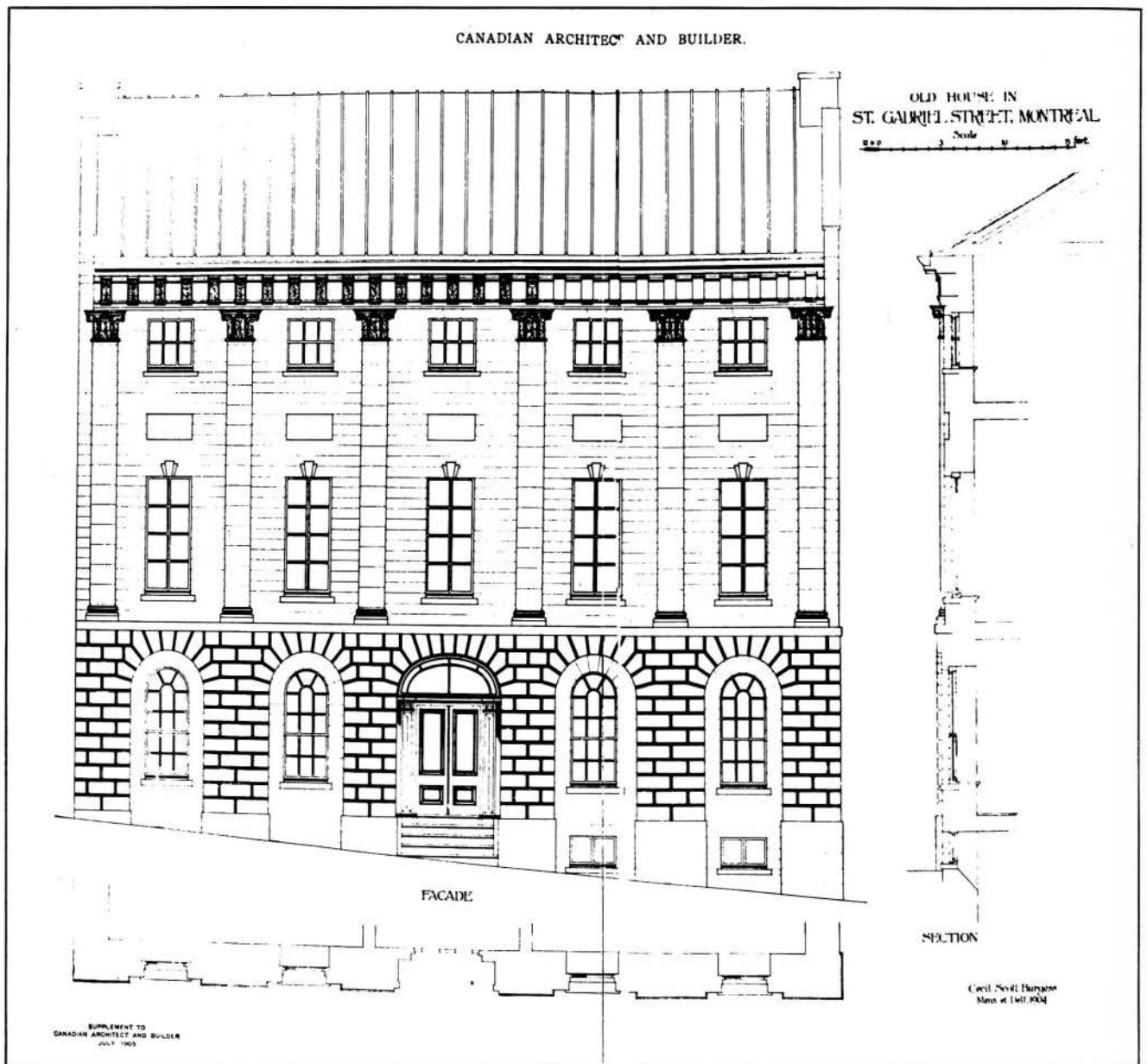


JOHN TRY

*A Master Carpenter, Builder,
and Architect in Old Montreal*



by A.J.H. Richardson and Stephen Otto

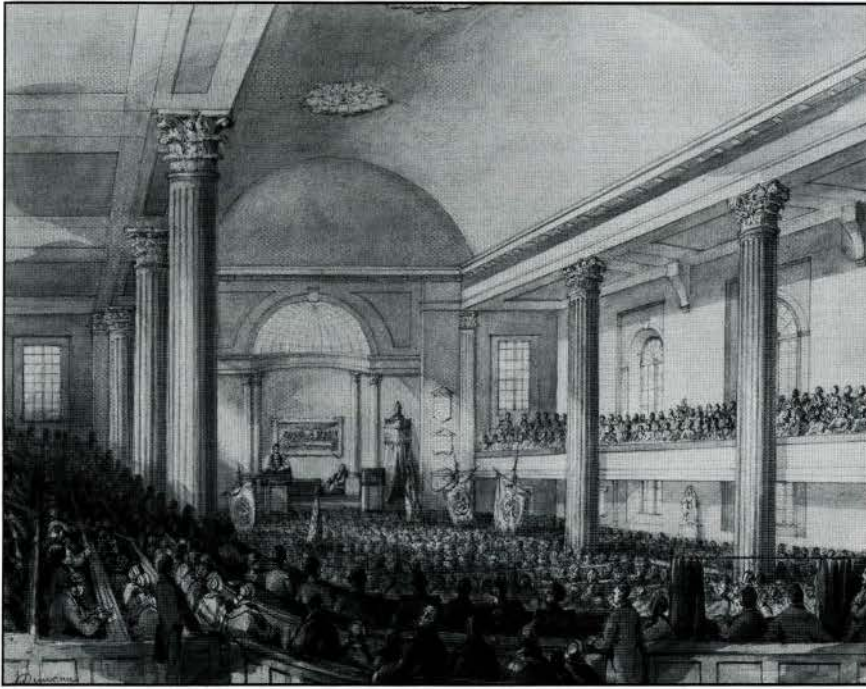


Figure 1 (previous page). House on St. Gabriel Street, Montreal, measured and drawn by Cecil Scott Burgess in 1904 and reproduced in the supplement to *Canadian Architect and Builder* 18, no. 211 (July 1905). This is the house built for David Ross in 1813-15. (Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library)

Figure 2 (left). Watercolour of the interior of Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal, 1852; James Duncan (1806-1881), artist. (McCord Museum of Canadian History, M6015)

John Try was likely born in 1779 or 1780; when he died suddenly on 14 August 1855, on holiday at Saco near Portland, Maine, he was said to be seventy-five years old and a native of England.¹ His exact birthplace has not been identified. Nor is it known where he was trained in his trade as a carpenter, although his rapid success in Canada suggests he arrived here well qualified.

Try appears to have emigrated to Montreal in 1807. Confirmation for this year is found in a statement he made in 1841: "I have resided in this City thirty-four years."² More circumstantial evidence exists in an application that David Ross, a lawyer, made in 1814 to the Governor-in-Chief to allow either "Daniel Reynard Architect and Stucco worker," or "— Roots Plasterer and Stucco worker," both of Boston, to enter the province to work on a large house Ross was building in Montreal (figure 1).³ Vice-regal consent was needed because a state of war still existed between Britain and the United States. Ross credited Try, his head carpenter on the job, with recommending the men, and tried to allay worries they would be security risks by describing them as "both Englishmen born and good men—one of them came out from England with Try who is also an Englishman."

It is most unlikely that Raynerd (the correct spelling) was Try's travelling companion. He had been living in Boston since the mid-1790s, when he had begun a long association with Charles Bulfinch.⁴ He had worked there also with Asher Benjamin; the first edition of *The American Builder's Companion* (1806) was their joint work. Almost certainly, therefore, Try left England with "— Roots." A Henry Roots of Boston appeared on a list of British aliens resident in the United States in 1813; his year of arrival was given there as 1807.⁵ Likely he was the Henry Roots who is listed in Thomas Doige's 1819 directory of Montreal⁶ and who plastered a house there for Dr. Daniel Arnoldi in 1821.⁷

