



THE FRIGONS

QUARTERLY FAMILY NEWSLETTER OF THE
FRIGONS, FRIGONES, FREGOS, FREGOES, FREGONS, FREGONES

VOLUME 9 - NUMBER 1

WINTER 2002



Renée-Claude Frigon in the streets of Mumbai, India.

TO BETTER KNOW ONE ANOTHER

Renée-Claude Frigon

Editor's Note: On January 23, 2001, Renée-Claude left alone to visit India, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. She returned on June 13, 2001, delighted with her adventure. Here she shares with us the highlights of her discoveries.

A TRIP TO ASIA

After having spent five months in Asia, people often ask me what struck me the most during this trip. It was definitely the warmth of the people, and their interest in the tourists. How often was I asked where I come from, what my country is like. And I am not counting the smiles and the greetings of the people on the street.

The Indians are, without a doubt, the friendliest. I had been warned about the violence in India. However, tourists run a greater risk of being invited for supper with the family of an Indian he has met by chance than of being attacked. They are curious and generous, even too much so at times.

According to Indian tradition, tourists are guests in the country. That is why they treat us as guests in their home. It is a pleasure for them to introduce us to the numerous members of their family. Tourists who accept an invitation for supper eat like kings. But do not be surprised if the lady who prepared the meal does not eat at the same time as you do. Tradition requires her to be at the service of the guests and that she remain standing, ready to serve them a second and even a third generous portion. The lady will eat later in the evening, following the departure of the guests.



Indian women harvesting tea at Munnar in southern India.

Elsewhere in Asia one also feels welcome. If one day you go up the Mekong River by boat in Vietnam or in Cambodia, it is the whole family that will wave at you from the riverbank. Tourists can be spotted from afar and are received with great pleasure.

The country people, even more than the city dwellers, have a disconcerting warmth and naturalness. They are not preoccupied about money and all the luxuries it can buy. Their residence is simple, their clothing likewise. Their daily life consists of simple activities, in harmony with nature. The Asians take the time to prepare and eat a good meal, to admire the sunset, to listen to the sound of the wind

in the bamboo leaves, to thank God for a good harvest and to pray for the next one.

Yes, it is true that Asians take the time to live and appreciate the beauty in nature. But it is sad to see they are suffering the consequences of Western industrialization, without ever reaping the direct benefits.

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GENEALOGICAL SKETCH

(Renée-Claude Frigon)

François and Marie-Claude Chamois

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Antoine Pierre and M.-Anne Trottier

Louis Augustin and Marie Lefebvre

Augustin and Marie Trudel

Joseph and Aurélie Vallée

Onésime and Jeanne Benoît

Onésime François and Clémentine Desrosiers

Onésime and Gériatrice Richard

Gérald and Lise Drolet

Renée-Claude Frigon

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Gérald Frigon (116)

This year, the Annual General Assembly will take place in Brigham, Quebec, in the Eastern Townships. This location near the U.S. border was selected with the aim of **encouraging our American members to participate**. With its "Country Feast" theme, the reunion should be very entertaining, as much for the visit to the Vignoble de la Bauge, a vineyard and exotic animal farm, as for the opportunity to mix with cousins from whom we have been separated for a long time. We must mark this date on our calendars immediately: Saturday, August 24, 2002.



The current newsletter deals with many adventures. A hunting party, fur trading, a trip to Asia... It would seem that François' penchant for adventure still runs in the veins of certain Frigons. Cutting the ties, leaving, going far from familiar daily routines, and getting up each morning without knowing what the day holds in store and daring to advance resolutely before the unknown. That takes courage and boldness.

Happy reading to each of you.

Renée-Claude Frigon

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Global warming has visible and dangerous consequences for Asia. In Thailand, the average annual temperature increases by one degree each year (in Bangkok, the average daytime temperature is 33° C). In Cambodia, the level of Lake Tonle Sap drops a bit more each year due to the deforestation caused by forest fires and drought.



A Cambodian woman wearing a Krama, the traditional head scarf.

Finally, we share the same planet, the same water and the same air as these people. For me, this is one more reason why we should take care of our environment.

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XIII

The Fur-Trade, a Profitable Occupation?

