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THE CHÂTEAU RAMEZAY DURING THE AMERICAN INVASION OF 1775-1776

THE CHÂTEAU RAMEZAY AT THE TIME OF THE INVASION

From the time it was constructed in 1705, the Château Ramezay was a place associated with power; first administrative power, then commercial. Built as a private residence for Claude de Ramezay, Governor of Montréal, the Château subsequently welcomed the intendants of New France when they were in town. The Compagnie des Indes, in charge of the fur trade on the continent, set up its offices there from 1745 to 1760. After the conquest of New France, the Château Ramezay once again found itself at the centre of political events during the American invasion of 1775-1776.

THE REASONS FOR THE INVASION

In the spring of 1775, Guy Carleton, Governor General of the new British colony, was informed that the United Colonies were planning to invade

the Province of Québec. At that time, the thirteen American colonies were rebelling against their British metropolis: they refused to be subject to pay the taxes decreed by the Parliament in London, in which they had no representatives. Fearing that the Province of Québec's habitants (tenant farmers) would be called upon to assist the British troops and subdue the rebellion, the Continental Congress of the future United States of America decided to convince the Canadians to join their insurrection.

THE OCCUPATION OF THE CHÂTEAU RAMEZAY DURING THE INVASION: THE SERIES OF EVENTS

May 26, 1775 - The advance of the troops of the Continental Congress forces the Governor General to leave Montréal and take refuge in Québec City.

November 13, 1775 - Following the capitulation of Montréal, Brigadier General Richard Montgomery makes the Château Ramezay his campaign headquarters. By occupying the place of residence of the political authorities of the Province of Québec, the invading troops appropriate one of the main symbols of British power.

November 28, 1775 - Montgomery heads for Québec City to join the troops of Benedict Arnold that have been surrounding the capital since November 16. From then until March 27, 1776 the Château Ramezay is the headquarters of Brigadier General David Wooster.

April 3, 1776 - The Château Ramezay is now under the supervision of Moses Hazen, a resident of the Province of Québec in charge of the 2nd Canadian Regiment that joined the troops of the Continental Congress.

Mid-April, 1776 - The military government of Montréal is now the responsibility of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold.

April 29, 1776 - Benedict Arnold welcomes at the Château Ramezay three emissaries from the Continental Congress: Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Carrollton describes the event in his journal: "When we landed, we were received by General Arnold in the most polite and friendly manner, conducted to headquarters, where a genteel company of ladies and gentlemen had assembled to welcome our arrival. As we went from the landing place to the general's house, the cannon of the citadel fired in our honour as the commissioners of congress." Staying at the home of Thomas Walker, one of the most ardent Canadian partisans of the United Colonies, they attended to their duties in the Château.

May 6, 1776 - Fleury Mesplet arrives in Montréal. The Continental Congress assumed the cost to transport his presses to Montréal to set up a printing house to serve the colonies. Tradition has it that Mesplet stored his equipment in the vaults of the Château Ramezay.

May 11, 1776 - Benjamin Franklin leaves Montréal without obtaining the success expected. He declares it would have been easier to buy Canada than to win over Canadians to the American cause!

May 29, 1776 - The retreat of the troops of the Continental Congress prompts Chase and Carroll of Carrollton to head back to the United Colonies.

June 15, 1776 - The approach of British forces obliges Benedict Arnold to leave the Château Ramezay: the Continental Army abandons Montréal. The same day, Governor Carleton and his troupes return to the city.

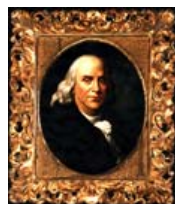
THE LEGACY OF THE INVASION

The Québec Act of 1775 restored the rights of the Catholic clergy and French civil laws guaranteeing the authority and income of the seigneurs. In doing so, the British metropolis sought to ensure loyalty of the Province of Québec's francophone elite. But the farmers and craftsmen had difficulty accepting to resume obligations inherited from the French Regime that forced them to provide labour for the seigneurs and pay tithes to the parish priest. Also, these "common people" actively supported the rebel troops for as long as the possibility of a victory of the United Colonies' forces could let them hope to avoid being subjected again to their clerical and seigneurial elite. However, as soon as it appeared that the rebels' enterprise was doomed to fail, the Canadians docilely had to resolve to accept their traditional authorities' restoration of powers.

