

THE ARCHITECTURE OF VILLÉGIATURE ON LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG, 1860–1890

Jody Robinson, Archivist,
Eastern Townships Resource Centre, Bishop's University

Abstract

This article examines growing trend towards *villégiature* in nineteenth-century Quebec as it looks at the country estates of Montreal *villégiateurs* on Lake Memphremagog, in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. In particular, the architectural styles of the estates of Sir Hugh Allan, Alexander Molson, Judge Charles Dewey Day and John Murray are at the centre of this analysis. The article concludes that the architecture and landscaping of these estates demonstrates the occupants' notions of nature, leisure and social status as well as indicating the contemporary influences of romanticism and antimodernism.

Résumé

Cet article illustre la tendance croissante vers la villégiature au Québec au XIX^e siècle par l'étude des maisons de campagne des villégiateurs montréalais au lac Memphrémagog, dans la région des Cantons-de-l'Est au Québec. En particulier, les styles architecturaux des maisons de campagne de sir Hugh Allan, d'Alexander Molson, du juge Charles Dewey Day et de John Murray sont au cœur de cette analyse. L'article conclut que l'architecture et l'aménagement paysager de ces maisons de campagne démontrent ce que représentaient la nature, les loisirs et le statut social pour ces résidents et offrent un indicateur des influences contemporaines du romantisme et de l'anti-modernisme.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, a growing number of wealthy Montrealers were choosing to escape the city during the summer months, preferring locations with more 'congenial' scenery and fresher air. Among the popular summer destinations were the shores of Lake Memphremagog, with its picturesque landscapes and perceived rejuvenating qualities.¹ From 1860 to the early twentieth-century, a selection of upper-class Montreal families made Lake Memphremagog, in Quebec's Eastern Townships region, their summer

home. Along the pristine shores they built impressive country estates with sprawling lawns and gardens, wharves to dock their personal yachts, and servants to wait on them.

The presence of wealthy summer tourists on Lake Memphremagog was part of a broader North American trend, most often termed *villégiature* in Quebec history. The word 'villégiature,' coming from the Italian *villeggiatura* and which lacks a suitable English equivalent, means to take a vacation in the country, at the ocean or in some other pleasurable location, for the purpose of relaxation.² The emergence of this phenomenon, which can first be seen in European countries such as England and France, was primarily a result of the societal and cultural changes brought about by industrialization and romanticism at the turn of the nineteenth century.³ Significantly, however, *villégiature* was specifically an elite trend. During this time period, they were the only social class that had the financial means to travel to distant locations and pay for lodging for prolonged periods of time. Furthermore, romantic concepts, such as the appreciation of nature and the picturesque, were well received by members of the upper class, thus creating in them a desire to seek out nature and the wilderness that did not exist among members of the working classes. Lake Memphremagog's estate-owning Montreal families are particularly significant because they represent a distinct group of *villégiateurs*. In part, the Montrealers under examination here were among the wealthiest and most influential families in Quebec and a study of the way they experienced *villégiature* allows us to understand the ways in which their upper-class status and culture affected their pursuit of leisure and nature.

Through an examination of primary sources, the following article will present evidence of the strong romantic influences in the experience of *villégiature* in Quebec and, more specifically, in the Lake Memphremagog region. The architecture of the country houses built by Montrealers demonstrated styles that purposely integrated elements that were linked to romanticism. Likewise, they chose picturesque locations and landscaping so that they would be able to appropriately appreciate their natural surroundings. Furthermore, in studying the Montrealers on Lake Memphremagog, it is evident that they were heavily influenced by their upper-class status. While the architectural styles and landscaping demonstrate the influences of romanticism, they also indicate an obvious status consciousness as they sought to denote to on-lookers the wealth and prestige of their upper-class position.

Although they chose to leave behind many aspects of urban life, the Montrealers brought their upper-class value system with them to

their summer homes. The growing wealth of the Montreal elite into the mid-nineteenth century resulted in a more pronounced effort to clearly define themselves from the less affluent in various ways. Among other symbols, it was common for them to express social status through their living spaces, their houses growing in proportion to their wealth.⁴ Their summer estates were no exception to this attitude. The Montrealers on Lake Memphremagog were proud and withheld no expense in the construction of their estates. A number of them commissioned the famous Montreal photographer, William Notman, to produce prints of their properties. Fortunately, many of these photographs have survived to the present, along with a few others, which allow us to view some of the original grandeur of the estates.

Without architectural plans available for study, photographs are the best way to determine the architectural styles used in the construction of these estates. As a result, photographs form the chief primary source consulted for the following examination of country-house architecture on Lake Memphremagog. Extracts from the *Stanstead Journal*, the Eastern Townships' oldest, continuously published newspaper, were also used to supplement the information available through photographs.

By studying the Montrealers' lakeside country estates, the following discussion will demonstrate how romanticism and upper-class culture strongly influenced many of the architectural and landscaping styles preferred by the Montreal elite.

1. Upper-class culture through architecture

As *villégiature* became increasingly fashionable in Quebec into the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of architectural styles were applied to the summer houses that were springing up in the countryside and along the seashore. Eager to emulate their American and English counterparts, many of the elite adopted styles popular in other regions, which were readily available through architectural pattern books from the U.S. and England.⁵ Particularly common for country-house architecture were the Shingle, Second Empire, Italianate, Gothic Revival and Palladian styles. Architectural styles varied from house to house but one thing remained common among the majority: each style played off of architectural elements from historical periods.⁶ The implied historical connection was intended to evoke images and feelings tied to their historical setting. The rapid societal changes brought about by industrialization pushed members of the upper class – many being *nouveau-riche* – to want to establish a connection to the past and to 'traditional' values, which they did in part

through architecture.⁷ For example, Italianate and Italian Renaissance styles identified with the humanist ideals of the Renaissance period.⁸ Similarly, North American Queen Anne Revival and Shingle-style were founded in the notions of vernacular architecture and gentility.⁹ Regardless of the specific style, the ostentatious architectural styles of the nineteenth century were largely intended as public displays of success, culture, power, and wealth. While this was particularly true when it came to their mansions in the city, it was also a factor in country house styles.