The first documentary proof of Try's residence in Canada may be a notice of sale in 1810 for a lot on St. James Street, Montreal, on which stood a stone house leased by "Mr. Try, carpenter."⁸ Similarly, the earliest building contract bearing his signature located so far is dated in 1812, when, in association with William Shand, a cabinetmaker, he undertook to finish the interior of Montreal's earliest Anglican church, Christ Church on Notre Dame Street. Their work included roughing in the ceiling, laying the floors, building the balcony, and fabricating the doors, altar, pulpit, reading desk, and pews.⁹ The church had been under way since 1805 to plans by William Berczy of York, Upper Canada; it opened for worship in 1814.¹⁰ Although the finishing contract was based on Berczy's plan, Try may have proposed a rearrangement of the pews, since a layout in his hand survives.¹¹ A drawing of this interior in 1852 (figure 2) shows it was very tastefully designed and must have required much skill to execute, particularly the Corinthian columns.

Figure 3. Detail of a view of St. James Street, Montreal, by Robert A. Sproule (1799-1845), engraved by William S. Leney (1769-1831), and published by A. Bourne, Montreal, 1830. On the right is the first office of the Bank of Montreal (Andrew White, architect, 1818-19). Beside it is the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel designed by John Try in 1820. (National Archives of Canada, C-16492)



Among Try's next projects were two large and important houses, the one already mentioned for David Ross built in 1813-15 on St. Gabriel Street, Montreal, facing the Champ-de-Mars, the other a mansion constructed in 1813-14 in Ste-Thérèse-de-Blainville, a short distance north of Montreal, for Thomas Porteous, a leading merchant and potash manufacturer. When Ross's house was completed it may very well have been the grandest town residence in British North America. Standing three storeys high, it had an ashlar facade enriched by Palladian features — a frieze carved in an acanthus motif and six shallow pilasters crowned by Corinthian capitals above a rusticated ground floor. In each bay a plain, rectangular panel was inset between the second and third floors. The interior had a fine spiral staircase that may have been Try's work too. However, since only a single contract relating to the construction of the house has been located, most of those responsible for it remain unidentified.¹² While the architect is not known, Try has not been ruled out. Indeed, he was credited by Porteous with supplying the plans for his country house in an advertisement for its sale, suggesting that Try's name had a cachet to it.¹³

