

THE MONTREAL FORUM

The Hockey Arena at the Nexus of Sport, Religion, and Cultural Politics¹

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On March 15, 1996, a parade made its way down Ste. Catherine Street in downtown Montreal. Originating at the Forum, home to the Montreal Canadiens hockey team since 1926 (and since 1924 to the Montreal Maroons, for whom it had been built), the parade's destination was the Canadiens' new home, the Molson (now Bell) Centre three kilometres away. Riding in open-topped cars of the 1950s to 1990s were Montreal hockey legends, also of that vintage (fig. 1). A four-storey tall inflated hockey player added a festive air to the procession, which nevertheless was tinged with a funereal sadness—something gained and something lost. The ostensible purpose of the parade was to mark the official opening of the Molson Centre, but its *raison d'être* was the transference of the Forum's ghosts, its karma, its winning spirit. In light of this underlying goal, even more important than those vintage hockey players decked out in the *bleu, blanc et rouge*, was the presence of a simple torch.

In 1940, then head coach of the Canadiens Dick Irvin, Sr. conceived a brilliant tactic to motivate his players. Inspired by John McCrae's famous World War I poem, "In Flanders Fields," Irvin had painted high on the dressing room wall the following lines:

To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.²

The words remained in place for fifty-six years, during which time the team won a record twenty Stanley Cups, becoming the most successful franchise in team sport history. Guy Lafleur, one of



ILL. 1. GUY LAFLEUR, RÉJEAN HOULE, AND MARIO TREMBLAY PARADING FROM THE MONTREAL FORUM TO THE MOLSON CENTRE, *THE GAZETTE*, MARCH 16, 1996.



FIG. 2. MONTREAL CANADIENS CAPTAIN PIERRE TURGEON SALUTES FANS WITH THE TORCH AT THE FINAL GAME PLAYED AT THE MONTREAL FORUM, THE GAZETTE, MARCH 12, 1996.



FIG. 3. THE MONTREAL FORUM UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 1924. | © MCCORD MUSEUM, MP-1977.140.18.2.

the greats through the 1970s and early 1980s, recalled that, “the first words that we learned when we first stepped into the room were about the torch. The first thing they show you is what’s written on the wall.”³

Four nights before the parade this torch had been the central actor in a public relations extravaganza; a staged melodrama that was moving in spite of its calculated kitschiness. Prior to the start of the final hockey game at the Forum, on March 11, twenty-three former Canadiens greats trooped onto the ice to be cheered by an adoring crowd. Maurice “The Rocket” Richard elicited the greatest applause from the crowd, nearly ten-minutes’ worth, including shouts of “Richard, Richard,” and “Campbell, Campbell” (a reference that will be clarified further along). Then, the oldest surviving team captain, Émile “Butch” Bouchard, skated to centre ice carrying aloft a flaming torch. This incarnation of Montreal hockey tradition was passed from hand to successive hand of Canadiens captains in an allegorical reenactment of the team’s

glorious history, until it reached those of then current captain Pierre Turgeon, who thereupon dipped the torch to touch the heart of the Canadiens’ logo, the CH inscribed at centre ice (fig. 2). In this action a chapter was ended; witnessed by some eighteen thousand in attendance and by many thousands more via television, the Forum was desanctified.⁴

And now this torch was threading its way through Montreal streets, along with ice scraped from the surface of the old Forum. The twenty-four Stanley Cup banners that had hung from the Forum’s rafters, inspiring local players and fans and striking fear among visiting teams, had been judged too small to be adequately visible within the more capacious confines of the Molson Centre. They had been sold off at a charity auction two nights earlier.⁵ New, larger replicas rode with the players in the open cars, towering above them. These precious artefacts were on their way to consecrate their new home. The torch would be lit anew, the banners hoisted, and the Forum ice, now melted, would be sprinkled over a fresh sheet of Molson

Centre ice, in a ceremony of baptism and rebirth. The overtly religious dimension of these ceremonies echoed the medieval tradition of “translation,” according to which a saint’s body, remains, or some other holy relic, was transferred from one church or holy resting place to another. The sacred aspect of the parade would not have been lost on French Quebecers, especially those old enough to remember the common occurrence of local and province-wide religious processions, such as the parades organized for Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste.⁶ While the hold of the Catholic church within the Québécois culture is not so strong today as it was fifty years ago, its impact is still in evidence, in the language of profanity (*callise, tabarnak*), in the popularity of communion wafers sold as snack food in grocery stores, and even in the nicknames for the Canadiens hockey team (*les Glorieux, la Sainte-Flanelle*).⁷

Over the course of its seventy-two-year history, the Forum witnessed many extraordinary events that contributed to its status as a revered shrine. Yet little of

this veneration redounded from the quality of the Forum's architecture, which has remained never more than ordinary through a series of additions and transformations. Completed in 1924 to a design by John S. Archibald, its three-storey neo-Renaissance exterior, composed of red brick with sandstone trim, repeated the rhythms, punctuating corner pavilions, and central arched main entrance on Ste. Catherine Street of the 1909 roller rink it replaced (fig. 3). The encompassing girdle of small shops at street level, marked by signs and marquees, endowed the Forum with a commercial aspect intended to harmonize its great bulk within its downtown location. Only the Forum's massive footprint, occupying the entire block bounded by de Maisonneuve Blvd., Atwater, Ste. Catherine, and Closse Streets, and its huge, simple shed roof, visible from above or at a distance of several blocks, betrayed the scale of the building's interior volume, its reason for being. Subsequent renovations, in 1948 and a decade later, added a floor and more seating but left the exterior unchanged.

The more substantial renovation of 1968, by architect Ken Sedleigh, increased seating to about eighteen thousand and removed the interior columns that had supported the roof but had obstructed views. This makeover completely transformed the exterior, unifying and accentuating its mass by sheathing it in a composition of concrete panels and glass. Though otherwise undistinguished, this final renovation did succeed in branding the building with the iconic and tele-visually punchy image of crossed hockey sticks, actually side-illuminated escalators, visible through the glazed façade along Ste. Catherine Street. This repeatedly televised image of the building has been seen by far more people than actually entered the Forum (fig. 4).⁸



FIG. 4. THE MONTREAL FORUM, 1968, KEN SEDLEIGH, ARCHITECT. | LOWELL KOTKO.

