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THE LIBRARY AND ITS PLACE IN CULTURAL MEMORY:
REFLECTIONS ON THE GRANDE BIBLIOTHÈQUE DU QUÉBEC
AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT LIBRARIES IN THE
CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

The Grande Bibliothèque du Québec (GBQ), the merger of the National Library of Québec with the Central Municipal Library of Montréal in a ninety-million dollar construction project which opened in the spring of 2005, serves as the point of departure and as a model and metaphor for reflection on the significance of libraries in the cultural life of a society and in the construction of social identity. The province of Québec is unique, not only because it is the sole province in Canada where the citizens are a French language majority, but also because it is the only province to have established its own national library. The Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and other significant libraries around the world collect and preserve memory in ways that create a context for cultural recall. Government and religious leaders have, for a long time, recognized the potential that libraries have in influencing popular thought and ideas of citizens. In societies where democratization of information is fostered, libraries are promoted as a source of pride and cultural achievement in buildings that are constructed as architectural monuments. In war-torn regions or in areas under authoritarian control, library materials are censured and cultural epochs are erased or destroyed. The heated debates that took place at the turn of the late 19th and early 20th century over the creation of a public or municipal library in Montréal and in the struggle between religious and secular forces over control and direction of public reading characterize a lengthy discourse that parallels the development of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and of public libraries in Québec. The various stages of evolution and current metamorphosis of the Bibliothèque nationale / Grande Bibliothèque can be viewed as a reflection of the evolution and metamorphosis of society and cultural memory in Québec throughout the nineteenth century to the present.
Subject Headings

Grande bibliothèque du Québec.
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.
Bibliothèque de la ville de Montréal. Bibliothèque centrale.
Memory (Philosophy)
Libraries and society--History.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mae and Bob MacLennan, loving parents, compassionate, giving people, my mentors and best friends.

In memory of mother, Domenica Mary Pintabona MacLennan (May 12, 1913-March 18, 2005), who gave me my first bilingual dictionary and instilled in me a love of language. Her encouragement and unconditional support of all of my educational endeavors guided me to the path I am on, and to the realization that life is a continuous learning experience. Cara mamma, grazie di tutto. Ti amerò sempre.

In honor of my father, Robert MacLennan, for his advice, wisdom, mechanical ingenuity, and quiet ability to go with the flow, “get the job done and get it done right.” I’m especially grateful to him for bringing me into a family with a far-ranging vision of hope that is reflected in his lifestyle and in the motto of our clan: Dum spiro spero / While I breathe I hope / Tant que je respire, j’espère.
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1. Qu’est-ce qu’une bibliothèque? / What is a library?

“On a toujours l’impression qu’une bibliothèque est une sorte d’autobiographie dans laquelle on se lit et les autres peuvent nous lire. Les livres qu’on accumule au long des années sont comme les mots d’un vocabulaire qu’on utilise; la bibliothèque représente une sorte de syntaxe pour ce vocabulaire et dans notre mémoire nous construisons une bibliothèque idéale, parfaite. Elle est parfaite parce qu’elle ne contient que ce dont nous voulons nous souvenir. C’est-à-dire un livre où le livre a eu dans nos esprits un certain poids—pas de tomes, pas de volumes, mais quelques phrases, quelques passages, ou même quelques mots des fois et ça suffit.”

[One often has the impression that the library is a sort of autobiography in which we can read ourselves and others can read us. The books that we accumulate throughout the years are like the words of a vocabulary that we use; the library represents a kind of syntax for this vocabulary and, in our memory, we construct an ideal and perfect library – perfect because this library contains only that which we wish to remember. That is to say, a book, where the book has had, in our minds, a certain force – not of tomes, not of volumes, but of a few sentences, a few passages or even just a few words sometimes, and this is enough.]

-- Alberto Manguel, responding to the question, “What is a library?”
What role have libraries played in the history, development, preservation and transmission of cultural memory and social identity in Québec, a relatively small enclave of French-speaking inhabitants in a predominantly English-speaking North American continent? One way to approach this question is to examine memory in relation to the definition of culture and the ways in which libraries have developed as institutions with cultural missions that communicate memory. After establishing a context for libraries as agents of culture and of memory in contemporary democratic societies, we will examine the fabric of Québec’s cultural identity, particularly in relation to the development of libraries, and also in relation to religious and secular debates taking place in late 19th and early 20th Québec, just as the “Public Library Movement” was taking place in North America. The advent of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BNQ), or the National Library of Québec, will be a primary focus of reflection. Its history, evolution, and current metamorphosis into an ambitious new 90.6 million dollar construction project known as the “Grande Bibliothèque du Québec” (GBQ)--the National Library’s merger with the Bibliothèque centrale or central municipal library of Montréal--can be viewed in parallel to the history, evolution and metamorphosis of the people of Québec’s social identity and cultural memory. In concluding, we consider ramifications of the present day “information explosion” and some of the issues that libraries face in “constructing a global time capsule”² to ensure that society’s cultural memory is preserved in accessible form for generations to come. Examples will be drawn from the BNQ/GBQ mandate from the provincial government to the people of Québec, as well as other notable sources concerning libraries and cultural memory.
2. **What is “Cultural Memory?”**

Marcel Lajeunesse muses that “it is easier to talk about culture than to explain the concept.”\(^3\) One could also say the same thing about memory. Nonetheless, much has been written on these two concepts. By perusing standard dictionaries in English and in French, meanings for these two words can be juxtaposed to derive a unified concept relative to both French and English language sensibilities.

Americans define “culture” as the “totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.”\(^4\) The French define “culture” as the “développement de certaines facultés de l'esprit par des exercices intellectuels appropriés. Par ext. Ensemble des connaissances acquises qui permettent de développer le sens critique, le goût, le jugement.”\(^5\) Lajeunesse, after musing on several texts dedicated to popular culture, offers a summary definition: “Culture est pensée et action, c’est-à-dire vision du monde et comportements collectifs.”\(^6\) [Culture is thought and action, that is, vision of the world and collective behavior.]

Americans define “memory” as “the mental faculty of retaining and recalling past experience; the ability to remember [...]” Synonyms [include] *memory, remembrance, recollection, reminiscence, retrospect*. *Memory* overlaps each of these terms without having all of their specific senses [...]\(^7\) The French define “memory” or “la mémoire” as “la faculté de conserver et de rappeler des états de conscience passés et ce qui s'y trouve...
associé; l'esprit, en tant qu'il garde le souvenir du passé.” “La mémoire” is sometimes translated into English as “history.”

If we take the adjective “cultural” (that which relates to “culture”) and place it next to “memory” we arrive at the concept of “cultural memory” and a working definition for the purposes of this paper. “Cultural memory” is the act of retaining / recalling / remembering the patterns, arts, beliefs, and products of human work and thought—in effect, of remembering human experience and human knowledge.
3. The Word as Memory, or Memory as the Word

_in principio erat Verbum_ (John I, 1). In the beginning was the Word. The Word--verbal expression of thought--gives witness. All that bears witness to human activity is culture--including social, economic, political, religious, philosophical and artistic events great and small. While oral and artistic traditions play important roles as witnesses and transmitters of culture, the written word or “le document écrit” in all its published forms: books, manuscripts, printed works of all kinds, drawings, maps, plans, photographs, etc. exists among the most tangible and enduring of witnesses. The written or recorded word, which takes physical form as a document, is the best and worst of witnesses since, along with whatever truths or facts one finds, are also varying interpretations and perspectives, errors, ideals, visions and utopias. Yet the document, such as it is, has both an intrinsic and potential value for explanation, interpretation, comprehension, awareness, and knowledge in all its forms. Indeed the origins of the word “document” can be traced back to early French and Latin meanings for “enseignement,” that is, teaching and instruction or imparting knowledge. The document--written, drawn, encoded--is a tool to access to all forms of expression of culture. It is memory. It is the key that gives access to ideas, imagination and knowledge.

Documentation, the tool to “recorded history, learning and knowledge” takes physical form as printed media, most notably as books--which recalls the root word for libraries. However, in recent years, libraries have expanded their missions to provide access to knowledge and learning through other forms documentation--including
evolving media such as photographs, sound recordings, films, and electronic media, including CD-ROMs, DVDs, and the Internet. The physical knowledge resources offered by libraries can be construed as our culture’s material memory.

To complement the documentary resources that they provide, libraries also offer services, programs and exhibits to promote literacy, reading, research, creative and artistic expression, and awareness of cultural heritage. They provide information resources for community members, as well as local enterprises, associations and interest groups. By collecting, preserving, and disseminating documentary resources, and providing programs and services that encourage their use, our culture assigns significance to them as objects worthy of our consideration. For example, literature and artistic materials enrich our lives by causing us to consider the possibilities of the imaginary and creative spirit. A popular novel offers recreational diversion. Local community and business resources offer practical tools for current awareness, as well as resources for gaining experience and knowledge to live, work or otherwise contribute to society. Reference and technical or scientific materials build our present-day base of knowledge from that which is known of the past, thereby encouraging social progress and innovation for the future.

The library gives place and shelter to documentary heritage and the written Word. It offers a point of entry to the sum of our civilization’s collective, recorded knowledge, the material manifestations of society’s cultural memory. Libraries are, in effect, repositories of memory and knowledge, providing access to essential tools for teaching and lifelong learning.
4. Libraries and Cultural Memory

The word “library” in English or “bibliothèque” in French is derived from ancient Latin and Greek designations for the word “book.” A “bibliothèque” is literally a repository for books. Although the specific mission of individual libraries varies according to the institution and the population served, there is a common thread in the concept of libraries as knowledge institutions. Libraries exist essentially as democratic institutions that collect, organize, disseminate and preserve information. The public library, in the broadest of library definitions, “is a community institution, primarily funded by tax revenues, where any person without regard to race, religion or economic condition should be able to obtain free access to the recorded history, learning and knowledge of [hu]mankind.”\textsuperscript{10} The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, which has been translated into 25 languages, reinforces this definition: “The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups [...] The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language, or social status [...] The public library shall in principle be free of charge. [It] is the responsibility of local and national authorities. It must be supported by specific legislation and financed by national and local governments. It has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education.”\textsuperscript{11}
National libraries are separate entities and have distinct mandates and services often defined by law. These responsibilities vary from country to country but frequently include collection building via a legal depository system; the cataloging and preservation of these materials which, in effect, represent: the national cultural heritage; acquisition of at least a representative collection of foreign publications; the provision of centralized information services to the public and to other libraries; the promotion of a national cultural policy; and leadership in national literacy programs. National libraries may also play a role in the development of cooperation and working relationships with the public, with other community and cultural organizations, and notably, with public libraries.

Although they have separate mandates, public and national libraries have a common mission as public institutions, generally supported by legislation and financed, in part or in whole, by local and national governments, that serve to collect and preserve local and national documentary heritage, promote literacy, lifelong learning, social progress and the betterment of the communities and the nations that they serve.

In Québec, as we begin to examine the evolution of the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec or the newly defined Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BNQ), it quickly becomes clear that the history of the national library is closely intertwined with that of public libraries in the province. Since its creation in 1967, the BNQ has had a clear vocation as a public institution promoting public reading and research with a national mandate to preserve the cultural documentary heritage of Québec. In the construction
project for the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec which opened in April 2005, the collections and of the national library were merged with those of the central municipal library of Montréal. The new institution has two distinct mandates: (1) the acquisition, conservation and diffusion of the national collection, and (2) the acquisition and diffusion of a lending collection for the general public. According to the mission statement:

“The mission of the [BNQ] is double. On the one hand, it collects and conserves in perpetuity, using the highest conservation standards, Québec’s published documentary heritage, as well as all Québec-related documentation published outside of Québec. On the other hand, it disseminates Québec’s documentary heritage in a...
user-friendly physical and virtual site, providing all Quebeckers with easy access, free of charge, to culture and universal knowledge. In keeping with its double mission, the BNQ also pursues the following objectives: to promote reading and research for the enrichment of universal knowledge, to promote Quebec publications, to facilitate lifelong learning, to aid in the [social and cultural] integration of newcomers, to reinforce the cooperation and exchange between libraries in acting as a catalyst with other Quebec research institutions, and to stimulate Quebec’s participation in the development of a virtual library.]

Furthermore, this double mission as a public and research institution is expressly stated in the law that defines the BNQ: “susciter la coopération entre les bibliothèques publiques et les autres réseaux de bibliothèques et agir comme bibliothèque d’appoint pour l’ensemble des bibliothèques publiques du Québec.” [stimulate cooperation between public libraries and library networks and act as the central back-up library to complement the ensemble of the public libraries of Quebec.]

Yet, this double mission, as innovative and well-defined as it is today, emerges fairly recently--focused and refined, as it is, by the construction of the Grande Bibliothèque. Prior to the founding of the BNQ in 1967, Quebec was immersed in a century-long history of debate and struggle between religious and secular forces essentially over the control and direction of public reading. Libraries were often the focal point of the debate. Public access to books and to documentary heritage--the very materials that shape culture, memory and identity--and the role that libraries should play
in making such materials freely available to the general population, were often the center-
point of the controversy.

Today, in contemporary North American Society, the publishing and book
industry flourishes and public libraries abound. In Québec alone, 94.6% of the
population has access to a public library. The freedom to read is not only a
fundamental right, but a social and economic necessity. Yet if we go back 100 years or
ago to the late 19th and early 20th century Québec, the situation was very different.
5. Turn of the Century Québec and the Public Library Movement

Montréal, at the beginning of the 20th century, was Canada’s industrial, commercial, and transportation center. Lovell’s Directory in 1914 described Montréal as the largest city in Canada, the largest city of the British colonies, the ninth city in North America with the second largest port on the American continent.  

During this time, Montréal, along with other major cities in North America, found itself at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Waves of people from the countryside and immigrant populations from different corners of the globe flocked to the cities, seeking a better quality of life and work in the industrial and manufacturing sectors that were flourishing in urban centers. This was the same period that the United States and Canada experienced the emergence of what has become known as the “Public Library Movement”—the construction of a significant number of public libraries across the nation. The proliferation of public libraries during this time played an integral role in creating focus points, particularly for the socialization process of workers and new immigrants. As industrial workers poured into North America from overseas, they were faced with staggering problems of readjustment. “Many of the nation’s public libraries were converted to staging areas for these newcomers to learn the language and the ways of their adopted land.” Libraries became places for new immigrants to adapt and absorb the culture of their new surroundings. There was also sentiment that the democratization of access to knowledge and information provided by libraries was a way to improve the
quality of life for the workers, as well as to educate them for being integrated, productive members of society.

The proliferation of public libraries at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century came about in no small measure because of the efforts of Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919). From 1881 until the time of his death, this Scottish immigrant, who became a wealthy steel magnate and philanthropist, gave millions of dollars in “challenge grants” to aid the construction of public libraries. Carnegie offered to pay for the construction of a public library building for any municipality that would assume responsibility for ongoing annual funding for its operation. By the time he died, his philanthropy had produced some twenty-five hundred new public libraries around the world, including 125 in Canada and over 1,600 in the United States.21

Carnegie’s personal history as it relates to his later philanthropic endeavors toward libraries and other cultural institutions is a remarkable attestation to the ways in which free access to information allows us to imbibe, inquire and acquire from a pool of documented human memory in ways that can add to our own internal knowledge and memory and profoundly (re)shape our perspectives, our comportment, the ways in which we think, live and act.

Carnegie came from Scotland to the United States in 1848 as the son of poor immigrants. Shortly after arriving in America, he began working as a bobbin boy in a cotton mill in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, for $1.20 per week. During this time, Colonel James Anderson, a leading Allegheny citizen, opened his private library of four hundred books to the working boys of the town for their use. Every Saturday afternoon Carnegie
visited Colonel Anderson’s library and borrowed a new book from the collection. Carnegie later wrote, “It was when revelling in the treasure which he opened to us that I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive [similar] opportunities.”

Carnegie did not have a formal education. Yet the memory of his youth, the recollections of his humble origins and of his fortune in finding books as a means of self-education, self-improvement, and self-transformation were what compelled him to establish libraries in the hope of making a difference in the lives of others, of helping others to help themselves. Many of his original buildings are still in operation, providing an integral tool to the past, present and future memory of the communities that they serve.

Yet, as the Public Library Movement flourished in late 19th and early 20th century English-speaking regions of the United States and Canada, French-speaking religious and conservative leaders in Québec hesitated to join the ranks. Several prominent Québec scholars, historians, and librarians chronicle a series of heated debates that took place, primarily in the popular press of Québec newspapers at the turn of the late 19th and early 20th century. Much of the debate took place between religious and secular forces over the creation of a free public library in Montréal. This proved to be a struggle over public access to reading, censorship, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum (often referred to simply as “the Index”) of works prohibited by the Catholic Church, and what constituted morality or “de bonnes mœurs.” This was essentially a struggle over the control of ideas. As Kenneth Landry writes, “Au Québec, où l’Église catholique s’est donné
comme mission de guider la société civile, le défi des autorités religieuses consiste à empêcher la prolifération d’institutions sur lesquelles le clergé n’a aucun contrôle. À ses yeux, l’organisation et la direction des bibliothèques ne doivent pas être confiées à des administrateurs laïques, comme c’est le cas en Ontario. Pour cette raison, l’Église prône l’encadrement paroissial." 25 [In Québec, where the Catholic Church assumed a mission of guiding the citizenry, the challenge of religious authorities was to impede the proliferation of institutions on which the clergy had no control. In their eyes, the organization and direction of libraries should not be entrusted to secular administrators, as was the case in Ontario. For this reason, the Church insisted on [libraries in] a parochial framework.]

Indeed, as Marcel Lajeunesse points out, between 1840 and 1960 there existed in Québec an important network of parish libraries, known as “les bibliothèques paroissiales,” that were linked to the Québec clergy and that constituted but one of the many church-related social and cultural structures that framed that day-to-day life of French Canadians for over a century. Lajeunesse and others have pointed out that parish libraries were created as a reaction by the Church to popular demand for free public libraries. 26 It is interesting to further note that the concept of parish libraries entered into Québec in 1844 when the Sulpicians launched in Montréal their Oeuvre des bons livres--essentially the début of the parish library and the precursor to the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. During the same year, the Institut canadien de Montréal, one of the first French Canadian literary and cultural associations that defended basic principles of liberal thought and democracy, established a library which, over the course of the next several
years, developed a substantial collection of over 10,000 volumes and included many titles that were listed in the Index. The Institut canadien ultimately drew the wrath of the Church and was condemned by Montréal bishop, Monseigneur Ignace Bourget. It was forced to close in 1880.

These small parish libraries were administered by volunteers and controlled by the parish priest. They often published a catalog and included a general description of the library’s goals and purpose. For example, in one such catalog, the description is as follows:

“[La bibliothèque] doit être, à la fois, une œuvre de préservation morale, une œuvre d’édification intellectuelle et une œuvre d’honnêtes récréations [...] En d’autres termes, son but, c’est de promouvoir le goût des saines lectures ; de combattre l’impiété, en opposant aux livres dangereux des livres conformes en tous points aux dogmes de la religion ; de conserver les bonnes moeurs, en opposant aux livres corrupteurs des livres d’une irréprochable moralité ; de faciliter l’instruction, en ménageant aux familles et aux individus des lectures variées, agréables et solides.”

[[The library] must be, at once, a place of moral preservation, intellectual edification and honest recreations [...] in other words, its goal is to promote a taste for healthy reading; to combat profanity by opposing dangerous books in favor of books that conform in all matters to religious doctrine; to conserve good morals, in opposing books that corrupt in favor of books of an impeccable morality; to facilitate]
instruction, by making available to families and individuals readings that are varied, pleasant and solid.]

Where did this concern for morality in public reading come from? Dagenais speculates that religious and government officials, who maintained close ties with each other, feared to put works that were judged to be frivolous or of a critical nature at the disposition of the people out of a concern that these works were subversive and contrary to the established order. She cites an excerpt from the debate that appeared on March 8, 1907 in _La Presse_: “Il s’agit [...] de protéger l’âme de nos enfants et de veiller à la conservation de notre foi nationale et de nos bonnes mœurs.”

[It’s a question of protecting the souls of our children and guarding the conservation of our national faith and morality.] She also points out that the principles of public libraries as institutions that are open to all citizens--regardless of their beliefs, their ethnicity, and their social or professional origins--threatened to overturn the established social order, with its ancient system of hierarchies and divisions between different classes and categories of people: “Bien des éléments de la société montréalaise s’opposent à l’érection d’une bibliothèque publique [...] La brèche ainsi créée risqué de compromettre les anciens divisions et hiérarchies en favorisant l’émergence d’institutions et de pratiques d’un nouveau genre, c’est-à-dire ouvertes à tous indépendamment de leurs croyances, de leurs origines sociales et professionnelles et de leur ethnie.”

[There were many elements of Montreal society opposed the construction of a public library [...] The breach thus created risked compromising the former divisions and hierarchies in encouraging the emergence of]
institutions and of practices of a new kind, that is to say open to all independent of their beliefs, of their social and professional origins and of their ethnicity.]

Indeed, the debate over a public library in Montréal turned vicious when the idea to put a public library in place was officially ratified by the adoption of a municipal law in 1902. The discussion over funding for a public library was particularly vitriolic. In 1901, prior to the adoption of the law, the mayor of Montréal, Raymond Préfontaine, had solicited Carnegie’s help to construct a municipal library. The request was followed in 1902 by a Carnegie challenge grant offer of $150,000 for construction, provided that the city agree to invest $15,000 per year to support the project and, notably, to develop its collections. Although the project had support from the liberal constituents, it was vilified by the Archbishop of Montréal, Monseigneur Paul Bruchési, and others who shared an ultramontane perspective: “On peut donc prédire [...] que les contribuables de Montréal auront à payer 15 000 $ par année pour entretenir au milieu d’eux un foyer d’infection mille, cent mille fois, infiniment plus redoutable que la petite vérole la plus maligne.”

[One can predict that the taxpayers of Montréal will have to pay $15,000 a year to support an infected establishment one thousand, five thousand times infinitely more dangerous than the most malevolent smallpox virus.] Dagenais, points out that Mgr. Bruchési feared raising the specter of “la perversion intellectuelle et morale.”

Clearly the Church had a vested interest in the outcome of the debate surrounding the construction of a municipal library and wished to maintain control over what the public could and could not read. Essentially, the ensuing debate was fought around the matter of the content of library materials—that is, the content of the books.
6. Collection Development at the Heart of the Matter: Good Books, Bad Books

Un bon jour le frère Léon décida de nous faire une longue diatribe au sujet des livres dans l’Index. […] “Tout Victor Hugo, m’entendez-vous bien, tout Victor Hugo est à l’Index! C’était un écrivain aux moeurs dissolues qui se prétendait près de Dieu mais qui pratiquait plus la révolution que la religion! N’approchez pas de ses livres, contentez-vous du court extrait des Travailleurs de la mer qu’on vous demande d’analyser dans vos cours de français. Ne lisez pas sa poésie! Ne lisez pas ses romans! Ce sont des œuvres pernicieuses.”

-- Michel Tremblay, Un ange cornu avec des ailes de tôle

[One day, Brother Léon decided to give us a long diatribe on the topic of books in the Index […] “All of Victor Hugo, do you understand? All of Victor Hugo is in the Index! He was a writer of dissolute morals with pretensions of being close to God but who practiced more the revolution than the religion! Don't go near his books, satisfy yourselves with a short extract from Travailleurs de la mer that you are asked to analyze in your French class. Don't read his poetry! Don't read his novels! His works are pernicious!”