By 1815 Try had achieved considerable success. Edwin Pridham, a carpenter he hired that year to work on Ross's house, described his employer as "the principal master builder in Montreal" who "was at the wharf on the lookout for carpenters" when Pridham disembarked.¹⁴ Try's peers also acknowledged his importance. The master carpenters of Montreal chose him as secretary of a meeting they convened in 1818 to respond to a request of the journeymen carpenters and joiners for better working conditions and pay.¹⁵

To label Try as simply a master carpenter, however, is to fail to understand how fluid the building trades were at the time. Before professional architects were common, experienced builders often wore three different hats: they contracted to build, they supplied designs, and they superintended construction on behalf of the owner. Superintendence involved checking the quantities of materials used, inspecting work, and certifying the contractor's accounts for payment. It was not unusual for the man who designed a structure to secure the building contract; this was the case with Andrew White and the Bank of Montreal (1818-19).¹⁶ In other instances, the architect might go beyond preparing the plans to superintend construction, as did Messrs. Clarke & Appleton for Montreal's New Theatre (1825).¹⁷ By definition, however, the contractor and superintendent on a particular job could never be the same person.

In an important contract of 1815 — the conversion of Sir John Johnson's former residence at St. Paul and Bonsecours streets in Montreal into the Mansion House Hotel for John Molson, Sr. — Try is credited with having supplied the design.¹⁸ As the work was completed within five months, major changes to Johnson's house must be ruled out.¹⁹ Johnson had acquired the property about 1798 and chosen to renovate rather than replace the dwelling then on the site, the former Château de Longueuil.²⁰ It follows, therefore, that the Mansion House incorporated part of the Château.

The hotel lacked a proper ballroom and supper room when it opened in the autumn of 1816, but this deficiency was remedied the following year when Molson built a huge room seventy feet long, thirty-eight feet wide, and twenty-six feet high over the existing north wing. Known as the Montreal Assembly Room, the space was fitted up by Messrs. Forster & Try of Montreal, a firm of cabinetmakers, upholsterers, and furniture importers in which Try's younger brother Charles was a partner. The addition was justly celebrated for its magnificence and hailed by the *Canadian Courant* as "a monument which will perpetuate [Mr. Try's] memory as an Architect" (see Appendix A). Yet Try's part in the project is unclear, since drawings for "Mr. Moulson's ballroom" dated 1817 were exhibited two years later at the Royal Academy, London, by W.F. Pocock, an English architect.²¹ A possible explanation is that Try and Pocock had different but complementary roles, the former being responsible for the outer shell and supervising its construction, the latter for the elaborate interior with its Corinthian columns. The Mansion House stood only until 1821, when it was destroyed by fire.²²

In 1820 Try again provided plans, this time for a chapel for the city's Wesleyan Methodists, next door to the Bank of Montreal on St. James Street (figure 3). With its porch and acroteria, it may well have been the first Greek Revival building in the country, predating works by George Blaiklock, Sr., in Quebec City, such as his Trinity Chapel (1824) and enlargements to the Union Hotel (1825).

Following the War of 1812, Try emerged as a developer of property and a landlord. In 1815, for example, he leased a building to Henry Miller, purchased a lot on Craig Street (an area recently opened for building by the demolition of the old town wall), and erected for his own account a three-storey stone store or workshop in the St. Lawrence suburb.²³ Within a few years he had become quite rich, although it is not known whether his fortune came chiefly from investing in property, contracting, designing, or inheritance. The extent of his wealth is clear from a will he made in 1821, in which he bequeathed to "his loving wife Elizabeth Barnett" all his household furniture, glass, linen cloths, plate, horses, carriages, and equipage, as well as an annuity of £2,500 Quebec currency.²⁴ His two daughters, Eliza and Ann, were willed £1,000 each. His brother Charles and sisters Ann, Mary, Charlotte, Frances, and Sarah were named residuary devisees and legatees. Besides his wife, Try's executors were John Molson, Jr., and John Harwood, both scions of important Montreal families. Harwood was head of a family-owned wholesale hardware house and became Try's son-in-law by marriage to his younger daughter Ann the year after the will was made.²⁵ When Harwood died unexpectedly in 1823,²⁶ Alexander Skakel, headmaster of Montreal's Royal Grammar School, was appointed an executor in his place.

By about 1820 Try had prospered sufficiently to be able to devote more of his time to good works. Chief among these charities was the Montreal General Hospital, where he was one of the founders and served on the original building committee in 1821-22.²⁷ A decade later he was the hospital's treasurer and a member of the building committee for the Richardson wing.²⁸ Yet, despite his deep involvement in the institution's affairs, Try designed neither the hospital's main building nor the Richardson wing: the plans for both were donated by Thomas Phillips.²⁹ Besides being interested in the hospital, Try was at this time an active member of the British Methodist Missionary Society,³⁰ the Committee for the Relief of Distressed Emigrants and other Protestant Poor,³¹ and the Montreal Auxiliary Bible Society.³²

Unlike many of his contemporaries in the building trades, Try took no significant part in Montreal's two largest building projects of the 1820s, Notre Dame Church and the Lachine Canal. His role in the Lachine project was modest, limited to standing surety for some of the contractors³³ and preparing a plan to aid in estimating the costs of constructing the lower part of the canal along a different alignment.³⁴