Perhaps it is the banality of its architectural design that has led the Forum, and professional sports architecture in general, to be overlooked by architectural historians. Discussing baseball's Oakland Coliseum, *Los Angeles Times* architecture critic John Pastier remarked upon the professional vacuum concerning criticism of sports architecture. He bemoaned the fact that, "Theoreticians and scholars have given this characteristically American building form roughly 1% of the attention that they have lavished upon a handful of secluded neo-Corbusian private residences."⁹ The same may be stated for the characteristically Canadian building type—the hockey arena.¹⁰

A possible reason for this discrepancy was suggested by the author of a New York City guidebook discussing Madison Square Garden: "Sports arenas [...] are defined less by their architecture than by the collective memories they contain."¹¹ And this view was echoed in a commemorative history of Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, which was described as being "never primarily about bricks or

accoutrements or functionality but about mystique, nostalgia, and heroics—about the transporting quality of what went on there."¹² The iconic status of Golden Era arenas owes much less to form and structure than it does to myth, memory, and a culture born of shared experience.

A brief overview of the origins and development of the places in which hockey has been played in Canada will help illuminate the nature of this shared experience as well as the extent to which the hockey arena has become embedded within the fabric of Canadian culture. From its beginnings hockey has been played in buildings constructed along utilitarian lines. In the late nineteenth century, the first indoor games took place in buildings originally constructed for other purposes—either pleasure skating or curling.¹³ The builders of those early wood structures spanned the ice surface in post and lintel fashion or with elegantly curving arches springing from floor level, as at Montreal's Victoria Ice Rink of 1862, one of the very few such structures



FIG. 5. INTERIOR VIEW OF THE VICTORIA ICE RINK, MONTREAL, 1862, LAWFORD AND NELSON, ARCHITECTS. | CHARLES P. DE VOLPI, MONTRÉAL, RECUEIL ICONOGRAPHIQUE : GRAVURES HISTORIQUES ET ILLUSTRATIONS RELATIVES À LA VILLE DE MONTRÉAL (1963).



FIG. 6. FIRE AT THE SHERMAN RINK, CALGARY, 1915. | GLENBOW ARCHIVES, NB-16-446.

to have been designed by architects (Lawford and Nelson) (fig. 5). All such rinks relied on natural ice surfaces, and while some assisted nature, through the inclusion of louvered openings at the base of the wall in a bid to draw colder air onto freshly watered ice surfaces, all functioned, and changed function, in concert with the seasons. Regardless of design, all of these drafty barns had been constructed for active participants rather than spectators, so that watching a hockey match within them would have approximated the experience of spectating out-of-doors, with the audience huddled around the perimeter of a cleared patch of frozen pond. What engraved views of these buildings do not reveal, is the dense smoky atmosphere, the poor lighting conditions, and the inevitable soft, snow-covered ice surfaces that typically prevailed by game's end, to say nothing of the limited views and lack of protection from flying pucks and bodies. One small technological advance, the shift from gas to electric lighting at the end of the nineteenth century, lowered the average interior temperature of these rinks by about eight Celsius degrees.¹⁴

In spite of these inconveniences, hockey continued to grow in popularity and that created the economic condition leading to the construction of the first purpose-built hockey arena in 1898—Montreal's Westmount Arena. The Arena's now ubiquitous continuous tiers of graded stands surrounding an ice surface created "a box to contain a drama," to borrow a phrase used to describe early enclosed baseball parks.¹⁵ Yet these primitive arenas offered little to devoted fans in the way of spectator comfort; buildings were unheated and it could be horribly cold inside. (At Westmount Arena blankets were rented to spectators at ten cents apiece.) Seats were narrow and hard, but still preferable to standing, as at Ottawa's Laurier Arena (1907) where two thousand five hundred of the seven thousand available "places" for spectators were for "standees."¹⁶ Poor ventilation meant that steam and tobacco smoke combined to make visibility increasingly difficult as games progressed. Fog-covered ice surfaces were not uncommon, and since electric lights originally lacked reflectors, much of their illumination was lost to the ceiling, further impairing visibility.¹⁷ Because most

early arenas were built of wood, fire was a real and constant threat. They burned easily and often. Calgary's Sherman Rink burned down in 1915, and during 1918 and 1919 fire destroyed the Jubilee Rink, Ontario Rink, and the Westmount Arena, all in Montreal (fig. 6).

Many of these drawbacks were addressed in the next generation of hockey arenas constructed between 1920 and 1931.¹⁸ Built of steel and concrete, often remarkably quickly during the off-season, these arenas (not rinks) were named Forum, Gardens, and Olympia in recognition of the new-found confidence of their owners. These buildings also distinguished themselves from their predecessors in being conceived exclusively by architects, mostly competent practitioners of local or regional repute, including two theatre architects: Thomas Lamb in New York and Charles Howard Crane in Detroit. The improved solidity and stability of these arenas were essential components to the financial success of the fledgling National Hockey League (NHL). While fan comfort was equally upgraded, hockey spectating still left much to be desired.¹⁹

Until the NHL expanded in 1967, hockey audiences comprised a core of traditional fans located in Canada and in the north-east and north-central United States. For these enthusiasts, hockey was a unique form of entertainment, often bordering on religious fervour. This devout audience willingly accepted a spectatorship experience that included obstructed sightlines, steeply graded stands that could induce vertigo, bad food, smoky corridors, and cold. (I well remember the galoshes, overcoat, and mittens I wore to watch the Canadiens play at the Forum in the mid-1960s.) For these spectators the game on the ice was the main attraction and they craved little more. It could even be argued that the shared experience of these hardships further united hockey fans, confirming their membership in a community of true believers. Such loyalty and evident contentment were repaid by team owners who were only too happy to maintain the status quo. Maple Leaf Gardens, the Montreal Forum, and indeed the remaining hockey arenas of what are referred to as the “Original Six” teams, served their cities with only modest alterations for longer than sixty years, on average. This fact alone contributed to the reverence with which these buildings were regarded by their respective fans.²⁰