As alluded to earlier, architectural styles during this period were also defined by elements common to romantic thought, such as eclecticism and the picturesque. More generally, romanticism describes a new tendency most prevalent among the middle and upper classes to attribute high worth to feelings, imagination and emotions evoked by secular experience. Included within romantic thought were the ideas of the sublime and the picturesque, which were frequently used as descriptors during this period. The sublime referred to the quality in art, literature and natural phenomena that induced its audience into awe while the picturesque referred to a quality in landscape that was visually attractive but lacked the profound emotional impact of the sublime.¹⁰ It is possible to see the widespread effects of romanticism in the methods of interpretation throughout Western art, architecture, landscape, literature, etc. In particular, romanticism created a climate where wilderness and nature could be appreciated.

When applied to architecture, these characteristics produced design elements that were meant to be eye-catching and dramatic. Additionally, to onlookers, they were intended to reference historical periods which suggested old, family wealth or a 'more simple' time. Such features included large projecting windows, turrets, high chimneys, irregular forms and striking gables.¹¹ In a particular example, one pattern book author refers to the functionality as well as the visual appeal of one of these design characteristics: "Hoods over the windows [...] relieve, by their shadows, what might otherwise appear to be a very plain exterior."¹² The application of the picturesque is particularly true for country houses as they often aspired to mimic the dramatic qualities of the natural landscape.

It is in this way that country-house architecture differed from urban architecture. It needed to combine the strong belief in the conspicuous status symbol with the desire to commune with nature. Styles were carefully chosen for the aesthetic environments they would create, which needed to be enjoyed from the outdoors. In the case of the summer villas around Lake Memphremagog, this aim resulted in architectural styles that were less assuming and pretentious

than their urban counterparts. As will be seen below, the villas were impressive but still relatively modest, especially when juxtaposed to the later, turn-of-the-century summer villas of Montreal's elite in other Quebec regions.¹³ This modesty can be partially attributed to the still comparatively juvenile state of Quebec's industrial revolution and the consequently limited fortunes. In the same way that industrialization lagged a few decades behind the United States, Quebec's popular architectural styles lagged somewhat behind the architectural trends to the south.¹⁴ Although they present more muted forms of the popular, nineteenth-century country house styles, the existing photographs of the country houses along Lake Memphremagog's eastern shore indicate that there were clear commonalities among them. If considering the architectural styles as part of a spectrum ranging from the grandiose to the modest, *Belmere* and *Fern Hill* would be in the centre while *Glenbrook*, as a modest design, and *Dunkeld*, as grandiose, would be at opposite ends. Through the following exploration of their similarities and differences, it will be shown that each property conveyed specific tenets of romanticism, as well as indicating the particular preferences of its specific owner.

1.1 Sir Hugh Allan's *Belmere* and Alexander Molson's *Fern Hill*

While the family of Sir Hugh Allan owned *Belmere* for over a century, a significant part of the estate was actually constructed under the direction of Henry Chapman, *Belmere's* original owner. John Murray describes the construction of Chapman's residence in a letter to his mother in 1864, which indicates that the main house had already been completed by the time Allan purchased it in 1866.¹⁵ Thus, Chapman was likely responsible for many of the architectural style choices for the country house. However, the specifics of which owner may have built what are not of utmost importance for this examination. Regardless of who built it, the fact that Hugh Allan chose to purchase *Belmere*, and for a price exponentially more than what Chapman had paid, indicates that the estate met his personal preferences.

Hugh Allan first amassed his fortune through a fleet of steamships he owned and operated with his brother, Andrew Allan, which was known popularly as the Allan Line. Similarly to other successful Montreal businessmen, Allan expanded his interests beyond shipping to manufacturing, insurance, natural resources and railway promotion.¹⁶ In recognition of his remarkable accomplishments and contribution to the commerce of Canada, Hugh Allan was knighted by the Queen in July 1871.¹⁷ It is not surprising, then, that by 1870, Allan was one of the richest men in Canada.¹⁸ His Montreal residence,

known as *Ravenscrag*, was appropriately extravagant in its size and design, built conspicuously on the slopes of Mount Royal.¹⁹

Belmere, as Allan's summer estate, consisted of the main house (also known as the 'big house'), boathouse, bathing house, two wharfs, gardener's cottage, bowling alley, hermitage, farmhouse and other farm buildings. The main summer house no longer exists unfortunately and because there are no known architectural plans, we now have to rely on photographs for insight into what it looked like originally. Purchased by Allan in 1866, some of the best photographs that have survived of *Belmere* were taken by Notman in June 1870, in honour of Allan's royal guest, Prince Arthur.²⁰ A series of these photographs, along with others that Notman had taken in 1867, were printed and bound as gifts; only a few copies still exist today.²¹ The bound album is incredibly useful to gain a perspective of the original estate as it includes photographs of the grounds, the buildings, the views and the visitors.

Looking for examples in A.J. Downing's popular, contemporary country house architectural pattern book, *Belmere's* main house appears most similar to the 'plain timber cottage-villa' but has been designed with elements of Gothic Revival.²² Without question, *Belmere*



View of *Belmere*, with employees on lawn, ca. 1870.

Source: William Notman, "Servants Group," (Stanstead Historical Society).



Avenue at Belmere, ca. 1870

Source: William Notman, "Belmere," (Stanstead Historical Society).

cannot be considered a villa by this American standard because of its size. Smaller than a villa but larger than a cottage and made with clapboard siding rather than stone, brick or stucco made it a 'cottage-villa' according to Downing.