-- Michel Tremblay, Birth of a Bookworm]
Collection development was at the heart of the matter. Most of the popular authors of the day, including many writers who have now become classics--Victor Hugo, Balzac, Dumas (father and son), Lamartine, Voltaire, Sand, Zola--were prohibited by Rome in the Index Librorum Prohibitorum [the Index of Prohibited Books] and thus by religious authorities in Montréal who shared the ultramontane perspective of the Church. One of the central areas of tension around the construction of a municipal library revolved around what types of books the library would contain and the matter of opposition to “mauvais livres” or bad or dangerous books. The Church was adamant about the need for censorship to assure that only “des bons livres,” that is, “good books,” or books “d’une irréprochable moralité”--books that upheld the moral values of the Church--should be made available. Most literary works, particularly novels, were excluded from the category of “bons livres” since they were prohibited by the Index. The idea of a library which gave unlimited access to novels--imaginative fictional works--was considered dangerous.

This perspective is summarized by Aegidius Fauteux, a young journalist who would later become the Director of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, when he wrote, under a pseudonym, in December 1901 to the newspaper, La Patrie, an eloquent plea for a public library in Montréal: “Sans doute, il y a chez nous des bibliothèques très dignes de remarque et même considérables, comme celle du Séminaire, par exemple, celles du Cabinet de Lecture, de l’Institut Fraser, et de l’Université McGill. Mais ou bien elles sont la propriété d’un institution et ne sont pas accessibles à tous, ou bien elles sont d’un genre spécial et ne répondent pas encore à tous les besoins.”

[Without a doubt, there
are [in Montréal] some very worthy--and even considerable libraries--that are worth
taking note of, such as [...] the Cabinet de Lecture, the Fraser Institute, and the McGill
University Library. Yet they belong to institutions and are not accessible to all, or they
are of a special kind and don't yet respond to all needs.] Yet, in the same article, he
cautions against the danger: “Elle [la bibliothèque populaire] peut être très utile, mais de
fait elle est si souvent funeste, lorsqu’elle n’est pas chrétienne, qu’on doit hésiter avant de
la donner au peuple ou la soumettre au moins au contrôle des ses pasteurs.”  

[The popular library can be very useful, but by the fact that it is so often dangerous when it is
not Christian, one must hesitate before giving it to the people or, at least, submit it to the
control of the priests or spiritual shepherds.]  

In order to avoid the inherent dangers of a “popular” public library, Fauteux
recommended a research library for the purposes of study and consultation, under the
supervision of Church authorities (“toujours sous cette haute surveillance [...] mais très
large”), but with enough flexibility to enable users to work at ease with adequate and
sufficient resources to meet their needs. Fauteux advocated above all for a public library
that would serve as an effective tool to advance the intellectual progress of French-
Canada, yet, having been raised as a student of the Sulpicians, he could not separate the
idea of a public library from an inherent belief in the need for monitoring closely its
collections, which essentially amounted to submitting it to the Church’s censorship.

The fact that the Carnegie offer was contingent on the ongoing development of
library collections essentially stirred such a controversy that, in 1904, after three years of
bitter debate, the project was officially abandoned. Nonetheless, the public debate gave
way to an important outcome: the idea of a public library had been solidified by ratification of the 1902 municipal law. There was no turning back. The municipal library of Montréal had been founded. In 1903, the City Council accepted the offer of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste to administer a modest library, the Bibliothèque technique de Montréal, which was established in the city’s center at the édifice du Monument national, rue Saint-Laurent, the headquarters of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Thus, the municipal library for the City of Montréal made its début as a scientific and technical or “industrial” library.  

Essentially the city rented in the Monument National building a one-room space for the library. The small library was used regularly and assiduously by the population and, within two years, the question again emerged of the need to construct a library with adequate space to accommodate public demand. A new debate would ensue concerning the location and pertinence of constructing a larger library, “une si grande bibliothèque” -- larger and more accommodating than the modest locale at the Monument National.
7. Concurrence of Circumstance: Two Libraries Amidst Church and State

Within the course of the next ten to fifteen years, two public libraries would emerge. The Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice was inaugurated on September 12, 1915 on the rue Saint-Denis as a public research library, privately funded by the Sulpician religious order. The Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, supported by public funds, was subsequently inaugurated on May 13, 1917 on the rue Sherbrooke East. While both libraries were free and open to all, the inauguration of the Bibliothèque municipale marks a particularly important moment in Québec history in that it was the first library oriented toward francophones that was both secular and truly public in the sense that it was financed entirely by public funds. Otherwise, the two libraries had several important elements in common. Both were located in Montréal’s downtown Latin Quarter, within a mile of each other. Both were designed as neoclassical monumental structures in the style of the École des Beaux-Arts. Indeed both construction projects were presided over by the same architect, Montréal native, Eugène Payette.
Yet the questions imposed by the Church of censorship, morality and how library collections should be developed would continue to be omnipresent for decades to come. Lajeunesse points out that in the first public conference offered by Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice on October 26, 1915, Aegidius Fauteux, conservator of the library, gave a presentation entitled, “Règlement d’une bibliothèque catholique” [Administration of a Catholic Library]. Fauteux addressed the moral responsibility of the librarian in following regulations prescribed by the Church, and particularly in using the Index to guide decisions about materials that might be problematical or dangerous. “Pourquoi trouverait-on étrange,” he wrote, “que, bibliothèque catholique, nous suivions les prescriptions de l’Église? C’est le contraire qui serait singulier. Il n’y a d’ailleurs rien de plus sage que la législation de l’Index.” [Why would anyone find it strange that, as a
Catholic library, we follow the instructions of the Church? It is the opposite that would be strange. There is, in fact, nothing wiser than the legislation of the Index.]

Fauteux documents in some detail the restrictions that were imposed in a Catholic library and the attention given to separating volumes into three distinct categories: prohibited books, dangerous books, and innocuous books:

“In toute bibliothèque catholique [...] les livres se partagent en trois catégories : 1º Les livres prohibés que ne se prêtent qu’à un nombre restreint de personnes ayant qualité pour les lire ; 2º Les livres simplement dangereux que l’on peut prêter impunément à plusieurs en tenant compte de leur âge, de leur éducation, ou de leur tempérament, mais qu’il serait imprudent de confier à un plus grand nombre d’autres moins bien armés ou moins mûris ; 3º Enfin, les livres inoffensifs qui peuvent être lus de tous ou à peu près.”  

[In all Catholic libraries [...] the books are divided into three categories: (1) Prohibited books that are lent only to a restricted number of people having the character to read them; (2) Books merely dangerous that one can lend with impunity to several people by taking into account their age, their education, or their temperament, but that it would be imprudent to trust to a great number of other people who are less equipped or less mature; (3) Finally, the inoffensive or innocuous books that can be read by all, or nearly all, people.]
Lassonde has noted that the nuances of this type of censorship were transposed in the card catalog of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, as evidenced by the letter “R” stamped in purple ink in the left hand corner of the cards for certain catalog entries. The more the number of “R,” the more the book was considered dangerous for faith and morality. For example, “R” signaled Attention (vigilance); “RR” - Réserve (restriction); “RRR” - Grande attention (dangerous or forbidden).  

Although Fauteux professed that, “Ce sont les romans qui constituent le principal danger d’une bibliothèque,” [It is the novels that constitute the principal danger of a library], he also recognized that this was the most popular form of reading among the library’s clientele. Library statistics between September 1915 and April 1916--the first six months or so of the library’s operations--indicated that the average use of fiction in the Main Reading Room was 50%, while in the Department of Circulation, the figure had reached 80%. Library users evidently had a preference for works that were considered dangerous.

Over time, Fauteux obtained special permission from Rome that the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice be exempt from the prohibitions of the Index. In his negotiations with Church authorities on this matter, he invoked the looming specter of the construction project for the municipal library: “[...] il se prépare actuellement à Montréal une bibliothèque municipale qui ne peut offrir les mêmes garanties que la nôtre.” [There are preparations underway in Montreal for a municipal library that can not offer the same guarantees that ours offers.] “C’est une liberté dont nous avons besoin plus que jamais si
nous ne voulons pas que la nouvelle bibliothèque municipale nous enlève nos lecteurs tout en offrant de moindres garanties de sécurité.” 48

[[This special dispensation] is a liberty that we need more than ever if we don't want the new municipal library to take our readers from us while offering a lesser degree of security.]

This correspondence, dated in October 1915 and February 1916, written shortly after the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice had opened (September 12, 1915), shows that the Sulpicians were keenly aware that they were in close competing circumstances with plans for the development of the municipal library and, in fact, had concerns about losing patrons to an institution that offered a means of more open access that was not regulated by Rome or the Index. Fauteux persevered and, in April 1916, received a favorable response from Rome. 49
8. Libraries, Censorship and La Grande Noirceur

The fact of the matter is that the Church exercised enormous influence on public reading. This influence permeated the social, educational and cultural fabric of Québec society and extended into the administrative activities of the municipal library—before, during, and after the foundation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. When the Bibliothèque municipale was initially founded in 1902 and the City Council went about the task of establishing a Library Commission to oversee its administration, two of the city councilors proposed that the library be subjected to a censorship committee composed of “trois censeurs dont un (nommé) par le Conseil de Ville, un sera le Principal de l’Université McGill [...] et un sera le Vice-Recteur de l’Université Laval à Montréal.”[three censors, one named by the City Council, one being the Principal of McGill University, and one being the Vice-Rector of the University Laval at Montréal.] Yet, in spite of this proposal, the city regulation stipulates simply that “la Bibliothèque Publique et Gratuite de Montréal sera administrée par une commission spéciale composée d’un maximum de neuf conseillers choisis par le Conseil municipal.”[the Free Public Library of Montréal will be administered by a special commission composed of a maximum number of nine councilors chosen by the City Council.]

Nonetheless, one of the Commission’s roles was to monitor the authorization of the acquisition of books chosen by the librarian. The Bibliothèque municipale was subject to an enormous amount of pressure to stay within the confines of its original mandate as a technical library in collecting scientific, industrial and technical materials.
Because the Church remained intransigent on matters of censorship, the Bibliothèque municipale avoided collecting literary works during its first few years of operation so that the library would not become a target for the clergy. Yet, little by little, library patrons began to inquire for literature. The chief librarian, Éva Circé-Coté, responded to their requests. She approached the Library Commission and, in November 1905, was granted authorization to purchase French literary classics.

The subtle changes in the Bibliothèque municipale’s collection did not pass unnoticed by Church authorities. In February 1907, as he learned of the library’s growing literary and historical collection, Archbishop Bruchési decided to intervene. In a letter addressed to the Library Commission, he wrote, “Je crois remplir un devoir en veillant à ce que dans une bibliothèque ouverte à tout le monde, il n’y ait pas de livres dommageables aux âmes confiées à ma garde.” [I believe that I’m filling an obligation in being vigilant that, in a library open to all, there be no books that damage the souls that I’ve been entrusted to guard.] Dagenais further notes that this letter, conserved in the archives of the Archdiocese of Montréal, is accompanied by a list of titles deemed dangerous, including works by Rousseau, Voltaire, George Sand, Balzac, Michelet, and others that treat “Mysticisme et folie” [Mysticism and madness] or “La question sexuelle exposée aux adultes cultivés [jugés] absolument rationaliste.” [The sexual question exposed to cultivated adults [deemed] completely rationalist]. The letter succeeded in invoking a need to tightly monitor the reading of the workers and the “petits gens” [commoners; literally “the little people”] that frequented the library. It also led to an
inquest into library operations which resulted in tighter controls on the library’s collections.

Just as the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice had adopted system of censorship notation in their card catalog, the Bibliothèque municipale also adopted a similar method and categorized books according to the perceived levels of risk or danger to faith and morality. The judgment rendered on individual works was duly noted and frequently appeared in the lower left-hand corner of the ex-libris in the book. For example, use of the symbol “O”--or a multiple attribution of “O”--was particularly common. The greater the number of “O” (maximum of four), the more the book was considered dangerous to faith and morality. For example, Le Passage de l’Aisne by Émile Clermont, an account of a battle during World War I, was labeled “O”. La peinture au musée de Vienne by Claude Roger-Marx was attributed “OO”.

Figure 4. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal--Mention de censure. Ex-libris, Émile Clermont, Le passage de l’Aisne (Mark “O”).

Figure 5. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal--Mention de censure. Ex-libris, Claude Roger-Marx, La peinture au musée de Vienne (Mark “OO”).
Other notations, perhaps more self-evident, that were employed include: DÉFENDU [Forbidden], À L’INDEX [listed in the Index], or “R” for books that were monitored on Reserve. Others carried special seals: “Bureau de la censure des théâtres, Propagande des bons livres,” “Bureau de la vérité,” or “Service de la Police. Bibliothèque théâtrale.” Thus, Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris was “À l’Index,” The Works of Oscar Wilde was “Déstendu.” Le Député Leveau by French Academy author, Jules Lemaître, was slapped with the seal, “Service de la Police, Bibliothèque Théâtrale, Censeur.”
According to Jean-François Chartrand, curator of an exhibition marking the centenary of the Montréal Municipal Library, this form of censorship prevailed until the 1960s.55

Indeed, the censorship was not limited just to libraries. The Church’s influence was pervasive throughout the publishing and bookselling trades, as well as the educational sector for well over a century. From the mid-nineteenth century to the events leading up to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, virtually all aspects of Québec culture and society were subject to the will of the Church. Those individuals and institutions that did not conform, suffered the consequences. Some were excommunicated—such as in the infamous “affaire Guibord” of the mid-19th century, when Joseph Guibord, a printer and loyal member of the Institut canadien de Montréal was excommunicated for his liberal views and, in the event of his death, refused a Catholic burial. The Institut canadien de Montréal, a liberal cultural and literary society for French Canadians, had developed a significant library of some 10,000 volumes—including many books that were listed in the
Index. In his condemnation of the Institut, the Archbishop of Montréal, Msg. Ignace Bourget, invoked what he called “the terrible excommunication” in decreeing that those who remained members of the Institut would be deprived of sacraments and of a Christian burial. When Joseph Guibord died in November 1869, the Church refused a Catholic burial and condemned his body to be buried in the section of the cemetery reserved for criminals and non-repentants. Guibord’s widow protested and, after five years of bitter legal battles, his remains were finally allowed to rest in the honorable part of the cemetery.

While the Guibord affair may seem extreme, the condemnation of the clergy for virtually any form of thought that contradicted the dogma of the Church continued to be manifest in Québec society until the 1960s and the advent of the Révolution tranquille.

This period of conservativism, often referred to as the “Grande Noirceur” [Great Darkness], is characterized in Gérard Bessette’s 1960 cult novel, Le Libraire, which illustrates all too clearly what happens in a small Québec town when a bookseller sells forbidden texts. “Le libraire” literally translates as “the bookseller,” however this work was translated into English under the title, “Not for Every Eye.” What was “not for every eye”? Voltaire’s Essai sur les mœurs figures as the title that causes problems for the bookseller. Not surprisingly, Voltaire was listed in the Index. Bessette would also be censored for the sentiments expressed in Le Libraire, as well as his other works, La Bagarre (1958) and Les Pédagogues (1961) which explored the theme of repressive influences of culture and tradition on the individual in the Québec society of the 1950s. Although he had obtained a doctorate in French literature in 1950 from the University of
Montréal and served as a professor in several colleges and universities, including the University of Saskatchewan, Duquesne University, the Royal Military College, and Queen’s University in Kingston, his dissident voice would impede his ability to find work in Québec. Although the Index and its prohibitions were lifted in 1966, Bessette’s writing was considered rebellious and dangerous in that he directly and indirectly challenged the status quo while exploring the role of individuals in relation to the expectations of the culture and society around them. From 1960, the same year that *Le Libraire* was published, Bessette left Québec, definitively, to teach in Kingston, Ontario—what one Québec journalist referred to as his “goulag.”

While *Le Libraire* offers a fictional account of the life of a bookseller during the Grande Noirceur, Paul Michaud in his autobiographical work, *Au temps de l’Index*, recounts the challenges and dangers in overcoming obstacles posed by the Church while working as a bookseller and publisher during the period 1949 to 1961. Michaud was a pioneer in founding the Institut littéraire du Québec on the rue de la Couronne in the city of Québec—an independent bookstore and publishing house that was among the first of its kind in the province. Michaud writes, “N’existait en ce temps-là que deux librairies à Québec, toutes deux vouées à la propagation de la culture religieuse [...] Aucune librairie profane, aucun simulacre d’éducation populaire au centre-ville, rien qui puisse combler un besoin d’émancipation.”

[In those days [the late 1940s] there existed only two bookstores in the city of Québec, both dedicated to the propagation of religious culture]
[... No bookstore that was independent from the Church, no semblance of popular education in the city center, nothing that could fill a need for emancipation.]

Starting out as a bookseller, Michaud displayed his merchandise in plain view--including books that were forbidden by the clergy. Resonating with the fictional account in Bessette’s Le Libraire, Michaud recalls a visit from the local priest:

L’abbé Pierre Gravel était allé visiter mon comptoir de livres [...] à la suite de quoi, utilisant sa chaire comme tribune, un prône en guise de paravent, il avait condamné le livre de Roger Lemelin, Au pied de la Pente douce, vouant l’oeuvre et l’auteur aux orties, ceux qui le lisaient et ceux qui le vendaient aux enfers [...] J’ai su, par la suite, que mon curé en avait profité pour mettre ses ouailles en garde contre les chats de Colette, la chaleur du nid de Magali et ces travestis que s’avéraient être George Sand et Max du Veuzit [...] Quand je reprochai au curé Gravel de mélanger les pommes et les oranges, de n’avoir pas lu les ouvrages qu’il condamnait, il me rétorqua que les titres et les auteurs lui suffisaient.”

[The abbot Pierre Gravel went to visit my book counter, after which, using his position as a religious authority he gave what amounted to a sermon condemning Roger Lemelin’s novel, Au pied de la Pente douce, condemning those who read it to the stinging nettles and those who sold it to Hell [...] I later found out that my pastor had warned his parishioners about Colette’s cats, the warmth of Magali’s nest, and the travesties that turned out to be George Sand and Max du Veuzit [...] When I reproached Father Gravel for having mixed
apples and oranges, of not having read the books that he condemned, he replied that the titles and the authors sufficed for his actions.]

Shortly after the visit from Father Gravel, the archbishop, Camille Roy, issued an order to local seminarians, under threat of sanctions, to stop frequenting the bookstore. Moreover, Michaud’s bookstore became the object of intense surveillance by the clergy who monitored the comings and goings of the clientele and, in effect, scared off business. Yet the actions of the clergy only served to reinforce Michaud’s convictions and encourage his talents both a businessman and a publisher. Though the clergy put a damper on the physical comings and goings of customers, Michaud was able to save his bookstore by transforming it into a mail-order business, essentially sending out books to subscribers who belonged to a network of reading clubs he had established. Michaud’s literary dealings led him to enter into the publishing realm, where his Institut littéraire du Québec ushered into print some of Québec’s finest authors—including Roger Lemelin, Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais and Yves Thériault. Michaud left a legacy that brought French-Canadian literature into the light of full recognition and prestige in the popular mainstream press. His memoir stands as a testament to the struggle for Québec’s intellectual freedom and emancipation from Church authorities.
9. Toward the Separation of Church and State:

The Révolution Tranquille

To what extent did the Church--its judgment on the moral character of books and its opposition to the secularization of the publishing industry and libraries--influence, impede, or even encourage collective identity and cultural memory in Québec? In looking back at the turn of the century debate over a public library, it appears evident that the Sulpicians’ announcement of their plan to construct a “public” library in 1910 was indeed a direct attempt to impede the development of a municipal library and to maintain control--not only on the types of material that people could read--but also on how they thought, and should be shaped to conform to the dogma of the Church. Yet, from a purely cultural vantage point, the development of two public libraries where there had previously been none was a great boon to the city. The front page of the March 3, 1915 issue of La Presse boasted of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice as “un palais de livres en marbre” [a book palace in marble]. City administrators were proud to have, at last, a monument worthy of the Canadian metropolis that was Montréal. In years to come, they could even boast of having constructed two cultural monuments in less than a decade.59

Nonetheless, in the development of these two libraries, a division had been created in the cultural landscape of Québec. With each step the clergy took to suppress free access to books and reading--in effect, to inhibit the free flow of thought and ideas--there came, on the one hand, submission and acquiescence, and on the other, increasingly more coherent manifestations of quiet, but steadfast resistance to the Church’s authority.
This is reflected in the work of Gérard Bessette and Paul Michaud. In recalling the Church’s monitoring of his bookstore, Michaud would write, “J’éprouvais [...] une immense solitude, un sentiment d’impuissance et, pour tout dire, une rancœur contre ceux qui de leurs théories font des pratiques abusives, des exceptions font des règles. Il y avait de quoi devenir anticlérical, comme on est d’instinct contre toute classe de la société dont on abhorre les comportements [...] Je me sentais bien à haïr.”60 [I felt [...] an immense solitude, a feeling of powerlessness--resentment against those who make abusive practices of their theories and make rules of exceptions. There was an unrelenting feeling of becoming anticlerical, as one is instinctively against any class of society whose behavior one abhors [...] It felt good to hate.] When his bookstore was nearly lost he wrote, “Les bourreaux, c’est connu, oublient plus aisément que les victimes. Je résolus donc de garder ma haine bien au chaud, d’attendre mon heure, de rester coi pour qu’ils m’oublient, de leur laisser croire qu’ils avaient gagné la guerre.”61 [The torturers, it is known, forget more easily than the victims. I resolved, therefore, to keep my hate on the back burner, waiting my turn, remaining quiet so that they’d forget me, to let them believe that they had won the war.]

Perhaps the most important element in the debate over a municipal library in Montréal was that it raised the issue of the need for separation of Church and State. The very existence of a municipal library and all that it represented (e.g., free access to information and enquiry through the written word) was living testament, a monument, so to speak, of the need for emancipation from Church repression. Yet, as the Church
continued to intervene in the cultural and educational landscape of modern, contemporary society for years to come, people such as Michaud, Bessette, and others in increasing numbers, would call the Church’s actions into question, eliciting a widespread movement toward the laicization of culture, society, and education for the French-speaking people of Québec.

This movement culminated in the 1960s with the advent of the Révolution tranquille or the Quiet Revolution, when much of the social and cultural doctrine imposed by the Church on education and cultural values was rejected in favor of a growing tide of modernization and nationalist sentiment. As for the matter of the two public libraries, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and the Bibliothèque municipale, they would continue to exist, side-by-side, for the next century. The unification of their respective roles into a single cultural institution would not be fully realized until the 21st century, with the advent of the Grande Bibliothèque.

It is interesting to note, as the francophone community of Montréal was grappling over the question of a public library, the small city of Westmount, with its predominantly English-language population of 7,000, adjoining Montréal, just to the west of the city’s center, undertook a project in 1897 to construct what would be the first truly public (in the sense of being tax-supported) library in Québec. What was the occasion? Westmount, a bastion of English-language culture and people (many with ties to the British crown) surrounded by a French-speaking milieu, decided to build a library in honor of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.

The Westmount library, inaugurated in 1899, was developed along a model similar to that of American and neighboring Ontarian public libraries, which were awash in Carnegie grants. Indeed, two significant people in the Westmount’s early history, Charles Gould and Mary Solace Saxe, had close ties to American library circles and were very much linked to the public library movement of the era.