While hockey players in Canada have been reckoned as heroes and the NHL arenas in which they battle regarded with awe, the fundamental importance of even ordinary winter sports facilities to life in Canada is no less relevant for lacking a mythological dimension and for being equally overlooked. In 1878, a British settler described how essential the skating rink was to winter life in Canada: “The rink is the great winter amusement [where] the bands play and young people meet to skate, to dance

on skates and to amuse themselves.”²¹ One hundred years later nothing had changed. In their 1989 book, *Home Game*, Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor showed how the humble, ubiquitous Quonset-hut type arenas that dot the Canadian landscape serve as *de facto* cultural centres, the glue that binds many small communities together. They recounted the compelling story of Radisson, Saskatchewan, a prairie town of four hundred and thirty-four people faced with the daunting challenge of replacing their structurally unsound rink. The authors interviewed locals who referred to their rink as “the grand central gathering place for the young and old [...] the backbone of the community [...] the gathering place for the winter months.” And they speculated on the impact of its loss: “We know of other towns that have lost their rinks. The towns die overnight.”²²

If the hockey arena’s cultural significance and “mystique” have been overlooked by architectural historians, some sports historians and sociologists have argued that the game of hockey needs to be demythologized in order to be properly understood. Richard Gruneau and David Whitson in *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics* ask whether hockey still commands a central place within the collective psyche (if such a thing can be said to exist) of an increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic Canada. And they argue that our view of the game has been coloured by romantic, essentialist notions, according to which hockey, the Canadian psyche, and the Canadian landscape have been seen as organically interconnected, as evidenced by references to hockey as “the Canadian specific” (Al Purdy), “the language that pervades Canada” (Scott Young), and “the game of our lives” (Peter Gzowski).²³ For Doug Beardsley,



FIG. 7. MAPLE LEAF GARDENS, TORONTO, 1931, ROSS AND MACDONALD, ARCHITECTS. | MAPLE LEAF GARDENS ARCHIVES.

“Hockey is an allegory of our life [...] the real national anthem of Canada.”²⁴ But it is not necessary to mythologize or universalize the significance of hockey in order to appreciate the primacy of the hockey arena as a major site of cultural activity in Canada.

For example, even after one brushes aside the Runyonesque saga of Maple Leaf Gardens’ construction from out of the depths of the Depression (a story that features owner Conn Smythe, the hockey-mad war hero and gambler who raises the money to purchase a stake in the team with a successful outing at the race track and who bends corporate financiers and union workers to the “higher” purpose of realising a sports temple), and one overlooks the nicknames it inspired—“The Taj Ma-Hockey,” “Make-Believe Gardens,” “Puckingham Palace,” “The Carleton Street Cash Box”—one is still left with a building known to and revered by millions of Canadians (fig. 7).²⁵



FIG. 8. THE SPORTIMER CLOCK AT MAPLE LEAF GARDENS, TORONTO. | MAPLE LEAF GARDENS ARCHIVES.

Designed in 1931 by leading corporate architectural firm Ross and MacDonald, Maple Leaf Gardens fully succeeds as a work of architecture; its streamlined eleven-storey form, Deco ornament, and massive dome alluding to its great column-free interior volume, establish a grand street presence in its predominantly low-rise neighbourhood and against a city skyline still dominated by church spires.

In addition to the legendary tales of its creation, the renown of Maple Leaf Gardens was fostered via another celebrated medium, the voice of Foster Hewitt. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Hewitt's weekly radio broadcasts of Maple Leaf games created a virtual community of faithful listeners across Canada, people who felt an intimate connection to Maple Leaf Gardens without ever having set foot inside the place. According to Scott Young,

By the end of the 1930s, each game was reaching nearly two million people. Foster Hewitt's voice and, beginning in 1939, the popular intermission discussions featuring hockey experts on what was called the "Hot Stove League" became part of Canada's social history. Millions in all provinces came to treat Saturday night as Hockey Night, one of the few bright spots in a country facing war while still suffering the Great Depression. Fans coming to Toronto for the first time trooped like pilgrims to Maple Leaf Gardens, the only Toronto institution known across Canada with unquestioning respect. The same situation prevailed in Montreal, where fans flocked to see the Forum.²⁶

It was Conn Smythe who recognized early on the power of radio to inspire fan interest and fuel attendance. And when Foster Hewitt discovered that the best location from which to observe the game and report the action was high above the ice surface, a special broadcast booth was constructed for this purpose at Maple Leaf Gardens, a pavilion, suspended fifty-six feet over centre ice. This "gondola," the term still used to describe these booths and derived from the cabins carried beneath dirigibles (the appearance of which were still cause for great wonder at this date), was originally accessed by a catwalk without safety railing. More than the Art Deco styling of its exterior, it was this element of Maple Leaf Gardens that suggested the modernity and giddy excitement of the late 1920s.²⁷

Other technological marvels contributed to the experience of modernity at Maple Leaf Gardens. The four-sided SportTimer time clock, installed in 1932, intensified the drama of game play through the urgent presence of its ticking seconds (fig. 8). Maple Leaf Gardens also included what then was believed to be the largest permanent indoor sound system in the Dominion of Canada.