Although generally symmetrical and lacking the very dramatic features of some contemporary styles, the house displayed a number of picturesque Gothic Revival characteristics. The steep roof, cross gable, tall windows, verandah with decorative brackets, along with the recurring use of the lancet arch (in the windows as well as on the flat-board balustrades of the second floor balcony), the carved barge-boards, finials and drip moldings set *Belmere* apart from traditional, vernacular architecture.²³ Also interesting are the circular and modified cathedral windows, the latter of which was not often seen in villa/cottage architecture during this time period. The decorative architectural details added whimsy and beauty to an otherwise traditional building. According to Downing, Gothic Revival was meant to express a certain level of modesty yet maintain a recognizable air of the picturesque and that the design "is that of a man or family of domestic tastes, but with strong aspirations after something higher than social pleasures."²⁴ In particular, the tall chimney, the pointed gable and horizontal lines of the verandah were designed to catch the eye of the on-looker.



View of Fern Hill, 1867.

Source: William Notman, "Fern Hill from the Avenue, Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867," (McCord Museum).

Furthermore, the large bay windows and tall casement windows, which extended almost to the floor, were intended to allow more light into the house, thus bringing more of the 'outside in'.

Although somewhat similar to *Belmere*, Alexander Molson's summer estate, *Fern Hill*, possessed features that differentiated it from the other estates that emerged lakeside and demonstrated the unique preferences of its owner. Alexander Molson was among the earliest Montrealers to buy Memphremagog lakefront property.²⁵ Late in 1862, Alexander purchased 50 acres from George W. Brown and, in 1864, purchased the remaining 115-acre farm from Brown.²⁶ The original estate no longer exists and we are, again, left with a series of photographs that were taken by Notman in 1867, as well as some descriptions in contemporary published sources. As with other summer estates around Lake Memphremagog, *Fern Hill* consisted of the large country house, a boathouse, stables, farm house and barn. Specific to *Fern Hill*, an impressive orchard also made up part of the estate.

Looking again to A.J. Downing's pattern book, *Fern Hill's* main house was an example of a plain timber cottage-villa with architectural influences from the Swiss Cottage style.²⁷ *Fern Hill* was rather simple in its basic design but stood out from the vernacular farm houses



Fern Hill from across the lake, 1867.

Source: William Notman, "A. Molson's house, Fern Hill, Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867," (McCord Museum).

through its impressive size and architectural features. Various design characteristics identified *Fern Hill* as influenced by the Swiss Cottage design; the cutout flat-board balustrades, the second-floor balcony with its gabled overhang and the gabled windows were intended to give the occupants a picturesque, almost "storybook" escape from the burdens of modern industrialization.²⁸ Other characteristics also contributed to its overall picturesque appearance, such as its sprawling, irregular lay-out, towering chimneys, bargeboards, latticework, finials and multiple ornate cupolas.

While both *Belmere* and *Fern Hill* were clearly styled after the popular country house architectural designs of the period, neither of the estates adhered closely to specific pattern. They each possessed varying design characteristics that were picturesque, irregular and eclectic. Clearly, they fit well into the romantic tendencies of the period, but also reflected the unique preferences of Allan and Molson.

1.2 Judge Day's *Glenbrook* and John Murray's *Dunkeld*

The estates of Judge Day and John Murray are interesting for their styles which were unique in comparison to the country estates of Sir Hugh Allan and Alexander Molson. As mentioned earlier, Judge Day's *Glenbrook* was particularly modest in design and was notably opposite from John Murray's *Dunkeld*.

The first Montrealer to purchase property on Lake Memphremagog was Judge Charles D. Day, who acquired part of a lakeside farm from James B. Hoyt in 1856. By the time he sold the property to his neighbour, A. Molson, in 1873, he had acquired a total of 273 acres including three of the lake's islands.²⁹ It is unknown exactly why

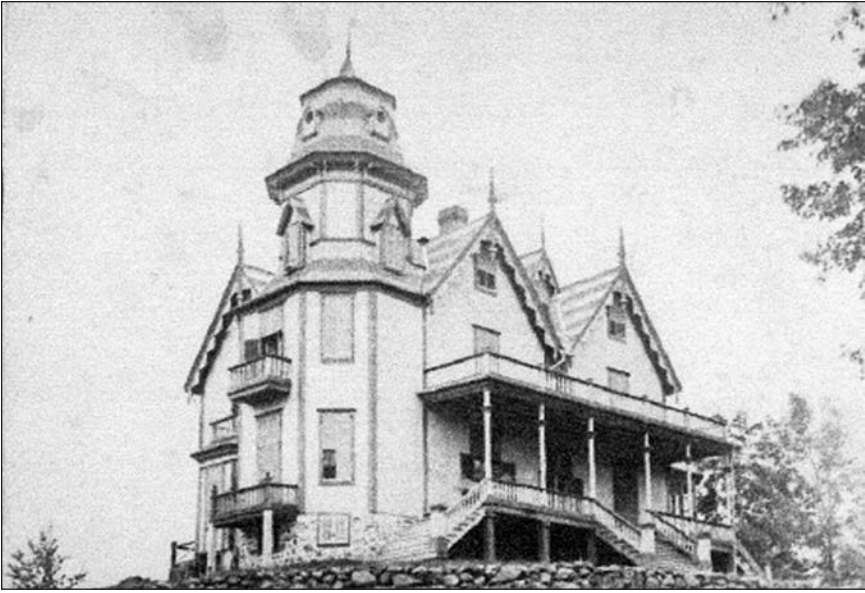


Judge Day's *Glenbrook*, 1867.

Source: William Notman, "Newport from Glen Brook, Judge Day's house, Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867," (McCord Museum).