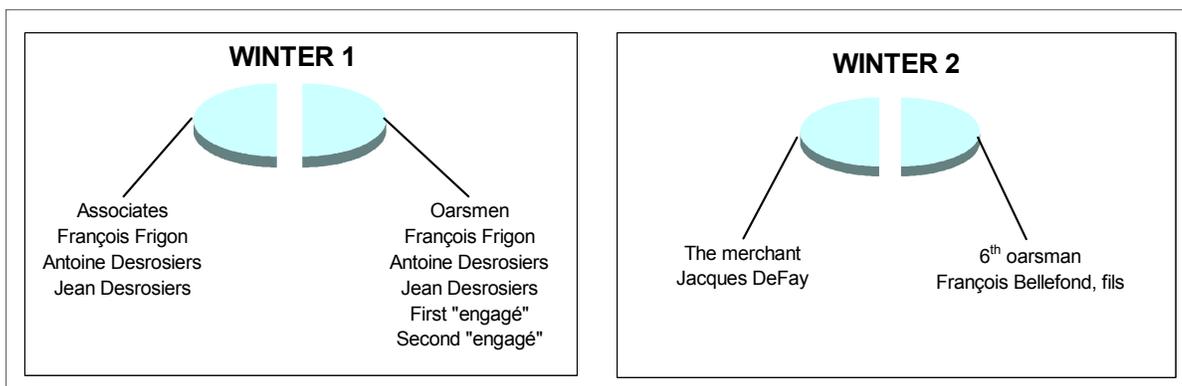
Profits from the voyages to the Illinois Indians in 1686-1687 and 1687-1688

According to the Society's contract of May 26, 1686¹ that bound the parties for two winters, the voyageurs were remunerated as follows:

"...the profits (of the first winter) will be divided into two parts, the first of which will be shared by and divided equally among all the said oarsmen and the said Srs frigon and desrosiers brothers; the (profits of the) second part will be used to pay the latter for both winters(of the voyage); the second winter's profits will belong to and be given to the said sr de la Conche and the said Bellefond." (Translator's note: this is a free translation for the sake of clarity). How could these voyageurs be motivated to return to the West the second winter? The merchant DeFay paid them in merchandise. The second winter, they had to respect their agreement if they wanted their families to be fed during their absence. What's more, the voyageurs were indebted to the merchant, which was another way of assuring their faithfulness.

The contract stipulates that the Associates Frigon/Desrosiers would hire two oarsmen to accompany them and that François Bellefond, son, would be the 6th oarsman. We presume that Bellefond did not have a right to the oarsmen's share since his name does not appear on the contract among those having that right. However, he would share 50% of the profits of the second winter. That is quite a bit.

Thus, the division of shares was as follows:



So, according to the Society's contract of May 26th, the Associates Frigon/Desrosiers would each get a fifth of the oarsmen's half plus a third of the Associate's half (of the first winter's profits). Each of the Associates Frigon/Desrosiers would therefore receive:

26.7% of the first year's profits or, extended over two years, 13.3% per year. This is in the range provided by Louise Dechêne, who gives 12% as the maximum average annual profit for the fur traders.⁽²⁾

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1- This contract was summarized in the newsletter The Frigons, Vol.7, No.2.

2- Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle.*, essay, Boréal, 1988, p.164.

THE 2002 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will take place in the Eastern Townships, at Brigham, QC on August 24th.

Don't miss it!

