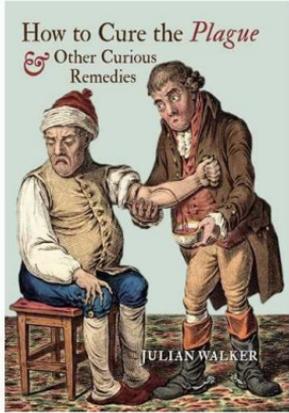
such barrier, only useful illusions of division.

As the summer progressed, the city polarized around the vaccination issue. By the time Louis was again with his family, he realized that the virus had cast a pall over everyone. People may have blamed the atmospheric miasma for the spread of disease, but they also understood that it was contagious. Events were cancelled, but many people felt that large meetings to perform the good work of God, like going to church, would be protected by Him. People believed so deeply in their religion that there were claims of cures. One woman brought her sick child to the tomb of Bishop Bourget, who had governed through the Church for forty years. He had died earlier that year, and the mother declared her child was cured simply because they prayed together at his tombstone.

Over the summer, no-one forgot the children who became sick from the virus. The percentage of these reactions was small, less than half of one percent, but its memory had grown to divide the city. The Catholic clergy were willing to encourage vaccinations but declared the doctors were of two opinions and they could therefore not oblige people. Finally, on September 22, amid warning that the people would revolt, the city councillors passed a law

making vaccination and revaccination obligatory. Dr. Louis Paré was not one of the high-profile doctors in the fight against smallpox, but his friend Dr. Lachapelle was. His signature was on the Provincial Board of Health's endorsement of the decision, immediately after the city voted on it.

During this same week, the stories were coming to Montreal about the trial of Louis Riel, the Métis leader who had turned himself in after the military had crushed his resistance. The French press was describing Riel as one of them and declaring reasons for why he should not be tried for treason. No-one believed he should be hung. It was becoming a hot controversy, alongside stories like the one the Toronto journalist wrote, the one that Lieutenant Doherty had reported at the reception where the regiment was recognized for its success.



5. The Streets Erupt

A week later, the restlessness took a dangerous turn. In the morning, a sanitary team posting notices on houses where the residents had smallpox were resisted and threatened by a crowd. They were forced to retreat to their East End headquarters where the mob threatened to destroy their offices. Meanwhile, the council was voting on funds to pay for the vaccinations. Earlier, the people who were being vaccinated had had to pay, but it was just too expensive for the poorer neighbourhoods where smallpox was the most prevalent. An additional clause was proposed that would make it not obligatory to accept the vaccination. The majority of the council, representing the poorest wards, were in favour of the additional clause, but one of them changed his mind. Originally, he had been against the vaccinations, but when he learned that his own brother and sister-in-law, also opposing the vaccine, had seven smallpox cases in their home, he changed his mind. At the same time, the news carried a story about the court's ruling against the Toronto journalist who had defamed the 65th Regiment, and how

a riot had broken out on the streets of Toronto.

On that same Monday evening, demonstrators assembled outside the East End health clinic to protest against the forced vaccinations. It started with speeches—then someone threw a stone through the window of the headquarters. From there, the crowd began swelling as the stone-throwing increased. Then someone shouted that they should go to City Hall. On the way, they turned into a singing, shouting mob and the words that echoed revealed a deeper anger. “Long Live France,” and “Bravo Riel” were heard. They smashed pharmacy windows. Next was Dr. Lachapelle’s home, and then the home of Dr. Laberge, Montreal’s chief medical officer. They threatened to kill him as the stones were thrown.

Council members and others telephoned to warn each other as the stoning continued. A woman was hit and knocked out. The mayor, Honoré Beaugrand, under medical treatment for exhaustion, told his wife and one employee to take their shotgun and pistol and shoot any hostile person who opened their front gate, then he walked towards the violence. Others armed their houses as well.

Beaugrand called in the militia.

Police-chief Paradis saw the situation differently. He called up his men, ordering them to put their firearms aside, and sent them wielding batons, pushing the mob back. He entered the health offices where he found a man trying to start a fire. When he grabbed the man, others entered and the chief was attacked. Bleeding from a head wound, he called out, "Are you going to assassinate your police chief?" His words had the desired effect. Someone warned a man he called Champagne not to hit the police chief. Champagne reacted against the other rioters because his name had been spoken out loud. Police reinforcements arrived and carried Champagne away while the half-conscious police chief was taken to the quiet of a nearby home.

Police action, without firearms, pushed the rioters away. They cried out that the office of the Herald newspaper was their next target, and the police followed them, trying to break up the crowd as it continued to smash pharmacy windows. Next, they went for the Montreal Star, but the crowd was diminishing. By two o'clock in the morning, it had dissipated.