Judge Day kept his property on Lake Memphremagog for less than a decade, only to continue to make summer visits to the lake in the years following.³⁰ It is not unreasonable, however, to suggest that after being appointed to the Canadian Pacific Railway Royal Commission, Judge Day may have felt the need to physically distance himself from Sir Hugh, who had been implicated in the affair.³¹

Only a few Notman photographs of *Glenbrook*, also from 1867, are available for examination today, but nonetheless offer a window on what the estate looked like during Judge Day's time there. In general, Judge Day's summer house looked the part of a vernacular timber farmhouse except for its large size. The only picturesque characteristics that it possessed were the wrap-around verandah and the dormer windows, which – while not intrinsically picturesque – added visual interest and character to the design.³² The architectural style of *Glenbrook* communicated a very different message to onlookers when compared to those of *Belmere* and *Fern Hill*; it was meant to blend in rather than to stand out. This unassuming style, described as "charming" in one newspaper article, may have reflected Judge Day's personality traits as well.³³ When news of the sale of his property and departure from the lake reached the townspeople, a disappointment was expressed in the *Stanstead Journal* as a Georgeville correspondent wrote "We are sure we speak sentiments of the people generally in



John Murray's Dunkeld, ca. 1890, Source: Anonymous, "Dunkeld," (W.A. Murray collection, Private Collection, Georgeville, Quebec).

saying we hope Judge Day will find a place to his mind without leaving the Township."³⁴ Even five years later, it appears that the people of Georgeville had not yet lost hope that Judge Day would return: "There is a good bit of news that Hon. Judge Day is about buying back his old place [...]."³⁵ While this rumour went unfounded, it indicates that Judge Day had built up a relationship with the local people during his summers spent on the shores of Lake Memphremagog.

Although John Murray had lived on Lake Memphremagog since the early 1860s, he did not build a proper estate house until after the deaths of his father, William Murray, in 1874 and his mother in 1880.³⁶ *Dunkeld* was certainly unique compared to its counterparts on the Eastern shore of the lake; it was designed in the Queen Anne Revival architectural style, popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and not comparable to the more common styles of country houses in the region. Queen Anne Revival was characterized by prominent chimneys, large verandahs, turrets, varied shingle and surface patterns, and widespread use of embellishments (e.g. brackets, finials, spindles, bargeboards, etc.), most of which *Dunkeld* possessed. These elements paired with steep cross gables, numerous dormer windows, the bay window and balconies made *Dunkeld* quintessentially picturesque in style.³⁷ In many ways, its design was better suited for the urban, upper-class neighbourhood of Montreal than the shores of Lake Memphremagog.



Dunkeld, ca. 1890

Source: Anonymous, "Dunkeld,"

(W.A. Murray collection, Private Collection, Georgeville, Quebec).

Picturesque architectural elements were intended to create a structure that was visually pleasing and striking to the onlooker. At the same time, however, these styles were intended to convey the wealth and social status of the residents.³⁸ In this way, *Dunkeld* spoke louder than other country houses along the lake. The grandiosity of Murray's house can be explained by a few factors. First, and probably most significantly, the *Dunkeld* property was John Murray's primary residence, rather than simply a country house. For this reason, it had to be comfortable enough to live in year-round. Also, while other Montrealers were able to convey their status through their ostentatious primary residences in the upper-class neighbourhood of the 'Square Mile,' Murray's *Dunkeld* did not have an urban counterpart. Given this, it is not surprising that *Dunkeld* resembled the upper-class houses of Montreal more than the country houses of Lake Memphremagog.

Notably, *Belmere*, *Fern Hill*, and particularly *Glenbrook* all conveyed some elements of vernacular architecture in their design, in particular through their material of construction. Downing describes this plain timber cottage-villa as a 'real' structure, one which derives its character from its "simplicity and fitness of construction."³⁹ Downing also emphasized the necessity that the design of a cottage or villa must suit its surroundings. Witold Rybczynski has identified an expressiveness and fantasy in estate and cottage architecture, which is not typical of urban architecture.⁴⁰ These architectural styles, described by Downing and chosen by the Montrealers, were best suited for the natural and

rustic surroundings of the lake and were chosen for their romantic and picturesque qualities. Though important, the houses of *Belmere*, *Fern Hill* and *Glenbrook* only made up a portion of the estate. As summer retreats, where great amounts of time were meant to be passed outdoors, the landscaping and agricultural buildings were significant components of the estates.

2. Creating structured nature: landscape design

The Romantic Movement gave Western society a framework in which nature and wilderness could be appreciated. As discussed earlier, it ushered in a period where notions of the picturesque and of the sublime influenced the way natural phenomena and landscapes were interpreted and valued.⁴¹ Transcendentalism was also on the rise during this period and influenced how nineteenth-century contemporary writers viewed nature. This movement promoted the belief that nature and wilderness gave a person better access to spiritual truths and that the wilderness possessed unique aesthetic and inspirational qualities.⁴² Although Transcendentalism was an American movement, many of the most prominent names in Transcendentalism were from New England and it is not unreasonable to assume that Montrealers, being in close geographic proximity and often with familial ties to the region, would have been exposed to these ideas in some way.

Furthermore, industrial businessmen increasingly sought out refuge from the suffocating confines of their urban surroundings. T.J. Jackson Lears argues this dissatisfaction grew out of emerging anti-modernist thought, which found the educated bourgeoisie desiring experiences that were outside of Victorian respectability and would recapture 'real life' experiences.⁴³ Some of these real life experiences could be found through pre-modern activities such as hunting, 'gathering' (agriculture) and, in general, a return to the land.⁴⁴ It has also been argued that one's perception of and relationship with nature and the countryside was dependent on their position relative to it. Working the land would carry a different appeal and significance to *villégiateurs* who experienced it as a pastime to be enjoyed during weekends or a few months during the summer rather than those for whom it was their source of livelihood.⁴⁵