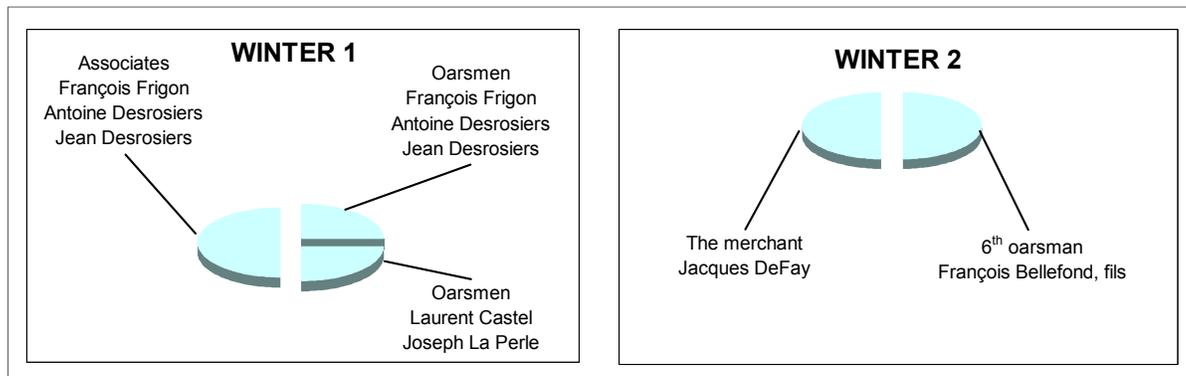
There will be more information in the Spring Newsletter.

Meanwhile, the information is already available on the Association's Web site.

(Continued from page 67)

Laurent Castel and Joseph Laperle are hired as oarsmen and the contract is signed on August 15, 1686. This contract changes the division of profits agreed upon in the trading contract of May 26th and slightly changes each one's share: "*And on (illegible) the fifteenth day of August in the said year 1686, appeared Laurent Castel, a resident of Champlain and Joseph la Perle residing in the seigneurie of Sainte Anne; they acknowledged and admitted having committed themselves to the said sieurs de la Conche, the said François Frigon, Jean and Antoine Desrosiers brothers and Bellefond, promising to make the fur trading voyage to the Illinois (Indians) with the said Frigon Desrosiers brothers and Bellefond, for which trip they have promised to leave and in return for which they will share half the profits that will come from the merchandise which they will have traded according to the aforementioned Society Contract; ...*". Thus, Laurent Castel and Joseph Laperle will receive one half of the oarsmen's share rather than one fifth.

The division of shares then becomes:



With this new scenario, the Associates Frigon/Desrosiers will each receive one third of the oarsmen's 25%, and one third of the Associates 50%. Thus, each one will receive 25 % of the profits of the first year, or extended over two years, 12.5% per year. A reasonable profit.

Let us now see how the profits of a trading voyage were calculated.

According to Lahontan, the profits were calculated as follows:⁽³⁾

The total value of the furs

1. minus the payment of the share of the trading permit,
2. minus the value of the merchandise,
3. minus 40% of the remainder for the bottomry.⁽⁴⁾

The contract of the Associates Frigon/Desrosiers specifies that when "*...the cost of the merchandise specified on the invoice and all the expenses, damages and interest have been subtracted from the fur sales of the said trade, the balance will be divided into two parts...*" (free translation).

So according to Lahontan, and confirmed by the contract, the profit is the value of the furs:

1. minus the payment of a portion of the trading permit:

The price of the trading permit is included in the obligation of 7,109 l. 6 s.⁽⁵⁾ that the Associates signed on August 16, 1686.

A trading permit gave the holder the right to have one canoe with three rowers. Our Associates paid for two permits. We underline the fact that the two permits issued by Governor La Salle of Louisiana were worth 1,600 l. (*livres*) in the contract the Society signed on May 26th, but that 2,400 l. were demanded on the bill describing the obligation signed on August 16th. They therefore had to pay 800 l. per permit based on the Society's contract of May 26th. That is the equivalent of a supplementary permit. Why? We have no idea. All we know is that these permits went to the highest bidders. (See also foot note 13.)

2. minus the value of the merchandise:

This is 7,109 l. 6s. less 2,400 l. for the trading permits. In other words: 4,609 l. 6 s..

3. minus 40% for the bottomry:

(Continued on page 69)

3- Lahontan, *Oeuvres complètes I*, édition critique by Réal Ouellet and Alain Beaulieu, PUM, 1990, p.323. (Note : An *écu* equalled 4 *livres*, Louise Dechêne, p. 131.)

4- Bottomry: (Bomerie: "prêt à grosse aventure" Lahontan, op. cit. p. 323, note 232.) "High-risk financing".

5- *Livre* : is symbolized by " l. "; the *sol* is symbolized by " s. "; the *denier* is symbolized par " d. ".

