

February 2013

## THE NECESSITY OF PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT AND ARTISTS ACTIVITIES

### Article by Pat James, a Caricaturist on Place Jacques Cartier



*Illustration 1: Jacques Cartier and the Iroquoians at Hochelaga.  
by Andrew Morris 1850. Library of Congress*

*- creative commons copyright*

### HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Place Jacques-Cartier is located on an area that is on an ancient Native Indian trail that led to the St. Lawrence River. Native Indians had been there for 8000 years. French explorer Jacques Cartier made contact with Native Indian Iroquoians there in 1535. French colonists arrived to start a settlement there in the 1600s. Various cultures and ethnic backgrounds have since then grown together at this location in building Montreal.

Place Jacques-Cartier has always been a very active area in its entire history. These activities have always involved local residents and businesses as well as visitors and merchants coming to Montreal – particularly from boats arriving at the port.

When we look back at historical images we do not judge the era by how pretty places looked. We are equally fascinated by places that are in ruins and images that show real life and activities. We should remember that heritage is about real lifestyles. The current projects for Old Montreal should not try to create a purely artificial meticulously glorified facade of who we are today. In the future, our own lifestyles will be appreciated more for what we really did day to day. Expo, student protests for free education, the Olympic Stadium will be regarded as true heritage topics as opposed to images of pristine concrete structures.



*Illustration 2: Artisans and Balloon Twisters on Place Jacques Cartier Square near St.Paul Street,*

*photo, private collection*

## **CURRENT HERITAGE**

We live in a time of much doubts and disillusion. But there are many things that constantly give us hope and belief in ourselves in still being able to find some happiness. One of these traditional escapes away from tensions of life is found in Old Montreal. It is far away from downtown traffic, close to the refreshing water-edge of the St.Lawrence, a step back in time, and of course everybody likes to be around many other happy people found there.

Part of this chemistry of the magic is found compacted on Place Jacques-Cartier. For much of its modern history it was typically a square on which dozens of horse-teams and later, trucks and cars, were parked en-masse. Since expo '67 and before when Old Montreal was declared a heritage area, the location has transformed beautifully in terms of the public space being honed towards a popular visiting for locals and tourists destination. Indeed much of the businesses in the area now rely on the visitors patronage.

Certain activities have proven to be crucial and indispensable for the stability and growth of the tourist-related merchants; these activities include the artists ( portraitists, caricaturists, artists, exposants, artisans ) and entertainers ( musicians, performers, mimes, balloon twisters ) who display their talents to the enthusiastic public during the summer tourist season. **The economy that keeps the businesses alive and hundreds of workers employed and their taxes paid comes from visitors who stay in the area from 8 pm to midnight. This nightlife has been Old Montreal's heritage for over 100 years !**

In 2012 Ville Marie bureaucrats adopted a policy that crippled the nightlife businesses in Old Montreal. The 'idea' was to cut off all street entertainers after 9 pm, before sunset! Even Balloon-twisters were forced to shutdown; this of course would traumatize kids and parents who had to be

informed there were no balloon-twisting activities allowed after 9 pm due to City Hall rules.

The impact of this drastic action was quickly confronted by the merchants of the area, along with complaints to politicians and legal action. This resulted in the policy being acknowledged as flawed and then being partially reversed. Most residents in Old Montreal love street entertainers. **But some isolated instances of excessive noise somehow steered a few residents and certain officials to launch a draconian action in 2012 against all street entertainers- and even balloon twisters. In many proven instances, the type of Public Inspections used in 2012 on Place Jacques-Cartier was unprofessional and showed poor training.**

**Remember – most established active nightlife tourist areas involve noise associated with it. Old Montreal has had this for centuries during the summer months. For a few bureaucrats and several residents to shut down the normal tradition of late nightlife and business activity (and possibly collapse businesses) is absurd and not justifiable.**

*Keep in mind, that where there are empty vacated spots, there will be activities by those without permits. The bureaucrats express that in place of them not providing Inspections at late evening hours, that it is up to others to waste their time repeatedly calling police to chase off illegal performances. This is a complete waste of police hours. Police prefer to be doing their jobs against real criminals in downtown Montreal instead.*

Hopefully the chaotic drama that unfolded in 2012 will result in honest appreciation of entertainment activities on Place Jacques-Cartier itself from 2013 onwards.