These interpretations of the urban, industrial environment versus nature heavily influenced the appeal of Lake Memphremagog and its surroundings to upper-class *villégiateurs*. The picturesque mountain views, crisp water, fresh air, and availability of rolling farmland to occupy made Lake Memphremagog, along with other areas in the Eastern Townships, a prime getaway destination. Each of the early Montrealers to settle at the lake also had working farms as a part of

their estate, which they continued to operate and employed people to oversee year-round. This is evidenced by estate photographs and newspaper descriptions. The Allans had a farm house where their tenant farmer, Robert Parker, lived for 26 years.⁴⁶ Also, through the years, various farm buildings at the estates succumbed to fire or narrowly escaped being destroyed.⁴⁷ In particular, the Molson estate, *Fern Hill*, was widely known for its extensive vegetable gardens and orchards.⁴⁸ Molson, along with fellow lakeside estate-owner R.A. Lindsay, also a Montrealer, strove to raise prize produce and animals: "R.A. Lindsay, Esq., of Woodland farm received the first prize on his Ayershire Bull [...]. We suppose that A. Molson's Fern Hill farm has produced more and better fruit than any other farm in this county."⁴⁹ Their retention of 'gentleman's farms' and their participation in local agricultural exhibitions suggest that the farms played a notable part in their retreat to the country and may have been perceived as contributing to the 'real life' experience that Jackson Lears describes.

Beyond selecting the location that would be their country getaway, *villégiateurs* went a step further by influencing how they experienced nature. Although Montrealers on Lake Memphremagog wanted to sojourn in places close to nature, their estates were displays of controlled nature, rather than wild nature. The photographs of *Belmere*, *Fern Hill*, *Glenbrook*, and *Dunkeld* give evidence of this. To guide them in this, there was no lack of contemporary literature with instructions on proper methods of landscape gardening. André Parmentier, recognized as the originator of picturesque principles in landscape design, introduced the upper class to these principles at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ A.J. Downing followed with his *Treatise on Landscape Gardening*, as he argued to readers that proper landscape gardening increased one's personal enjoyment as well as expressed cultural and social status. Downing's work was wildly successful in bringing the upper and middle classes to the realization of the merits of residential landscape design. Nineteenth-century picturesque landscape design literature often focused on historical styles, such as Italianate and eclecticism, which were trends also present in architecture.⁵¹

Unfortunately, too few photographs of the early Lake Memphremagog estates exist to determine a specific type of landscape design. Nonetheless, the photographs available now, along with other sources, show a combination of careful landscaping paired with an admiration for the wilderness just beyond. Photographs of Sir Hugh's *Belmere* show extensive manicured lawns, foliage-covered arbours along with gardens and shrubbery. Molson's *Fern Hill* shows even more detailed landscaping with multiple gazebos, substantial flower gardens,



View of *Belmere's* lawns, ca. 1867.

Source: William Notman, "Belmere," (Stanstead Historical Society).

vegetable gardens and walking paths. Reports found in the *Stanstead Journal* also express the significant extent of the landscaping on the estates. A description of a trip to Memphremagog in 1867 describes Molson's estate with a few lines about his gardens, "[...] his productive garden with its acre of asparagus and thriving fruit trees [...]." ⁵² Later, in 1879, a correspondent writes "[...] lots of trees and shrubbery for gardens, &c. are being freighted out for those pleasant summer resorts [*Woodlands, Fern Hill, and Glenbrook*]." ⁵³ There is no doubt that the Montreal estate-owners were engaged in the beautification of their properties.

Beyond their manicured lawns and gardens, the Allans, Molsons, and others demonstrated their parallel admiration of the wilderness. The Notman collection of Lake Memphremagog area photographs from the 1860s contains numerous images of mountain and shoreline views from the estates. In the Allans' album of *Belmere*, 17 of the 33 photographs were views of relatively untransformed nature. In the McCord Museum's Notman collection, there are a handful of similar views from the grounds of *Belmere*. Likewise, the Notman views from *Fern Hill* and *Glenbrook* also included a greater number of landscape,



The gardens at *Fern Hill*, 1867.

Source: William Notman, "A. Molson's house, Fern Hill, Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867," (McCord Museum).

or 'scenic,' views than of the carefully maintained estates or country houses. The large number of these photographs suggests that wild nature held an equal evaluation among the Lake Memphremagog Montrealers.

The North American literature on nature, the wilderness and tourism during the nineteenth century suggests something similar. As discussed earlier, the wilderness was seen as having rejuvenating and inspirational qualities while 'picturesque' landscapes were valued as an element of taste.⁵⁴ Lynda Villeneuve, in her study of landscape and myth in nineteenth-century Charlevoix, further describes representations of the picturesque. She explains that, in England, the possession of topographical art was seen as a symbol of high society, political and social power as well as personal success; a meaning that was carried into Quebec in the nineteenth century. Although landscape photographs were not art in the traditional sense, they often reflected many of the qualities present in picturesque topographical art. Such qualities included the subtle placement of trees in the foreground with mountains in the background, which made the landscape more majestic and striking.⁵⁵ Given this, the landscape photographs taken



Untransformed nature on the *Belmere* estate, ca. 1867.

Source: William Notman, "Mount Orford," (Stanstead Historical Society).

from the Montrealers' estates may have been a way for the estate-owners to portray their success and wealth to friends and family. Furthermore, the Montrealers' focus on images depicting wild nature demonstrates that they also attributed much value and meaning to it. Through their estates, they were able to exact some control over nature while simultaneously admiring the untamed nature that lied just beyond the boundaries of their influence.

This admiration for views of wild nature likely influenced their choice of Lake Memphremagog as a summer getaway over



Untransformed nature on
Glenbrook estate, 1867

Source: William Notman,
"Judge Day's house, Glen Brook,
Lake Memphremagog, QC, 1867,"
(McCord Museum).

other popular destinations. Mid-century travel guides expounded on the 'untamed' scenery, forests and rolling hills offered by Lake Memphremagog. However, along with the gradual development of *villégiature* came significant changes to the view from the lake.