(continued from page 68)

Even if it is not identified as such in the contract, bottomry was included in it since the price of the merchandise was inflated by 50% upon arrival in New France, to cover the transport costs and the benefits. In addition, the price was raised 33% due to the inferior value of the Canadian *livre* ⁽⁶⁾. Furthermore, the trade goods were sold at a higher price to the voyageurs than to the rest of the inhabitants. Finally, there was a 25% tax on beaver furs, (but not on the other pelts). This tax was passed on to the fur traders. Between 1677 and 1696, the official price ⁽⁷⁾ for a *castor gras* was 110 s. ⁽⁸⁾, and 70 s. for a *castor sec*. Yet, the fur traders were paid only 82 s. 6 d. for the *castor gras* and 52 s. 6 d. for the *castor sec*. The 25% difference went to the king in taxes ⁽⁹⁾ for the public and parish administrations. Therefore, the 40% that Lahontan lists for bottomry is not exaggerated. The inhabitants of the colony were really highly taxed and the fur traders even more so than the others!

To calculate the profits, let us evaluate the potential returns from two canoes of beaver skins.

First, the most optimistic hypothesis: the shipment was made up exclusively of top quality beaver skins; that is, of *castors gras* at 82 s. 6 d. per pound. The skins were tied into 50-pound bales. A canoe could contain 40 of these. ⁽¹⁰⁾ That is to say, 2,000 pounds. Two canoes loaded with *castors gras* were then worth about 16,500 *livres*. ⁽¹¹⁾

The least optimistic hypothesis: the canoes carried only *castors secs* at 52 s. 6 d. per pound. Thus, two canoes carrying 2,000 pounds were worth 10,500 *livres*.

Let us see what was left for François Frigon, according to these hypotheses.

	Value two canoes <i>castor gras</i>: 16, 500 l.	Value two canoes <i>castor sec</i>: 10, 500 l.
Costs	Balance	Balance
Merchandise and trading permit: 7,109 l.	9,391 l.	3,391 l.
Profit for two years 25 %	2,347 l.	847 l.
Amount owed to the merchant: 113 l.	2,234 l.	734 l.
Net profit for two years	2,234 l.	734 l.

In the case where the cargo consisted of half *castor gras* and half *castor sec*, the amount received must have been about 2,234 l. and 734 l., that is, an average of 1,484 l., in other words, 742 l. per year.

Louise Dechêne specifies on page 227, note 159: "If an experienced hired man earns up to 400 *livres* per year, the revenue of the independent voyageurs must be more than 500 *livres* for an average year." This corresponds roughly with the estimates we have just made.

But if the canoes did not contain 2,000 pounds of weight as stated by Lahontan, but rather 1,000 ⁽¹²⁾, the net gain becomes 172 l. (*castors gras*) or a debt of 1,972 l. (*castors secs*). For a half-and-half load, there was a debt of 900 l to be divided by 6 or 150 l. each. Now our voyageurs are caught up in a vicious circle of debt.

It is surprising that this voyage, which certainly seemed to be typical, could end with a loss rather than a profit. Our explanation is as follows: the price for the trading permits (2,400 l.) seems to be too high. ⁽¹³⁾ Were there practices that the contract does not reveal and of which we have no knowledge? Have we really well understood the contents of the contract? Have we accurately calculated the profits? A note to our readers: any additional information would be welcome.

Actually, what is a good income for a 17th century Canadian? That will be the topic of our next article.

6- Louise Dechêne, p. 131.

7- Louise Dechêne, p. 141.

8- *Castors gras*: beaver skins that the Amerindians had worn for several months; the long hairs had been already been shed. These were the most sought-after furs, for only shorthaired furs were useable for beaver hats. *Castors secs*: the skins as they come from the animal, with only the flesh removed." (Marcel Trudel, *Initiation à la Nouvelle France*, HRW, 1971, p. 208.)

9- Louise Dechêne, p. 142, note 58

10- Lahontan, op. cit. , p. 316

11- A *livre* is worth 20 *sols* and a *sol* is worth 12 deniers.

12- Louise Dechêne, p. 130: " The first canoes transported only three men and about 1,000 pounds of freight. Around the year 1715, canoes 30 to 40 feet long, manned by four or five men, carried up to 3,000 pounds."