This can involve;

- Inspectors and artist/ entertainer representatives arranging meetings on the Square itself before each tourist season starts.
- City Hall making official recognition of the entertainment permit holders on its website and tourist promotions.
- Cessation of referring to the permit holders as merely 'privileged to work in a public space' when in fact they are doing much to help merchant businesses survive as well as present on a world stage, Old Montreal as a world-class tourist destination.



*Illustration 3: No normal nightlife crowds on the Square in July 2012 due to the infamous 'contract' in place by the City*

*photo, private collection*



*Illustration 4: Without entertainment to attract visitors, only small numbers of people will visit beautiful Place Jacques Cartier*

*- photo, private collection*

## **POPULAR PUBLIC INTERACTION**

Obviously, visitors and tourists love public entertainment in Old Montreal. However, it should be

acknowledged that much more goes on than bringing smiles to faces. We as constant 'fixtures' on the Square have

- helped visitors who have fallen ill and had accidents.
- directed emergency personnel to injured persons.
- notified police of criminal activities (thieves and perverts) and about people without permits operating in various schemes and scams.
- risked our safety to apprehend criminals too.
- blocked off dangerous street traffic to the Square many times when Public Works has forgotten to do so after some of their jobs on the location.
- Called 9-11 spotting urgent situations that normal people do not spot.
- Give restaurant/ tourist spot directions – a lot!
- help reunite kids who have lost their parents.
- Between 2006-2008 there was a plague of purse-snatchings and terrace thefts in Old Montreal. One artist who had a talent for observation, counted no less than 6 or 7 theft gangs/ teams operating in Old Montreal. Fortunately there was a coordinated effort between the City/ Police/ and some permit holders to totally eradicate the systemic theft activities.

## **SECURITY**

One can not ignore how night time public entertainment activities in a dark area brings too much positive attention for criminals to operate. And even if no criminals or gangs were in the area to exploit the void, visitors would have little or no inclination to visit poorly lit and under-used areas. This is the case in the Old Port and Prince Arthur St. where public entertainers were obliged to be dismissed from those places. Entertainment Permit holders must be allowed to operate until 11pm – midnight so that various illegal activities do not take over the Square and thus scare away tourists and visitors. That will also be bad for the economy in the area. Our presence in a coordinated effort with the City brings orderly pleasure as opposed to unrestricted chaos.

**Popular public entertainment = large crowds watching = businesses staying open late to accommodate the mass public = more lights in the area = less criminal activity**





*Illustration 5: Due to regular permit holder performers being stopped at 9 pm in July 2012, here we see illegal musicians sneaking in and playing out of place and disturbing restaurants and other permit holders.*



*Illustration 6: illegal activity after 9pm involving aggressive persons selling dollar-store toys. Not the type of activity that will bring back tourists.*

## **EVOLUTION**

There have been 'official' several attempts in the past to 'shift' public entertainers. With much public, media, and political support these attempts were stopped. Nowadays the value of public entertainment and artists operating in the area has been somewhat recognized officially. More needs to be done in giving proper status to these talented public ambassadors of Old Montreal. They can not be left out of notice in massive projects such as the 2007-2017 Action Plan. Artists, and street entertainment have operated in Old Montreal for over 30 years and have been essential in creating a vibrant and prosperous era of heritage to this famous place.



*Illustration 6: 100 years from now Montreal's history books will speak about our times as heritage. Let us make sure we remain focused on human richness as our legacy. Projects concerned only with perfect landscapes without human activity integrated will be a very sad and sterile relic to leave for future generation of Montrealers.*

*photo, private collection*

<http://vieux-old-montreal.3eeweb.com/>