3. The view from the lake

Drawn by fertile soil and access to the water, many of the first settlers along the shores of Lake Memphremagog cleared large wooded areas in order to cultivate the land. The areas too mountainous for such ends, largely along the Western shore, were left untamed forests. For *villégiateurs* first visiting the lake in the late 1850s and 1860s, forests, mountains, farmland and quaint farmhouses would have been the predominant views from the lake. Furthermore, the shores around the lake would have been essentially undeveloped with few docks or wharves to disturb the natural landscape, all of which would have attracted *villégiateurs* to the area.

The early travel literature and other available descriptions of Lake Memphremagog produced in the mid-1800s focus on this picturesque landscape. Shortly after the launch of the *Mountain Maid* in 1850, a description of a day trip on the steamer appeared in the *Stanstead Journal* wherein the author described the 'natural beauties' as well as the 'feminine beauties' of the excursion. Included within the description, he wrote "[t]he scenery about 'Owl's Head' struck me as awful in its sublimity [sic], and is worth a page of description. Then there were the beautiful and highly cultivated farms along the shores of the Lake, indicative of the skill and industry of their thriving occupants."⁵⁶ The article is significant for its demonstration of the characteristics of the Lake in 1850, at the beginnings of *villégiature* in the area and, in particular, what characteristics were most valued.

Into the early 1860s, published travel guides that included the Lake Memphremagog area generally focused on the mountains of the Western shore, wooded hills of the Eastern shore and occasionally noted the attractive farmland. Dix's *Handbook for Lake Memphremagog*, dated from around 1864, chiefly details the natural and wild scenery while making brief mention of the "upland being dotted with farms and pretty dwellings" and of Georgeville being "a pretty rural village" with "handsome dwellings."⁵⁷ In Trollope's *North America*, from 1862, his brief time on the Lake also focuses on the natural landscape.⁵⁸ Into the latter part of the 1860s, much of the literature continued to focus on the undeveloped views.⁵⁹ However, as summer estates were built up along the lakeshore, their presence was the first step in a long process that would forever change the view from the lake.

It was not long after the arrival of the Montrealers on Lake Memphremagog that the estates began to make their appearance in contemporary publications. One of the first mentions of the estates appears in Burt's *Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*, published in 1866. He makes many of the typical remarks about the lake, such as noting the "grand and inspiring" scenery, but also comments on the "splendid" summer residences of wealthy Montreal men.⁶⁰ While Burt's note on the estates is brief, it was demonstrative of the developing trend to feature the impressive estates in descriptions of lakeshore scenery. In later literature, the country houses often feature more prominently. *Car Window Glimpses*, published by Quebec Central Railway in the 1880s, features a relatively brief description of Lake Memphremagog's natural attributes but includes a line about the "handsome summer homes" that can be seen, along with a prominent sketch of Sir Hugh's 'villa' as seen from the lake.⁶¹ The 1882 *Picturesque Canada* also includes Sir Hugh in its detail of the Lake, "Yonder, on the opposite headland, is that old sea-king's Chateau [*Belmere*]; for, in the swelter of summer, it was his custom to rest here from the care of his fleets, and brace his nerves with 'the wine of mountain air.'"⁶²

Perhaps the most interesting commentary describing the general scene of the grand estates from the lake comes from a newspaper article, wherein the writer observes that "[t]his is now the charming part of the lake. Nature has done her part well and man is now aiding to make the picture fascinating. Let all who wish to see wealth and beauty enjoying nature in the most pleasant and agreeable way."⁶³ In these three sentences, the writer was able to sum up one of the significant effects the country estates had on the view from the lake; part of the Lake's tourist appeal was redirected from natural scenery and quaint farmland to the lavish estates and country houses along the shore. As seen above, this redirection is evidenced by the changing descriptions in the tourist literature in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The increasing number of *villégiateurs* that purchased lakeshore property into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially as the rising middle class became better able to afford summer cottages, had another significant effect on the landscape of the lake. They were also the first phases in a process called 'exploitation encirclement,' as described by Jan Lundgren, which has affected the major lakes in the Eastern Townships. In the process of exploitation encirclement, tourist real estate development around a lake – in such forms as cottages, estates and condominiums – eventually leads to the almost complete elimination of public access to the lake and contributes extensively to the "ecological impairment of the natural

lakeshore."⁶⁴ Although this process took over a century to complete in the case of Lake Memphremagog, it has its origins in the first summer estates of wealthy Montreal businessmen.

Conclusion

Upper-class ideas of romanticism and the picturesque greatly informed the elite's pursuit of *villégiature* in mid-nineteenth century Quebec. In particular, the Romantic Movement encouraged Montreal's upper-class to escape the confines of the industrializing city and seek out refuge and rejuvenation in natural surroundings. As has been demonstrated above, the appreciation of the picturesque, the sublime and wilderness influenced their choice of Lake Memphremagog for their summer destination. These principles also played a major role in the architectural styles and landscaping of their summer estates. Furthermore, the Montrealers generally selected styles with the dual aim of reflecting nature's beauty and displaying their privileged status. In the end, however, their migration to the lake was the first step in a process that would eventually detract from the qualities that had originally attracted them to this place and would forever change the lake.