Twelve loudspeakers were suspended over centre ice from the same frame used to support the boxing ring lights and from the centre of which hung the time clock. Together with Foster Hewitt's gondola, these features served as focal points of advanced technology within Maple Leaf Gardens, lending a progressive dynamism to sport spectating that was entirely new. Not only did this sound system amplify and broadcast music and announcements to fans within the building, but it could receive programming feeds from outside and transmit everything to external radio stations for broadcast to remote listeners. Maple Leaf Gardens was "plugged in."²⁸

Like Maple Leaf Gardens, the Montreal Forum was one of the Original Six hockey arenas that achieved iconic status over the course of its seventy-two years of continuous operation. But due to Quebec's unique history and distinct culture within Canada, the Forum came to symbolize more than just athletic struggle and triumph. Since the beginning of organized hockey in Montreal in the 1870s, teams had often been established along ethnic lines. The Shamrock and Wanderer teams were Irish, the Montagnard and National were French, and the Victorias were Scots. With the advent of open professionalism in the early twentieth century and the rise of civic-based teams competing in inter-city leagues, such early vestiges of the game largely were left behind, although promoters might still try to use the ethnicity of players, sometimes manufactured, to drum up fan support from specific communities.²⁹ But in Montreal, the rivalry between French and English hockey clubs, which continued at the NHL level through to 1938, was always perceived as more than a struggle to establish ethnic bragging rights. It carried on its back long-simmering, irreconcilable differences over

language, religion, economics, politics, and cultural values.

After fire destroyed the Westmount Arena in 1918, the Montreal Wanderers ceased operations, leaving the Montreal Canadiens as the sole club representing Montreal in the National Hockey League. The Montreal Canadiens Hockey Club had been formed in 1909 “to add a French face to hockey in Montreal,” which then included English teams such as the Shamrocks, Wanderers, and Victorias.³⁰ The name “Canadiens,” as well as the nickname “Les Habitants” or Habs, made reference to specifically French-Canadian traditions.³¹

When the National Hockey League expanded from three to ten teams, between 1924 and 1926, Montreal gained a second franchise. From the very start the Maroons were intended to draw support from Montreal’s English community and to restore a rivalry with the Canadiens that had lapsed after the Montreal Wanderers folded.³² The Maroon’s new building, the Montreal Forum, was located on the border of Westmount, bastion of English Montreal society, and a stone’s throw from the site of the now-destroyed Westmount Arena, former home to the now-defunct Wanderers.³³ The site was already associated with popular entertainment, having served since 1908 as home to a roller rink that enclosed an open-air skating rink, also called the Forum. The new arena’s investors and board of directors represented a Who’s Who of Montreal’s English corporate elite, including: Edward Beatty, president of the Canadian Pacific Railway; Sir Charles Gordon, president of the Bank of Montreal; Sir Herbert Holt, president of the Royal Bank; J.W. McConnell of St. Lawrence Sugar; and several Molsons, of brewery and bank fame.

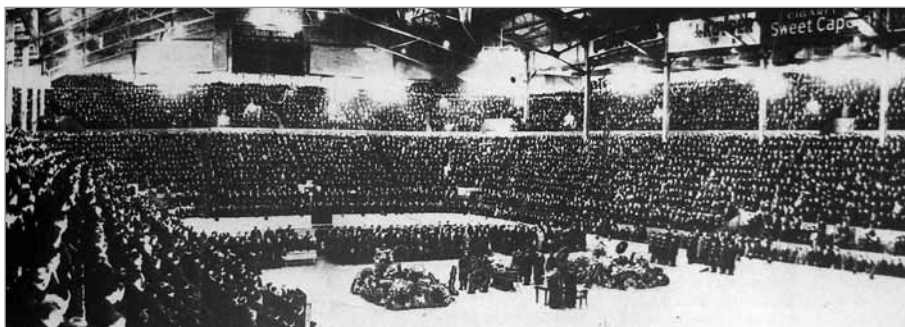


FIG. 9. THE FUNERAL SERVICE FOR HOWIE MORENZ AT THE MONTREAL FORUM, MARCH 11, 1937. | HOCKEY HALL OF FAME, TORONTO.

French-English relations in Quebec ever have been subject to often inexplicable and ironic anomalies and hockey is no stranger to these. The fact that it was the Canadiens who played the first game in the new Forum, rather than the Maroons, is merely one of these incongruities.³⁴ That the Forum would soon become the sole home of the Canadiens, emerging as a symbol of French-Canadian pride in the excellence of their hockey team, and a rallying site for a rising wave of French-Quebec nationalism, is merely a further instance of this irony.³⁵

Prior to 1963, every NHL franchise sponsored amateur teams as a means of grooming junior-aged players who might eventually play for the parent club. The rights of these young players were owned by the franchise. Consequently, Canadiens teams were guaranteed a steady stream of local, French-Canadian talent for fans to identify with and rally behind. Even when this system was dismantled in 1963 with the introduction of the NHL Amateur Draft, a system that guaranteed each NHL club equal opportunities to acquire amateur players, the Canadiens were allowed a special dispensation. “Due to the unique situation of the Montreal Canadiens, it was agreed to protect the French-Canadian flavour of the team. Therefore, the Canadiens were granted the option to select up to

two players of French-Canadian heritage before any other team could exercise its first selections in the Amateur Draft.”³⁶

Between 1924 and 1938, Montreal’s two hockey teams combined for five Stanley Cups, four of them won at the Forum.³⁷ The two teams produced a succession of stars, from the goaltending heroics of three-time Vezina trophy winner George Hainsworth to the scoring prowess of Nels Stewart, Herb Gardiner, Aurel Joliat, and the “Stratford Streak,” Howie Morenz. It was the tragic events surrounding the death of Morenz, named Canada Press “hockey player of the first half-century,” that first, and forever, marked the Forum as more than a simple sports auditorium. Rushing toward the net during a match against Chicago on the evening of January 28, 1937, Morenz was checked and fell awkwardly into the boards with a Chicago defenseman on top of him, breaking his leg. Still in the hospital two months later, he suffered a heart attack and died. His funeral service, held at the Forum, was the largest ever arranged for an athlete in Canada. After thousands had paid their respects at the funeral chapel, Morenz’s casket was brought to the Forum on the morning of March 11 (fig. 9). Laid at centre ice, surrounded by four truckloads of flowers and an honour guard of team-mates, some fifty thousand mourners filed past to bid farewell



FIG. 10. "SUSPENSION DE RICHARD : CAMPBELL EST MENACÉ DE MORT," LA PATRIE, 17 MARS 1955.