As the smallpox death toll rose through October, people across the city began to settle down. By the end of the year, the tally of deaths from smallpox had risen to 3,164 in Montreal alone, almost two percent of the population. In comparison, the total death toll for the whole military action on both sides of the Métis Resistance was about 100 people.

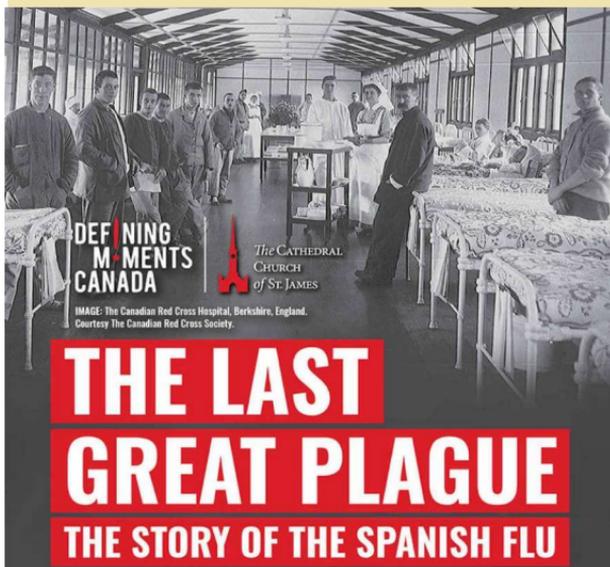
In Regina, on Monday morning November 16, Louis Riel was hung. When the news reached Montreal, the raging smallpox epidemic was forgotten for a week as demonstrations of protest filled people's minds. By the following Sunday, November 22, twenty thousand people, over 12% of the population, stood in the mud in the largest protest Montreal had experienced. Were they there in part to think about something else besides smallpox? No longer heroes, one imagines that the members of the 65th Regiment were not present.

By late November, Montreal was blanketed under a huge snowfall and the streets were frozen again. Smallpox was forgotten in the years that followed, but the hanging of Louis Riel has grown as a historic marker in our country.

Plagues and Consequences

Another plague isolated Isaac Newton in the countryside in England where he developed most of his thinking during his “Year of Miracles.”

Did they really believe it was the last one?



Like COVID-19, it spread around the world a hundred years before, in 1919.

It was probably one of the reasons my grandparents bought a country house in the Laurentians in 1920.

6. Order Returns

Life slowly returned to normal in Lachine. Josephine was pregnant. They anticipated a sixth child, to be born in July, but Josephine was not well. Marie-Josephine Béatrix was born on July 8, 1886, but died the next day. Josephine was diagnosed with tuberculosis some time later, probably in the early winter.

Smallpox and cholera were epidemics, one a virus, the other bacterial. They came and went, leaving deaths in their wake. Tuberculosis, a bacterial infection, was something else. It is considered to be the greatest enemy humanity has ever faced. The most vulnerable were not children and the elderly, but people in the prime of life. In the two centuries between 1700 and 1900, it killed five million people a year, a total of a billion people. It, more than warfare, starvation or other diseases, kept the world population in check. The world population only reached two billion people in the 1930s.

In the late 1840s, Hermann Brehmer, a young botany student in Germany, contracted tuberculosis (also known as TB). He knew he was going to die so he decided to die pursuing his

love of botany in the Himalaya Mountains. To his surprise, in the cool, dry alpine air he slowly recovered. Dr. Edward Trudeau of New York City survived in a similar way, moving to Saranac Lake, New York, in the late 1870s. In the mountain air, he recovered and set up his medical practice there. In 1882, he learned about Brehmer's sanatorium. By the mid 1880s, Saranac Lake had become the first treatment centre for what was called the Rest Cure. Could Dr. Louis Paré have thought of the Rest Cure as a means of saving Josephine from TB? He may have read something about Brehmer's work in Germany, but Trudeau's work was just beginning.

Louis had a medical practice in Lachine. Their youngest child was less than two years old. The city was still dirty. It had improved with a better mandate and more money for scavengers, but they began incinerating the waste, and that added to the airborne pollution, a serious trigger for tuberculosis.

Josephine still had family in Mattawa,

Ontario, where you will find ancient tombstones with your ancestors' names on them.

Louis moved his family there but stayed in Lachine himself. He continued his work while planning to get the family to somewhere where Josephine could recover.



A Timmins family tombstone, Mattawa



The Red River meanders through the plain and following its route easily doubles the distance between the two countries.