13- Note: In the Decree dated January 29, 1686, Governor Denonville declared that any permit that had not been signed by him was invalid. This may be an explanation for the increased value of the permits on the bill.

MEMORIES OF THE GENERAL STORE and Village of Saint-Prosper-de-Champlain

Editing: Dominique Frigon (190)

Research: Odette Frigon (52)

The story of the General Store belonging to the Frigon family of Saint-Prosper-de-Champlain begins in 1876. But first, a bit of background information about this village of the Mauricie Region for our readers.

Saint-Prosper encompasses part of the *Seigneurie de Batiscan*, a part of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade and of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Batiscan. The Sainte-Anne River and its tributary, the "Gendron" River flows through the village.

In 1874, the Exploration Party, through its secretary D.-N. Saint-Cyr,⁽¹⁾ reports that the parish of Saint-Prosper, which became a legal entity on February 13, 1855, covers an area of 46 square miles of which roughly 12 miles are cultivated and 31 are forest.

The members of the Party, assisted by M. Dupuis, the parish priest of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, did not restrict themselves to surveying only the developed roads; they penetrated great distances into the forests that bordered these roads in order to assess the quality of the soil and the woods.

A more important development was being planned for the Charest River Valley. At the time, there were 1,147 inhabitants. Today, there are 600 in Saint-Prosper and about the same number of dwellings.⁽²⁾

The Exposition Party's report was submitted to the Minister of Agriculture and Public Works. It consisted of notes about the brooks, flourmills and saw mill. The latter belonged to the Frigon family, descendants of Abraham Frigon, a resident of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Batiscan. Several descendants of this family settled in Saint-Prosper.

The most important road planned for Saint-Prosper was given the name *Chemin du Manitou*; today it is called *rue Saint-Charles*. The construction of this road cost about 250 dollars per mile. It was eight and a half miles long. Today the best maple sugar groves of the province are to be found on this road. One section of it still bears the name *Chemin du Manitou*.

In 1876, Pierre-Octave Frigon, a prosperous merchant of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Batiscan, bought the piece of land on which his house was being built⁽³⁾ in the centre of the village of Saint-Prosper. In fact, at that time, the construction of a house often began before the purchase of the land. A few months later, a part of the building was converted into a business place. As you have guessed, this is the beginning of the General Store. Besides being a businessperson, Octave Frigon was also secretary-treasurer of Saint-Prosper. When in 1877, the Saint-Joseph de Saint-Prosper aqueduct was built, the costs were partly covered by an American by the name of Eugene Godshire. This fellow, who was a burnisher by trade, came from Meriden, Connecticut.

(Continued on page 71)

(1) Session Documents (no 4) 1875, *Exploration des chemins de la colonisation et de la contrée qu'ils traversent dans le comté de Champlain*. (Exploration of the settlement roads and the surrounding countryside: Champlain County.)

(2) 1851 Census, *Canada East Champlain County 78 – St-Prosper Parish*. Enumerator J.-N. Goin certified by Louis Guillet, notary public.

(3) Sale by Louis Bacon to P.-O. Frigon, July 29, 1876, Robert Trudel, notary.



MEMORIES OF THE GENERAL STORE and Village of Saint-Prosper-de-Champlain

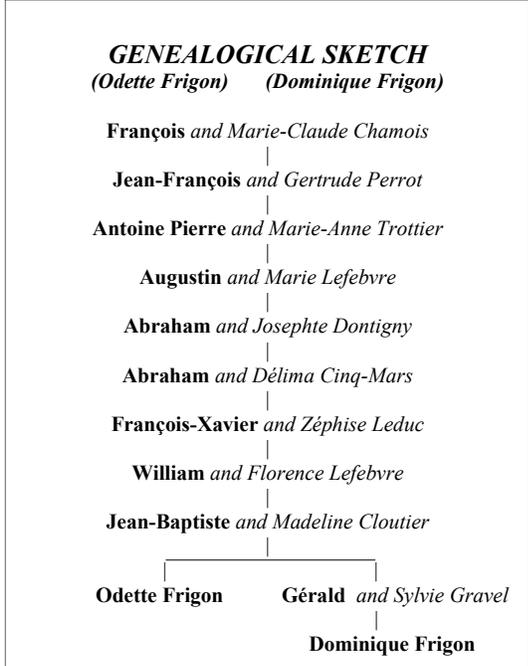
(Continued from page 70)