FIG. 11. "ARREST 41 AFTER FORUM HOCKEY RIOT," THE MONTREAL STAR, MARCH 18, 1955.

to Morenz in the four hours preceding the ceremony. Ten thousand fans remained behind for the funeral service itself, which was broadcast to a still larger audience on radio.³⁸

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, a period during which French Quebecers were subjugated by both church and state and economically subservient to English bosses, the success of their hockey team provided an important and visible source of pride and positive self-identification. And it was during these two decades that the Canadiens began their ascendancy as the most successful franchise in team sport history by winning eight Stanley Cups. The Forum began to be recognized as a shrine where home-grown heroes could be worshipped with raucous abandon. But the events of March 17, 1955, proved that hockey sometimes could be more than a sport, and that a hockey arena sometimes could be more than bricks and mortar. The Forum, formerly a site

of athletic brilliance and entertainment, became a national stage for the unfolding of a cultural and political drama.³⁹

On March 16, the greatest of the Forum's heroes, fiery-eyed champion Maurice (the Rocket) Richard, was suspended by NHL President Clarence Campbell for the remainder of the hockey season and all of the playoffs for having attacked an official. When Campbell attended a hockey game at the Forum the following night, he was pelted with debris and physically assaulted by indignant fans. A tear gas canister erupted within the arena and as the angry crowd left the building, the game now forfeit, they were joined by placard-carrying protesters who had gathered outside, and together they rioted and looted through the night (fig. 10). The next evening, a shaken Maurice Richard spoke to Montreal fans over the airwaves in French and in English from the Forum dressing room. Asking for calm, he said: "I'll take my punishment and come back next year."

The riot was more than an outburst of hooliganism, as it was described by Montreal's English-language newspapers (fig. 11).⁴⁰ In Roch Carrier's poetic retelling of the story, Richard's suspension was both unfair and a direct cause of the riot: "Clarence Campbell is trying to crush a little French Canadian who has wings. That's what people are saying. Anger is rumbling in the province of Quebec like the water held captive in the rivers by the winter ice."⁴¹ Clarence Campbell was regarded by many as an agent of James Norris, head of the powerful family that effectively controlled the NHL and whose team, the Detroit Red Wings, was then in a struggle with the Canadiens for first place.⁴² But for Quebec's Francophones, Campbell also represented the Anglo establishment that for too long had dominated the little guy, for whom Richard was their symbolic champion. One year earlier Richard had accused Campbell of being anti-French in his ghost-written sports



FIG. 12. EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE MOLSON (NOW BELL) CENTRE, MONTREAL, 1999. | HOWARD SHUBERT.



FIG. 13. EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE PEPSI FORUM, MONTREAL, 2005. | HOWARD SHUBERT.

column, “Le Tour du Chapeau,” in the French-language Montreal newspaper *Samedi-Dimanche*.⁴³ And even twenty years later, in a biography of Richard, bitterness over Campbell’s handling of the affair and his identification with Anglo authority remained absolute: “*Monsieur Campbell, du haut de sa grandeur, écrasait de sa botte anglaise Maurice Richard, et, en celui-ci chaque Canadien français se sentait écrasé.*”⁴⁴

As if Richard’s suspension was not enough to draw attention to the grievances of French-speaking Quebecer’s against their English masters, an ongoing controversy over the naming of the new Canadian National Railway (CNR) hotel then nearing completion on downtown Dorchester (now René-Lévesque) Boulevard exploded onto the front pages of Montreal newspapers. Sharing the front page of *Le Devoir* with the news of Richard’s suspension on March 17 was an article subtitled “Le royalisme et Donald Gordon.” Francophones, championed by then mayor Jean Drapeau, were offended by CNR President Donald Gordon’s plan to name the hotel the *Queen Elizabeth*. They preferred the name *Château*

Maisonneuve. Drapeau had also spoken out against Clarence Campbell, condemning him for his harsh suspension of Richard. After the riot, Drapeau blamed Campbell for having incited the crowd through his presence at the game and advised him to stay away in the future.⁴⁵

Newspapers called the rioting the worst the city had seen since the anti-conscription battles during World War II, an earlier flash point that had highlighted the distance separating Canada’s two solitudes.⁴⁶ There is divided opinion on when to date the start of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution. Did it begin as early as 1949 with the Asbestos Strike, when the Church gave its support to workers and union rather than to the corporation and the government of Maurice Duplessis? Or, as many commentators believe, did it begin with the election of Jean Lesage’s Liberal party in 1960? Some have even suggested that the Richard Riot, five years earlier, deserves credit.⁴⁷ Whatever one believes, there can be no argument that the Montreal Forum played a pivotal role at the politically charged centre of a people’s movement from oppression toward self-definition.

The closing of the Forum and the move to the Molson Centre in 1996 were therefore events requiring careful handling for both economic and political reasons (fig. 12). Those fans greeting Maurice Richard with shouts of “Richard, Richard” and “Campbell, Campbell” indicate the long memories of Quebecers, but also the political and cultural resonance of the Richard Riot. (Many of those in attendance at the Forum’s final game probably had not even been born when the riot occurred.) Quebec society had undergone massive changes in the intervening years, striking evidence of which could be found in Montreal’s remaining English-language newspaper. *Montreal Gazette*’s front page on March 12, 1996, featured a headline and photograph describing the closing of the Forum along with an article titled, “We are all Quebecers—Bouchard,” reporting on a speech in which Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard sought to reassure Anglophones that they “belong in Quebec because it’s their home, too.”

The game of hockey and the economic and social environment encompassing it had also undergone substantial changes in the intervening years since the Richard



FIG. 14. INTERIOR VIEW OF THE PEPSI FORUM, MONTREAL, 2005. | HOWARD SHUBERT.