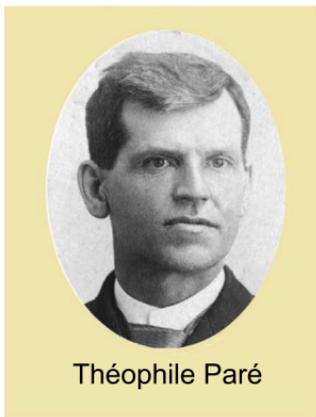
7. The Move West

Years before, in 1872, Louis was in Manitoba. There are no records explaining why, but his younger brother, Théophile, had already moved there. Getting to Manitoba was not easy because there was not yet a rail link. You could cross the Great Lakes by ferry to Port Arthur and Fort William, now called Thunder Bay, and then by Lake of the Woods. Beyond that, stagecoach may have been the only means. Alternatively, there was a train network through the United States that would bring you to Moorhead, Minnesota/ Fargo, North Dakota, a twin city on both sides the Red River and in two different states. The state border is the river all the way to Canada, and it was travelled by riverboat until the first train line replaced it in 1878.

Théophile had also

become ill, and it is possible that Louis came to look after him. Théophile was 22 in 1872. Apparently, he had moved west to become a priest. Louis was 24. There is a certificate naming Louis as a Justice of the Peace in Selkirk that same year. It is dated June 18, 1872. The original territory of Selkirk comprised the places where Théophile lived. Louis was not yet married, but we know he left there to go to Mattawa to marry Josephine Timmins.

Théophile was put in the hands of a nurse, Angélique Nolin (also spelled Nolan). She nursed him back to health. It is possible that Louis came with family funds to set that up. The two brothers would always be close. When Théophile recovered from his long illness, he married Angélique.





Province of Manitoba

Victoria, by the Grace of God, of
the United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Ireland, Queen.
Defender of the Faith
40. 40. 40.

To Louis A. Paré, Esquire, & J
Greeting:

Whereas your great zeal, care
and confidence in your loyalty, industry and
ability we have nominated and appointed
you to be a Justice to keep our Peace for
the County of Selkirk in our Province of
Manitoba, with all and every the powers,
authority, privileges and viceregal to the
said Office of Justice of the Peace of right
and by Law appertaining

Our Testimony We therefore have
caused these our Letters to be more
patent and the Great Seal of
Manitoba to be hereunto affixed
Witness our Trusty and Well
Beloved, the Honourable, Adair
George Ritchie, Esquire,
Governor of our Province of
Manitoba, Member of our
Privy Council for Canada &c. &c.
at our Government House
at Fort Garry this Eleventh
day of June, in the year of
our Lord, One thousand eight
hundred and seventy two
and, in the Thirty First
year of our Queen.

Yours Command.



Provincial Secretary

Dr. Louis A. Paré, Justice of the Peace,
Selkirk Manitoba 1872

8. Josephine Succumbs

Louis knew that he could depend on his brother, but he did not know where he would be posted when he joined the North-West Mounted Police. His first posting was to Battleford, Saskatchewan and they chose Calgary for Josephine and the five children, closer to Battleford but further from Théophile. At least it was on the direct rail route to Winnipeg. Louis had time to settle them in before reporting for duty. The following year, they were living together, but her health continued to decline. Fresh air is not a guaranteed cure, and people often resigned themselves to dying from the illness, even with the best treatment. Tuberculosis was not treatable until the 1950s. Josephine was between 28 and 33 years old when she died in 1888.

What happened next in the family's lives is hard to follow. The official family history states that the oldest child, Noémie, took over her mother's responsibilities and that her younger sisters, Emma and Blanche, were sent back to the convent in Lachine, where they had all been born and where they would

be in the care of two of their aunts, both nuns. Noémie looked after the boys, Alfred, five, and Alphonse, three. Noémie was only nine when their mother died, and with Louis' work and travelling, staying in Battleford would not have been a good long-term option. They did move to the Winnipeg area at some point during this period where it seems likely they fell into the care of their uncle Théophile and aunt Angélique. Their cousin Marie was a few years older than Noémie.

The boys, Alfred and Alphonse, grew up on the farm that had come into the family from the Nolins. Theirs is another story for another time.

Appendix

In the Book of Jonah in the Hebrew Bible stories of the Prophets, Jonah was a successful prophet. God instructed him to go to the city of Nineveh and warn the people that if they didn't change their ways, God would punish them. Jonah was having nothing to do with that. He decided to take a ship to the far city of Tarshish, on the other side of the sea. When a storm threatened the ship,

Jonah told the sailors that he was fleeing his orders from his god. They decided they should throw him overboard to save themselves. Jonah landed in the water and was promptly swallowed by a whale, who swam to Nineveh and deposited him on the shore.