NOTES)

- 1 Many sources make direct reference or allude to Lake Memphremagog's romantic and healthful setting, including: "Lake Memphremagog," *Stanstead Journal*, 14 September 1871; N.P. Willis, *Canadian Scenery Illustrated, from drawings by W.H. Bartlett*, Vol. I & Vol. II, (1842, reprint, London: Peter Martin Associates, 1967); Anthony Trollope, *North America*, (New York: Harper, 1862); John Ross Dix, *A Hand Book for Lake Memphremagog, with Route List*, (Boston: Evans & Co., 1864); and Henry M. Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley, containing descriptions of Mount Holyoke, Mount Mansfield, White Mountains, Lake Memphremagog, Lake Willoughby, Montreal, Quebec, etc.*, (Springfield: New England Publishing, 1866).
- 2 Michèle Dagenais, "Fuir la ville : villégiature et villégiateurs dans la région de Montréal, 1890–1940," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 58, 3 (2005): 319 and Michel Lessard and Gaston Cadrin, "Les sentiers de la villégiature," *Cap-aux-Diamants*, no. 33 (1993): 10.
- 3 With the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century, poor sanitation and over-crowding made North American cities unhealthy environments where disease and sickness spread rapidly. Contemporaries also believed the fast-paced urban, industrial

life to be detrimental to their mental health. A number of historians identify the connection between the detrimental urban environment and the growth of *villégiature*, such as Caroline Aubin-des Roches, "Retrouver la ville à la campagne," *Urban History Review* 34 (2006): 17–31, and Dagenais, "Fuir la ville." Robert Fishman, in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1987), discusses the creation of nineteenth-century suburbs and points to the moral degradation of the cities as part of the drive behind the creation of suburban communities. The elites viewed a move to the suburbs as a way to protect women and children from the "dangers, cruelty, bad language, suffering and immorality" that ran rampant in the city (58). Given the otherwise similarity between the origins of the suburbs and country estates, the morality question likely played a role in their desire to escape the city.

- 4 Roderick MacLeod, "Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal's Golden Square Mile, 1840–1895." (Doctoral Thesis, Montreal, McGill University, 1997), 205–7.
- 5 For examples, see Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses: Including Designs for cottages, farm-houses and villas*. 1850, (reprint, Ottawa: Algrove Publishing, 2002); George E. Woodward, *Woodward's Cottages and Farm Houses*, (New York: Orange Judd & Co., 1867); and D.H. Jacques, *The House: A Manual of Rural Architecture, or, How to Build Country Houses and Out-buildings*, (New York: American News Co., 1866).
- 6 See Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling of Three Centuries*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) for a general description of architectural styles and trends common in Canada during the nineteenth century.
- 7 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (New York: Cambridge, 1983), 1–2, 12.
- 8 François Rémillard and Brian Merrett, *Demeures bourgeoises de Montréal: Le Mille carré doré, 1850–1930*, (Montréal: Éditions du Méridien, 1986), 33.
- 9 Mark Alan Hewitt, *The Architect and the American Country House, 1890–1940*, (New Haven, Mass.: Yale University Press, 1990), 69–77, 155 and Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The Queen Anne Movement 1860–1900*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 2–5, 59–62.
- 10 Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790–1914*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 7–9. William Cronon also defines the sublime through the powerful emotions it evoked but, in place of the picturesque, he identifies a 'domesticated sublime.' Similar to the definition other authors have given to the picturesque, Cronon describes domesticated sublime in writing that "the religious sentiments [wilderness] evoked were

- more those of a pleasant parish church than those of a grand cathedral [...]” [William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 75].
- 11 France Gagnon-Pratte, *Maisons de compagnie des Montréalais, 1892–1924: l’architecture des frères Maxwell*, (Montreal: Éditions du Méridien, 1987), 130; and France Gagnon-Pratte and Philippe Dubé, “La Villa,” *Continuité*, no. 40 (1988), 22–25.
 - 12 Woodward, *Woodward’s Cottage and Farm Houses*, 65.
 - 13 For examples of the Montrealers’ extravagant urban residences, Rémillard and Merrett provide a detailed survey in *Demeures bourgeoises de Montréal*. Gagnon-Pratte, in her survey of the Maxwell brothers’ architecture in *Maisons de compagnie des Montréalais*, demonstrates the extent of the turn-of-the-century opulence when it came to country-house architecture. These summer houses were designed largely without restraint as they aimed to be representations of stability for future generations as well as objects of admiration (Gagnon-Pratte, *Maisons de compagnie des Montréalais*, 17–18, 55).
 - 14 Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling of Three Centuries*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 149.
 - 15 John Scott, “A Briefing Paper on the nineteenth Century Summer Retreats on Lake Memphremagog,” (unpublished, 2006), 14.
 - 16 Donald MacKay, *The Square Mile: Merchant Princes of Montreal*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987), 68.
 - 17 George MacLean Rose, *The Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography: Being Chiefly Men of the Time*, (Toronto: Pose Publications, 1886), 35–6.
 - 18 MacKay, *The Square Mile*, 78.
 - 19 “Ravenscrag,” *Canadian Illustrated News*, 30 November 1872, 339.
 - 20 “Belmere, Lake Memphremagog,” *Canadian Illustrated News*, 16 July 1870, 35.
 - 21 One known surviving copy is preserved by the Stanstead Historical Society, in Stanstead, Quebec.
 - 22 Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 295–300.
 - 23 John Milnes Baker, *American House Styles: A Concise Guide*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 66–7 and Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 295–7.
 - 24 Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 295.