Charles Gould, the University Librarian at McGill and the first Canadian in 1908 to be elected President of the American Library Association, served as an advisor to the
Westmount’s Library Committee during its initial planning stage. Gould, almost single-handedly, engineered the development of the Westmount’s initial collection of close to 2,000 volumes, which included British, American, Canadian, and a “sprinkling of famous authors of other ages and nationalities, including Dumas, Horace, Dante, Hugo, Cervantes, Plato, and Verne.” By all accounts, the Westmount’s collection was developed without hindrance from religious authorities concerned by the moral character of the books. Several authors were listed in the Index--yet Church authorities, markedly absent in Westmount, took no notice, nor made any move to intervene.

Mary Solace Saxe, the Chief Librarian of the Westmount from 1901 to 1931, also maintained close ties to the American library community. Born in Saint Albans, Vermont, she was educated in Montréal by private tutors then went on to study journalism at McGill and Columbia Universities before embarking on a career as a librarian. Before assuming the role of Chief Librarian at Westmount, she apprenticed at the McGill University Library and the Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts, studying under two distinguished North American librarians, Charles Gould and Charles Ammi Cutter. Once installed at Westmount, she introduced open shelving, a children’s room, a reference room and a conservatory--concepts that were relatively new and innovative for their time. Deeply involved in the professional milieu of her day, she traveled widely throughout Canada and the United States, served on the American Library Association Council from 1918 to 1923, and frequently published in the professional literature of both countries. Saxe’s involvement with other librarians undoubtedly influenced her leadership style and was a factor in the Westmount’s
innovation for implementing the latest advances in modern librarianship. Lajeunesse notes that for many observers, the Westmount served as a model image for the modern Québec library until the 1960s.63

So why did the Westmount library prosper and thrive with an unhindered collection development policy while the project for a municipal library in Montréal met with opposition and debate at virtually every step of the way? Three key reasons come to mind: (1) because it was the will of the people of Westmount to have such a library; (2) because Westmount was constituted of well-to-do citizens who had the means and the tax base to build and support a public library--i.e., it was one of the most affluent communities in all of Canada,64 and; (3) because of the absence of the Roman Catholic Church in the social, cultural, educational and religious milieu of the Westmount community.

Curious as it seems, given the proximity of Westmount to Montréal’s city center--within a three to four-mile radius of the Bibliothèque municipale and the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice--the Westmount Public Library developed without hindrance by Church authorities, evidently beyond the range of their scope and control. Indeed, Westmount was beyond their scope and control. In 1897, the year that the library was founded, the small borough of Westmount was flourishing in terms of a growing population and in the development of public institutions, such as the library, as well as a variety of schools and churches to meet the demand for services. Hanson notes, in 1897, the presence of nine churches--including Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist--and two schools, the Westmount Academy and the King’s School. Yet no Roman Catholic
churches or schools were situated in Westmount at this time. Call it coincidence or oversight, but in the absence of the Roman Catholic church in particular, there was no opposition to the public library. The Westmount Library prospered and flourished at the height of the public library movement, as did many libraries in the United States and in neighboring Ontario, which alone established 111 public libraries on Carnegie grant funds between 1890 and 1917. The difference is that Westmount, being both innovative and having its own means, did not need Carnegie funding to build or support a library. The Westmount Library was built and continues to be maintained on its own publicly-funded tax base.

The Westmount’s presence in 1899, in providing high quality library services to a segment of the English-language population of the city, stood in stark contrast to the lack of public library services in the metropolis of Montréal, and bears witness to a deep divide between the French- and English-language populations of Canada’s largest city. The separation in language, ideology and religion between the two resident cultures precluded the establishment of single public library meeting with a universal array of materials that could respond to the needs of all. Thus three public libraries within a five-mile radius were constructed within a twenty-year period, from 1897 to 1917—each with its own mission and its own public.

Over time, the Westmount Library grew and expanded to meet the changing needs of its community of users. Today the Westmount Library is part of the Montréal library network. It remains accessible to all citizens of Montréal, though its orientation is
still distinctly anglophone, as reflected in a collection that mirrors its user demographics--
approximately 80% English and 20% French language materials.
While the Westmount Library and the Bibliothèque municipale were developed as popular public libraries to serve the needs of their respective English and French language populations, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice quickly distinguished itself as a public library with a research mission tied to a university. Indeed, the library had been conceived as both a public and university library which would be open to the general public and also serve as the research library for the burgeoning Université Laval de Montréal, precursor to the University of Montréal which, in 1895, had established its campus in the Latin Quarter at the intersection of the rues Sainte-Catherine and Saint-Denis—neighboring the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.

Jean-René Lassonde notes, “Cette idée de faire une bibliothèque universitaire et publique peut paraître inusitée, mais elle permettait de contenter tout le monde; elle fut donc retenue. Et c’est ainsi qu’en février 1914, un an et demi avant l’ouverture de la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, la fusion est décidée […] D’ailleurs, déjà, dans l’Annuaire de l’Université Laval de Montréal pour l’année 1913-1914, on annonce : ‘Par un contrat intervenu entre l’Université et le Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice, au cours de la présente année, la bibliothèque va quitter le local actuel devenu trop étroit et s’installer dans les salles spacieuses […] mises à sa disposition dans l’édifice que le Séminaire fait construire sur la rue Saint-Denis […] Le contrat garde à l’Université le contrôle de ses volumes et la décharge des frais d’entretien et d’administration. Les règlements en vigueur seront ceux
The idea of creating an academic and public library was rare. Nonetheless, it was an idea that people approved of and so it was retained. Thus, in February 1914, one and half years before the opening of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, the merger was decided [...] Indeed, an announcement had already appeared in the Annuaire de l’Université Laval de Montréal for the year 1913-1914: 'By the terms of an agreement reached between the University and the Saint-Sulpice Seminary during the course of the present year, the [University] library will be leaving its present quarters, which have become too small, and will move to the spacious rooms [...] made available in the building that the Saint-Sulpice Seminary is constructing on the rue Saint-Denis [...] Under the terms of the contract, the University will keep control of its volumes and defray the costs associated with their upkeep and of administration. The regulations in force will be those of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.'”

Under the care and direction of Aegidius Fauteux, conservator from 1912 to 1931, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice grew into a significant research library and cultural center with a noteworthy collection of over 130,000 works. Fauteux undertook an ambitious collection development program to respond to the needs of the first francophone university of Montréal. He traveled to the United States and Europe in 1913 and again to Europe in 1923. The purpose of his visits was two-fold: (1) to make contacts with other libraries and research institutions and to study their organization and operations, and (2) to make contacts with booksellers, societies, government agencies, and others who would furnish documents to support the research mission of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. Fauteux visited libraries in New York, Washington, D.C., France, Belgium, England,
Germany and Austria and developed a wide-ranging collection of documents across a
diverse array of languages and subject areas--including literature, history, sociology, the
arts, philosophy, religion, and the sciences. The collection also included periodicals,
government documents and special collections which encompassed manuscripts,
photographs, portraits, engravings, maps, ex-libris, et al. The special collections
constituted significant contributions to Canadian family history and genealogy.
Particular emphasis was placed on French language and French Canadian history in
developing collections that would serve to educate and inform the general public while
also supporting the research needs of the faculty and students of the Université Laval de
Montréal.69

In 1933, the Commission of Enquiry into the Library Situation in Canada noted,
“La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice [...] with 120,000 volumes--one of the finest and best
organized collections of Canadiana in the Dominion.”70 Indeed, Fauteux worked
tirelessly to constantly innovate and improve the collections and to develop a vigorous
program of cultural activities (exhibits, lectures, programs, etc.) to create, not only a vital,
dynamic and state-of-the-art research library, but also a thriving cultural center in the
heart of the downtown university district. Fauteux laid a solid framework for what would
later become the National Library of Québec.
Figure 12. Aegidius Fauteux in his office, ca. 1923.

Figure 13. “Aegidius Fauteux, 1876-1941, Bibliothécaire, homme de lettres.” Bronze plaque by renowned Québec sculptor Alfred Laliberté.
12. Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice:
The Wings of Icarus and the Ashes of the Phoenix

As Icarus had wings to soar, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice during its initial decade had leadership and resources that led it to thrive as a vibrant cultural center with a growing collection, lectures and cultural programming, and a series of expositions. Yet, as Icarus found his downfall in the sun, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice would, toward the middle and end of the 1920s, find its wings beginning to melt in the gradual, but persistent decline of collection development and cultural activities. The Sulpicians, as sole financial supporters of the library, would be profoundly affected by the economic climate that ensued and culminated in the Depression or “la crise économique.” As their financial resources diminished, so did the collection development and cultural activities of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. In spite of the best efforts of Fauteux and of the Amis de la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice [the Friends of the Library] to rally support for the library, the Sulpicians, ridden with debt, were left with little recourse but to close the doors of the library to the public in July 1931.71 As Fauteux would later write, “Mieux vaut une fin prompte, mais honorable, qu’une déchéance lente, mais certaine.”72 [Better a quick, but honorable, ending than a slow, but certain decline.]

By the summer of 1932, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice had been closed for several months. Aegidius Fauteux resigned his post as conservator and, in June 1932, began working at the Bibliothèque municipale where he would again assume a leadership role in serving as chief librarian until 1941.73 In 1937 Fauteux was one of the original
founders, with Marie-Claire Daveluy, of the École de bibliothécaires at the University of Montréal--the first francophone library school in North America and the forerunner of the University’s present-day École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l’information (EBSI).\textsuperscript{74}

But what would become of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice? For more than a decade it languished, as though in a state of abeyance awaiting a renaissance, like the ashes of the phoenix, waiting to be reborn. After its official closure to the public in July 1931, the building and its collection were preserved with minimal staffing. In the wake of Fauteux’s resignation, Félix Leclerc, who had been assistant conservator under Fauteux, was promoted to conservator--a position that he maintained, without an assistant, from 1932 to 1935. From 1935 to 1937 the direction of the library returned to the Sulpicians, with Raoul Bonin as the conservator and Marie-Eugène Labrosse as assistant conservator. In 1933, under the direction of Leclerc, the library remained open five days a week to researchers. In 1936, under the direction of Bonin, the library received researchers three days a week by special appointment for those who had obtained special permission. Beyond this, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice continued to provide loans to other libraries until 1937.\textsuperscript{75} As of May 1937, the Sulpicians withdrew and the library closed definitively. The building, its furnishings and the collection were ceded to the government of Québec in exchange for payment of debt.

In 1939 the government, with renewed interest in opening the library, authorized an inventory under the direction of René Garneau. Garneau’s report qualified the library as “la plus importante des bibliothèques françaises de la Province après celle du
Parlement” [the most important French library in the Province after the Parlementary library] and an “important centre intellectuel.”

On March 13, 1941 the library was officially acquired by the government for $742,000, the amount of tax dollars owed by the Sulpicians to the city of Montréal. Jean-Marie Nadeau assumed the role of director in 1942 and began the work of preparing the library’s reopening. On January 16, 1944, after thirteen years of uncertainty, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice was reopened to the public under the auspices of the Department of the Secretary of the Province. Nadeau, tragically, died in a car accident shortly after the library was reopened. The two directors who succeeded him, Jean-Jacques Lefebvre (1944-1947) and Damien Jasmin (1947-1963) concerned themselves principally with the collection, updating and filling in gaps in the wake of many years of inaction. Roland Auger maintains, “Les conservateurs qui se sont succédé à cette époque ont eu le mérite de travailler sur un acquis précieux et d’en reconnaître la valeur; mais ils ont été privés des moyens qui auraient pu redonner le dynamisme des début: un budget et un effectif convenables.” [The conservators that followed after Nadeau had merit in working on a precious asset and to recognize the value of what they were working with; but they were deprived of the means that could have restored the library to its dynamic beginnings, that is, a budget and an appropriate system of support.]

In 1961, the reporting structure of the library was shifted from the Department of the Secretary to the newly created Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The Deputy Minister, Guy Frégault, would play a key role in repatriating a young and dynamic librarian, Georges Cartier, to Québec. Cartier, who had been directing library services for
UNESCO in France, was thus engaged in 1964 as Chief Conservator of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.  

While Nadeau and Jasmin were lawyers and Lefebvre was a historian and self-taught archivist, Georges Cartier, in addition to being a man of letters, was the first professional librarian to direct the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.  Cartier’s mandate, as described by Auger, evokes the legend of the mythical phoenix who renews itself from the ashes: “Georges Cartier avait pour mandat de ranimer les braises et d’orienter le destin spécifique de ce service gouvernemental.”  

Cartier would indeed ignite the ashes of the phoenix--that is, spark the transformation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice from its lethargic state of abeyance during the Grande Noirceur into a National Library riding the wave of the Révolution tranquille, the Quiet Revolution of educational and cultural reform that was spreading throughout Québec during the 1960s.

Born in the town of L’Assomption, just to the north of Montréal, on April 4, 1929, Georges Cartier studied at the Université de Montréal where he received in 1951 a degree in literature and in 1952, a baccalauréat in library science and bibliography (with first prize for excellence). He completed his doctorate in literature in 1955 and went on to study philosophy.
and aesthetics at the Collège de France. To further hone his library skills, he would also complete an internship at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.\textsuperscript{84}

Cartier’s background had prepared him well. He was known for his dynamic personality, remarkable sense of organization, and “savoir-faire.” Frégault would write, “L’homme ne manque ni d’énergie ni de savoir-faire. Dans ce temple du livre, il inaugure le culte de la personnalité.”\textsuperscript{85} [The man lacks neither energy nor ability. In the temple of the book, he inaugurated the cult of the personality.] Within the first two years of his initial appointment, Cartier succeeded in tripling both the library’s budget and the number of its employees.\textsuperscript{86} As the collections once again began to grow and multiply, so did cultural activities, such as lectures and exhibitions. The library was also renovated. The external stonework was cleaned and revitalized, the interior walls were repainted, the stained glass windows were cleaned, the oak woodwork was refinished, and the ventilation, heating, and lighting systems were brought up to date. As the Minister of Cultural Affairs proclaimed during this period, “La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice retrouve l’éclat de sa splendeur d’autrefois.”\textsuperscript{87} [La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice has recovered the spark of its original splendor.] By the middle of the 1960s, under the direction of Georges Cartier, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice was indeed the proverbial phoenix rising out of its ashes to its past, present and future state of splendor--once again a dynamic library, information, and cultural center in the heart of downtown Montréal.
13. From Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice to
Bibliothèque d’État to Bibliothèque Nationale

In October 1964, shortly after Georges Cartier was named Conservateur en chef of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, the Association canadienne des bibliothécaires de langue française (ACBLF) formed a committee to study the transformation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into a “bibliothèque provinciale” or a “bibliothèque d’état” [provincial or state library]. The work of this committee, which was presided over by Cartier, would be particularly important in charting the future direction for the library, as well as its status as a government institution. In September 1965, the committee issued a report which would form the framework for the transformation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into what would eventually become, after various transformations in appellation ... a national library.

Although the study was framed in the context of a “provincial” or “state” library (“bibliothèque provinciale” or “bibliothèque d’État), modeled perhaps along the concept of American “state libraries,” the Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs had asked Cartier to furnish a definition of a national library, which Cartier did on December 31, 1964. Indeed, the committee’s study included elements concerning the “rôle d’une bibliothèque nationale” [the role of a national library] and “aspects particulier du Québec; rapports de la ‘Bibliothèque provinciale’ avec la Bibliothèque nationale d’Ottawa” [distinct aspects of Québec; relations of the Provincial Library [of Québec] with the National Library [of Canada] in Ottawa.] Included among the committee’s recommendations were, “Que soit
créée la Bibliothèque d’État du Québec” and “que la Bibliothèque d’État du Québec, désignée comme telle, soit la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.”92 [That the State Library of Québec be created [and] that the State Library of Québec, designated as such, be the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice].

Although labeled in the context of a provincial or state library, the report clearly had implications for a research institution in a national context with a particular function to preserve French-language documentary heritage for all of Canada: “Rassembler et conserver dans sa forme originale la totalité de la production imprimée de langue française au Canada et de la production étrangère relative au Canada d’expression française ; acquérir et conserver une vaste collection de Canadiana et dans les diverses disciplines, toute documentation utile à la recherche.”93 [Collect and conserve in its original form the totality of the production of printed French language materials in Canada and of the foreign production [of printed materials] relative to French Canada; to acquire and conserve a vast collection of Canadiana in diverse disciplines, all documentation useful to research.]

The committee’s report was received favorably. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs Annual Report for 1965-1966 mentions the, “préparation d’un projet destiné à doter la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice d’un nouveau statut, et [de] la recherche d’espace supplémentaire suffisant pour permettre le développement des activités au cours des prochaines années.”94 [preparation of a project intended to grant a new status to the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and to look for supplementary space sufficient enough to permit the development of activities for the course of the coming years.]
At about the same time, a letter from Patrick Allen, secretary of the committee of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal that had been charged with presenting testimony before the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec (more commonly known as the Commission Parent) informed Cartier that, “[La Société] recommandons avec insistance que l’on crée une Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.” [The Société urgently recommends that a National Library of Quebec be created.]

Later that year, in November 1965, Pierre Laporte, Minister of Cultural Affairs, conferred the title of “Bibliothèque d’État” [State Library] to the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice in his Livre blanc or White Book on cultural policy. Laporte’s deputy minister, Guy Frégault, would note in his autobiographical memoir that there was a preference for the term “Bibliothèque nationale,” however, out of respect for Canadian federalism, jurists who were charged with drafting laws, were opposed. There is little doubt that consideration of the existence of the National Library of Canada, founded in Ottawa in 1953, was at least in part the reason why the project to transform the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into a governmental institution was initially framed in the context of a state or provincial library.

The period from 1964 to 1967 was clearly one of major transformation, marked by a phenomenal growth of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice in terms of budget, staff, collections, cultural programs and library patrons. In a memorandum addressed to the Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs dated October 6, 1965, Georges Cartier wrote, “Dès mon entrée en fonction [de conservateur] au mois de février 1964, l’un des problèmes
majeurs que j’ai rencontré [...] résidait dans le manque d’espace disponible, à la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, pour le personnel et les collections.”99 Indeed, from 1964 to 1967 the number of personnel had grown from twenty-four (24) to sixty-five (65) and the operating budget increased from $133,000 to $400,000.100 The need for new space had become imperative.

The government was responsive to the growing need and, in 1966, acquired the building that had been occupied by the Jewish Library of Montréal, thus procuring an additional 10,000 square feet in an annex which would house newspaper and periodical collections, government documents, as well as technical services operations. A reading room with a view looking out onto Mont-Royal would accommodate about sixty patrons.101 The Annexe Aegidius-Fauteux, named in honor of the first conservator of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, was inaugurated on November 14, 1966. At the opening ceremony, the new Minister of Cultural Affairs, Jean-Noël Tremblay, would announce the library’s new status, “Il nous semble nécessaire de préciser que, dans notre esprit, la Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice est d’ores et déjà, notre bibliothèque d’État.”102 [It seems necessary to emphasize that in our minds the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice is, from now on, our State Library].

Over time, as the framework for the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice’s function and vocation as a national library was already in place, the appellation of “State” became synonymous with “National.” The transformation to the title of National Library would follow shortly thereafter. On December 7, 1966, a communiqué from the Ministry announced the transformation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into the Bibliothèque
nationale du Québec. On August 12, 1967, the Québec Legislative Assembly voted unanimously the passage of law 91 thereby creating the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec under the auspices of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.
One might ask the question, “Why a national library in Québec?” After all, the National Library of Canada had already been established in 1953 in the federal capital of Ottawa. In 1967, when the law creating the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec was passed, Québec was at the height of the Révolution tranquille. This period of collective awakening that began in the 1960s, following the end of the “Grande Noirceur” and the long reign of the conservative government of Maurice Duplessis, is characterized by sweeping social, educational, and cultural reforms for French-speaking Quebecers seeking a new social vision encompassing a national identity that affirmed their language and culture while propelling them into the modern epoch. Québec secularized its schools and more than doubled its provincial budget between 1960 and 1967.

In March 1961, the Liberal government of Jean Lesage created the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Lesage affirmed that, “Le gouvernement a l'intention de faire de la province de Québec le centre de rayonnement de la culture française en Amérique. Le fait français constitue un ensemble de valeurs qui enrichissent le Canada tout entier. Nous croyons que la création d'un ministère des Affaires culturelles est une nécessité vitale, surtout au moment où la population du Québec dans son ensemble est plus que jamais éveillée à l'apport qu'elle pourra fournir à l'épanouissement de notre vie nationale.”

[The government has the intention of making the province of Québec a center for the transmission of French culture in America. The French culture constitutes a set of values that enriches all of Canada. We believe that the creation of a Ministry of Cultural Affairs...]

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is a vital necessity, especially at the moment when the collective population of Quebec has awakened to the contribution that it brings to the blossoming of our national life.]

Thus, the newly-formed Ministry unified service functions for archives, libraries, museums, the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Arts, aid and encouragement to literary, scientific and artistic endeavors, and a new department, Canada français outre-frontières [French Canada Beyond Borders].

It was not long after the creation of the new ministry when the Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs, Guy Frégault, called upon Georges Cartier and was instrumental in repatriating him from France to take direction of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice in 1964. The partnership between government and library administration was thus assured and boded well for the institution in terms of governmental and broad-based tax support, as well as in being able to use the library as an instrument to promote new-found pride in the French language and cultural heritage of Québec. Clearly, the National Library was seen as having a vital and integral role in the preservation and dissemination of French culture in Québec and in Canada, as a whole.


The year 1967 was particularly significant in the cultural landscape of Québec. Montréal hosted the Universal Exposition (Expo 67), which opened in April. The year was also significant because it marked the centenary anniversary of the Canadian federation. French President Charles de Gaulle came to visit Canada that summer. The first stop in his visit was Québec where he had, naturally, a special affinity for the
French-speaking population and wished to bolster popular morale by encouraging people to preserve and maintain their French identity. He also wished to reaffirm the historical connection between France and Canada. His initial plan was to visit Québec Province and the World Exposition and subsequently to continue on to Ottawa to meet with federal officials.

After arriving in Québec City on July 23, he set out the next day along the Chemin du Roy (Route 138) toward Montréal. He made several stops in towns and cities along the way, giving speeches and encouraging the spirit of French pride and nationalism. Much as De Gaulle is known as the liberator of France from the German occupation during World War Two, his 1967 visit to Québec sparked a kind of nationalist liberation sentiment which would have repercussions for decades to come. Indeed, he was greeted in Québec as a liberator, with signs along the route that read, “France libre!” and “Québec libre!” [Free France! Free Québec!]- drawing parallels between his liberation of France and the liberation movement that was sweeping Québec during the 1960s and the Révolution tranquille. De Gaulle responded accordingly. Some key phrases from the speeches that he made to the throngs of people that welcomed him along the trajectory of his journey from Québec City to Montréal on July 24, 1967 include:

- In Donnacona: “Un pays qui prend en mains ses destinées.” [A country that takes control of its own destiny]
- In Sainte-Anne: “Vous serez ce que vous voulez être.” [You will be what you want to be]
• In Trois-Rivières: “Le Québec devient maître de lui-même pour le bien du Canada tout entier.” [Quebec becomes its own master for the good of all of Canada.]