Jonah realized that his god was too powerful to run away from, so he warned the people to change their ways or suffer *fire and brimstone*, a storm of burning stones that would destroy them. They did! Jonah was furious with God, because he looked like an idiot. No-one would ever believe him again because they weren't punished. He left Nineveh and sat under a tree feeling sorry for himself. God found him and scolded him. Jonah had saved God's city, and now he wanted God to destroy it anyway, to make Jonah look credible? We still have the old bible where we read that story when your father was born. Here is the last line of the Book of Jonah where God says:

“...and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein there are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

When your dad was born, we were keeping cattle too. In fairness, though, we did not read this story closely until after he was named.

Then, years later, at the beginning of the

year 2000, your dad wrote a letter to CBC scolding people for doubting the prophets who told them that we must change the way we record dates before the calendar turned over, because no-one had actually planned properly in their computer programming for the end of the millennium, or even for the end of the century.

The imminent disaster was called Y2K.

The Y2K problem was based on society's dependency in the computer age. When it began, in the middle of the 20th century, computing required punch cards. These cards had holes punched into them that codified the information being stored. There were no screens or methods of electronic memory like we have today. Each card could handle 80 characters. Since space was at a premium, dates were reduced to six characters: MMDDYY. The next millennium was far away in people's imaginations and the limits of two digits to express the year weren't considered. Punch cards evolved to binary programs recorded onto magnetic tape, but the problem was still not addressed. Dates were essential but bit storage was expensive. Although some systems anticipated the need for the year to be represented in four digits, different results were anticipated when the year 99 rolled over. Depending upon the system, the next year could appear as either 00 or 0100, or it could simply trigger an alarm and shut down. Utilities, communications, railroad scheduling and other services had to coordinate their programming rules. The system had grown too fast and there was fear that chaos would reign when the clock ticked past midnight on December 31, 1999, and different computers interpreted the

new day differently.

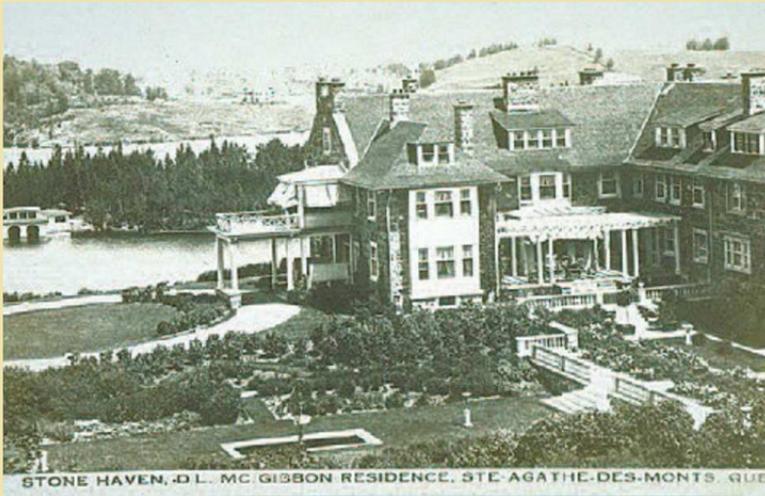
Happily, people believed the scientists and prophets who anticipated these problems. Right across the world, computer clocks were standardized, and patches were put in place. When the date rolled over, there were only minor problems. Alarms sounded in isolated nuclear plants, some email programs began automatically deleting newer messages because it interpreted them as being a hundred years old, and the US Naval Observatory official time posted the date as January 1, 19100. The worst problems were avoided but that did not stop the cynics. People claimed that the Y2K bug had been a "false alarm." Perhaps we can date the current rise of cynicism and doubt of science to this crisis, but it was society's belief that there was a crisis that enabled it to be averted.

We received an email from your dad, then a computer science student. The CBC had published the letter he had written complaining of the cynicism of people criticizing the scientists who saved us from the crisis. Of course, it was signed "Jonah Graham," with his first name recalling the story of the successful prophet for whom he was named. Like the prophet who saw the results of doubting his god, the young science student saw the dangers of doubting science.

Sources consulted for this book include Lucy Griffith Paré, The Seeds, The Life Story of a Matriarch; Michael Bliss, How Smallpox Devastated Montreal; Frank Ryan, Tuberculosis: The Greatest Story Never Told; a long number of other sources including online ones. We can discuss it all when you wish. -Grandpa

"Canada, so far as Montreal is concerned has two wars on her hands, one against the rebels in the Northwest and the other against the filth of her streets; and, of the two, the latter is, by far, the most dreaded."

The Montreal Gazette, 1885



The private home of the benefactor who built a tuberculosis hospital in Ste. Agathe. Note how far it is above the "miasma that forms in the lowlands and carries all disease."