At the same time, his interest in other important architectural projects continued unabated. He is known to have supplied plans to Charles Hunter in 1823 for a store and residence on St. Paul Street, Montreal, to replace one destroyed by fire a short time before.³⁵ The contractors for the carpentry work were Edward Barnett and Gordon Forbes. The former was perhaps Try's brother-in-law, but in any event a close friend to whom on one occasion he gave a half-share in a property in recognition of "numerous services offered ... for several years."³⁶

Try's architectural masterpiece, a magnificent new hotel for John Molson on the Mansion House site, was begun in 1824 (figure 4).³⁷ Erected in cut stone, it was four storeys high with projecting wings of three storeys enclosing a handsome Greek Revival entrance portico on St. Paul Street, rather similar to that of the Wesleyan

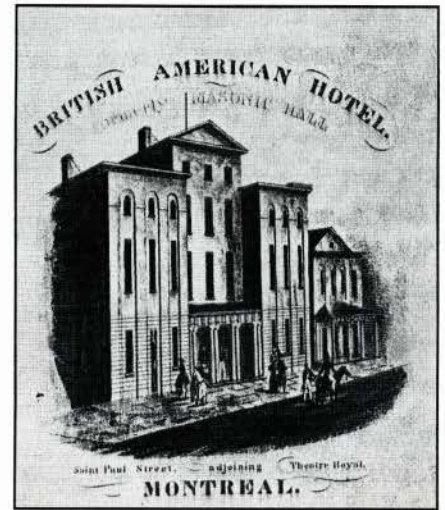


Figure 4. View of the British American Hotel, Montreal, ca. 1831, by an unidentified artist. The Masonic Hall Hotel was renamed the British American Hotel in 1831. (Pemberton Smith, *Early Canadian Masonry, 1759-1869* [Montreal: Quality Press, 1939], frontispiece)

Methodist Chapel. A terrace on the roof overlooked the river and afforded a view of the distant mountains around Chambly and in Vermont.³⁸ Inside, there were between thirty and forty bedrooms, separate ball and supper rooms stacked one above the other on the top two floors, and, most elaborate of all, a great room on the third floor reserved for Masonic lodge meetings, said to be the first "Masonic Hall" in Canada. As described by Pemberton Smith, a historian of Freemasonry, the Masonic lodge room was chastely and classically fitted up, with double rows of columns of the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders, in pairs; and terminating, on the eastern [river] side, by a magnificent throne of the Composite order. Between the columns, standing on their bases, twelve feet from the sides of the walls and twelve feet from each other, from west to east, were placed the couches for the accommodation of the members; and these, with the rest of the furniture, were covered with blue damask, the remainder of the furniture being in perfect keeping.³⁹

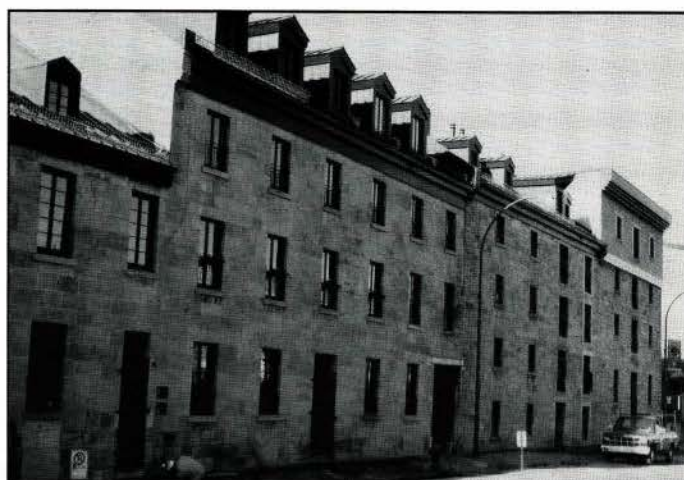
The Masonic Hall Hotel was opened in 1825, renamed the British American Hotel in 1831, and destroyed by fire two years later, not to be rebuilt.⁴⁰ In the 1840s the ruined walls were torn down to make room for the Bonsecours Market.

Messrs. Forster & Try played no part in furnishing either the lodge room or hotel; their eight-year partnership had been dissolved a month before construction on the building began.⁴¹ Charles continued in the same line of business afterwards, augmenting it on at least one occasion by offering scenic French wallpapers, but was not notably successful.⁴² Perhaps the Forster & Try firm had folded when John Try withdrew his backing in anticipation of leaving the city—three days before the cornerstone for the Masonic Hall Hotel was laid in 1824, Montreal newspapers advertised the auction of his household furnishings as he and his family prepared to go abroad, probably to England.⁴³ It is not known his purpose in going there. In 1825 Try described himself as being "late of Montreal,"⁴⁴ but returned to the city the following year, arriving with his family aboard the *Amethyst* from London.⁴⁵