• In Louiseville: “La France entend contribuer aux transformations matérielles et morales du Québec.” [France intends to contribute to the material and moral transformations of Quebec.]

• In Berthier: “Vous prenez en mains vos destinées pacifiquement et par les moyens modernes.” [You take your destiny in hand peacefully and by modern means.]

• In Repentigny: “La collaboration dans les deux sens va aller en se développant.” [Two-way collaboration will develop.]

Yet the most memorable moment of the day was when de Gaulle reached Montréal and was welcomed by the mayor of the city, Jean Drapeau. On the balcony of City Hall, de Gaulle, greeted by a throng of cheering masses, and clearly building on the events of the day, gave an unscheduled speech which ended with the words, “Vive Montréal! Vive le Québec! Vive le Québec libre! Vive le Canada français et Vive la France!” [Long live Montréal! Long live Québec! Long live free Québec! Long live French Canada and long live France!]

Figure 15. Charles de Gaulle proclaims “Vive le Québec libre!” from the balcony of Montréal’s City Hall, July 24, 1967.
These words, “Vive le Québec libre!” set off a diplomatic furor with the federal government in Ottawa. Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson considered the speech as unacceptable interference in Canada’s internal affairs. On the following day, July 25, De Gaulle visited the French Pavilion at the Universal Exposition. Though scheduled to continue on to Ottawa to meet with federal officials, his speech on the preceding day had stirred such a controversy with the federal government that De Gaulle cut short his visit. He departed for France on July 26, abandoning the trip to Ottawa.¹⁰⁶

De Gaulle’s visit would have important ramifications. He inspired among the general population of Québec new pride and confidence in the French identity, language and cultural heritage particular to North America, while encouraging a movement to protect and preserve this legacy for generations to come. He reinforced Canada’s connection to France, and France’s connection to Canada--and particularly to Québec. As a result of his visit, closer relations developed between France and Québec in the domains of education, science and culture. At the federal level, the government in Ottawa would also pass legislation giving French-speakers more place in Canadian society. De Gaulle’s goal in helping the Québécois to gain recognition of their special standing within an English-speaking structure was fully achieved. Québec would, indeed take steps, as de Gaulle had encouraged, to become its own master, in a national sense. In November 1967, just a few months after De Gaulle’s visit, René Lévesque would found the Mouvement Souveraineté Association, thereby launching the Québec movement for independence.
14.2. The Bibliothèque nationale du Québec is Born

Thus it was on August 12, 1967, less than three weeks after De Gaulle’s visit, when the Québec Legislative Assembly unanimously passed Law 91 creating the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. Any remaining questions over what to call the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice (e.g., “Bibliothèque provinciale, Bibliothèque d’État”) in light of its new status as a government institution were thus put to rest. The government of Québec had acted decisively in establishing a national library.

The appellation “nationale” was significant and precedent-setting. In granting the title Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec to the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, Québec legislators, for the first time, affixed the term “national” to a Québec “State” (“État”) institution.107 Other State institutions would follow suit. In 1968, the Legislative Assembly of Québec adopted the title of Assemblée nationale du Québec. Likewise, in 1970, the Provincial Archives of the Province of Québec became the Archives nationales du Québec.

In the same nationalist spirit of the period, Noëlla Desjardins would write in Montréal’s daily, La Presse, “La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice est morte! Vive la Bibliothèque Nationale!”108 [The Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice is dead! Long live the National Library!] Jean-Noël Tremblay, who in June 1966, succeeded Pierre Laporte as Minister of Cultural Affairs and piloted, with Georges Cartier, the establishment of the BNQ, declared in an interview, “Si les bibliothèques nationales constituent, à travers le monde, les voûtes les plus sûres de l’identité de chaque peuple, si elles sont le plus fidèle
reflet de leur vie quotidienne et de leur cheminement culturel; si elles deviennent rapidement les plus grands centres de recherches où se prépare l’action du peuple; si elles sont le ferment de sa pensée; il faut, il est même urgent qu’à son tour, le Québec se dote d’un tel moyen d’action.”

[If national libraries around the world constitute the surest archway to the identity the people, if they are the most faithful reflection of their daily life and their cultural progress; if they are rapidly becoming the greatest research centers where the actions of the people are developed; if they are the ferment of thought; it is necessary, even urgent that Québec endow itself with such means of action.] Tremblay and his Ministry recognized the role of the library as a research and cultural center, not only inspiring the thought and actions of the people, but also promoting the development and advancement of society. The urgency in his tone may well be attributed to the fact that, until the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec was established, no other institution in Québec or in all of North America existed to ensure the ongoing preservation of French-Canadian documentary heritage on this continent.

In 1987, twenty years after the founding of the BNQ, the Meech Lake Accord introduced constitutional reforms to recognize Québec’s status as a distinct society. Philippe Sauvageau explains the distinct character of Québec society in relation to its national library: “Parce qu’il forme une société distincte dans l’ensemble confédératif du Canada canadien, et en raison de son caractère particulier qui repose sur une identité culturelle et sur la langue française, le Québec est la seule province qui assume le maintien d’une bibliothèque nationale. Celle-ci s’avère un instrument essentiel à l’épanouissement de cette identité culturelle.”

[Because Québec forms a distinct
society distinct in the Canadian confederation, and by reason of its individual character
which centers on a cultural identity and on the French language, Québec is the only
Canadian province that maintains a national library. The national library, as it turns out,
is an element essential for the affirmation of this cultural identity.]

14.3. Demographical Influences

Indeed, when one looks at the demographic situation of Québec and of the French
language in North America, it is not difficult to understand that the Bibliothèque
nationale du Québec emerged because of Québec citizens’ concerns for preserving and
transmitting its distinct French language heritage, particularly in the face of being a small
minority culture in a large, predominantly English-speaking North American continent.

The province of Québec is the sole province in Canada where the citizens are a
French language majority (83% of the population). Even though French is one of the two
official languages of Canada and is the official language of Québec,¹¹¹ French speakers
across Canada (6.7 million) constitute only about 22% of the overall Canadian population
(31.6 million).¹¹² By contrast to the rest of Canada, native French speakers in Québec
comprise approximately 83% of the population (approximately 5.7 million of Québec’s
7.04 million inhabitants)¹¹³ and approximately 85% of the overall French speaking
population of Canada (5.7 million inhabitants in Québec out of 6.7 million French
speaking inhabitants in Canada).

Guy Rocher eloquently explains the Québec sentiment of fragile singularity:
Le premier est un fait géographique inéluctable : c'est **le fait nord-américain**. Ayant eu d'abord ses origines en Europe, ayant aussi gardé des liens nombreux avec les pays européens, la vie culturelle québécoise n'appartient pas à l'Europe. Si elle en est un rejeton, elle a grandi en ce qui fut d'abord une terre étrangère, l'Amérique du Nord, qui est maintenant son lieu et sa patrie [...] Ce premier axe de la culture québécoise en évoque immédiatement un deuxième : **le fait minoritaire**. Au nord du Rio Grande, le Québec ne compte que pour 2,5 % de l'ensemble de la population qui habite le territoire des États-Unis et du Canada. Pour le francophone québécois en particulier, ce fait, démographique celui-là, est particulièrement évocateur de la singularité qu'il y a de parler français et d'avoir une tradition d'origine française en Amérique du Nord. Ce n'est qu'au Québec que se trouve sur ce continent un regroupement de quelque 5 millions de francophones. Le Québec se perçoit donc inévitablement comme le point d'ancrage, le symbole de la francophonie nord-américaine. Sans l'existence du Québec, la francophonie n'aurait ni visibilité ni avenir significatif sur ce continent. C'est dire que la francophonie québécoise est profondément marquée par ce fait brutal d'être un ilôt dans une vaste mer de culture étrangère. Il n'est pas de francophone québécois qui n'ait le sentiment d'appartenir à une minorité. Cette conscience habite le Québécois--et plus encore le Canadien--d'expression française depuis plus de 200 ans, elle a conditionné et conditionne toujours ses comportements, ses attitudes, ses réflexes, ses craintes, ses aspirations. La destinée de cette petite francophonie est forcément marquée au coin de la fragilité,
de la précarité, et conséquemment de l’incertitude devant l’avenir. Être minoritaire--pour qui que ce soit--entraîne toujours une inquiétude latente, sinon explicite, quant à sa survivance et à son devenir collectif, le sentiment de ce que Proust appelle “la permanence du danger.”¹¹⁴

[Foremost is the unavoidably geographical fact: **being North American.**]

Having, first of all its origins in Europe, having also maintained numerous links with European countries, the cultural life of Québec does not belong to Europe. If Québec culture is the offspring of European culture, it has grown up in a foreign land, North America, which is now its place, its homeland [...] This first [North American] premise of Québec culture immediately evokes a second: that of **being a minority.** North of the Rio Grande, Québec makes up but 2.5% of the total population that inhabits the United States and Canada. For the French speakers of Québec in particular, this demographic is particularly evocative of the singularity that exists in speaking French and in having origins steeped in French tradition in North America. Québec is the sole placed on the North American continent where one finds a society of some 5 million French language speakers. Québec sees itself thus as an anchor and as a symbol of North American French language and culture. Without the existence of Québec, this culture would have neither visibility nor a significant future in North America. French language and culture in Québec is profoundly marked by the stark reality of being a small island in a vast ocean of foreign culture. To be a French speaking native of Québec is to
have the sentiment of belonging to a minority. This sentiment has pervaded the Quebec consciousness--and, indeed, the Canadian consciousness--of French-language origin for more than 200 years [since the British conquest]. It has conditioned and continues to condition behavior, attitudes, reflexes, fears, and aspirations. The destiny of this small community of French language and culture is inevitably marked by fragility, by precariousness, and consequently by the uncertainty of the future. To be a minority entails a latent, if not explicit anxiety regarding one’s survival and one’s collective evolution, the sentiment of what Proust calls “the permanence of danger”.

The province of Québec is thus--both literally and figuratively--the center of French language and culture in Canada and in North America. Given the demographic landscape, it is therefore logical to assume that, without a national library in Québec, the care and preservation of its unique, minority French language documentary heritage would remain beyond the scope of the province and thus in question. This sense of danger, the sentiment of being an endangered culture has given added impetus to the need for a national library within Québec.

14.4. International Context

While Québec is the sole Canadian province to have established its own national library, other nations or cultural groups within nations around the world--including individual countries and/or regions within countries--have established national libraries.
These institutions play a significant role in the affirmation and preservation of cultural identity and language. Countries such as Scotland and Wales, regions such as Catalonia, and the national libraries in Italy (Rome and Florence) offer examples of national libraries that exist with distinct mandates in cultural contexts similar to that of Québec in the context of Canada, or North America.
One distinguishing element of national libraries is their mission of collecting and preserving the documentary heritage of the state or the nation to which they belong. They accomplish this mainly through the implementation of legal deposit (or “dépôt légal”) programs which require by law that publishers deposit in the national library one or more copies of materials published within the national jurisdiction. The system of legal deposit thus forms the core of a national collection while ensuring the integrity of the original work (by registering copyright) and access for current and future generations of citizens.

On April 12, 1967, the Québec Legislative Assembly passed law 91, transforming the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BNQ). The law entered into effect on January 1, 1968 with the establishment of a legal deposit system.

The BNQ’s legal deposit program requires that two copies of all materials from Québec publishers be deposited: one to be conserved under archival conditions as part of Québec’s national heritage collection (“la collection patrimoniale”), and the other to be made available for public use. Implementation of the legal deposit program enabled the BNQ to formalize its two-fold mission of developing and conserving a national research collection while fulfilling a public service function in making the national collection widely accessible to the general public.
The principles of legal deposit have been traced as far back as 16th century France, when François 1er, who was known for encouraging literature and the arts, issued in 1537 the *Ordonnance de Montpellier*, which promoted “la nourriture des bonnes lettres” [the nurturance of literary works] and provided a means of ensuring that these works deposited would be preserved and made available for future use. According to the *Ordonnance*, “Nous avons délibéré de faire retirer, mettre et assembler en notre librairie toutes les œuvres dignes d’être vues qui ont été ou qui seront faites, compilées, amplifiées, corrigées et amendées de notre tems pour avoir recours aux dits livres, sit de fortune ils étoient cy après perdus de la mémoire des hommes, ou aucunement immués, ou variés de leur vraye et première publication.”\(^{115}\) The *Ordonnance* essentially aimed to collect all important works “dignes d’être vues” [worthy of being seen], in order to ensure that it would always be possible to refer to the original work as “first published and not modified.”\(^{116}\)

The obligation of the original legal depository system in France made it illegal for publishers and booksellers to distribute or sell new works published in France without first having given a copy of the work to the king’s library at the château de Blois.\(^{117}\)

Historians have pointed out that, despite its official and royal character, the decree was not well respected. Yet the fact remains that the decree established the system and that it would be subsequently adopted in other countries. Great Britain’s depository system can be traced back to 1610 when Sir Thomas Bodley made an agreement with the Stationer’s Company that the library at Oxford was to receive free copies of all books printed by members of the Company. In 1662 the agreement was confirmed by law and
the deposit became a legal requirement. Legal deposit systems have been in place in Sweden since 1661, in Denmark since 1697 and in Finland since 1702. The United States adopted similar legislation in 1790. These examples confirm that the legal depository system was well established in several nations during the 18th century and even earlier. Indeed, the system has endured for nearly five centuries in France--except for a brief period during the French Revolution when it was abolished, only to be reinstated in 1793. Over the centuries it has withstood the test of time and proved to be an invaluable means of preserving and protecting national documentary heritage.

By instituting a system of legal deposit, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec was following a long line of history that parallels that of great libraries and research centers of other countries. One of the by-products of the legal deposit was the development of a national bibliography, La Bibliographie du Québec, a monthly publication listing all documents published in Québec and acquired by legal deposit or purchased. Included are documents published abroad, but related to Québec by author or subject. From 1980 to 1996 a retrospective bibliography, La Bibliographie du Québec, 1821-1967, was published, to provide access to more than 48,600 monographs published in Québec before the application of the legal deposit. In 1992, the BNQ’s legal deposit definition would be expanded to take into account a greater variety of material documentation beyond books--including original prints, posters, art reproductions, postcards, sound recordings, software, microfilm, and electronic documents. In 1994, with the advent of the Internet, the BNQ’s catalog was made available through the web
and the Library began a digitization program to make selected documents and sound recordings available via the Internet.

The legal deposit program in Québec has assured a growing national collection, including books and multi-media documents. As the catalog and collections of the Bibliothèque nationale have grown, so has their use as tools to access the diverse range and perspectives of Québec’s culture and memory.
16. Libraries and the State or the State of Libraries in the Construction and Deconstruction of Cultural and Social Memory

Government officials and other state authorities have long realized the importance of shaping popular thought and perception to form a sort of national cultural identity or pool of memory for their citizens to draw upon. This identity can then work to shape and fashion the social codes by which people live and the society that they create. Those in positions of political authority have also realized the power of the library as a tool for the flow of information and in shaping thought and ideas that form individual and social memory. Maurice Halbwachs, the French sociologist, “has argued persuasively that it is primarily through membership in religious, national, or class groups that people are able to acquire and then recall their memories at all. That is, both the reasons for memory and the forms memory take are always socially mandated, part of a socializing system whereby fellow citizens gain common history through the vicarious memory of their forbears’ experience. If part of the state’s aim, therefore, is to create a sense of shared values and ideals, then it will also be the state’s aim to create the sense of common memory, as foundation for a unified polis.” Public institutions, including libraries, as well as educational systems, along with public memorials, national days of commemoration, and shared calendars all work to create focus points around which national identity and common cultural memory are constructed.
The fact that public libraries exist as public institutions, supported by tax payers’ dollars, has meant that librarians have to work closely with government officials or public administrators to maintain support for their budgets and operating expenses. This has also meant that libraries, for better or worse, often reflect the values or ideals of the state in which they exist. In democratic societies, where the government rests largely in the hands of the people, democratization of information is encouraged. The American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights, adopted in 1948, affirms the principles of freedom of access for all citizens to library materials representing diverse points of view on current and historical issues and that “materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.”

Although library content has at times been deemed controversial and come under fire, libraries exist, in these principles, to assure the free flow of public information.

In the democratic context, public libraries have flourished and been promoted as a source of pride and cultural achievement with remarkable collections housed in architecturally distinctive buildings that reflect pride in the history, ideas, and ideals of the communities they serve. The buildings themselves can, in effect, be construed as monuments to human memory that set an ambiance of recall, both for the capacity of human knowledge and the attestation to the achievement that knowledge brings. It is as though each library, by virtue of its architectural conception and by that which is housed within, has been endowed with memory and has a story to tell about the people and place to which it belongs, and that the memory and stories that are represented by the library are reflected in the thoughts and deeds of those served by its contents.
Yet, just as our greatest libraries may assume monumental qualities in their aspirations to learning, knowledge and the memory of humankind, and as our community libraries serve as gathering points for information and cultural exchanges and activities, the opposite is true in areas under authoritarian rule, where libraries have been censored, or stocked with materials that represent only certain viewpoints. Likewise, in war-torn regions they have been ransacked and pillaged, their books burned, their shelves “cleansed” of “offending” materials from cultural epochs that conquering powers seek to suppress or erase altogether.

In this chapter we will examine the power and presence of libraries in relation to place--with place representing both the physical space as well as within the social and cultural apparatus of the state. In this sense, place has a role in constructing--or deconstructing--the cultural and collective memory of citizens to form a cohesive and unified polis around a particular set of values that drive the society.

16.1. The Democratic State: Memory through Enlightenment

The tradition of embellishing library buildings with artistic representations of civic virtues and literary, historical and cultural icons--images that evoke the library’s connection to humankind’s pursuit of knowledge, learning and enlightenment--can be evidenced in many libraries over the last one hundred years. This style was very much present in turn-of-the century construction. Some interesting parallels can be drawn between the symbolic images found in the Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and two notable American libraries, the Library of Congress
and the Boston Public Library—all of which were conceived as late 19th and early 20th century libraries, and all of which have served as flagship models for libraries in their respective geographical regions, Québec and the United States.

16.1.a. The Library of Congress

The domed, marble reading room in the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress—the national library of the United States—completed in 1897 and restored in the late 1990s for its 100th birthday, was constructed in the style of the Italian Renaissance to prove that America could compete with Europe's greatest architecture. Fifty American artists contributed elaborate murals, mosaics and sculptures to the walls and ceiling of the 75-foot-high Great Hall, whose arched transepts are devoted to science, theology and music. Stained glass representations of the seals of 48 states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) adorn the eight semicircular windows surrounding the Reading Room. Eight giant marble columns each support 10-foot-high allegorical female figures in plaster representing characteristic features of civilized life and thought: Religion, Commerce, History, Art, Philosophy, Poetry, Law and Science. The 16 bronze statues set upon the balustrades of the galleries pay homage to men whose lives symbolized the thought and activity represented by the plaster statues. Included are
Moses and St. Paul (Religion); Christopher Columbus and Robert Fulton (Commerce); Herodotus and Edward Gibbon (History); Michelangelo and Ludwig van Beethoven (Art); Plato and Francis Bacon (Philosophy); Homer and William Shakespeare (Poetry); Solon and James Kent (Law); and Isaac Newton and Joseph Henry (Science). The circle of knowledge is completed by the reader desks, as users of the Main Reading Room make their own contributions to the various fields of knowledge represented by the imagery and icons in the room.\textsuperscript{122}

16.1.b. The Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal

In Montréal, both the Bibliothèque municipale and the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice were constructed in the style of neoclassical monuments. The main entrance of the Bibliothèque municipale opens into a great marble hall where, in addition to the circulation desk, one finds a rich array of historical and cultural symbolism. Looking up from the first floor, visitors can see a mezzanine enclosed by a marble balustrade. Beneath the stained glass windows of the ceiling is a frieze where the names of great literary figures known in French-language Canada are sculpted, including: Garneau, Crémazie, Fréchette, Victor Hugo, Homère, Platon, Cicéron, and others.

The 21 stained glass windows in the ceiling represent the coat of arms of seven historical personages in the history of Québec as well as those of different French provinces and the first seven provinces of Canada.

Next to the main entrance and hall, in the general Reference Room a fresco decorates a portion of the ceiling--an allegory of music and four medallions representing
historical figures: the historian François-Xavier Garneau; the playwright, William Shakespeare; playwright and actor, Molière; and the Maréchal Joseph Joffre, the French Field Marshall who was idolized in Québec for having stemmed the tide of German aggression during World War I--and who was present as an official from the French government during the inauguration of the municipal library.

Figure 17. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, Hall, Vitraux [Stained glass ceiling].

Figure 18. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, Humanités Référence générale, Fresque d'Hector Végiard.

Figure 19. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, Comptoir du prêt, vue de la mezzanine [Circulation desk, viewed from the mezzanine].
In order to make maximum use of natural light, the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice was constructed with a multitude of windows, including a striking array of stained glass which adorns the ceiling, walls, and mezzanines of the main reading room. The stained glass ceiling in the reading room offers floral motifs and lets in generous amounts of light. Those in the periodicals wing present the coat of arms of France and those of the French port cities of Dieppe, Honfleur and Saint-Malo--from whence came the first French colonists to Canada. Those in the reference wing present the coat of arms of the Province of Québec and those of the port cities of Montréal, Québec and Trois-Rivières. The three most elaborate stained glass windows are situated in the library’s façade, just above the main entrance on rue Saint-Denis. They are three imposing allegorical figures of draped women representing the Arts, Religion and the Sciences. They light the hall and great marble stairway leading to the main reading room.
Figure 21. Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, l’édifice Saint-Sulpice, Les trois verrières [Three stained glass windows] in the central façade of the Library, representing (from left to right) the arts, religion and the sciences. The signature of the artist, Henri Perdriaud of Montréal, is found in the center window in the square to the lower right.
16.1.d. The Boston Public Library

The stained glass allegorical figures representing the Arts, Religion and the Sciences as part of the central facade of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and the frieze beneath the stained glass ceiling of the Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal where the names of great literary figures known in French-language Canada are sculpted, are reminiscent of a similar motifs that grace the main entrance to the Boston Public Library, the first publicly supported municipal library in the United States.

Figure 22. Boston Public Library, Bronze statues representing Science and Art flank the entrance.

Two seated allegorical female figures, one representing Art and one representing Science flank the entrance steps to the library. Art holds a palette and a paint brush. Science holds a sphere. Both figures are shrouded in drapery and each faces toward the entrance of the library. Each sculpture rests on a low base flanked by two granite inscription blocks on which are carved eight names of noteworthy artists (Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Valasquez, Phidias, Praxiteles, Michelangelo, Donatello) and eight names of noteworthy scientists (Pasteur, Cuvier, Helmholtz, Humboldt, Newton, Darwin, Franklin, Morse).
16.1.e. Monuments to Popular Learning or “The University of the People”

These brief descriptions highlight some of the ways in which libraries can be viewed as monuments that set the tone and ambiance for the pursuit of knowledge, yet also evoke memories from the past and incite those who enter to immerse themselves in the worlds of civilization that the library has to offer inform and enlighten and thus inspire new contributions to add to the collective pool of human knowledge and memory.