Riot. Players were now less loyal to teams, in the face of million-dollar salaries, and fans were less loyal to hockey, in the face of an expanding universe of competing entertainment possibilities. In spite of those fans with long memories, capable of connecting the dots between Maurice Richard, the Forum, and a struggle over politics and language, the Forum succumbed to economic realities. Though not demolished—the fate of Golden era arenas in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, and New York—it has been gutted and otherwise disfigured on the way to its reincarnation as the Pepsi Forum, a multiplex cinema with shops and restaurants (fig. 13). An ersatz re-creation of the Forum’s former interior, located within the new atrium, complete with tiers of rescued seats, provides a sanitized and Disneyfied experience for visiting tourists (fig. 14). In Toronto, a proposal was put forward in 2004 to transform Maple Leaf Gardens into a Loblaws superstore,

according to a plan that would preserve its exterior along with glimpses of the original interior.⁴⁸

Although of no consolation to those devoted fans mourning the loss of such cherished shrines and of the memories they embodied, it is nonetheless useful to recall that Canadian society generally has become less observant of religion through the twentieth century, even as it has placed greater emphasis on wealth and consumption. According to statistics gathered by the *Fondation du patrimoine religieux du Québec*, some two hundred and fifty religious buildings in the province have closed their doors since 1976.⁴⁹ Nearly half of these gained new life in the service of different religious faiths, but the remainder either have been demolished or transformed to new functions, often quite remote from the spiritual roles they once played. If one such example, the 1893 Valleyfield



FIG. 15. "WHILE BIDDING THE FORUM FAREWELL MIGHT INDUCE FEELINGS OF TRAUMA OR GREAT LOSS..." | NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR DECARIE MOTORS, MARCH 1996.

Presbyterian Church, could be rechristened the Centre d'Escalade Vertige, an indoor rock-climbing centre, as it was in November 2005, we can hardly be surprised by the fate of the Forum.⁵⁰ The deconsecration and destruction of so many religious buildings, over such a long period, has elicited very little public response, individually or collectively. Conversely, the overwhelming outpouring of sadness and regret surrounding the Forum’s closing and subsequent transformation potently illustrates that building’s deep hold on the popular imagination and serves as stirring evidence for its claim to apotheosis within some future pantheon devoted to buildings of Canadian culture (fig. 15).

NOTES

1. This paper is part of a larger study on the history of skating rinks and hockey arenas in North America from about 1860 until 2000. Research for this project was supported by the Institut de recherche en histoire de l'architecture, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture. I would like to thank Nicholas Adams, Réjean Legault, and Irwin Shubert who kindly read earlier versions of this paper and offered important suggestions for corrections and improvements.

2. John McCrae, 1919, *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*, Toronto, Briggs.

In Flanders Field the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Some 600,000 Canadian soldiers saw action in World War I, out of a population of 6 million. Nearly 60,000 lost their lives, 87% as a result of enemy action in France and Flanders, and more than 150,000 were wounded. Dick Irvin, Sr. served in the Fort Gary Horse Regiment as a motorcycle dispatcher from late-1917 until war's end. He saw action in France, Belgium, and Holland. (I am grateful to Dick Irvin for generously sharing details of his father's service in World War I; telephone conversation with the author, December 13, 2005.)

3. "Au revoir Forum, bienvenue Molson Centre," *Associated Press*, March 12, 1996 – 21:58 EST, [<http://hockey.ballparks.com/NHL/MontrealCanadiens/articles.htm>], accessed September 15, 2006.
4. For a stimulating and insightful look at the closing of the Forum and the cultural significance of hockey arenas in Canada, see Shubert, Irwin, 1998, "Hockey Arenas: Canada's Secular Shrines," *Architecture*

Canada, Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, vol. 23, no. 2. p. 49-54.

5. The banners and other Forum memorabilia were sold at an auction on March 12, 1996, that raised over \$700,000 for charity. A hot dog grill sold for \$900, a turnstile for \$1,800, while former NHL President Clarence Campbell's seat went for \$12,000. (Curran, Peggy, 1996, "Fans Bid for Forum Treasures," *Montreal Gazette*, March 13, p. A1.)
6. Religious processions date back to the seventeenth century in Quebec and continued into the 1930s, only disappearing completely with the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. All such processions in Quebec followed a similar pattern: meeting at the church, the faithful would take mass, assemble behind the banner for their group, and then parade through the streets while reciting prayers and singing hymns. The ritualistic patterns of religion also find a parallel in the deep strain of superstition that runs through professional sport. Lucky socks, specific bus seating plans, playoff beards, and game-day rituals are legion. Famously, goaltender Patrick Roy used to step, rather than skate, over the centre-ice line when entering or leaving the ice surface.
7. Peretz, Ingrid, 2005, "Wafers Sold as Snacks Showing Mass Appeal," *Globe and Mail*, December 27, p. A1.
8. The televisual qualities of sports stadiums and their potential as marketing tools is now an accepted fact amongst designers of sports facilities. Brian Trubey, architect of the new Baltimore Colts football stadium, noted that, "NFL venues are the most-seen type of architecture on television. As much time as we spend making [the stadium] incredible for the people actually physically there, we believe the balance of the audience—which is probably 99 percent of it—hadn't been leveraged as a participant in terms of enhancing brand through the stadium." (Frangos, Alex, 2005, "New Football Arenas Push Bounds of Stadium Engineering," *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, as published in *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, [<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/pp/05241/561996.stm>], accessed September 15, 2006.)
9. Pastier, John, 1974, "The Laurel That Oakland Lost," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, p. 1. If baseball stadiums

received 1% of architectural criticism, it is fair to assume that hockey arenas, by extension, have been virtually unnoticed. Pastier himself only discusses the stadium, ignoring the pendant arena. Oakland Coliseum (1974) was designed by Myron Goldsmith and Chuck Bassett for Skidmore, Owings, Merrill. (Adams, Nicholas, 2006. *Skidmore, Owings, Merrill 1936-2006*, Milan, Electa.)