Soon after his return, Try became the owner of property at Pointe-à-Callières near the eastern entrance to the Lachine Canal, one of the prime business locations the city. In providing evidence in 1841 to a commission appointed to consider the periodic flooding of the area (known also as Griffintown), Try testified he had "been a proprietor in the neighbourhood affected ... about fifteen years."⁴⁶ His property interests were concentrated along the present rue de la Commune between Port and St. Pierre streets, facing on the St. Lawrence River. By 1830 he already had a large stone building "situated on the Pointe à Callière" that he rented to D.W. Eager.⁴⁷ The *Canadian Courant* reported in July 1831 that he was about to construct two new ranges of warehouses, one extending 120 feet along Commune Street and the other running 150 feet back along a small lane or cul-de-sac.⁴⁸ They were to be 50 feet deep and five storeys high in cut stone. On an 1833 plan of Montreal Harbour they appear as "Try's new building."⁴⁹ In 1838 he erected another building north of these warehouses, but it cannot be identified now with certainty.⁵⁰ Some or all of the structures were used as barracks in 1841. Most of them survive today at 295-307 rue de la Commune (though built a storey or two lower than projected), standing as remarkable relics of Canadian business history (figures 5, 6). A datestone for 1831 can still be seen above a carriageway leading from the former cul-de-sac. Immediately adjacent to these warehouses on the southwest, where the buildings at 315-23 rue de la Commune are located today, David Handyside's distillery stood until April 1836, when it was demolished by an ice shove during the spring breakup.⁵¹ Try was the owner of the property at that time, and may have been responsible for its later redevelopment.

In late 1831 and early 1832 Try contracted to build two large town houses, both three storeys in height, at the corner of St. Paul and Bonsecours streets.⁵² These are the last buildings he is known to have undertaken for clients. One house was for William Lauder, the other for William Rutherford and William Patterson. It is of some interest that both Lauder and Rutherford were themselves building contractors.

Following his return from England, Try became more active in the affairs of the Bank of Montreal. Although not one of the bank's original shareholders, he held enough of its stock by 1828 to secure a seat on its board, where he remained a member until 1833.⁵³ For some of this time he was also a director of the Montreal Savings Bank, a close affiliate of the Bank of Montreal. He also resumed many of his charitable interests.⁵⁴ Besides the Montreal Hospital, they included the British and Canadian School Society,⁵⁴ the Montreal Library,⁵⁵ and the House of Industry,⁵⁶ all of which were important



institutions in the community. In 1828 he was one of eight citizens who petitioned the Legislative Assembly to incorporate Montreal.⁵⁷ In the early 1830s he sat on commissions for building a jail in Montreal⁵⁸ and for improvements to the Government House there (now Château Ramezay).⁵⁹

About 1833 Try left Montreal a second time, to live in England. Likely his decision was influenced by his wife's death the year before⁶⁰ and by his daughter Ann's move to Sheffield, Yorkshire, following her marriage to Joseph Unwin Harwood, a younger brother of her late husband.⁶¹ Try's second sojourn abroad probably ended in September 1837, when his return to Montreal on the Liverpool packet was reported.⁶²

In 1839 his elder daughter Eliza was married in Montreal to the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Davies, the head of a newly established college in the city for training Baptist ministers.⁶³ It is not known whether her marriage preceded or followed Try's switching his allegiance from the Methodist to the Baptist Church. For a man who likely had been raised an Anglican, nonconformity proved irresistible and brought out his most generous instincts.

In the early 1840s Try and James Thomson, who jointly owned some land near Richmond Square in the city's St. Antoine suburb, gave part of the property as the site for a new Baptist college building.⁶⁴ Try headed the building committee, and in May 1845 laid the cornerstone for a substantial brick structure designed by James H. Springle and estimated to cost £6,000.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the college did not thrive and closed its doors in 1849. No doubt Try was deeply disappointed, the more so because only a year before he had moved to live a few hundred yards from the college in Sydenham Place, as that part of St. Antoine Street between Aqueduct and Guy streets was known.

Shortly after Try's second return to Montreal he was appointed a commissioner of Montreal Harbour. He served on the commission from 1840 until 1853; from 1850 to 1853 he was its chairman.⁶⁶ Another body that took advantage of his expertise at this time was the Bank of Montreal. He rejoined its board from 1844 to 1848, a period that coincided with the planning and construction of the bank's new head office in Place d'Armes. The invitation to architects in 1845 to submit plans for the building stated that "requisite information will be given on application to Mr. TRY."⁶⁷ He was probably the chairman of the building committee.

Try died in 1855. His daughters outlived him, and he was survived by at least one grandchild, John Try-Davies, the only son of Benjamin and Eliza Davies.⁶⁸ The grandson's wedding to Eleanor Papineau, eldest daughter of Louis-Joseph-Amédée Papineau and grand-daughter of Louis-Joseph the Patriot, took place in 1875 at the Papineau manor house at Montebello, Quebec.⁶⁹ The young couple had an annual income from the Try estate of about \$2,300.⁷⁰ Sadly, their marriage was cut short by Eleanor's death in London, England, from a cardiac thrombosis only two-and-a-half months after the wedding.⁷¹ Try-Davies, who seems never to have remarried, was residing in Montreal as late as 1905, working as a stock broker, real estate, and insurance agent.