The important role that public libraries have to play as a social, cultural and educational agent for the general population or as a kind of “University of the People” has been noted throughout the years in library literature and in speeches and articles that justify and defend the need for their existence. Indeed, inscribed in a frieze on the external façade of the Boston Public Library are the words, “The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty.” As if to echo this sentiment, President Kennedy said in 1963, “Good libraries are as essential to an educated and informed people as the school system itself. The library is not only the custodian of our cultural heritage, but the key to progress and the advancement of knowledge.” The same sentiment is expressed in Québec library literature. Edmond Desrochers in 1952 wrote, “[T]oute démocratie, pour être vivante, demande des citoyens éclairés [...] La complexité et l’importance des problèmes amena l’organisation de l’enseignement postscolaire puis celui des adultes, puis du vaste mouvement contemporain de l’éducation populaire en vue de toujours mieux former chez le citoyen l’intelligence des problèmes de la société et la conscience droite de ses obligations [...] Aujourd’hui la bibliothèque publique moderne n’est plus seulement une source de
renseignement par le livre au service de tous les citoyens, mais de plus en plus elle est une source de toutes les formes d’information, même les plus populaires comme le sont les moyens audio-visuels. Elle occupe donc une place centrale dans tout le travail de l’éducation populaire. Son nouveau rôle social fait partie intégrante du rôle social de l’éducation populaire.”…[Democracy, in order to function, needs an informed citizenry [...] The complexity and seriousness of issues led to the organization of post-secondary education, then adult education, then a vast contemporary movement of popular education aiming to better alert and inform citizens about the problems of society and the moral obligation of conscience […] Today the modern public library is not only a source for information found in books, but more and more it is a source for all forms of information, including the most popular, such as audiovisual media. The library thus occupies a central place in popular education. This new social role for public libraries is an integral part in the social role of popular education.]

Over time, with the development of concrete cultural policies by the government of Québec, the public library has assumed the role of social, as well as cultural agent in the formation and orientation of the general population. In 2002, at a seminar in Québec City entitled, “Politique culturelle et bibliothèque publique,” Mayor Jean-Paul L’Allier underscored the importance of the public library in the city’s ambiance and as part of its cultural identity: “Les bibliothèques sont notre mémoire collective. Elles sont constituées d’un ensemble d’œuvres de toute nature qui reflètent à la fois notre identité culturelle et la diversité de la pensée humaine. Elles sont des espaces de convivialité, des sources de fierté, des facteurs d’enracinement et d’intégration sociale qui contribuent à
rendre nos villes plus humaines. Les bibliothèques publiques sont des ports d’attache, des lieux de rencontre, des sites de la connaissance et des outils de la promotion de la culture. Ce service de proximité est également notre garantie d’ouverture au monde, grâce aux frontières que les bibliothèques abolissent, avec l’apport des technologies de l’information et des relations qu’elles entretiennent avec leurs différents partenaires.”

Libraries are our collective memory. They constitute a collection of works of all nature that reflect both our cultural identity and the diversity of human thought [...] Public libraries are akin to a ship’s home port; they are meeting places, knowledge sites, and tools for the promotion of culture. This service of accessibility is also our guarantee of openness to the world. Libraries abolish borders by virtue of their information technologies and the relationships that they maintain with diverse partners.

Finally, to underscore the educational, social and cultural role of libraries and their contribution to human progress, Carl Sagan in Cosmos wrote, “The library connects us with the insight and knowledge, painfully extracted from Nature, of the greatest minds that ever were, with the best teachers, drawn from the entire planet and from all our history, to instruct us without tiring, and to inspire us to make our own contribution to the collective knowledge of the human species. I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries.”
16.2. The Authoritarian State: Selection and Suppression of Memory

How well do we support our libraries? In the United States and Canada, where democratic societies prevail and access to information is considered a fundamental human right, public libraries abound as a common municipal service. Recent figures indicate, for example, that in the Province of Québec and the State of Vermont approximately 95% of the respective populations have access to public library services.\textsuperscript{127} Although budgetary support varies from town to town, few would dispute the right of a community or a municipality to have a library. In this light, we may be tempted to become complacent and to take our libraries for granted. Yet, just as our greatest libraries may assume monumental qualities in their aspirations to learning, knowledge and the memory of humankind, and as our community libraries serve as gathering points for information and activities, there is another story to be told about libraries in relation to loss of social and cultural memory, particularly in areas under authoritarian rule or in war-torn regions. From the disappearance of the legendary library of Alexandria to the ransacking and pillaging of the National Library of Iraq, libraries throughout history have been lost to opposing and conquering forces seeking to suppress or, in certain cases, erase altogether the cultural and collective memory of various societies and civilizations. Recent examples from the last hundred years indicate that the phenomenon of library suppression or destruction as a tool for suppressing cultural memory is still very much present.
16.2.a. Montréal, Turn-of-the-Century

As discussed in previous sections of this work, the bitter debates in turn-of-the-century Montréal over the construction of a municipal library and the content of books reflect, in no small measure, a struggle between religious and civic authorities over the availability of uncensored public information and its ability to influence minds and shape the ideas of citizens. The Church was concerned about losing power, credibility and ability to shape popular thought and opinion in the face of a rising tide of literature that offered alternative or opposing viewpoints to Catholic doctrine. Though the Church, by virtue of its power and influence in political and civic circles, succeeded in slowing the development of libraries, the public debate in Montréal at least resulted in open discourse that gave way, over time and particularly with the Révolution tranquille, to social and educational reforms in which democracy prevailed and the library was accorded its proper place in society.

16.2.b. Berlin, 1933

Yet, in war-torn regions or in areas under authoritarian control, the effects on libraries have been particularly brutal. For example, when Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) party came to power in Germany in 1933, one of its first acts was the “synchronization of culture” under Joseph Goebbels Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. As part of the goal to bring the arts in line with Nazi goals, the government seized control of all public libraries. Books by Jewish authors were swiftly removed from library shelves. Non-fascist political writers and others that were
considered “un-German” or oppositional to state doctrine were banned. On May 10, 1933, giant Nazi bonfires consumed some 25,000 offending books to prevent German citizens from ever reading them again.\(^{128}\)

\textbf{16.2.c. Sarajevo, 1992}

The story does not end with the Nazis. In August 2003, The Chronicle of Higher Education published an International segment entitled, “Rebuilding the World’s Libraries,” which featured a series of three articles about attempts to rebuild libraries of major national and cultural significance in Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and Latvia--countries with libraries which had been profoundly affected by wars and/or, in the case of Latvia, years of communist occupation.\(^{129}\)

The destruction of the Bosnia’s national library in 1992 by Serbian nationalist forces fighting to carve out an ethnically exclusive homeland resulted in the loss of 90% of the national collection, which once contained more than 1.5 million volumes, including 4,000 rare books, 478 bound manuscripts, 100 years of Bosnian newspapers and journals and largely irreplaceable special collections documenting two centuries of the country’s cultural and political life in photographs, posters, musical scores, and various archives.\(^{130}\) Jeffrey Spurr, coordinator of a multinational effort to rebuild Bosnia’s collections, called the attack, “arguably the worst single case of deliberate book
burning in absolute terms [...] [The library] enshrined the strivings of generations [and showed, despite the arguments of the Serbian nationalists that] multi-confessional Bosnia had thrived under centuries of Ottoman rule and then decades of Austrian and Yugoslav rule, its inhabitants of whatever background able not simply to live next to, but also with each other.” For this reason, it became a target of the guns of those seeking to create an ethnically exclusive nation.


Likewise, in April 2003, the National Library and Archives in Iraq were destroyed by looters and arsonists in the wake of war. Reports indicated that the libraries were unguarded at the time of their destruction and that very little, if any, of the collections survived. The National Library and Archives in Baghdad housed all the books published in Iraq. It preserved rare old books on Baghdad and the region, important books on Arabic linguistics, and antique handwritten manuscripts from the Ottoman and Abbasid periods. The Islamic library was home to some of the world’s most priceless early Qurans and other scholarly material pertaining to the Islamic faith. The extensive damage and looting to libraries, archives, museums and other cultural monuments in Iraq elicited international public outcry, calling on coalition forces to observe the principles of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and to take immediate measures to prevent further loss.
16.2.e. Reconstruction of Libraries, Reconstituting of Cultural Memory

History has shown that Nazi propaganda chiefs, communist regime leaders, military dictators, petty warlords, intransigent religious leaders, and elected democratic officials all have something in common. They recognize the power and potential of libraries for what they are in any country—a key to the minds of its citizens. Control of library books means control of popular thought and ideas. Libraries are storehouses and gateways to all recorded thought. They are memory institutions. In the case of national libraries, they are the cultural memory of a nation. Any attack on libraries is a direct assault to the intellectual core, the memory center of any community’s culture and history.

Recent experiences in Bosnia and Iraq continue to demonstrate the historical pattern of significant libraries as targets of destruction in armed conflicts. The target is, in fact, loss—if not total obliteration—of collective and cultural memory. The demise of a national library acts as a tremendous blow to the cultural fiber of a nation. Even if earnest attempts are made at reconstruction, they will be based on recollections and interpretations or what Sigmund Freud has labeled as “observer” or present-day memories” of what once existed of the library and its collections. Such reconstruction can, at best, only produce an altered version of the original. When unique objects and artifacts of cultural memory such as rare books, photographs, archives, original manuscripts, works of art, are destroyed by catastrophic or traumatic events such as war, they are irretrievably lost and can never be wholly replaced. Without such objects to elicit and invoke memory, the culture is destined, if not to disappearance, than at least to
loss of memory, forgetfulness; a form of cultural amnesia. Thus it stands to reason that the people of Bosnia and Iraq may very well need to re-think and re-shape their cultural identity as they go about rebuilding their national libraries, just as Europe did when rebuilding its libraries after the Second World War, and just as Québec did during the Quiet Revolution when the government transformed the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice into the National Library of Québec.
17. Libraries and Literacy Shaping Memory, Shaping Society

Quand tu sauras lire, tu ne seras jamais plus tout seul.\textsuperscript{134}

[Once you know how to read, you will no longer ever be alone.]

-- Jacques Folch-Ribas, \textit{Une aurore boréale}

With the election of Jean Lesage and rise to power of the Parti Libéral du Québec in 1960 began the Révolution tranquille and a steady stream of reforms in the laicization and democratization of social and educational institutions. Among these reforms came the first Ministry of Cultural Affairs, with Georges-Émile Lapalme appointed as the first Minister of this office in 1961. Yet, in 1961 in Québec, not more than 45\% of the population were served by a public library.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs put into application a 1959 law that had created the Service des Bibliothèques Publiques and a consultative Commission des Bibliothèques Publiques. This resulted in the beginning of significant investment of funding on the part of the state for the construction of public libraries and the acquisition of collections.\textsuperscript{136}

The foundation of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec in 1967 during this period marked an noteworthy moment of self-awakening of the Québécois consciousness of the importance of preserving national identity in the face of being a small minority of French-speaking inhabitants on the predominantly English-speaking North American continent--and in having a national library to play a prominent role in this task. Yet it would take another decade for the government to recognize the more widespread need for
public libraries in municipalities throughout the province as a tool to promote literacy, the burgeoning publishing industry in Québec, and “as leverage for collective economic, social and cultural development.”

In 1979, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs issued a five year plan, to encourage municipalities to work with the provincial government to develop public libraries throughout Québec. The plan is encapsulated in the publication, *Une bibliothèque dans votre municipalité*—commonly referred to as the “Plan Vaugeois” after its sponsor, Denis Vaugeois, then Minister of Cultural Affairs. The report noted that public libraries in Québec were significantly underdeveloped, resulting in “une collectivité dépourvue” [a society lacking] in libraries: “Au 1er septembre 1979, 52 des 155 municipalités [33%] de 5000 habitants et plus sont encore dépourvues du service d’une bibliothèque publique.” [As of September 1, 1979, 52 of the 155 municipalities [33%] of 5000 inhabitants and more are still devoid of public library services.]  In comparison with neighboring Ontario, the Ministry noted that while Ontario was investing more than 108 million dollars per year in public libraries ($12.98 per capita), Québec was spending 23 million ($3.80 per capita).

Between 1960 and 1979, with steady support from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the proportion of the population having access to a public library had grown gradually from 45% to 77%—an increase of 1.7% annually. Yet the Plan Vaugeois indicated a need to “rattraper le retard que nous constatons” [compensate for the slow progress in library development] and envisioned libraries “à la fois comme un complément normal aux services publics existants et comme un moteur de la vie...
culturelle et sociale de la communauté.” [both a normal complement to existing public services and the driving force of the cultural and social life of the community.] By expanding library buildings and collections, the Ministry was also aiming to assure libraries as an appropriate point of distribution for materials published in Québec from a publishing industry that was blossoming and expanding after more than a century of religious censorship, and also to rally active interest, support and use of libraries by the general population as a means of both encouraging and enabling people to find books from Québec, coming out of Québec’s own literary and cultural heritage.

To address the situation, the Vaugeois Ministry proposed a series of hypotheses, based upon a set of qualitative norms for public libraries, to create partnerships between state and municipal government to develop a public library in municipalities where there were none, and to modernize space and collections for existing libraries, as well as to bring in professionally-trained personnel for staffing.

During the five years that the Plan Vaugeois was in effect, from 1979 to 1984, the provincial government’s contributions to the development of public libraries increased by nearly 150%. The percentage of the population having access to public libraries grew from 78% to just over 85%. This “âge d’or des bibliothèques publiques québécoises” [golden age of Québec public libraries] and collective push to develop the book industry in Québec also coincided with mandate of the sovereignist Parti Québécois, which had came into power in 1976 with the election of René Lévesque as Prime Minister.
Yet the Golden Age of public libraries under the Plan Vaugeois would be short-lived. In 1986, following the end of the application of the five year Plan and, after another round of elections and with the transfer of power from the Parti Québécois to the Parti Libéral, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, under Lise Bacon, reduced funding to public libraries by approximately 20% or four (4) million dollars. This resulted in a general public outcry, which gave rise, in 1987, to the formation of the Commission d’étude sur les bibliothèques publiques du Québec [Commission for the study of public libraries in Québec], which was chaired by Philippe Sauvageau, then Director of the Institut canadien de Québec.

In a relatively short six-month period of time, this six-member Commission worked intently to identify and analyze various scenarios for public library planning relative to the needs of the citizens of Québec. They reviewed existing professional literature, and solicited testimony from a broad constituency of interested associations, organizations, government officials, and individuals from around the province. During the course of their study, the Commission received 101 “mémoires” [written testimonies] from 51 municipalities, 20 national associations and organizations, 23 regional associations and organizations and 7 local organizations. The end result was a 359 page report, Les bibliothèques publiques, une responsabilité à partager--essentially an in-depth study on the history, development and current situation of public libraries in Québec and a resounding affirmation of the place of the public library in Québec society. The Commission’s recommendations underscored the importance of a shared responsibility between state and municipal governments for funding the development of public
libraries. At a time when library budgets had been cut with repercussions that were viewed as “catastrophic,” the first recommendation of the Commission called on the government to officially acknowledge that it has a responsibility in the development of quality public libraries as support essential to the democratic policies of equal opportunity and access to information (“que la responsabilité du gouvernement dans le développement de bibliothèques publiques de qualité soit reconnue officiellement comme soutien essentiel à ses politiques d’égalité des chances et d’accès à l’information [...]”).

One of the immediate effects of the report was that presented strong enough evidence to regain in 1988 from the Ministry of Culture the four million dollars that had been cut following the end of the five-year Vaugeois Plan. The support of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for public libraries would fluctuate at around 20 million dollars per year between 1988 and 1995 -- that is, the seven years following the report of the Commission Sauvageau. However, municipal contributions to public libraries during this same period increased significantly, by nearly 75%--from 73 million to 128 million dollars, or $12 to $18 per capita. Thus, as state contributions remained more or less stagnant, local communities began to assume a greater share in the direct responsibility for their libraries, and also, as a network developed, to share resources through regional library cooperation. Nonetheless, in many instances, and contrary to the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (“the public library shall in principal be free of charge”) municipal libraries also developed policies for passing costs on to their users, including instituting minimal charges for borrowing and access privileges, which helped them to meet operating expenses.
17.1. *Politique de la lecture et du livre:*

The Government Adopts a Policy on Reading and Books

As municipalities assumed increasing percentages of costs for local libraries, the Ministry of Culture and Communications\textsuperscript{152} under Jacques Parizeau’s Parti Québécois would cut spending to libraries by five (5) million dollars in 1995--a reduction of more than 12% since 1988\textsuperscript{153} and since the publication of the Commission Sauvageau’s report. At the same time, Ministry studies to track cultural activities among the population during the mid-1990s gave a bleak assessment of reading habits in Québec. In one study, taking the year 1994 into account, nearly 44% of people who were 15 years of age and older had admitted to never having opened a book that year.\textsuperscript{154} With considerable resources being dedicated to development of the book industry in Québec, with programs in place to aid publishers, libraries and bookstores in the creation, distribution, and promotion of Québec books, and with a relatively low rate of book consumption, the Québec government grew concerned and took steps to intervene.

Thus, in 1998, the Ministry of Culture and Communications launched a policy, the *Politique de la lecture et du livre*\textsuperscript{155} [Policy on Reading and the Book]--an ambitious wide-ranging policy that touched off efforts in 14 governmental ministries and organizations to address the 74 measures that were targeted in virtually all spheres of society that had potential influence in the development of reading and in the creation and distribution of books. Targeted areas included children (from infancy), day-care centers, schools, libraries, those involved in the creation and diffusion sectors (authors,
bookstores, media centers, et al.). The principal governmental partners of the Ministry of Culture and Communications in developing this policy included le Ministère de l’Éducation, le Ministère de la Famille et de l’Enfance, the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC), the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ), and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. The plan was ambitious in that it established reading and all spheres of the book as a dominant centerpiece of cultural development in Québec. The policy reiterates the importance of learning, of development, and of need for the capacity to read in view of the demands of “la nouvelle société du savoir”\textsuperscript{156} [the new society of knowledge]. The Politique de la lecture et du livre was envisioned as a long-term plan to instill good reading habits as a common individual and social practice, omnipresent throughout Québec society.

The Politique de la lecture et du livre came into place more than thirty-five years after the start of the Révolution tranquille and after thirty-five years of educational reforms and expansion of a network of public libraries, booksellers, and publishers. Why at a time when the Internet was coming into its own and the web, as well as other multi-media resources, such as film and television, could be tapped as important mechanisms for distribution of culture and social values, why place emphasis on the book and on reading at this particular moment in time? Certainly, the government’s recognition of the relatively high percentage of the population that confessed to never, or rarely, opening a book, pushed the development of a public policy. Yet beyond this, as Gérald Grandmont maintains, “Même si Internet est devenu une source formidable d’accès à une myriade de renseignements, on n’y trouve toujours pas des contenus structurés tels que le livre nous
en fournit. De plus, celui-ci constitue encore l’accès privilégié au patrimoine écrit, celui qui est légué depuis plusieurs millénaires jusqu’à nous jours. Le livre constitue encore une source prépondérante de transmission de savoir et de culture [...] Nous vivons dans un monde de plus en plus interdépendant. On parle désormais de mondialisation. Dans un tel monde, pour survivre et laisser sa marque, la maîtrise des savoirs est devenue un passage obligé. L’accès au livre est donc une clef stratégique pour maîtriser ces savoirs.”

[Even though the Internet has become a great source of access to a variety of information, one cannot always find structured content there, such as the book provides for us. In addition, the book still constitutes the favored means of access to written heritage such as it has been passed on to us since several millennia through today. The book constitutes a major source of transmission of knowledge and culture [...] We live in a world that is more and more interdependent. We talk of globalization. In such a world, in order to survive and leave a mark, the mastery of different fields of knowledge has become essential. Access to books is thus a strategic key to gaining knowledge.]

Indeed, the first page of the Politique de la lecture et du livre is a discussion of the social, economic and cultural stakes of a literate society: “L’écrit est partout, dans toutes circonstances de la vie et à chaque moment de notre existence. Savoir bien lire et beaucoup lire est aujourd’hui une nécessité. La lecture est au coeur du développement personnel, au coeur de la vie en société et au coeur du travail. Elle répond à des besoins divers [...] Comme pratique culturelle, la lecture est une des grandes voies du savoir et de l’imaginaire. L’écrit, en fixant les idées et les connaissances, à rendu possibles leur accumulation et leur transmission, et accéléré le développement des sociétés [...] la
réussite de l’individu, dans une très large mesure, dépend de sa capacité de lire.”158 [The written word is everywhere, in all circumstances of life and in every moment of our existence. Knowing how to read well and to read often is a necessity today. Reading is at the heart of personal development, at the heart of life in society and at the heart of work. It responds to many diverse needs [...] As a cultural practice, reading is one of the great paths to knowledge and imagination. The written word, in fixing ideas and knowledge, has made possible their accumulation and transmission, and accelerated the development of societies [...] the success of the individual, to a great extent, depends on the capability of reading.]

The policy validates reading and the “book” (in a very broad sense of the term) and fully integrates and articulates the vital role that public libraries must play, along with the education system and book industry, in the promotion of literacy, as a means of social and cultural development and of staying vital and viable in a global market and economy. It further develops strategies to incorporate reading habits from infancy and pre-schoolers into adulthood by developing cultural and community programs that focus on the book, the written word, and that celebrate the literary and documentary heritage of Québec.

Another aspect was the promotion of Québec publications as a means of both developing a national literary culture as well as to orient readers to Québec society and culture vis-à-vis the book. The policy states, “On devra [...] s’assurer de la présence et de la mise en valeur, dans les bibliothèques publiques, d’un nombre suffisant de livres et de périodiques édités au Québec afin de favoriser la diffusion de la culture et de la littérature
Québécoise auprès de la population.”159 [We should [...] guarantee the presence and emphasize the value, in public libraries, of a sufficient number of books and periodicals published in Quebec in order to encourage the dissemination of the culture and literature of Québec to the population.]

Just as early turn-of-the-century American public libraries welcomed waves of immigrant workers coming into the country to work, and played a crucial role in helping many of them adapt to and learn the language of their adopted country, the Politique de la lecture et du livre recognizes the same role that public libraries have to play in welcoming newcomers and orienting them to the language and culture of Québec: “Les bibliothèques publiques, qui sont fréquentées par une part importante de la population, ont un rôle important à jouer à cet effet [à l’égard de la diffusion de la culture et de la littérature québécoise], notamment auprès des nouveaux arrivants.”160 [Public libraries, which are used by a significant part of the population, have an important role to play in this regard [i.e., in the dissemination of Québec literature and culture], notably in relation to immigrants and newcomers.]