10. Sports facilities, including arenas for skating and hockey, have received virtually no attention by architectural historians, even while closely related building types such as movie theatres, circus buildings, and shopping malls have been studied regularly.
11. Morrone, Francis, c1994, *The Architectural Guidebook to New York City*, Salt Lake City, Gibbs Smith, p. 138.
12. Wilkins, Charles, 1999, "Maple Leaf Gardens (and how it got that way)," In *Maple Leaf Gardens Memories & Dreams 1931 – 1999*, Toronto, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Ltd., p. 53-54.
13. For a more detailed consideration of the changes in hockey spectatorship since the nineteenth century, see Shubert, Howard, 2002, "The Changing Experience of Hockey Spectatorship: Architecture, Design, Technology, and Economics," *Putting it on Ice*, Halifax, Gorsebrook Research Institute, St. Mary's University.
14. By 1887 most important American and continental theatres were lit by electricity. (Penzel, Frederik, 1978, *Theatre Lighting Before Electricity*, Middletown (CT), Wesleyan University Press, p. 74.)
15. Nelson, Brian, 1995, "Baseball," In Karl B. Raitz (ed.), *The Theater of Sport*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins Press, p. 34.
16. Kidd, Bruce, 1996, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 197.
17. Kitchen, Paul, 1993, "Dey Brothers' Rinks Were Home to the Senators," unpublished paper, Ottawa City archives, p. 3.
18. For a chronological listing of skating rinks and hockey arenas in North America, see Shubert, Howard, 2000, "The Evolution of the Hockey Arena 1860 – 2000," *Total Hockey II*, New York, Total Sports.
19. On the origins of professional hockey in Canada, particularly its economic and administrative history, see: Chi-Kit

- Wong, John, 2005, *Lords of the Rinks: The Emergence of the National Hockey League, 1875-1936*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press; Kidd Bruce, *op. cit.*; and Mills, David, 1991, "The Blue Line and the Bottom Line: Entrepreneurs and the Business of Hockey in Canada, 1927 – 1988, In James A. Mangan and Paul Staudohar (eds.), *American Professional Sports: Social, Historical, Economic and Legal Perspectives*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
20. Between 1942 and 1967, the National Hockey League consisted of only six teams, in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, New York, and Toronto. The arenas in these cities (and their dates of operation) are as follows: Montreal Forum (1924-1996), Madison Square Garden, New York (1925-1966), Olympia Stadium, Detroit (1927-1979), Boston Garden (1928-1995), Chicago Stadium (1929-1994), Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto (1931-1999).
 21. Rowan, John J., 1876, *The Emigrant and Sportsman in Canada: Some Experiences of an Old Country Settler: With sketches of Canadian Life, Sporting Adventures and Observations on the Forests and Fauna*, London, E. Stanford, [republished Montreal, Dawson Bros., 1881].
 22. Dryden, Ken and Roy MacGregor, 1989, *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, p. 15. The old rink was demolished in 1992 and replaced by the Radisson Communiplex, a \$1.9 million facility that hosts hockey and figure skating. See "The Town of Radisson Saskatchewan," [http://radisson.sasktel-hosting.net/], accessed September 15, 2006. On the cultural significance of Radisson's arenas and of the fund-raising campaign to support construction of the new facility, see Shubert, Irwin : 49. According to Statistics Canada, the 2001 population of Radisson was 401.
 23. Gruneau, Richard and David Whitson, 1993, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, Toronto, Garamond Press, p. 25.
 24. Beardsley, Doug, 1987, *Country on Ice*, Toronto, PaperJacks, p. 36-37.
 25. Ross and MacDonald were the architects. On the Toronto Maple Leafs and Maple Leaf Gardens, see: *Maple Leaf Gardens Memories & Dreams 1931 – 1999*, Toronto, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, 1999; Podnieks, Andrew, 1995, *The Blue and White Book: From Mutual Street to Maple Leaf Gardens*, Toronto, ECW Press; Young, Scott, 1990, *The Boys of Saturday Night: Inside Hockey Night in Canada* Toronto, McClelland and Stewart; Hewitt, Foster, 1970, *Hockey Night in Canada*, Toronto, Ryerson Press [1953, revised printing].
 26. Young : 61.
 27. Another aspect of hockey's modernity arose through the last half of the twentieth century. As athletes and teams adapted to advances made throughout the world, sport become increasingly international. (For hockey, the pivotal moment was the 1972 series between Canada and the USSR, which demonstrated to Canada that it had much to learn from other countries.) For sports historians and sociologists, this quest for international excellence reflects sport's participation in the culture of modernity, but a consequent side effect has been a loss of national character. Allan Guttman contends that in watching international sporting events we are participating in a thoroughly modern cultural form and thereby celebrating our modernity. Cities that can boast a major league team are therefore truly modern and world class. (See Guttman, Allen, 1978, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, New York, Columbia University Press, as quoted in Hall, Ann, Trevor Slack, Garry Smith, and David Whitson, 1991, *Sport In Canadian Society*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, p. 42.)
 28. "An Outstanding Accomplishment – Erection of Large Sports Arena in Five Months," *Contract Record and Engineering Review*, November 11, 1931, p. 1353.
 29. Johnny Bruno, the promoter for Madison Square Garden, changed the names of Lorne Chabot to "Chabotsky" and Oliver Reinikka to "Ollie Rocco." (Kreiser, John and Lou Friedman, 1996, *The New York Rangers: Broadway's Longest Running Hit*, Champaign (IL), Sagamore Publishing, p. 1.)
 30. Goyens, Chris, 1998, "Montreal Canadians," In Dan Diamond (ed.), *Total Hockey*, New York, Total Sports, p. 201.
 31. "Habitants" was a French term used to describe the rugged farmer-settlers of seventeenth-century New France, while "Canadien" had a similar meaning, referring specifically to the hard-working citizens of Montreal. (Goyens : 201.)
 32. On the Montreal Maroons, see Brown, William, 1999, *The Montreal Maroons: The Forgotten Stanley Cup Champions*, Montreal, Véhicule Press.
 33. On the Forum, see: "The Forum Building, Montreal," *Construction*, March 1925, p. 81-86; Goyens, Chrystian, Allan Turowitz, and Jean-Luc Duguay, 1996, *Le livre officiel Le Forum de Montréal : La fierté pour toujours*, Montreal, Éditions Effix; Johnson, Dana, 1997, "Montreal Forum / Le Forum de Montréal," *Ottawa: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Agenda Paper (1997-20)*.
 34. The Canadiens' home ice was the Mount Royal Arena, which did not have artificial ice. With the construction of the Forum, the owners of the Mount Royal Arena feared, correctly, that they might lose the Canadiens as tenants unless they also installed an ice plant. It was problems with the functioning of this ice plant that led the Canadiens to play their home opening game at the Forum on November 29, 1924.
 35. "Ironically, the first owner [of the Canadiens], J. Ambrose O'Brien, was neither a Montrealeur nor a French Canadian [but] the scion of a wealthy mine-owning family [...] [from] Renfrew, Ontario." (Goyens : 201.)
 36. Tredree, Chris, 1998, "The NHL Entry Draft," In Dan Diamond (ed.) *Total Hockey*, New York, Total Sports, p. 285.
 37. The Canadiens began playing at the Forum in 1926 after breaking their lease at the Mount Royal Arena. Montrealeurs were already accustomed to viewing the Stanley Cup as their property. The trophy had been won by Montreal teams 14 times in 25 years, from 1893, when the prize was first awarded, to 1917, the year the NHL was formed.
 38. Robinson, Dean, 1982, *Howie Morenz: Hockey's First Superstar*, Erin (ON), Boston Mills Press, chap. 9. Maurice Richard's funeral in 2000 elicited a still larger public response. His open casket at the Molson Centre was mourned by some 115,000 persons.
 39. Montrealeurs were already familiar with the idea that buildings could embody cultural, political, and religious values. Since the mid-nineteenth century they had lived with a particularly apt opposition