TRY'S LAST YEARS WERE ONES OF SUBSTANTIAL RETIREMENT. This may explain why his death was noticed by only one Montreal newspaper.⁷² Such scant tribute was deplorable, to say the least, given his contributions to the city's vitality and well-being.

Figure 5 (left). Aerial photograph of the buildings between rue de la Commune and Place d'Youville, c. 1972. Try's buildings at 295-299 and 305-307 rue de la Commune constructed in 1831-32 are those shown as "D" and "E." It is possible that the buildings at 315-323 rue de la Commune, shown as "F," were also built by Try after Handyside's distillery on this site was destroyed by ice in 1836. (Parks Canada, Place d'Youville Project, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada screening paper, October 1972)

Figure 6 (above). Try's warehouses at 295-299 and 305-307 rue de la Commune, Montreal (1831-32), as seen today. Some of the warehouses are currently being converted into loft-style apartments. (Herb Stovel, 1997)

- 1 *The Pilot* [Montreal], 17 August 1855, p. 3, c. 4; and records for Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal, Section C, Lot 237 (Merle A. Christopher, Mount Royal Cemetery Co., to Robert G. Hill, 28 July 1992).
- 2 National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), RG4, B54, v. 1, "John Try to the Commissioners appointed ... to consider the causes and remedy of the periodical inundation in Griffintown," Montreal, 25 February 1841. Try includes two long absences; see pp. 36-37.
- 3 NAC, MG4, A1, v. 138, p. 44084, David Ross to E.B. Brenton, Montreal, 31 August 1814. The full text of the letter is reproduced in Pierre Mayr and John Bland, *Three Centuries of Architecture in Canada* (Montreal: Federal Publications Service, 1971), 87.
- 4 Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).
- 5 Kenneth Scott, *British Aliens in the United States During the War of 1812* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1979).
- 6 Thomas Doige, *An Alphabetical List of Merchants, Traders, and Housekeepers, Residing in Montreal* (Montreal: James Lane ..., 1819).
- 7 Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal (hereafter ANQM), gr. Nicholas Benjamin Doucet, #1091, 8 August 1821.
- 8 *Canadian Courant* [Montreal], 23 April 1810, p. 4, c. 1.
- 9 "Proposals for Work to be done in the New English Church," signed by Try and Shand and dated 27 April 1812, were preceded by an undated "Estimate for the carpenters & joiners work of the Episcopal Church" McCord Museum Archives, Montreal, Anglican Church collection, folder I. Nothing in either document confirms that Try and Shand were partners; they may have had some looser arrangement particular to the Christ Church project. Until December 1810 Shand was in partnership with Andrew White, who was also a carpenter by trade. *The Gazette* [Montreal], 14 January 1811, p. 2, c. 2.
- 10 *The Canadian Magazine* [Montreal], 1825, pp. 525-31.
- 11 McCord Museum Archives, Montreal, Anglican Church collection, folder I.
- 12 The only contract for Ross's house included in the standard reference, *Inventaire des marchés de construction des Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal, 1800-1830* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1981), pertains to the foundations (ANQM, gr. Thomas Bédouin, #8, 23 April 1813). Bédouin's contracts #5 to #12 inclusive are missing from the ANQM microfilm, and may be absent from the file itself. They are known to have existed in 1939; in a letter which E.-Z. Massicotte, archivist of the Judiciary District of Montreal, wrote to A.J.H. Richardson, 4 March 1939, he stated: "I said the house of David Ross was built in 1813 because we have the whole contract which was made before a notary by him and different contractors. You would be surprised to know how meticulous he was, about the wood, the stone etc., that were to be utilised."
- 13 *Quebec Gazette*, 16 March 1820, advertisement for sale of various properties by T. Porteous
- 14 C. Thomas, *History of the Counties of Argenteuil, Que. and Prescott, Ont.* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1896), 371. Try is called "Mr. Fry" by Thomas, who may have originated the error sustained by Parks Canada throughout its otherwise admirable publication, *Inventaire des marchés de construction des Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal, 1800-1830*.
- 15 *Montreal Herald*, 7 March 1818, p. 3, c. 3; *ibid.*, 14 March 1818, p. 3, c. 3.
- 16 The contract for the bank's construction was between Andrew White and John Gray, Horatio Gates, and George Platt. ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #2099, 23 January 1818. The name of the architect was not known until recently, when a newspaper report was found which said, "The elegant and commodious building, erected for the Bank of Montreal, is nearly completed, and in a style calculated to do great credit to the architect, Mr. Andrew White, of this city." *Canadian Courant*, 19 April 1819, p. 2, c. 4.
- 17 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #5709, 18 April 1825.
- 18 ANQM, gr. Thomas Barron, #2754, 13 December 1815, contract, André Auclair with John Molson, Montreal.
- 19 Construction was scheduled to begin on 1 May 1816. Shirley E. Woods, Jr., *The Molson Saga, 1763-1983* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1983), 57. The hotel was open by 11 October 1816, when one of the first guests was Sir Francis Gore, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. *The Gazette*, 14 October 1816, p. 3, c. 2.