In keeping with this spirit, the section for “Services aux nouveaux arrivants” [Services to newcomers] in the Grande Bibliothèque was envisioned as an ensemble of services and multilingual resources to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Québec society. In this environment, newcomers can obtain information on Québec and Canada, training and employment, the business world, the climate, geography, history, language, tourist attractions, sports, and other skills needed to adapt and function as members of society. In addition to being able to consult or borrow from the library’s multi-lingual
collections, a language laboratory and software library are in place as tools for helping newcomers improve language skills and become familiar with software and new technologies that can facilitate the transition into Québécois society.\textsuperscript{161}

While the adoption of the Politique de la lecture et du livre made reading and the book a governmental priority in the cultural development of Québec as a whole, it also had two important outcomes for libraries. In the year following its publication, the government increased subventions to public libraries by nearly 20\%, from $17,657,803 in 1998 to $21,810,251 in 1999.\textsuperscript{162} Moreover, it endorsed the recommendations of the Richard Report [Rapport Richard]\textsuperscript{163} which had been submitted in June 1997 by the Comité sur le développement d'une très grande bibliothèque [Committee on the Development of a Grande Bibliothèque]. This committee, chaired by Clément Richard, who had served as Minister of Cultural Affairs from 1981 to 1985, called for the development of a large library that would serve all of Québécois. When the Politique de la lecture et du livre announced the government’s intention to move forward on the recommendations of the Richard Report in giving to Québécois citizens “une institution d’envergure nationale”\textsuperscript{164} [an institution of national breadth], a Grande Bibliothèque that would be the “tête de pont du réseau des bibliothèques québécoises”\textsuperscript{165} [the flagship in the network of Quebec libraries], the wheels were put into motion for subsequent legislation to make the concept of a Grande Bibliothèque turn into reality.
Louise Beaudoin, the Minister of Culture and Communications who had piloted the development of the Politique de la lecture et du livre would later refer to 1997 and 1998 as “celles de la lecture et du livre. De belles années. Avec une priorité: mettre la lecture et le livre au coeur de notre actions [...] nous avions comme objectif d’améliorer radicalement la situation.”[^166] [the years dedicated to the reading and the book. Beautiful years. With a priority: to put reading and the book at the center of our actions [...] we had an objective to radically improve the situation.] During these two years, the creation of the Richard Committee to study the prospects for a Grande Bibliothèque, the adoption of the Politique de la lecture et du livre, a Summit on Culture--the first to address the role and place of culture in society--led by Prime Minister Lucien Bouchard, and finally, the adoption of legislation for the creation of a Grande Bibliothèque by the National Assembly in June 1998[^167] all contributed to a remarkable new emphasis and careful set of plans to promote reading and the book as a means to shape and transform Québec society. Libraries were considered an essential and integral part of the planning.

What role would the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec have to play in the plan? The “belles années” of 1997 and 1998 marked another important turning point in the development of the BNQ, beginning in 1997 with the inauguration of a new Conservation Centre in the Rosemont Quarter of Montréal, on rue Holt. Space needs had been plaguing the library’s administration for some time. Collections and personnel were
dispersed between three buildings: the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, the Aegidius-Fauteux Annex, and a third building, the Marie-Claire-Daveluy Annex at the corner of the rues Sherbrooke and Saint-Urbain. None of these buildings was wholly adequate to meet the needs of the growing collections or to satisfy public demand for services. The situation had been critical for sometime--so much so that when Philippe Sauvageau became Président-Directeur Général in 1989, addressing the need for new space quickly became one of his chief priorities. In 1990, the BNQ’s administration presented to the Minister of Cultural Affairs, Lucienne Robillard, a document entitled, *Programme des besoins de la nouvelle Bibliothèque nationale du Québec*,\(^{168}\) which proposed the construction of two buildings: one for conservation and the other for diffusion.

By 1997, even as the Richard Committee was preparing its report, the situation was still considered acute: “Si le mandat de conservation de la BNQ peut aujourd’hui s’exercer adéquatement, celui de la diffusion et de la mise en valeur du patrimoine québécois publié est compromis à cause de locaux inadéquats. En effet, les collections sont dispersées dans trois édifices, ce qui s’avère un obstacle majeur à leur mise en valeur, à la rationalisation des ressources et à l’efficacité des services. En outre, les locaux occupés par la BNQ pour ses activités de diffusion présentent des conditions climatiques inadéquates et un aménagement--dont celui des ‘magasins’ inaccessibles au public--qui complique le service à la clientèle. Construits il y a plusieurs décennies, ces locaux ne répondent pas aux exigences modernes.”\(^{169}\) [If the conservation mandate of the BNQ can today exercise itself adequately, its mandate for dissemination and promotion of the importance of Québec’s published heritage is compromised because of inadequate
space. In effect, the collections are dispersed throughout three buildings, resulting in a major obstacle to use and promotion of their value, in the planning of facilities and in the efficiency of service. In addition, the buildings occupied by the BNQ for making its materials available show signs of conditions and climate that are inadequate and of an arrangement--including stacks which are inaccessible to the public--that complicates service to the clientele. Constructed several decades ago, these buildings do not respond to modern requirements.]

The inauguration of the BNQ’s Conservation Centre on rue Holt in 1997 addressed, at least in part, the concern for modern space and conservation of the collection. The building, located in the industrial quarter of Rosemont, was originally constructed in 1948 by General Cigar Company, a subsidiary of Imperial Tobacco Company, as a cigar factory. From 1976 to 1982, the building was home to various occupants: a furniture store, a jeans company, a nightclub, the kitchens of small mobile canteens, and a shoe manufacturer. In the 1980s, the building was occupied by a printer that produced lottery tickets. Vacant in 1995 and found to be in good condition, the government purchased and renovated the building as the BNQ’s Conservation Centre. Its solid industrial structure turned out to be ideal for supporting the weight of books, journals, archives, and other collections. The temperature and humidity control factors that had been conceived for cigar production were well suited to the conservation needs of the burgeoning patrimonial collections of the BNQ. The renovations were highly successful, housing the library’s administration, acquisitions, technical processing of documents, and conservation collections and equipment. With 13,300 square meters of
space, the BNQ projects that the building, as it is currently conceived, will be adequate for collection expansion until the year 2025.\textsuperscript{170}

Following the move into the new Conservation Centre on rue Holt, the Marie-Claire-Daveluy Annex, which the BNQ had occupied since 1982, was vacated and returned to the government. Space concerns and the need to update and modernize other existing buildings--notably the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and the Annexe Aegidius-Fauteaux--with new information technologies and to better serve a public that was beginning to tap into the Internet, would continue to be omnipresent.

In the meantime, the central Municipal Library of Montréal or the Bibliothèque centrale (BCM) was also experiencing space concerns. In 1997, with a collection of about one million documents, about half of which were books, only one book in five, or approximately 20\% of the book collection, was available in an open shelving
arrangement. Both the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and the BCM were designed during a period when direct access to books was not common; books were shelved in closed stacks or “en magasin.” Library patrons would ask at a counter, wait, and the books would eventually be delivered to them. Over the years, and with changing times, open shelving was integrated into the reading rooms of the BCM. However, this meant that seating had to be sacrificed to the growing collections. Even so, this only permitted direct access to a small portion of the books. Over time, the problem of access was compounded, not only by the closed stacks, but also because, like the collections of the BNQ, the BCM’s holdings were dispersed in several places: the different reading rooms, the “magasins” or closed stacks in the Bibliothèque centrale on rue Sherbrooke, as well as in a book storage annex on rue Iberville. Thus, access to books in the magasins and in the storage facility had to be requested to be obtained. Materials at the storage annex necessitated a shuttle service, which meant a long wait or a return trip for patrons.

In addition to important book, reference, and genealogy collections, the BCM had opened a Phonothèque in 1984 on the rue Roy East and, by 1997, had acquired a popular lending collection of more than 50,000 sound recordings (compact discs, cassettes, vinyl) reflecting a wide-range of musical tastes (classical, jazz, blues, folk, international, popular music of Québec, et al.).

The Richard Committee, in conceptualizing the physical dimensions of a Grande Bibliothèque, was also projecting the cultural and social dimensions of a “grande collection,” useful and appealing to the public. As the report states, “Il en est des bibliothèques comme des musées: c’est d’abord la collection qui détermine leur force
Thus, the committee weighed the importance of the collections of the BNQ and the BCM and, taking into account the space problems at the two institutions and potential economic advantages of a merger, they concluded, “Il fallait réunir les collections de la Bibliothèque nationale du Québec et de la Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal. Les membres du comité estiment que cette solution est la meilleure, non seulement parce qu’elle permet de doter la GBQ d’une collection initiale impossible à constituer autrement, mais également parce qu’elle est la plus avantageuse financièrement.” [It will be necessary to unite the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal. The members of committee believe that this is the best solution, not only because it is a means of endowing the GBQ with an initial collection impossible to constitute otherwise, but also because it is the most advantageous financially.]

The Richard Report goes on to detail the context, the need and a concrete plan for a Grande Bibliothèque and concludes with recommendations for its creation. Once received by the government, a series of consecutive actions followed over the course of the coming months and years to bring the project of the Grande Bibliothèque to fruition.
Soon after the Richard Report was submitted, the government appointed a provisional council to determine the needs and legislative guidelines of the project, and to specify the precise relationships between the BNQ, the BCM, and what would eventually become the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec. In November 1997, a parliamentary committee held hearings on the Richard Report, at which 30 organizations and individuals were heard. The Politique de la lecture et du livre followed suit in March 1998, incorporating an outline for the role and national mission of the Grande Bibliothèque. Public hearings were subsequently held to determine the location of the new institution. The site of the Palais du commerce in the heart of Montréal’s Latin Quarter at the intersection of Berri and Maisonneuve streets, was recommended by 70% of participants. In June 1998, less than a year after the Richard Committee submitted its report, the government chose the Palais du commerce site and the National Assembly passed unanimously the law creating the Grande Bibliothèque. In August, the same year, Lise Bissonnette, director of the influential daily newspaper, Le Devoir, was named as Présidente-Directrice-Générale (PDG) or Chief Operating Officer (CEO) of the Grande Bibliothèque. Author, journalist, political and cultural analyst, Madame Bissonnette had, in several editorials in Le Devoir, vigorously defended the principle of a prominent institution dedicated to the promotion of public reading. She maintained that such institutions were typical in large North American cities and that a Grande Bibliothèque, belonging to the citizens, is an essential cultural institution which Montréal and the province of Québec were lacking and had need of.
In January 2000, the government authorized construction of the Grande Bibliothèque. An international architecture competition was launched and, in June of the same year, a team of architects, the Patkau/Croft-Pelletier/Gilles Guité group from Vancouver and Québec City, were selected (the Montréal firm Menkès Shooner Dagenais would later join the architectural group in October 2001). At the same time, agreements were reached between the Grande Bibliothèque, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and the City of Montréal for the transfer of collections to the GBQ.

In October 2000, Philippe Sauvageau resigned as director of the BNQ, which led the Ministry of Culture and Communications to reconsider the organizational structure of the project. In November, the Ministry put forward new legislation aiming to create a new institution, merging the activities of the Grande Bibliothèque with the Bibliothèque nationale to create a new entity, “la nouvelle Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.” The legislation was voted into law by the National Assembly in June 2001.\footnote{176} The law went into effect as of March 4, 2002, at which date the GBQ and the BNQ became synonymous\footnote{177} and plans for construction of a new building were well underway.\footnote{178} Lise Bissonnette, with her proven analytical, organizational and managerial skills, was named as PDG (or CEO) of the new institution.

Thus, construction of the Grande Bibliothèque was ongoing from 2001 through 2004. In addition, by the summer of 2002, teams under the BNQ’s Document Processing units of the patrimoniale collection (non circulating) and the lending collection (i.e., Direction du traitement documentaire de la collection patrimoniale and the Direction des acquisitions et du traitement documentaire de la collection de prêt et de référence) had
been put into place to harmonize collections and bibliographic data for the future integrated library catalog. Following the recommendations of the Richard Report, the BNQ made the decision to adopt the Dewey Decimal Classification, which was already in place at the BCM and in the majority public libraries throughout the province. However, this choice would necessitate a retrospective conversion project for some 200,000 monographs in the patrimonial collection of Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, which had been organized according to the Library of Congress classification system. Nonetheless, by August 2003, the two processing units were working in a unified catalog. By the end of March 2004, the reclassification project was nearly completed and plans were underway to relabel the books with new call numbers and to reclass them on the shelves at the Grande Bibliothèque.

By the fall of 2004, the building was essentially ready for its occupants and the administration began moving the collections from three separate library buildings--the BNQ’s Saint-Sulpice and Aegidius Fauteux libraries, as well as the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal--into the new edifice. In addition, more than 50,000 documents were moved from the collections of the Magnéothèque and Institut Nazareth et Louis Braille--materials in braille, on cassette and compact disc (books adapted for the visually impaired), and 475,000 new acquisitions, including books and multimedia documents, were added. When the Grande Bibliothèque opened its doors to the public on April 30, 2005, it housed approximately four million documents (including 1.2 million books, 1.6 million microforms, 1.2 million other documents (journals, newspapers, compact discs, music cassettes, DVD, videocassettes, reference works, software, et al.), and a wide range
of services spread out on six levels and 33,000 square meters of space, covering every conceivable range of knowledge and culture, offering what is probably the most vast collection of French language documents on the North American continent.

Figure 26. Grande Bibliothèque du Québec (in construction), 475 boulevard De Maisonneuve Est, viewed from the pavillon Judith-Jasmin, Université du Québec à Montréal.

Figure 27. Architectural rendition of the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec, angle Berri-Maisonneuve.
19. The Grande Bibliothèque Opens in Montréal, World Book Capital

The inauguration of the Grande Bibliothèque coincided with activities for World Book and Copyright Day and the celebration of Montréal as the World Book Capital. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, had proclaimed Montréal as the 2005 “Capitale mondiale du livre” [World Book Capital], an honor bestowed each year since 2001 to one of the world’s most deserving cities. The event was previously hosted by Madrid (2001), Alexandria, Egypt (2002), New Delhi, India (2003), and Antwerp, Belgium (2004). Chosen for its unique North American culture, its dynamic book community, its soon-to-open new library, and its ability to offer a high-quality program of events in both French and English, Montréal is center on the world stage from April 23, 2005 to April 22, 2006 as a forum for the promotion of books, reading, and a diverse range of related activities.183 The opening of the event corresponds with UNESCO’s World Book and Copyright Day on April 23, a symbolic date for world literature for, according to UNESCO, on this date and in the same year of 1616, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega all died. “It was a natural choice for UNESCO's General Conference to pay a world-wide tribute to books and authors on this date, encouraging everyone, and in particular young people, to discover the pleasure of reading and gain a renewed respect for the irreplaceable contributions of those who have furthered the social and cultural progress of humanity. The idea for this celebration originated in Catalonia where on 23 April, Saint George's Day, a rose is traditionally given as a gift for each book sold.”184
Denis Vaugeois, publisher, historian, co-chair of the administrative council for Montréal, capitale mondiale du livre (MCML), and former Minister of Cultural Affairs, described the event as follows: “Montréal, capitale mondiale du livre représente une opportunité exceptionnelle de reconnaître l’importance du livre, de ses auteurs et de ses artisans. Tout au long de l’année, les Montréalais se rassembleront autour des thèmes du livre et de la lecture. Cela exige un travail énorme de toutes les personnes et organisations impliquées. Mais le jeu en vaut la chandelle. Encourager les vocations de lecteurs et, pourquoi pas, d’auteurs, d’éditeurs et d’artisans du livre : quelle magnifique année en perspective!”

Naturally, the Grande Bibliothèque figured largely in UNESCO’s choice of Montréal as the World Book Capital. Its opening was heralded at the festivities for World Book and Copyright Day on the weekend of April 23 at the Place des Arts. Its official inauguration and public opening on April 30, took place in the context of a wide range of cultural programs, activities, and expositions that had been put into place, in effect timed, as part of a great collective effort to celebrate the new institution in the context of World Book and Copyright Day in UNESCO’s World Book Capital. The
coordinated efforts of the media, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, to promote and communicate activities and events, marked the opening of the Grande Bibliothèque as a truly historical event, a crowning achievement for the start of a new century and a marked separation from the previous century-long struggle for freedom from the clergy and the right to self-determination.

At least one observer hailed the opening of the new library as a symbolic indicator, like the Révolution tranquille, of the Québec spirit of resistance to conquest and the inherent right to self-identity. Éric Bédard, historian and professor at the University of Québec at Rimouski would write in *Le Devoir*, “Dans cette histoire qui est la nôtre, cette Grande Bibliothèque me semble bien plus que le parachèvement de notre modernité culturelle, elle est aussi, et peut-être surtout, le symbole d'une ambitieuse reconquête. Une reconquête qui fut, on le sait, à la fois culturelle, économique et politique et dont la Révolution tranquille n'est qu'un jalon parmi d'autres. Cette Grande Bibliothèque, qui témoigne d'un esprit de résistance et d'une vitalité indéniable du peuple québécois, devrait nous rapprocher de nos devanciers. En effet, la beauté et la richesse du lieu devraient nous rappeler l'extrême dénuement de ceux qui, bien avant la Révolution tranquille, ont voulu contredire les sombres prédictions de lord Durham.”

In this history that is ours, this Grande Bibliothèque seems to me much more than the crowning achievement of our cultural modernity, it is also, and maybe especially, the symbol of an ambitious re-conquest-- re-conquest that is cultural, economical, and political all at once, and where the Révolution tranquille is but one indicator among others. This Grande Bibliothèque, that testifies to the spirit of resistance and to the undeniable vitality of the
people of Québec, should bring us closer to our forebears. Indeed, the beauty and the wealth of place should recall to us the extreme impoverishment of those who, long before the Révolution tranquille, wanted to contradict the somber predictions of Lord Durham.

Indeed, the “somber predictions of Lord Durham,” who in 1839 had recommended a legislative union of Upper and Lower Canada with the aim of encouraging the extinction of the French language and culture through intermingling with the more numerous English, could be put to rest by the symbolic, yet very real presence of the Grande Bibliothèque and all that it represents as a legacy to the French speaking people of Québec and of Canada.
20. A Library for the 21st Century: Remembering the Past, Reshaping the Present, Anticipating the Future

The Grande Bibliothèque does indeed represent a kind of testament to the strength and fortitude of the Québécois and the French language and cultural heritage on the North American continent. The institution is infused with a sense of legacy that pays homage to the history, culture and memory of Québec’s citizens—both in its legislative mandate as well as in its architectural conception. The merger of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal into the Grande Bibliothèque evokes a historical connection to each of the earlier institutions in the new mandate for the Grande Bibliothèque, yet it goes much further, in naming new missions with new tools for creating a library for the 21st century. The national mandate, to acquire, preserve and disseminate the patrimonial collection, remains clear. The integration of the municipal library brings a broader directive to acquire and disseminate a universal collection to the general public.

Indeed, the two collections, now united, maintain their duality in the new building. Each is housed in one of two “chambres de bois” [wooden rooms]—an architectural concept inspired from the title of a novel, Les chambres de bois, by renowned Québec writer, Anne Hébert. These multi-story partitions—louvers—or...
wooden slats, made of yellow birch, the provincial tree of Quebec, envelop the collections, either allowing indirect natural light or blocking it according to the conservation needs of the collection. They delineate the two collections from each other and from the reading and study areas, located on the periphery of the building. The intended effect is that when one enters the chambre de bois, one enters into the collection, the documentary landscape of Québec.

The exterior of the postmodern six-story edifice is clad with 6,200 plates of ceramic glass (“lamelles de verre”) specially fabricated in Québec for this project—a sort of glass that is unique, never having been used before in North America. Though the design is somewhat
controversial--particularly since in June and July of 2005 six of these glass plates shattered--it is also quite innovative in that it allows natural light to permeate the interior, filtered by the effects of the birch louvers surrounding the collections.

The main hall on the rez-de-chaussée [ground floor] leads to the entrance, which opens into the news and new releases section, including journals, magazines and newspapers from Québec and from around the world. The central elevators and staircase arch upward with a transparent view from the exhibition hall, at the metro level, to the upper levels. The effect is one of vast transparency, and luminosity, as though to echo the sentiment that Lise Bissonnette expressed in her inaugural address, “le livre poursuit d’abord et avant tout la lumière.”

In addition to its book collections, new services and technologies have been added in a state of the art environment to fuel research, dissemination of information, culture, discovery and development. The Carrefour Affaires is a business connection center devoted to sectors of economic activity, including business creation, international trade, and the job market. The Logithèque is a software library and laboratory that facilitates use and learning of software tools--everything from word processing and spreadsheets to web design tools. In the Phonothèque and Vidéothèque, the music and film sections, library patrons can select from more than 70,000 music compact discs and 16,000 films.
(DVD or VHS) to borrow or to use at listening and/or viewing stations in the library. In the two *Salles de musique électronique* [electronic music rooms], each equipped with specialized software and a digital keyboard, musicians and aspiring musicians can compose music or play pieces from the library’s collections. In addition, the GBQ offers special services to targeted populations. A language laboratory and a multi-language collection (20,000 documents) in the ten most common foreign languages in Québec both encourages language learning and offers materials of international interest for prominent language communities. *Espace jeunes*, the children’s section, which occupies an entire floor, offers books, multimedia, toys, activities and special programs and exhibits targeting children up to the age of 13. Beyond that, the GBQ offers a collection oriented toward adolescents. The *Service québécois du livre adapté (SQLA)* offers services for visually impaired users, including titles in braille, on cassette and on compact disc. Carrels with a braille printer and multimedia stations equipped with touchpads or specialized software are also available. An auditorium, meeting rooms, exhibition halls, workstations and computers connected to the Internet, reading and workspace equipped with wireless technology for laptops ... the list goes on.

With the goal of making its resources and collections truly accessible to the ensemble of citizens throughout the vast geographical territory of Québec, and to create a truly virtual library, the GBQ/BNQ has stepped up its digital initiatives. It currently provides access to some 50,000 digital documents--primarily heritage and Québec works--including 1,500 books, 200 music scores, 1,500 posters, 13,000 illustrations, 5,000 prints, 2,000 maps, 2,000 sound recordings, 8,000 postcards and more than 4,000 Québec
government publications. Digital initiatives for several prominent Québec newspapers published before 1950 are also underway.\textsuperscript{189}

Moreover, to fulfill the part of its mission to “renforcer la coopération et les échanges entre les bibliothèques, en agissant comme catalyseur auprès des institutions documentaires québécoises, et stimuler la participation québécoise au développement de la bibliothèque virtuelle” [reinforce the cooperation and exchange between libraries in acting as a catalyst with other Québec research institutions, and to stimulate Québec’s participation in the development of a virtual library] and to “encourage cooperation between public libraries and other library networks and act as an auxiliary library for all public libraries in Québec [and] develop support and specialized technical services and make them available to public libraries,”\textsuperscript{190} the GBQ/BNQ has set up a variety of innovative electronic services that provide special remote-access services to libraries and other documentary institutions, as well as to members of the public, thus stimulating the development of a “grande bibliothèque virtuelle” across Québec.

The GBQ, at the end of 2003 was promoted as a “bibliothèque de la nouvelle génération,” a “lieu de savoir,” “lieu d’atmosphère,” “haut lieu de culture,” “lieu d’échange”\textsuperscript{191}--a project designed to usher in a new range of collections and services for the information, educational and cultural needs of Québec citizens in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Indeed, with the opening of the Grande Bibliothèque, the government of Québec has come a long way in realizing the original vision, as put forth in the Richard Report and in the Politique de la lecture et du livre. Yet, even as Lise Bissonnette delivered her inaugural speech on opening day and gave homage to Anne Hébert by reading some
verses from a 1944 poem, she referred to a “temple incomplet” [an unfinished temple], “donc de travail inachevé” [thus, a work incomplete]. Indeed, on December 2004, Line Beauchamp, the Minister of Culture and Communications, announced passage of a new bill by the National Assembly to merge the activities of the Bibliothèque nationale with those of the Archives nationales du Québec, thus creating a new institution, the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. The law will enter into effect in autumn 2005, adding the preservation and diffusion of Québec’s archival and film heritage to the mandate of a new institution. As Madame Bissonnette declared at the GBQ inauguration, “Nous pouvons être heureux aujourd’hui mais nous n’avons ni le loisir, ni même le droit d’être satisfaits. Les prochains jours seront un bonheur. Mais non un repos, car il reste tant à faire. Le livre n’a pas à chercher la paix, il en perdrait son sens. Le livre poursuit d’abord et avant tout la lumière.” [We can be happy today, but we have neither the leisure, nor even the right to be satisfied. The next days will bring happiness, but no rest, because there remains so much to do. The book does not look for peace; it would lose its meaning. The book pursues the light first and foremost.]