The failure of the invasion therefore contributed to consolidating clerical and seigneurial power. But the propaganda of the thirteen colonies accustomed the inhabitants of the Province of Québec to the political principle of parliamentary representation: the adoption of the Constitutional Act of 1791, which notably established the Parliament of Lower Canada, was a result of introducing the ideals of the United Colonies to the Canadian population. And Montréal owes the creation of the city's first newspaper to the Continental Congress. Staying on after the invading forces departed, printer Fleury Mesplet founded, in 1778, the *Gazette Littéraire*: forerunner of *The Montreal Gazette*.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)

At the time of the invasion of the Province of Québec, Benjamin Franklin, thanks to his already long and fruitful career as a journalist, inventor, and politician, was considered one of the most influential figures in the 18th century, the Age of the Enlightenment.



In early 1776, the United Colonies realized that their plan to associate the Province of Québec with their rebellion against

the British authority was likely to fail. On February 15, Continental Congress appointed three emissaries to Canada to analyze the situation and propose solutions to the difficulties the Continental Army was experiencing there.

Two of these representatives, Samuel Chase and Charles Carroll of Carrollton, were chosen due to their knowledge of French and familiarity with Catholicism. Benjamin Franklin could also express himself in French, but was above all an internationally renowned personality whom the United Colonies saw as embodying their political ideals. Including a man with such a reputation among its envoys indicated the importance Congress placed on the mission it entrusted to them.

The emissaries arrived in Montréal on April 29, 1776. During the following days, at the Château Ramezay, Franklin and his colleagues participated in meetings that they described to the Continental Congress in a series of alarming reports.

While Chase and Carroll of Carrollton stayed on in their positions until May 29, Franklin headed back to the United Colonies on May 11. The great man was already seventy and apparently his state of health contributed to hastening his repatriation. But above all, it was probably to avoid the risk of the most famous American of the time being taken prisoner by the British troops already marching toward Montréal.

BENEDICT ARNOLD (1742-1801)

The invasion of the Province of Québec by the United Colonies began and ended under the orders of Benedict Arnold. On May 17, 1775, he was the first rebel officer to command an incursion on Canadian soil so as to seize British ammunition from the fort of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.



In September 1775, Richard Montgomery and the Continental Army began their advance onto Canadian territory through the Richelieu Valley. At the same time, Arnold commanded a secret and perilous operation: entering the Province of Québec by the Kennebec and Chaudière rivers. On November 8, after a month of exhausting marching in the woods of Maine and two weeks along the Chaudière River, during which he benefitted from the help of Canadians in the region, Arnold and his men suddenly appeared across from Québec City.

On December 2, Montgomery and his troops joined those of Arnold: the capital was surrounded. On December 31, the invading forces attempted an attack. The operation failed: Montgomery was killed and Arnold hurt during the fighting.

In April 1776, Arnold assumed command of the garrison at Montréal. He welcomed at the Château Ramezay the three emissaries from the Continental Congress and led several military operations aiming to counter the advance of British troops. On June 15, he had to decide to abandon the city. Pursued by enemy forces, his troops returned along the Richelieu and reached the territory of the United Colonies on June 26.

Afterwards, Arnold's numerous victories, including that of October 17, 1777 at Saratoga, made him one of the principal figures of the War of Independence. But three years later, in September 1780, deeming that Congress did not justly recognize his military talents, Arnold defected and joined the British Army. From then on, he became the embodiment of a traitor to the cause of the United Colonies. *nation du traître à la cause des Colonies-Unies.*

RICHARD MONTGOMERY (1738-1775)

Richard Montgomery's ancestors were Protestants who left France at the end of the 16th century to flee religious persecution. The family celebrated its origins by perpetuating use of the French language, which Montgomery spoke with ease.



A British officer, Richard Montgomery participated in the battles of the Seven Years War in America, notably those that led to the capitulation of Montréal on September 8, 1760. In 1772, he settled in New York State, where he joined the rebel party. When the Continental Congress decided to invade the Province of Québec, his military experience and knowledge of the region earned him the command of the troops that entered Canadian territory on September 4, 1775.

On October 20, Montgomery's forces seized Fort Chambly. Fort Saint-Jean fell on November 3. On November 12, Montréal fell and the following day Montgomery set up his campaign headquarters in the Château Ramezay. On December 2, he joined Benedict Arnold's troops on the outskirts of Québec City: the forces of the United Colonies surrounded the capital.

On December 31 at dawn, during a snowstorm, the Continental Army attempted to seize Québec City. Montgomery marched at the head of a detachment: he was killed by the first fire of British cannon. The rebel forces lost their main leader and at the same time the support of the French Canadian population, who had learned to trust Montgomery. From then on, the invasion of the Province of Québec was destined to fail.

Montgomery and Guy Carleton, the Governor General of the colony, had served together during the Seven Years War. While the rebel soldiers fallen in combat were buried in a common grave, Carleton ordered that his former colleague be buried in a coffin, with military honours. The remains of Richard Montgomery were sent home to the United States in 1818.

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