of cultural symbols at Place d'Armes, in the heart of the old city, where the Gothic Revival Notre-Dame Church, emblem of French Catholic religion, stands across from the neoclassical Bank of Montreal headquarters, symbol of Anglo-Scottish commerce.

40. The headline of the *Montreal Star* on March 18, 1955, was: "Arrest 41 after Forum Riot Crowd Loots or Damages 50 Stores." The *La Presse* lead was: "Défi et Provocation de Campbell."
41. Carrier, Roch, 2001, *Our Life With the Rocket: The Maurice Richard Story*, Toronto, Viking/Penguin, p. 222.
42. In spite of a stately and dignified manner that personified wisdom and leadership, Clarence Campbell functioned as a servant to the owners, according to David Cruise and Alison Griffiths. Responding to the suggestion that Campbell be replaced, Stafford Smythe, son of Maple Leafs owner Conn Smythe, reportedly replied, "Where would we find another Rhodes scholar, graduate lawyer, decorated war hero, and former prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, *who will do what he's told?*" (Cruise, David and Alison Griffiths, 1991, *Net Worth: Exploding the Myths of Pro Hockey*, Toronto, Penguin Books, p. 41.) (See also Goyens, Chrystian and Allan Turowetz, 1981, *Lions in Winter*, Markham, Ontario, Penguin Books Canada Ltd., p. 94.)
43. O'Brien, Andy, 1967, *Firewagon Hockey: The Story of the Montreal Canadiens*, Toronto, Ryerson Press, p. 57-58; and Carrier : 210-212.
44. Pellerin, Jean Marie, 1976, *L'idole d'un peuple : Maurice Richard*, Montreal, Éditions de l'homme, p. 92, as quoted in: Dupperault, Jean R., 1981, "L'Affaire Richard: A Situational Analysis of the Montreal Hockey Riots of 1955," *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 12, May, p. 80. Maurice Richard and his riot continue to exert a hold on the popular imagination of Quebeckers, and others. The 2005 feature-length film, *Maurice Richard*, directed by Charles Binamé and starring Roy Dupuis as Maurice Richard, culminates with the Forum riot.
45. "Il était évident bien avant la partie de hockey de jeudi soir que la décision de M. Campbell était d'une extrême impopularité, et l'on pouvait facilement prévoir une démonstration de la part de ceux qui allaient y assister. J'avais raison d'avoir confiance que la population manifesterait dans l'ordre, puisque ce n'est que sur la provocation causée par la présence de M. Campbell que les protestations ont pris une autre tournure. Il eût été sage de la part de M. Campbell de s'abstenir de se rendre au Forum, surtout d'annoncer publiquement à l'avance sa visite. Sa présence en effet, pouvait être interprétée comme un véritable défi." (Drapeau, Jean, 1955, "La venue de Campbell au Forum constituait un véritable défi," *La Patrie*, 19 mars, p. 1.)
46. The reference is to Hugh MacLennan (*Two Solitudes*, Toronto, Collins, c1945), which treated the alienation and confrontation of Canada's two European founding nations/cultures (English – French) through an individual's struggle for linguistic and cultural identity in the inter-war years.
47. Goyens and Turowetz : 87-92; Ulmer, Michael, 1996, *Canadiens Captains*, Toronto, Macmillan Canada, p. 65-72.
48. On the proposed transformation of Maple Leaf Gardens, see Richards, Larry, 2004, "The Puck Stopped Here," *Building*, October/November.
49. The "Liste des lieux de culte fermés" documents more than 300 Quebec religious buildings that have closed since 1920, according to records of the Fondation du patrimoine religieux du Québec. On this organization, see [<http://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/>], accessed September 15, 2006.
50. On the Valleyfield Presbyterian Church, see the "Inventaire des lieux de culte du Québec," [<http://www.lieuxdeculte.qc.ca/index.htm>], accessed September 15, 2006. On the Centre d'Escalade Vertige, see "Une église qu'il faudra escalader," *Le Soleil de Valleyfield*, 20-21 mai 2005, p. 1, 4; and the website [<http://www.vertige-escalade.com/>], accessed September 15, 2006.