Thus the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec which, since its inception, has not ceased its path to change and innovation, will once again metamorphose into a new institution: the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Its relationship to the government’s Ministry of Culture and Communications marks its conception as a cultural icon for the people of Québec—a source of national identity and pride. Yet the connection to the past remains inter-woven into the fabric of its present-day being. Like
the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, the Grande Bibliothèque is situated in the heart of Montréal’s Latin Quarter, the cultural quarter, in close proximity to in the film and theatre district, schools and universities, notably the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) and the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal. It is also positioned next to the central bus terminal and at the Berri-UQÀM Metro stop--a central hub in Montréal’s public transportation network. In effect, in looking at a map of Montréal, one could surmise that the Grande Bibliothèque is situated between the two buildings--just two blocks east of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and a few blocks south and west of the Bibliothèque centrale.

Thus it seems fitting that when the Grande Bibliothèque opened in the spring of 2005, that the two distinguished collections of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (comprising both the Collection nationale and the original core collection from the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice) and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal were merged--finally housed together with their collections accessible in one catalog, in open-stacks and in a new édifice built for the 21st century. It is as if, in reflecting on all the long debates of the past, they never should have been apart.

Figure 33. Berri-UQAM Metro Station, Montréal city center. Signs point the way to the Grande Bibliothèque.
21. Exposition “Tous ces livres sont à toi!”

Social and Cultural Significance for Collective Memory

“Pierre angulaire de la démocratie, moteur d’inspiration et de création, gardienne de toutes les mémoires, terreau de la recherche, transmetteur des connaissance, on arrive à peine à décrire la bibliothèque et son importance dans une civilisation libre et avancée. Elle est l’héritage laissé par les hommes et les femmes de toutes les sciences, de toutes les pensées et de tous les arts.”

[Corner stone of democracy, generator of inspiration and creation, guardian of all memory, fertilizer of research, transmitter of knowledge, one can hardly describe the library and its importance in a free and advanced civilization. It is the heritage left by men and women of all the sciences, of all thought and of all the arts.]

-- Michel Marc Bouchard and Nicole Lemay

The Grande Bibliothèque’s creation and position as a major institution dedicated to the transmission of knowledge and culture marks a significant turning point in the history of Québec libraries and in the 160 or so years since the Sulpicians founded the Oeuvre des bons livres (the parish library in Montréal that preceded the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and constituted part of its original collection). The public policy and perspective toward books and reading in Québec has changed significantly from the Church’s legislation, via the Index, of what citizens should be allowed to read. From the closed stacks of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and Bibliothèque municipale to the
luminous spaces of the Grande Bibliothèque’s open stacks enfolded in their chambres de bois, the documentary heritage, the collective memory of the Québécois has moved from the hidden shadows of closed stacks to the full access of the light, where it can be seen and shared by all.

With more than $176 million dollars invested on the part of the Québec government at start-up, it is clear that putting the institutionalization of knowledge and culture--and especially knowledge and culture in the French language--is one of the government’s top priorities. Although the Grande Bibliothèque has a formidable multi-language collection, including 30% of its titles in English, it is first and foremost a French language library. And that, perhaps, is the point of the government’s investment in it as a cultural flagship. As Louise Beaudoin wrote in Le Devoir, “Au départ, la Grande Bibliothèque fut l’objet d’un enjeu politique: le mot ‘grande’ est-il approprié? Quelle place faut-il accorder à la culture du Québec? Et surtout les peuples, les nations, ont-ils besoin de symboles? De cathédrales de verre et d’acier? Oui, nous avons répondu, ce grand projet porte et exprime une ambition: créer un lieu symbolique à la mesure de l’importance que nous devons accorder à la culture et au savoir dans notre vie nationale.” [From the beginning, the Grande Bibliothèque presented a political stake: Is the word ‘grande’ appropriate? What place should be accorded to the culture of Québec? And especially the people, the nations, do they have need of symbols, of cathedrals of glass and of steel? Yes, we answered, this ‘grand’ project carries and expresses an ambition: to create a symbolic place to the measure of the importance that we must grant to culture and to knowledge in our national life.]
And so the Grande Bibliothèque exists as a symbol—a sort of sanctuary or shrine. Lise Bissonnette alludes to it in her inaugural speech as a “temple à ciel ouvert” [temple to open sky]. Yet the true charm of the Grande Bibliothèque, although it possesses the vast and luminous sense of a temple or a cathedral, is its down-to-earth accessibility to the people of Québec. This is also one of its most innovative aspects. There are a great many libraries in the world that have both national and public vocations and missions, that conserve a national collection through a system of legal deposit, and that also make available a vast selection of documents from a multitude of areas and disciplines beyond the national range. The Library of Congress and National Library of Canada are two such examples. Yet, as Mylène Tremblay points out, the innovation of the Grande Bibliothèque is found in the amplitude of the national collection made accessible to citizens, through an open-access system of shelving that can be freely browsed in one building (with exception to some of the rare and special works which are available in the Conservation Center). As Lise Bissonnette stated, “Avoir une vocation nationale et publique à ce point, c’est assez rare.” [To have a national and public vocation at this level is quite rare.]

For the Québécois, this must indeed seem like a breath of fresh air, particularly in comparison to the system that was in place through the end of 2004, before the Grande Bibliothèque opened, where two thirds of the holdings at the Bibliothèque centrale, as well as the near-totality of the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale (i.e., at the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice and at the Aegidius-Fauteux Annex) were shelved in closed stacks. As Lise Bissonnette states, “Il y avait là-dedans des choses remarquables. La
collection nationale était disponible dans l’édifice Saint-Sulpice et Aegidius-Fauteux, mais dans quelles conditions! On devait remplir la petite fiche, aller au comptoir, demander, attendre ... Et si vous aviez besoin d’un périodique en même temps que d’un livre, il fallait prendre la voiture ou l’autobus pour vous en aller à la bibliothèque de l’Esplanade. Ce n’était pas des conditions de consultation normales. Le public était en quelque sorte découragé d’avoir accès à des choses qui pourtant lui appartenaient entièrement.”202 [There were some remarkable things in the national collection, which was available in the Saint-Sulpice and Aegidius-Fauteux buildings, but in what conditions! It was necessary to fill out a small card, go to the counter, ask, wait ... And if you had need of a magazine at the same time as a book, you had to take the car or the bus and go to the other building. These were not conditions for normal use. The public was discouraged from having access to things that, after all, belonged entirely to them.]

The public mission of the GBQ reinforces its special function in Québec society. Its doors are open to all, free of charge, with no requirement for admission, and irrespective of wealth, race, or any worldly condition. Open stacks throughout the library and automated self-check-out to borrow materials from the lending collection, demonstrate a new level of openness for access to knowledge. It is as though, after more than a century and a half of religious domination and censorship, the collective memory of Québec society, as it has been recorded in its documentary heritage, has finally been liberated.

The popularity of the Grande Bibliothèque during its first month of operation has surprised both librarians and skeptics alike. During the first week that followed the
inauguration, the GBQ received 63,000 visitors and recorded 50,810 loans (books, DVDs, etc.). During its second week, it received 49,000 visitors who borrowed over 44,000 documents. During the fourth week, 50 to 100 people were counted standing in line to sign up for borrowing privileges, including people from various ethnic communities and a number of anglophones. Danielle Chagnon, Director of the Client Services Division at the GBQ, noted that more people had visited the Collection Saint-Sulpice during the first month that the GBQ was open than during all of 2004, when the collection was situated at the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice behind closed stacks.

By all accounts, the Grande Bibliothèque appears to drawing Québec citizens to the library in the same way that J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, has drawn readers to the book. One can speculate that the current popularity of the Grande Bibliothèque may be just a curious phase due to its newness and the publicity surrounding its inauguration. Though, as Claude Turcotte has noted, there are already a fair number of regulars who go there every day to read, listen to music, surf the Internet, connect their portable PCs to the wireless, to do school assignments or work on research. Its location in the Latin Quarter, near the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal and the Université du Québec à Montréal would seem to assure a regular amount of use by people in the educational and academic sectors. Yet, its general, popular appeal may also be well assured by the wealth of popular materials (books, scores, sound recordings, DVDs, Internet access, etc.), its facilities, and its state-of-the-art design as a modern library and information and research center. Yet, there are others who might attribute the fascination and allure of the Grande
Bibliothèque to the sentiment and to the fact that the citizens of Québec finally have access to cultural objects--books and other heritage documents--that for more than a century and a half had been denied to them. In history, legend, and mythology there are numerous examples of the human fascination to discover that which has been deemed by others as forbidden. From the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit, to the “mauvais livres” or forbidden literary works tucked away in the closed stacks of the library, human beings have manifested a kind of a fascination for the forbidden, for the unattainable or the inaccessible, which, in the case of the French-language community of Québec, includes a great number of works that, up until the 1960s, would have been denied or forbidden without some form of authorization. Certainly this legacy of pushing beyond the limits of the forbidden, the inaccessible, or the unattainable--that which is beyond our normal everyday reach--is what drives discovery, builds on our collective knowledge base and leads to social progress.

Surely it is this interest and fascination for knowledge, discovery, and social progress that will ensure the ongoing use and support of the Grande Bibliothèque by the citizens of Québec.

To celebrate the inauguration of the Grande Bibliothèque, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec put together a major exhibition recalling the long and often difficult saga of the book and its close ally, the public library, in Québec. The exposition, “Tous ces livres sont à toi!”; de
l’Oeuvre des bons livres à la Grande Bibliothèque (1844-2005), brings together more than 350 artifacts, including many books that were once labeled “forbidden,” and retraces the steps of the struggle led, over the course of a century and a half, by the liberal constituents of society against the many diverse forms of control and censorship that their adversaries (often the clergy) had put into place to impede access to the printed word.

The title, “Tous ces livres sont à toi” is significant in invoking the words of Aegidius Fauteux in his editorial to La Patrie on December 21, 1901, more than ten years before the advent of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. Fauteux describes a dream which he attributes to Charles Nodier, librarian of the Arsenal Library in Paris and prominent French author who helped launch the Romantic Movement. Some theorize that Fauteux, describing the dream in an article that he wrote under a pseudonym, could have had the dream himself. Fauteux recounts how Nodier (or himself) dreams of being guided through the city of Baghdad, just before the first light of dawn, by a khalif and his vizier. In the silence of the early light, a palace appears “noble and calm” at the edge of the Tigris River. After climbing an immense stairway, they enter into a room glowing in the light of its tall windows, where the walls are luminescent with beautiful books in magnificent bindings. The khalif says to the poet/librarian, who is in a state of rapture, “Tous ces livres sont à toi!” [All these books are for you!]

Figure 35. GBQ, Grande salle d’exposition [Exhibition Hall] where the inaugural exposition, “Tous ces livres sont à toi!” is on display.
After the first room, there are others, where books are equally plentiful, the light of the
sun abounds and a breeze caresses the branches of trees as the city begins to awaken.
The khalif and his vizier smile as they repeat, “Ces deux cent mille volumes, ces
manuscrits précieux, cette noble demeure, tout cela est à toi et c’est là maintenant que
s’écoulera ta vie.” [These two hundred thousand volumes, these precious manuscripts,
this noble edifice, it is all for you and it is from there that your life will pass.]

The exposition evokes the past, the early remnants of a dream that, over a one
hundred and sixty year evolution led to the creation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice,
(with the two hundred thousand or so volumes that constituted its original collection), the
Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, and the slow, but steady growth of a network of
public libraries across Québec.

To underscore the importance of the role of libraries, as well as the significance of
the struggle for access to books, to the development of thoughts and ideas and to
knowledge as elements that have played a crucial role in the evolution of Québec society,
the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec has co-published, with the Presses of the
Université Laval, a catalog of the exposition--to serve as a sort of extension to the
exposition, and also to commemorate the struggle and the legacy of a dream that has been
newly realized in the presence of the Grande Bibliothèque. The exposition and its
catalog are thus inscribed as part of the library, as part of history, and as part of Québec’s
collective memory.
22. Libraries and Their Resources as Agents of Memory:

An Interdisciplinary Perspective

“Lieu de mémoire” [place of memory] is a phrase often used to describe libraries. They are the first words that Lise Bissonnette used to describe the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec in her inaugural day speech at the Grande Bibliothèque. Indeed, much of the discussion in this thesis has already focused on how libraries, both in their design (frequently evoking monuments or temples to learning) and in their collections serve to evoke and elicit memory to allow users to draw from knowledge and experiences of the past to build upon or otherwise shape or transform their knowledge in and of the present. Clearly, the Grande Bibliothèque’s inaugural exposition and catalog is intended to convey and prolong the memory of Québec’s history and its turning points in the struggle for the freedom to read. Indeed, Louise Beaudoin has written of the importance of creating symbols “de cathédrales et de verre d’acier [...] un lieu symbolique” [cathedrals of glass and of steel [...] a symbolic place]\(^\text{211}\) to emphasize the significance of the materials related to knowledge and culture and their importance to society.

In her article, “Realizing Memory, Transforming History,” Diana Drake Wilson discusses the concept of “materials memory” and its significance in relation to Native American indigenous cultures. Wilson maintains that “materials have an agency (and power) that remembers.”\(^\text{212}\) She explores the ways in which European, American, and Indian cultures assign significance to material representations of their culture: “In the European and American traditions, texts and archives, the representations of history, and
especially the institutions of museums, make the past, and the memories of that past, possible. They do this by ordering material signs according to very specific assumptions about what memory is and how it may be used.”

In contrast, “American Indian material documents of the past constitute a continent-wide palimpsest; some artifacts and documents have been excavated and exhibited, but many are still in place [...] virtually everywhere underfoot” [in the Los Angeles basin region].

Wilson maintains that, for American Indians interested in preserving their heritage, there is a “cultural resource struggle [...] to use materials memory--to read and remember--in ways that are culturally significant to their indigenous traditions.”

As increasing real estate value and future urban development encroach upon the present archival status of historical artifacts or material documents, Indian leaders have been called upon to explain their cultural significance. Wilson cites A-lul’Koy Lotah, a Chumash spokeswoman and practitioner of indigenous religion and medicine, as she attempts to explain to an attorney how the Chumash interpret the legal meaning of “cultural resources of significance.” In Lotah’s words, “Things that are there are significant. They are there because the culture put them there, and they have to be there for the culture to be there.”

With these words, Lotah rejects legal attempts to hierarchize significance and attributes significance to all cultural materials for their historical or narrative representation of the past, and their connection to the present.

Just as A-lul’Koy Lotah attributes significance to all cultural resources of the Chumash, European and American social structures attribute significance to the material manifestations of our culture, i.e., those physical forms of self-expression that the culture
creates and disseminates in order to perpetuate its memory. Contemporary
Euro/American traditions tend to institutionalize cultural objects, notably in museums
and libraries--buildings that are often constructed in granite or marble or in other ways
that evoke a sense that we enshrine our objects of cultural memory in monuments or
temples.

Wilson’s article, as noted earlier, maintains that, “In European and American
traditions, texts and archives, the representations of history, and especially the institutions
of museums, make the past, and the memories of that past, possible [...] by ordering
material signs according to very specific assumptions about what memory is and how it
may be used.” Yet her emphasis is on museums. Libraries are not museums.
Libraries are less concerned with narrative representations than in simply making
materials available as information resources, and in letting users choose and come to their
own conclusions about what these materials represent and how they may be used. Yet
libraries have a similar function in their role as social institutions that collect and
disseminate cultural materials from all periods since the beginning of recorded history
and, through this dissemination, they thereby elicit memory. Whether these materials are
written texts, photographs, sound recordings, films, historical artifacts, or objects of art,
they exist and are transmitted as physical manifestations of culture. Once discovered or
accessed and examined, they are absorbed as part of our consciousness, our cultural
memory.

As long as cultural resources exist and can be accessed as a form of materials
memory, discernible to human consciousness, the culture remains alive and intact. In this
sense, these physical materials, these material memories, as A-lul’Koy Lotah explained, “have to be there for the culture to be there”--like signal to human identity, linking past to present, constituting a tangible part of who we are.

In thinking about the Grande Bibliothèque and the government’s push, through its Ministry of Culture and Communications, to create a “lieu symbolique à la mesure de l’importance que nous devons accorder à la culture et au savoir,” it seems clear, that as a French-language minority culture on the face of an overwhelming English-speaking North American continent, the need for a memory institution of the magnitude of the Grande Bibliothèque had to exist ... and to be in a position to realize itself ... to preserve its heritage and to perpetuate the memory of its unique French-language culture among its citizens, who can, in turn, see a part of themselves reflected in the symbolism and in the content of the collections.
23. Constituting Cultural Significance: Constructing a Global Time Capsule

Eric Wainwright, Deputy Director-General at the 2nd National Preservation Office Conference in Brisbane addresses the idea of cultural significance as a subjective matter, by saying “that an item is significant if somebody believes it to be so.” Yet, if as a society or culture, we assign significance to all subjective physical manifestations of memory, what recourse do we have for its recall? Daniel Schacter describes a phenomenon called “crisis of memory”—that is, “a progressive sense of disconnection from the past and traditional forms of remembering.” Schacter maintains that, “as [our society’s] reliance on external storage devices increases, the transmission of socially significant knowledge and events has relied less and less on the autobiographical recollections of elders [...] Society’s most important memories now reside in the electronic archives of the mass media, not in the heads of individual rememberers and storytellers.”

Yet society’s memories also reside in its libraries, where written and recorded accounts from researchers, rememberers and storytellers can be retrieved—but only if we can keep apace in developing tools and technologies for storage and recall. Librarians often talk about the challenges of their work in relation to “the information explosion.” The “memory crisis” that Schacter describes takes on heightened meaning in relationship to libraries.

Certainly, it is true that the amount of available information, of printed books, periodicals, sound recordings, films, etc., is now so overwhelming that libraries are often
preoccupied with the problem of lack of physical storage space. Indeed, this was one of the primary motivating factors for building the Grande Bibliothèque: Lack of adequate space.

One response has been to develop the system of “weeding” (or “élagage” in Québec) to thin the collection down and keep it at a manageable level. This has resulted in a need to make choices about what is valuable to memory, what is worth preserving, what is pertinent and what is not.

Another solution has been to move into the realm of digital means of storage: transferring more and more of our documentary heritage onto computers that require far less space than our shelving areas, but are endowed with increasingly greater amounts of memory that can be accessed virtually from anywhere in cyberspace. Yet, as Tallmo and Hamid were quick to point out in their articles, which are a decade old at this point and still ring true, digital technologies change rapidly and become obsolete. Tallmo muses that hackers may well be useful in the domain of “cyber-archaeology [...] gladly spend[ing] weeks reconstructing old computer files” to render them useful. But he wonders “about the much touted easy access for everybody?”

Clearly, as we enter into the digital realm, there is a need for continual adaptation to new systems and technologies in order to avoid obsolescence. We often wonder if one new form of chosen technology will accommodate the next and worry that if it doesn’t, if today’s memory will be lost to the future. Moreover, as the Internet has come into its own, as information and digitization technologies have become more sophisticated, and as commercial vendors have become increasingly adept at marketing tantalizing new
arrays of information services, librarians have to make choices about what information resources they should provide ... and in what format (e.g., print or electronic).

As Hamid maintains, “Collective human memories and computer memories are not interchangeable, and the ability of our tools to hold information far exceeds our human ability [and most library budgets] to gather [or acquire] all that information.”

Joël Roman maintains that “le problème devient moins d’accéder à l’information, au savoir et à la culture, que de trouver les moyens de s’y orienter, de trier dans cette masse pour y découvrir l’information pertinente ou la qualité esthétique.” [The problem has become less that of access to information, knowledge and culture than finding the means to orient oneself, to sift through the mass in order to discover pertinent information or esthetic quality.]

So how do we decide what to save and what to delete or discard? Roman contemplates whether or not a new means of “censure positive” [positive censorship] should be invoked, particularly for controversial materials, including pornography or the viewpoints of political extremists. Although the word “censorship” evokes a negative connotation of controlled thought--especially in Québec, since this tactic was used so often to condemn books and discourage reading--it is certainly true that the need for filtering systems is becoming more and more apparent. Filters for controlling “spam” or unsolicited email or Internet advertising, have now become quite common.

Librarians have attempted to address the problem of information overload in several ways. Of course most libraries have a mission that helps define the institution and the scope of its collections. For example the mission of the Bibliothèque nationale
du Québec states that the library “collects and permanently preserves Québec’s published documentary heritage, as well as all Québec-related documents published outside Québec.” Yet, the BNQ has developed in-house collection development policies for distinct areas of the collections, including the patrimonial collection and the digital collection, to better narrow and focus their areas of attention. In addition to developing focused collection development policies that help define the nature and scope of a library collection, librarians also enter into consortiums with other libraries to share resources or to increase their acquisitions leverage with information providers. To help users sift through the ever growing mass of available information, they develop tools, such as bibliographies or pathfinders, to help guide research, as well as to help sift out unwanted recall. They also offer information literacy courses to teach people to navigate, as Roman suggests, through the mass of sources to discern what kinds of materials are relevant, qualitative, and reliable.

Still and all, most libraries do not have the exhaustive mission of being a legal deposit library or collecting at the national level. Hamid aptly describes the paradoxes and dilemmas facing librarians and archivists in their conservation efforts, or why it is impractical try to conserve everything. She reasons that “just as Wainwright acquiesced that cultural significance can only be interpreted on subjective bases, the very idea of history and the meaningfulness of recording the past have a multitude of definitions. For every different interest and point of view is another possible way to frame the archive.” Both Hamid and Tallmo conclude their articles by acquiescing that “maybe we must accept that each era has its own form of amnesia.” Daniel Traister, offers further analysis
of the role that libraries play in the construction of cultural memory. He also concludes that “neither a single individual nor a single institution can remember everything or provide for total recall.” He maintains that “the repositories that librarians build are [...] constructions that only partially represent [...] the vast universe of potentially salvageable memories that print and its surrogates have produced” and that the gap between what is published and what is collected widens from year to year. However, rather than merely accepting the idea that some materials will be uncollected, hence some memories will be uncontained or forgotten, Traister calls for analysis and further study of the institutional and bureaucratic structures through which libraries collect materials--particularly since the daily selection and decision-making about what is and what is not worth acquiring and preserving, as well as the classification and subject analysis systems that are developed for retrieval, all affect how and what memories can be recalled and what will ultimately be part of the memories that document our age.

Whether we accept the gaps in library collections as conscious choices or as inevitable oversights in a society that is producing unprecedented amounts of memories through an expanding range of choices in recorded information, we are confronted by the tensions between our choices and our limitations: the choice of what to retain and the limitation of what it is possible to retain. This tension has challenged us to work creatively and collaboratively as librarians and as information professionals to pool resources, develop consortia, new tools and networking technologies to capture and encapsulate that which we deem or choose as essential. While this may be an uphill battle in that cultural memories are inevitably lost in the process of choice or limitation,
the best we can hope to accomplish is to work with our communities to form partnerships and develop projects to determine that which we wish to remember, and to do our best to document our decisions in ways that might explain to future generations what is contained in the global time capsule of today’s library.