Obviously, this financing was not completely gratuitous. Godshire wanted a guarantee. So Octave Frigon, acting on behalf of the Aqueduct of Saint-Prosper, mortgaged his store to give Godshire the security he demanded for the loan received by a "prêt de paroli"⁽⁴⁾ of seventy-five dollars.⁽⁵⁾

The General Store was the most frequented business of the village. They sold all kinds of things: the men could find that which they needed for their farm work, renovations, and building maintenance. The women found everything that was necessary for the family: clothing, fabrics, food, soap, toys and so much more.

In 1920, William Frigon (alias Guillaume), the son of François-Xavier Frigon and Zéphise Leduc, bought the General Store. (At this point, the succession of storeowners in a direct family-line begins. Notice the names in bold type in the following paragraphs.) The wife of William, Flora Lefebvre, made the very elegant hats that she sold in the store. In a good year, she would make as many as fifty. Their daughter Brigitte also worked at the store and looked after the fabric section, clothing, ladies' lingerie and, sometimes, the grocery department.



One day, **William** passed on his business to his son, **Jean-Baptiste Frigon**. The latter married Madeleine Cloutier on July 14, 1937. They had six children. There is an amusing anecdote about this couple: Madeleine Cloutier was the daughter of P.-D. Cloutier, who owned the General Store for a few years. In 1920, M. Cloutier sold it to William Frigon, the father of Jean-Baptiste Frigon. In other words, Madeleine's father sold his business to her husband's father, William, who later passed it on to his son, Jean-Baptiste Frigon, her husband. The General Store: a real family story!!! In 1974, Jean-Baptiste Frigon retired and sold his business to one of his sons, **Gérald Frigon**, who, in 2001, is still the owner of the store. However, around 1985, Gérald Frigon sold the whole grocery section of the General Store to the Saint-Prosper Food Market and transformed his business into a hardware store specialized in construction materials. However, cleaning products, farm materials and products, pool supplies, tools, and paint are still available at the business that now bears the name *Magasin Frigon*. Through the years, the house and store have been renovated, but the architectural style of yesteryear has remained.

In closing, a few varied allusions more or less closely linked to the General Store. It was believed that certain persons had the gift of stopping fire and even blood. For example, we remember *Monsieur le curé* Lacerte (1860-1937) who, it was said, could stop fire with his cane. *L'herbe à dinde* (Achillea, milfoil) could heal just about everything.

The ancestor, François-Xavier Frigon (1846-1919) had 21 children. He had a traditional-style house in Saint-Prosper that still exists today, and among the antiques preserved by the family, one finds among other things, chamber pots, 21 settings of nice cutlery, wooden hat forms, an EDDY's match box on which was written the words NON-POISONOUS, containing a variety of rocks that grandfather William enjoyed collecting.



(4) *Prêt paroli*: we believe this is a loan without security. Perhaps the term comes from "parole-liée", in the sense of a loan given on someone's word alone.
 (5) Obligation of P.-O. Frigon to Eugene Godshire, June 1, 1877, notary Robert Trudel.

A HUNTING TRIP WITH THE FRIGONS

During the 1940'S

- II -

Jean-Pierre Frigon (194)

THE PREPARATION

As in most small frontier towns in the province, the coming of autumn in Shawinigan used to bring about a period of feverish activity in many working class families. In fact, during the weeks preceding the hunting season, one would find hunters meticulously preparing their expeditions. Before the war, the regulations governing hunting were much different than what they are today. The moose-hunting season, in particular, extended from mid-September to the end of November. From the very beginning of September, seasoned hunters were polishing and checking their weapons, preparing their ammunition, their kits, and their provisions. Game animals were the main topic of their animated conversations among themselves. Hunting fever had taken hold of them.