- 25 As is suggested by his family name, Alexander Molson was part of the prominent Montreal Molson family, who had first made their mark with their brewery and later expanded into other areas of industry. Alexander, the youngest of John Molson Jr.'s five sons, is mentioned largely in passing in the histories of the Montreal Molsons. His primary profession was vice-president and manager of the Mechanics' Bank in Montreal [*The Bankers' Almanac for 1873* (New York: Banker's Magazine and Statistical Register, 1873), 242]. In *The Molsons: The Birth of a Business Empire* by Doug Hunter, Alexander is named only in the family tree (Toronto: Penguin/Viking, 2001, xxv) and in *The Molson Family* by Bernard K Sandwell he is acknowledged only with a few brief lines (Montreal: Ronalds, 1933, 154, 240). However, upon his father's death, Alexander was left with a generous annuity and was a part of Montreal's elite social circle (*Canadian Dictionary of Biography Online*, s.v. "John Moslon," by Alfred Dubuc and Robert Tremblay, accessed 4 March 2012, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=4091&&PHPSESSID=be7dhstgkjr7vb305reff0e54).
- 26 Province of Quebec, Stanstead Land Registers, Register B, Vol. 12, no. 785, "George W. Brown to Alexander Molson," 21 December 1864; Province of Quebec, Stanstead Land Registers, Register B, Vol. 12, no. 806, "George W. Brown to Alexander Molson," 12 January 1865 and Scott, "A Briefing Paper," 6, 11.
- 27 For a description of the Swiss Cottage style, see Andrew Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 122–5.
- 28 Baker, *American House Styles*, 74.
- 29 Province of Quebec, Stanstead Land Registers, Register B, Vol. 19, no. 366, "Charles Dewey Day to Alexander Molson," 13 May 1873. Judge Charles Dewey Day moved with his family from Vermont to Montreal as a young boy. He was educated in Montreal and admitted to the bar in 1827. During his career, Day achieved political prominence through his work as solicitor general in the Executive Council, his appointment to the Court of the Queen's Bench and as a judge to the Superior Court, as well as being one of three judges to codify Lower Canada's civil law. Day also possessed a particular interest in education, which led him to his involvement with the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning as well as to his part in McGill's mid-century revival. In Montreal, the Judge had a house on Durocher Street, just outside of the traditional limits of the 'Square Mile' but still within the elite neighbourhood. [Mrs. Robert W. S. Mackay, ed., *Mackay's Montreal Directory, New Edition, Corrected in May and June 1857–1858*, (Montreal: Owlver & Stevenson, 1857), 87 and *Canadian Dictionary of Biography Online*, s.v. "Charles Dewey Day", by Carman Miller, accessed 4 March 2012, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=5467&&PHPSESSID=o75dsc2co5ec0jvhuuqk5udee1].

- 30 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 17 July 1873; "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 2 August 1877 and "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 15 August 1878.
- 31 *Canadian Dictionary of Biography Online*, s.v. "Charles Dewey Day," by Carman Miller, accessed 4 March 2012, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=5467&&PHPSESSID=o75dsc2co5ec0jvhnuk5udee1.
- 32 Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 47.
- 33 "Notes of a Trip from Montreal to Memphremagog," *Stanstead Journal*, 6 June 1864.
- 34 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 17 July 1873.
- 35 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 15 August 1878.
- 36 John Murray was one of William Murray's sons, who was a prominent Montreal businessman. In 1867, William founded the Canada Shipping Company, popularly known as the Beaver Line for the company's flag bearing the Canadian beaver. During his lifetime, William built up a sizeable fortune in insurance and shipping. Beyond these interests, he founded the Mount Royal Cemetery Company in 1847 along with others, including John Molson, and served time as a director of the St. Andrew's Society. From when he purchased the Lake Memphremagog property in 1861, up until his death, William's oldest sons, John and Walter Gow lived as gentleman farmers on Lake Memphremagog (Jody Robinson, "The loveliest lake in the New Dominion: Montreal villégiateurs on Lake Memphremagog, 1860–1914," Master's Thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 2012, 59–61).
- 37 Baker, *American House Styles*, 88–9.
- 38 Jansen, *Wild Things*, 11, and McLeod, "Salubrious Settings," 205–7.
- 39 Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 300.
- 40 Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, (New York: Viking: 1991), 172.
- 41 Jasen, *Wild Things*.
- 42 Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67–9, 85–6.
- 43 T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 5–7.
- 44 Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).
- 45 Aubin-des Roches, "Retrouver la ville," 17–31.
- 46 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 21 April 1894.
- 47 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 20 February 1896 and "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 11 February 1897.

- 48 "Notes of a Trip from Montreal to Memphremagog," *Stanstead Journal*, 6 June 1867; "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 11 October 1877; "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 22 July 1897.
- 49 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 11 October 1877.
- 50 Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 314.
- 51 Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), 260–6.
- 52 "Notes of Trip From Montreal to Memphremagog," *Stanstead Journal*, 6 June 1867.
- 53 "Georgeville," *Stanstead Journal*, 15 May 1979.
- 54 Nash, *Wilderness*, 88-9 and Jasen, *Wild Things*, 7–8.
- 55 Lynda Villeneuve, *Paysage, mythe et territorialité: Charlevoix au XIX^e siècle, pour une nouvelle approche du paysage*, (Sainte-Foy, Que.: Presses Université Laval, 1999), 77–80.
- 56 "Pleasure Trip on Lake Memphremagog," *Stanstead Journal*, 10 October 1850.
- 57 Dix, *A Hand Book*, 14, 47.
- 58 Trollope, *North America*, Chapter 4.
- 59 Other travel guides featuring descriptions of Lake Memphremagog are H. B. Small, *The Canadian Handbook and Tourist's Guide Giving a Description of Canadian Lake and River Scenery and Places of Historical Interest*, (Montreal: M. Longmoore & Co., 1866) and Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*.
- 60 Burt, *Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*, 191–203.
- 61 Quebec Central Railway, *Car Window Glimpses en Route to Quebec by Daylight via Quebec Central Railway*, (ca. 1881; reprint, Sherbrooke, Que.: Page-Sangster, 1952), Anna Lebaron fonds, P022, Eastern Townships Resource Centre, Sherbrooke, Quebec.
- 62 George Munro Grant, ed., *Picturesque Canada; The Country As It Was and Is*, vol. 2, (Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882), 693–4.
- 63 "Memphremagog," *Sherbrooke Gazette*, 10 September 1864.
- 64 Jan O. Lundgren, "The Tourism Development Process in the Eastern Townships – The Changing Tourist Product Composition," *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies* 8 (1996): 5–24. J.I. Little's article, "Scenic Tourism," also addresses the changes along Lake Memphremagog's lakeshore. In particular, he identifies logging and real estate development as the principle causes of the deterioration of the lake's natural and romantic scenery ["Scenic Tourism on the Northeastern Borderland: Lake Memphremagog's Steamboat Excursions and Resort Hotels, 1850–1900," *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009), 735–6].