While the BNQ’s traditional emphasis has been on access to knowledge, information and culture by virtue of reading and books, new information technologies, new media (audio cassettes, CDs, DVDs, etc.), and most recently the advent of the Internet and electronic media, have pushed the boundaries of the BNQ and forced it to rethink its mission. In 1992, the legal deposit program was expanded to include a greater variety of documents, including original prints, posters, art reproductions, postcards, sound recordings, software, electronic documents and films. In 1994, the BNQ began a digitization program for its heritage documents, which has only become more vigorous in recent years, making thousands of documents available directly through the Internet. As it dons its new name, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, it will assume a new role and mission with an archival and film preservation component.

Indeed, the BNQ’s systematic review and revisions of the legal deposit program and its collection policies covers a vast documentary territory. The BNQ’s global time capsule would appear to be already quite full. Its retrospective bibliography dates back to 1821 and some the earliest French-language publications on the North American continent. The BNQ aims to be exhaustive in covering the scope and breadth of Québec documentary history, and yet ... the depths of human knowledge are limitless. How much of the past has been overlooked? How much of the present and future remains to
be discovered? How can any one institution get a handle on the depth and breadth of human knowledge?

![Image](image1.jpg)

**Figure 36. Sculpture by Jacek Jarnuszkiewicz, *Le temps du verbe*.**

The sculpture in front of the BNQ’s Conservation Centre on rue Holt, *Le temps du verbe*, by Jacek Jarnuszkiewicz, may offer some symbolic clues as to the nature of library and archival collections. The sculpture presents an intriguing image of an anvil balanced atop a large cement tablet, which resembles an archaic card catalog or a cabinet of archival drawers where documents are arranged. On either side of the tablet are inscribed numbers and letters of the alphabet. An anvil, unfinished, half skeletal and crowned with an octahedron in white marble, is balanced precariously atop the tablet. What does it all mean?

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.] Thus, the sculpture can be interpreted as paying homage to The Word and all of the symbolism that it invokes in giving a tangible form to memory.

Jarnuszkiewicz wrote that he wanted to confer a symbolic dimension to the sculpture in adding several elements that invoke “ces notions de mémoire, de connaissance, de temps qui passe, de conservation et de classification, notions sur lesquelles repose l’idée même d’archives.” [notions of memory, of knowledge, of time that passes, of conservation and of classification, notions on which idea of archives are based.] The sculpture is influenced by various elements from Albrecht Dürer’s 1514 engraving entitled Melencolia, which the Jarnuszkiewicz describes as, “une oeuvre grave qui exprime l’impuissance de la science humaine.” [a serious work that expresses the futility of human knowledge].

He continues, “Cette vérité jamais démentie ne parvient cependant pas à stopper les hommes ni dans leur quête de savoir ni dans leur volonté de préserver les documents qui jalonnent leur histoire” [This truth, never contradicted, does not ever stop men, either in their quest for knowledge, nor in their will to conserve the documents that mark their history.] With this as his background, and incorporating two symbolic elements from Dürer’s Melencolia--the octahedron and the magical square (where the sum of all the numbers in the squares total “34” in all directions)-- Jarnuszkiewicz undertakes the evocation of “trois caractéristiques de l’aventure humaine: l’impuissance de la science, soif de connaissances, nécessité de se souvenir” [three characteristics of the human adventure: the futility of science, the thirst for knowledge, and the necessity to remember
oneself]. The sculpture includes many symbols related to “the human adventure” that the artist describes. The anvil, for example, unfinished in the sculpture, represents the symbol of alchemy and recalls the blacksmiths (or “forgerons”) who used all the natural elements (earth, wind, fire and water) to forge tools and new paths in their craftsmanship and in developing knowledge. The part that is finished, represents the sum of human knowledge; the part that is skeletal, or unfinished, signifies that knowledge is a work in progress, incomplete, and that there remains more to do. Moreover, the anvil appears to be unbalanced, on the brink of falling. The octahedron, placed symbolically at the top, provides the counter-weight that holds the anvil in place. The magical square is
superimposed with a grill, invoking the graphical indicator for printers, indispensable tool in the fabrication of books. The center of support is found in the cement at the base of the sculpture, and in the tablet representing the drawers that hold the documents of knowledge. This is symbolic of the place of memory and “the nécessité de souvenir,” the need to remember oneself (individually) and ourselves (collectively). This evokes the motto, “the dévise” of Québec, which is so very present on the license plates of every car that is registered in the belle province, and on the routes that they traverse, “Je me souviens,” I remember myself.

So maybe Dürer and Jarnuszkiewicz have already created our global time capsules ... and we return to their works of art for the same reason that we return to our libraries ... just for the sake of our cultural identity, to remember who we are.
24. Great Libraries and Endurance of Cultural Memory

This article began as a reflection on libraries and their role in the preservation and transmission of cultural memory in Québec. Though it has diverged somewhat in reflecting on libraries and cultural memory in general, the narration has never strayed far from the BNQ/GBQ, even when not focusing directly on it. From its first affirmations and reclamations that French cultural heritage in North America is worth cultivating, preserving, and disseminating, to its present (re)construction vision as a vibrant knowledge and cultural center, the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec attests to the enduring spirit and memory of the people of Québec, encapsulated in a “Great Library.”

Indeed, this thesis, when first envisioned, began as a cross-cultural comparative study of public libraries in Québec and Vermont, is largely inspired by a perception of the “Grande Bibliothèque” as a metaphorical, almost mythical representation of any “Great Library”—from the papyrus scrolls of the ancient Library of Alexandria, to the hallowed halls of the world’s greatest national libraries, to here where I live, in the northeast border regions of the United States and Canada, where the small public and community libraries along the border of rural Vermont and the eastern townships of Québec offer after school reading programs to children and adolescents, crafts and book discussion groups for adults, service to shut-ins, and Internet classes for seniors. This is the “bibliothèque idéale, parfaite,” that Alberto Manguel refers to in the documentary film, La Bibliothèque entre deux feux—“perfect because it contains only that which we wish to remember about ourselves” and perhaps because it contains only that which we wish to know.
Mathieu and Lacoursière have written, “La mémoire collective, c’est le savoir de la société sur elle-même. Elle définit ‘ce que nous sommes à la lumière de ce que nous ne sommes plus’ [...] Elle est le point de référence à travers lequel on se reconnaît et s’identifie. Elle est le regard sur soi, actuel, social, pluriel, non coupé de ses sensibilités. Elle voit les recherches sur le passé comme un projet du présent tourné vers l’avenir.”

[Collective memory is society’s knowledge about itself. It defines who we are in the light of who we no longer are [...] It is the point of reference through which we recognize and identify ourselves. It is self regard, in the moment, social, plural, connected to collective sensibilities. It sees the research of the past as a project of the present turned toward the future.] These same reflections can be applied to the Grande Bibliothèque. Our collective and cultural memory is reflected in the knowledge we find about ourselves in the library--in any Great Library. Such knowledge serves to connect us to a point of self-recognition related to the greater whole of generations that have preceded us--part of something that has endured since the beginning of recorded history, and will continue to endure as part of some future legacy.
Notes

*Text translations from French to English are my own.*

1. Alberto Manguel, writer, responds to the question “What is a library?”

Transcribed from the film *La Bibliothèque entre deux feux*, VHS, dir. Serge Cardinal (Montréal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2002).


15. For the purposes of this paper, the designations “Grande Bibliothèque du Québec” (GBQ) and “Bibliothèque nationale du Québec” (BNQ) are used synonymously. In June 2001, the government of Québec adopted a law that merged the activities of the
GBQ and BNQ under one name, that of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. The term “Grande Bibliothèque du Québec” is used to designate the building that houses the patrimonial and general/diffusion collections of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.


17. Québec (Province), Loi sur la Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, L.R.Q. c. B-2.2, c. II, s. 15, 7°

18. Québec (Province), Bibliothèques publiques: statistiques, 2002 (Québec: Ministère de la culture et des communications, 2005), 11.


20. Seymour, For the People, 11.


22. Andrew Carnegie, quoted in Seymour, For the People, 10.


29. Ibid.


35. Ibid.

36. Ibid. See also comments by Lajeunesse in Les Sulpiciens et la vie culturelle, 202.

37. Jean-René Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 1910-1931, 3e éd. (Montréal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2001), 39, notes that Fauteux was a student of the Sulpicians, first at the Collège de Montréal, then as a theology student at the Grand Séminaire. He later studied law at the Université Laval de Montréal, and was admitted to the Bar in 1903, though he never practiced. Instead, he pursued a career in journalism before being named as Conservator of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.


44. Handwritten notes contained in Essai de Classification décimale Dewey refondu par Aegidius Fauteux, Fonds Saint-Sulpice, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. Quoted in Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 204.

45. Fauteux, “Règlement d’une bibliothèque catholique,” 553. Quoted in Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 204.

46. Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 204.

47. Letter from Aegidius Fauteux to Abbot Léonidas Perrin, 22 octobre 1915, Fonds Saint-Sulpice, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. Quoted in Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 203.


50. Montréal (Québec), Division de la gestion des document et des archives (DGDA), Procès verbaux du Conseil municipal, microfilm, bobine 21, 6 août 1902. Quoted in Dagenais, “Vie culturelle,” 46.


52. Dagenais, “Vie culturelle,” 47, explains that the municipal library’s gradual shift in vocation from a strictly technical library to more of a true public library was probably due, in no small measure, to the presence of its first librarian, Éva Circé-Coté, who was also a journalist and defender of education, democracy and the rights of women and the working class. She wrote under a masculine pseudonym, Julien Saint-Michel, notably for, Le Monde ouvrier—the official publication of the Québec Federation of Workers.


54. Montréal (Québec), Division de la gestion des documents et des archives (DGDA), Procès verbaux de la Commission de l’hôtel de ville, microfilm, bobine 1, 7 mars 1907. Quoted in Dagenais, “Vie culturelle,” 47.

55. I learned of this system of notation from a centenary exhibition that was held at the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, “100 ans d’histoire à voir: la Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal / 100 Years of History: the Municipal Library of Montreal,” from June 2 to
November 28, 2004, and from a conversation with the exposition’s curator, Jean-François Chartrand.


58. Ibid., 63-64.


60. Michaud, Au temps de l’Index, 72.

61. Ibid., 69.


64. Hanson, A Jewel in the Park, 45, notes that “between 1896 and 1900 the assessment of taxable property [in Westmount] fluctuated between $1,235 and $1,574 which [...] was three or four times the property value per head of the average city of Canada.

65. Ibid., 49.

66. Miller, Carnegie grants for library buildings, 8.

67. L’Annuaire de l’Université Laval de Montréal, Année académique 1913-1914 (Montréal: Arbour et Dupont, 1913), 139. Quoted by Lassonde, La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, 28.


71. Lassonde, *La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice*, 310, gives the date of closure to the general public as July 31, 1931. He recounts, in some detail, the difficulties leading to the closure in chapter VI, “Des difficultés à la fermeture,” 289-325.


78. Jean-Rémi Brault in a personal conversation with the author, recorded in Abercorn, Québec, October 30, 2004.

79. Jean-René Lassonde, in an e-mail message to author, June 18, 2005, furnishes specific dates for the terms of the conservators, presidents, and general directors of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice from 1912 to 1964.


82. Ibid., 114.


90. Ibid., “En toute fin d’année, le 31 décembre 1964, le conservateur, à la demande du sous-ministre des Affaires culturelles, fournit une définition d’une bibliothèque nationale.”


92. Ibid., 109, 111.

93. Ibid., 109-110.


95. The Commission royale d'enquête sur l'enseignement dans la province de Québec--also known as the “Commission Parent”--was established in the early 1960s to reform and modernize Québec’s educational system. The Commission’s findings, published in five volumes between 1963 and 1966, played a significant role in educational and social reforms for years to come.

97. Frégault, 163. Laporte’s Livre blanc, dated November 1965, was deposited in the Archives of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The text was never published nor deposited at the National Assembly according to the bibliographic record for this title in the online Catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, s.v., “Laporte, Pierre. Livre blanc,” http://www.bnquebec.ca/ (accessed June 15, 2005).

98. Frégault, 163.


These citations are supported with scanned images of articles and photographs from newspapers during this period, including *Le Journal de Montréal*, http://recit-us.csqi.qc.ca/histoire/equip51/pageunejml.htm, and *Le Monde* http://recit-us.csqi.qc.ca/histoire/equip51/pageunemonde1.htm (accessed July 5, 2005).

106. There are numerous Internet sites that document de Gaulle’s visit to Québec in 1967, including: Fondation et l'Institut Charles de Gaulle, “De Gaulle et le Québec,”
http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=111 (accessed July 1, 2005); Archives-télé de Radio-Canada, “Vive le Québec libre!” http://archives.radio-canada.ca/400d.asp?id=0-17-209-1048-20&wm6=1 (accessed July 1, 2005), and;


109. Ibid.


française, c1984), 15-16. Also available online:


118. Jules Larivière, “History of Legal Deposit.”


127. Québec (Province), Bibliothèques publiques: statistiques, 2002 (Québec: Ministère de la culture et des communications, 2005), 11, notes “% de la population desservie, 94.6%,” and Vermont Department of Libraries, Vermont Public Library.
Statistics: 2005 Biennial Report Supplement (Montpelier: Vermont Department of Libraries, 2005), 6, notes, “Of the total state population [...] (95%) have public library service”.


132. Several Internet sites chronicle the damage to Iraqi libraries, archives and museums and international efforts to restore the infrastructure of Iraq’s cultural institutions, including: International Federation of Library Associations, General Conference and Council, “Council Resolutions on Libraries in Iraq” IFLA, 69th Congress, Berlin, (August 1-9, 2003), http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/resolutions.htm (accessed June
26, 2005); “Prized Iraqi annals lost in blaze,” BBC News, UK ed., April 14, 2003,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2948021.stm (accessed June 26, 2005); and
American Library Association, “ALA joins international library community in assisting
Iraq National Library,” American Library Association, April 23, 2003,
http://www.alal.org/Template.cfm?Section=news&template=/ContentManagement/Conte
ntDisplay.cfm&ContentID=27982 (accessed June 26, 2005).

133. For additional information see: International Federation of Library
Associations, “Heritage Professionals Call for Emergency Protection to Save Iraq’s
(accessed July 12, 2005) and American Library Association, “ALA joins international
library community in assisting Iraq National Library,” American Library Association,
April 23, 2003,
http://www.alal.org/Template.cfm?Section=news&template=/ContentManagement/Conte
ntDisplay.cfm&ContentID=27982 (accessed July 12, 2005).

133. Daniel L. Schacter in Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the
Past, (New York: Basic Books, c1996), 21, elaborates on Sigmund Freud’s theory of
“field” and “observer” memories, which asserts that observer memories are necessarily
altered versions of original events or episodes because our initial perceptions take place
from a field perspective, at the actual place in time that an event occurs. Time and
distance thus alter memory or perceptions toward original events. Thus, any attempt to
reconstruct a library that has been destroyed will only succeed in creating an altered
version of the library based on “observer” memory--a variant of the actuality of the
“field” perspective of those who conceived the original library in the past.

134. Cited in Québec (Province), Le temps de lire, un art de vivre : politique de la
lecture et du livre (Québec: Ministère de la culture et des communications, 1998), 76.


136. Ibid., 8.

137. “[L]a bibliothèque constitue un des plus puissants leviers du développement
économique, social et culturel d’une collectivité” in Québec (Province), Ministère des
affaires culturelles, Une bibliothèque dans votre municipalité (Québec: Ministère des
affaires culturelles, 1979), 9.

138. Ibid., 11.

139. Ibid., 13.

140. Baillargeon, “Les bibliothèques publiques et la Révolution tranquille au
Québec,” 8.

141. Québec (Province), Ministère des affaires culturelles, Une bibliothèque dans
votre municipalité, 33.

Québec,” 8, notes that the book market in Québec, at the dawn of the Révolution
tranquille, was dominated by the foreign press (principally from France), that bookstores
were rare and often of mediocre quality, and that the Québec book trade was at a
disadvantage in relation to the distribution of imported books. Part of the aim of the
Révolution tranquille was to encourage literary production within the province and emphasize the value and importance of the French-language book industry in Québec.

143. Denis Vaugeois would later write, “Tout plan d’encouragement à la création de livres […] ne peut donner aucun résultat tangible si le livre ne se rend pas au public. L’objectif n’était pas tant de s’assurer d’un bassin d’auteurs et d’œuvres publiées, mais plutôt de voir à ce que les oeuvres de ces auteurs, les livres de ses éditeurs puissent rejoindre facilement le public.” [Any plan to encourage the creation of books […] can give no tangible result if the book has no means of reaching the public. The objective was not so much to assure of a supply of authors and of published works, but rather of seeing that the works of these authors, the books of these publishers could easily be joined with the public.] in Vaugeois, “Du Plan Vaugeois à aujourd’hui,” Bibliothèques publiques et transmission de la culture à l’orée du XXe siècle d’hier à aujourd’hui, ed. Jean-Paul Baillargeon, ([Sainte-Foy]: Éditions de l’IQRC: Presses de l’Université Laval; [Montréal]: Éditions de l’Asted, 2004), 83.


146. Ibid., 2.
147. Ibid., 96, 309.
149. Ibid., 143 (table).
150. Ibid., 145 (table), 148 (table).
152. The Ministère des Affaires culturelles [Ministry of Cultural Affairs] changed its name to the Ministère de la Culture in 1993 and to the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications [Ministry of Culture and Communications]--its present-day appellation--in 1994.
155. Québec (Province), Le temps de lire, un art de vivre: politique de la lecture et du livre (Québec: Ministère de la culture et des communications, 1998).
156. Gerald Grandmont, “Premiers effets de la Politique de la lecture et du livre,” Bibliothèques publiques et transmission de la culture à l’orée du XXe siècle d’hier à aujourd’hui : actes du colloque tenu à la bibliothèque Gabrielle-Roy les 5 et 6 mai 2003 à
l'occasion du 30e anniversaire de fondation de l'Asted et du 20e anniversaire de
l'inauguration de la Bibliothèque Gabrielle-Roy, ed., Jean-Paul Baillargeon ([Sainte-
Foy]: Éditions de l'IQRC: Presses de l'Université Laval; [Montréal]: Éditions de l'Asted,
2004), 90-91.

157. Ibid., 89-90.

158. Québec (Province), _Le temps de lire, un art de vivre: politique de la lecture et
du livre_, 1.

159. Ibid., 33.

160. Ibid.

161. Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, _La nouvelle Bibliothèque nationale du
Québec: les rayonnements de la mémoire_, (Montréal, Québec : Bibliothèque nationale du
Québec, 2002), 26. See also “Collections et services offerts aux nouveaux arrivants,”
[Services for newcomers]
http://www.bnquebec.ca/portal/dt/services/services_par_clientele/services_aux_nouveaux

162. Québec (Province), _Bibliothèques publiques: statistiques 1999_ (Québec:
Ministère de la culture et des communications, 2002), 11.

163. Québec (Province), Comité sur le développement d'une très grande
bibliothèque, _Une grande bibliothèque pour le Québec: rapport_. [Québec: Ministère de la
culture et des communications], 1997. Also known as the “Rapport Richard” [Richard
Report] after Clément Richard, chair of the committee and former Minister of Cultural
164. Québec (Province), *Le temps de lire, un art de vivre: politique de la lecture et du livre*, 42.

165. Ibid., 44.


167. Ibid.


169. Québec (Province), Comité sur le développement d’une très grande bibliothèque, *Une grande bibliothèque pour le Québec*, 25.


171. Québec (Province), Comité sur le développement d’une très grande bibliothèque, *Une grande bibliothèque pour le Québec*, 53.

172. Ibid., 52.

173. Ibid., 49.

174. Ibid.

175. Ibid., “Principales recommandations du Comité,” 89-91.


179. Québec (Province), Comité sur le développement d’une très grande bibliothèque, Une grande bibliothèque pour le Québec, 55-56.


182. Ibid., 18.


188. Lise Bissonnette, “ Allocution à l'occasion de l'inauguration de la Grande Bibliothèque” (29 avril 2005),

189. Much of the description about collections and resources is derived from Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, *Voici votre Grande Bibliothèque* (Montréal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2005), 6-16.

190. Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, “Mission,”

191. Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, “Présentation générale,”
http://www.bnquebec.ca/fr/edifice/edif_present_gen.htm (accessed December 4, 2003; this site was no longer accessible in August 2005).


197. Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, “Grande Bibliothèque en chiffres,” Voici votre Grande Bibliothèque, 6, indicates costs as follows: Construction (including facilities and land): $97.6 million; Computer architecture: $12.7; Acquisitions of new documents: $17.2 million; Document processing and cataloging: $14.1 million. These figures total $176.6 million.


201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.


204. Ibid.

205. Ibid.


207. The Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal is currently a branch of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. In Nodier’s time (1780-1844) it was the library of the Comte d’Artois.


209. This dream is largely translated from Fauteux, “Les bibliothèques publiques,” 24, though I’ve included key phrases in their original French.


213. Ibid., 117.

214. Ibid., 130.

215. Ibid.

216. Ibid.

217. Ibid., 130-131.

218. Ibid., 117.


221. Daniel L. Schacter, Searching for Memory, 305.

222. Ibid.


225. Ibid., 207. My own comments as a librarian are added in square brackets.


227. Ibid., 11-12.


229. The Bibliothèque nationale du Québec spent several months in 2002-2003 crafting a revised collection development policy for the national collection. The “Politique de développement de la collection patrimoniale de la Bibliothèque nationale du Québec” outlines definitions, objectives, responsibilities, types of materials, modes of acquisition, tools needed to work, and other details. This 54 page document was adopted by the library’s Administrative Council in June 2003. The collection development policy for digital collections was mentioned in a conversation that I had with Hélène Roussel, Director of Diffusion, during a visit to the GBQ in June 2005.


231. Ibid.


233. Daniel Traister, “‘You Must Remember This …’; or, Libraries as a Locus of Cultural Memories,” in Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 220.
234. Ibid., 203.

235. Ibid., 222.

236. Ibid., 220-221.


238. Ibid. Much of the discussion on symbolism in the sculpture is based on Jarnuszkiewicz’s own description of the work, with a few of my own interpretations added.


_____. Politique de développement de la Collection patrimoniale de la Bibliothèque national du Québec. Adoptée par le conseil d’administration de la BNQ le 27 juin 2003 par la résolution CA-2003-06.

_____. “Présentation générale.”


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_____.”Les bibliothèques paroissiales, précurseurs des bibliothèques publiques au
Québec?” Les bibliothèques québécoises d’hier à aujourd’hui : actes du colloque de
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_____.”Les bibliothèques publiques à Montréal au début du XXe siècle : essai d’histoire
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_____.”Les Sulpiciens et la vie culturelle à Montréal au XIXe siècle. Montréal: Fides,
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def la création de la bibliothèque civique de Montréal.” Les bibliothèques québécoises
d’hier à aujourd’hui : actes du colloque de l’ASTED et de l’AQÉI. Trois-Rivières, 27
octobre 1997. Editor, Gilles Gallichan. Collection Documentation et bibliothèques, n°


_____. Loi sur la Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, L.R.Q. c. B-2.2.

_____. Le temps de lire, un art de vivre: politique de la lecture et du livre. Québec:
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grande bibliothèque pour le Québec: rapport. [Québec: Ministère de la culture et des
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