- 20 "Sir John Johnson," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 6:353. The history of the Château de Longueuil and its somewhat similar contemporary, the Château de Vaudreuil, can be followed in *Les Cahiers des Dix* 1 (1936): 103, 129-34; *ibid.*, 6 (1941): 173-79; and *ibid.*, 10 (1945): 239, 247, 254-62.
- 21 Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Directory of British Architects, 1600-1840*, 3rd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 769.
- 22 *Montreal Herald*, 17 March, 1821, p. 3, c. 1; *The Gazette*, 21 March 1821, p. 2, c. 2-3.
- 23 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #829, 2 February 1815; ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #848, 10 February 1815; ANQM, gr. Jean-Marie Cadieux, #295, 1 June 1815.
- 24 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #3944, 13 October 1821, will of John Try, Montreal. Little is known about Elizabeth Try (née Barnett), who may have been closely related to Edward Barnett, a Montreal carpenter and joiner.
- 25 *Canadian Courant*, 3 August 1822, p. 3, c. 1.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 29 March 1823, p. 3, c. 2.
- 27 H.E. MacDermot, *A History of the Montreal General Hospital* (Montreal: Montreal General Hospital, 1950); Newton Bosworth, *Hochelaga Depicta: The Early History and the Present State of the City and Island of Montreal* (Montreal: William Greig, 1839), 127.
- 28 *Canadian Courant*, 21 September 1831, p. 4, for laying of cornerstone; *ibid.*, 2 November 1831, p. 2, c. 5-6.
- 29 Bosworth, *Hochelaga Depicta*, 127.
- 30 *Canadian Courant*, 6 November 1819, p. 3, c. 2.
- 31 *Montreal Herald*, 18 December 1819, p. 3, c. 2.
- 32 *Montreal Herald*, 24 October 1820, p. 2, c. 2.
- 33 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #3884, 29 August 1821.
- 34 NAC, National Map Collection, H2/340, Montreal, 1823, John Try, "Plan of a part of St. Ann's Suburb representing the direction of the Lachine Canal through the different properties."
- 35 *Canadian Courant*, 1 March 1823, p. 3, c. 1.
- 36 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #2475, 26 January 1819.
- 37 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #5071, 19 February 1824, contract between John Molson, Sr., Montreal, and John Redpath to erect masonry to plans and specifications of John Try, architect of Montreal; *ibid.*, #5072, 19 February 1824, contract between John Molson, Sr., Montreal, and Joseph Clarke and Teavil Appleton to undertake carpentry and joinery work to plans, etc.; *ibid.*, #5073, 19 February 1824, contract between John Molson, Sr., Montreal, and George Weatherill and Edward Perry for plastering and stuccoing to plans, etc.; *Canadian Courant*, 31 January 1824, p. 2, c. 4, for description of plan; *ibid.*, 24 April 1824, p. 2, c. 5, for laying of cornerstone; *ibid.*, 4 May 1825, p. 2, c. 3, for opening of hotel; *W.H. Coverdale Collection of Canadiana* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1983), ill. 66, 67. The building's masonry was undertaken by John Redpath, who contracted for some of the most important works undertaken that decade: the great church of Notre Dame in Montreal; the stone locks of the Lachine, Rideau and Carillon-Grenville canals; and the giant arched dam at Jones Falls on the Rideau. The carpentry and joinery work for the new hotel were awarded to Joseph Clarke and Teavil Appleton, whose partnership was one of the most active in the city. George Weatherill and Edward Perry did the plaster and stucco work.
- 38 *Canadian Courant*, 31 January 1824, pp. 2-3, copied in *Upper Canada Gazette, Weekly Register* [York, U.C.], 12 February 1824, p. 56, c. 2-3.
- 39 *Canadian Courant*, 27 April 1833, p. 2, c. 5.
- 40 Pemberton Smith, *Early Canadian Masonry, 1759-1869* (Montreal: Quality Press, 1939), 109.
- 41 The partnership was formed on 22 November 1816 (ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #1649), and was terminated in March 1824 (*Montreal Herald*, 27 March 1824, p. 2, c. 4).
- 42 The notarial records of Henry Griffin in ANQM show that in 1831 no fewer than twenty notes given by Charles Try were protested, chiefly by the Bank of Montreal.
- 43 *Canadian Courant*, 14 April 1824, p. 2, c. 4.
- 44 NAC, MG24, L3, v. 17, p. 10304. Transcript from original in the Baby Collection, Université de Montréal. The letter is not addressed and is undated in the text, but the copyist has assigned to it a date of 7 November 1825.
- 45 *The Herald* [Montreal], 27 May 1826, p. 3, c. 1.
- 46 NAC, RG4, B54, vol. 1. In evidence given 25 February 1841 to the commissioners appointed to consider the periodical flooding of Griffintown at the entrance to the Lachine Canal, Try said he had "been a proprietor in the neighbourhood affected ... about fifteen years."
- 47 *The Gazette*, 8 March 1830.
- 48 *Canadian Courant*, 13 July 1831, p. 2, c. 4-5, reprinted in *The Gazette*, 16 July 1831, p. 2, c. 2.
- 49 "Plan of the Harbour of Montreal in Lower Canada, Shewing the Improvements executed under the direction of Captain Piper, R.E., 1833," original in the Public Record Office, London, transcript in NAC (NMC 1911).
- 50 NAC, RG4, B54, vol. 1. Evidence given 25 February 1841 to the commissioners appointed to consider the periodical flooding of Griffintown.
- 51 *The Gazette*, 28 April 1836, p. 2, c. 6.
- 52 ANQM, gr. Henry Griffin, #9535, 20 October 1831; *ibid.*, #9681, 28 January 1832.
- 53 Merrill Denison, *Canada's First Bank* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967).
- 54 *Canadian Spectator* [Montreal], 10 December 1828, p. 4, c. 3.
- 55 *The Gazette*, 17 March 1828, p. 2, c. 2; 20 March 1828, p. 2, c. 3; and 3 April 1828, p. 2, c. 4. To allow the library to discharge its debts, Try purchased its