At the time, weapons were expensive luxury items and a family rarely had more than one rifle. Thus, in the group including the three Frigon brothers, only the head of each family owned one. Shortly after the First World War, my grandfather Bruno Frigon acquired a .303 calibre Ross rifle. Apparently, it was a war weapon that he had obtained from a former soldier. Along with this weapon, he had succeeded to get a stock of 1000 cartridges, of course at a reduced price. He also owned a smaller .16 calibre rifle for hunting small game. He took meticulous care of his weapons, giving them all the attention that such precious possessions deserved. With the coming of fall, he spent long hours cleaning, degreasing and polishing his rifle; it had to be impeccable. "His rifle," as Roland confided, "was his own and was as precious (to him) as his watch!"

Like so many others, my grandfather Bruno then took out his "hunting clothes". A pair of military pants, a thick flannel shirt, and good woollen stockings were the essentials of his hunting attire. His boots received special care. They had to be greased several times to make them waterproof for the whole season. There is nothing more unpleasant than plodding about in damp boots for two weeks. Roland remembers that the hunters "spent a whole month 'oiling'⁽¹⁾ their boots two or three times a week so that they would be well saturated with oil and would not leak".

Knives constituted a very important and expensive part of the hunter's equipment. It takes high quality blades to cut up a moose that weighs several hundred pounds. However, on that account, Bruno Frigon and his brothers called upon their employer's assistance. Charles Edouard, who worked in the mechanical engineering workshop at the Shawinigan Water & Power, was able to get many (discarded) industrial-quality blades. The Company felt that these blades were too worn-out and discarded them. Charles Edouard eagerly retrieved them and used his expertise to give them a new vocation. He reconditioned the blades and then made complete hunting knife kits with them. They had to be sharpened each season, just as carefully as a butcher hones his knives.

Lastly, they saw to the food supplies. They stocked enough beans, lard, peas, bacon, eggs, butter, and a few "cannages"⁽²⁾



(canned goods) to feed six to ten hunters during a two-week period. Then they were ready to go up to the campsite.

THE ASCENT

The hunters took the train to reach their hunting grounds. Upon request, the train would stop between Shawinigan and Parent to let the huntsmen off. A ribald and jovial atmosphere prevailed in this train packed with hunters; it was the good humour train. Having left Shawinigan about 10 p.m., the Club Caribou lads would get off in the Lac Brochet region around thirty minutes past midnight. It was a very isolated place, half way between Hervey-Junction and La Tuque.

No one knows by what stroke of fate "père Nobert" had settled in this out-of-the-way place, but he operated a small farm and managed to feed his family. The hunting season brought Nobert a considerable amount of extra income. He lodged the hunters when they got off the train and, the next day he transported their baggage up to their camps. Nobert would meet the Club Caribou hunters as they got off the train and bring them to his home to spend the night. The welcome must have been very cordial for the hunters always left the settler a small 10-ounce bottle of gin as a token of gratitude. The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, the hunters began the long hike towards their hunting grounds.

To reach the Club Caribou campsite, they had to take a trail almost four and a half miles long. The journey was done on foot. Since Nobert would bring the rest of their baggage later on, the group members carried only guns, munitions, and enough food for one day. In the afternoon, Nobert would go up with a horse and a "bracagnole". The latter consisted of two logs hitched to the horse, and linked together by a small platform on which the baggage was stacked.

In the meantime, the hunters were struggling to move ahead on the rugged trail. It was very hilly and passed through a few swamps. "Çà montait comme dans la face d'un bœuf", Roland remembers. "It was like climbing a bull's head." In other words, the climb was steep and rough. With a knapsack on their back and a rifle slung over their shoulders, the ascent proved to be very demanding. Halfway up, they reached a small stream where they took a break. They also took this opportunity to have a small shot of gin, as a booster. By early afternoon, they reached the campsite, which they now had to make liveable, for it had been closed for a year.

The next article will cover the hunters' living conditions.

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- 1- Actually, boots were greased with bear grease, or with pork tallow, but in the region concerned, the terms oiled and greased were used indiscriminately. The term oiled is used in my father's statement. He said the hunters "oiled" their boots when, in fact, they "greased" them.
 - 2- At that time, the term "cannages" was in use in our region.