building for £1,259 on behalf of a new company, which carried on the library. In 1829 Try was treasurer of the company and a director. Frederick William Terrill, *A Chronology of Montreal and of Canada from A.D. 1752 to A.D. 1893* (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1893).

- 56 *Canadian Courant*, 12 May 1830, p. 2, c. 4. Try was elected president of the House of Industry on the death of François Desrivières in 1830, and was re-elected the following year.
- 57 *The Gazette*, 27 November 1828, p. 3, c. 1; *ibid.*, 11 December 1828, p. 3, c. 1-3.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 2 September 1830, p. 3, c. 2.
- 59 Bosworth, *Hochelaga Depicta*, 162.
- 60 *The Gazette*, 19 June 1832, p. 2, c. 5.
- 61 *Canadian Courant*, 4 September 1833, p. 3, c. 1.
- 62 *Montreal Transcript*, 23 September 1837, p. 2, c. 2. Try was said to be "of London" when he arrived on the packet.
- 63 NAC, RG4, B28, v. 39, p. 2141, marriage bond, 15 October 1839.
- 64 A sketch plan of the land is found in McGill University Rare Books, European and American Manuscripts, CH 323, S 283. A note on the plan says the property was sold to Try and Thomson by Samuel Gerrard on 18 March 1842. Henry Griffin was the notary.
- 65 *The Register* [Montreal], 8 May 1845.
- 66 Information kindly supplied by Ernest Labelle, archivist, Port of Montreal, 16 July 1993.
- 67 Denison, *Canada's First Bank*, 2:20.
- 68 Try made his last will on 22 March 1855. A few weeks later, on 17 April 1855, he executed an enigmatic codicil providing a £50 annuity to one Martha Ferguson, "a person who has sustained a serious injury from myself ... and who has the strongest claim upon me," and leaving to her son, then a minor, a lump sum of £200 when he reached the age of 21 "to assist him in beginning [in] the world." No explanation for these bequests has been found.
- 69 NAC, MG24, B2, v. 39, dossier 9, p. 638 (microfilm C-15799).
- 70 NAC, MG24, B2, v. 39, dossier 5, p. 470 (microfilm C-15799).
- 71 NAC, MG24, B2, v. 39, dossier 8, p. 599 (microfilm C-15799).
- 72 *The Pilot*, 17 August 1855, p. 3, c. 4.

MONTRÉAL ASSEMBLY ROOM.

The following are some of the most conspicuous beauties of this noble apartment:—its length is seventy feet, breadth thirty eight, and height twenty-six feet. The cornices are of stucco ingeniously ornamented. The pillars, of the Corinthian order, are covered with Grecian bronzed figures, and have the happiest effect. Fifteen curtains to the windows, of rich crimson sarsen, suspended on embossed gilt cable poles, trimmed with very broad gold lace, with a superb fringe, surmounted by a wreath of laurel. The seats, which are not yet quite finished, will be ten Grecian couches, with thirty-six gilt and bronzed chairs, corresponding with the curtains, and may be seen at Messrs. FORSTER & TRY, where they are nearly completed. The orchestra is sufficiently spacious to contain a full band; it is surrounded by a light iron railing, in which the coat of arms of the spirited proprietor, and the national arms, are appropriately introduced. The chandeliers, three in number, are truly magnificent; that in the centre is surmounted by a large crimson, and gilt crown; each chandelier has thirty-six branches for candles, the whole composed of thirty thousand variegated pieces of cut glass.—The fitting up of the room was performed by Messrs. FORSTER & TRY, and it is generally remarked that there will no longer be any need of importing furniture, while a room can be so splendidly adorned, and furnished by workmen, whose prosperity is identified with our own interest.—This beautiful room is to be warmed by four large stoves, in the form of statues, which are to be placed in niches made designedly to receive them. There are but immense looking glasses in elegant gilt frames.—The whole of the edifice, in which this delightful room is included, cost Mr. JOHN MOLSON, we understand, £40,000. Mr. TRY has completed a monument which will perpetuate his memory as an Architect while the Montreal Assembly room shall continue to be the deserved centre of attraction, and the resort of the beauty, taste, and fashion, of this city. *Conrad*

Appendix A (above). This report, copied by *The Gazette* from a now-lost issue of the *Canadian Courant*, appeared unaccountably more than a year after it was prepared in anticipation of the opening of the ballroom and supper room at the Mansion House on 28 November 1817. (*The Gazette* [Montreal], 9 December 1818, p. 3, c. 1)

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