

- **The Montebello Conference La Conférence Montebello**

July 2023.

Dr Denise Green,
Executive Director of Advancement
Mount Saint Vincent University
166 Bedford Highway,
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3M 2J6

Dear Dr Green,

Re: Archives - La Conférence Montebello

You have been so kind as to inform me on an annual basis about the Mount St. Vincent University “Montebello Conference Endowed Scholarship” and we, the Directors⁽¹⁾ of The Conference Montebello Society, are very grateful to you for the excellence of your work and the amazing performance of the funds.

In recent months, as we are all aging, we have addressed Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), to seek their agreement to permanently house documents we considered to be of some historical value about our Society. Our request was granted; all our files will have been transferred by December 31st, 2023.

Therefore, allow me to provide you with the mailing address where in the future you will be able to send the printed annual results of the Montebello Conference Endowed Scholarship Funds :

Conférence Montebello

Archives nationales du Québec à Gatineau
855, boulevard de la Gappe
Gatineau (Québec) J8T 8H9

819 568-8798 x6341

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Indeed, we had in mind that some people could one day wonder what “La Conférence Montebello” was all about? And we anticipated that some of the Mount St. Vincent Alumni might be amongst them. Attached is a brief History of the Conference.

Sincerely,

Louise Fleischmann
1727 Place Costain
St-Bruno LONGUEIL QC
J3V 3B5

(1) Society Directors : Antoine Normand, Louise Rousseau, Louise Fleischmann

Cc : Jacinthe.duval@banq.qc.ca

ORIGINS AND A BIT OF HISTORY

The Montebello Conference began after the Second World War when the federal government, which had brought together a number of public relations specialists in its wartime information effort, decided that it now needed their advice and assistance in order to improve Canada's image abroad in peacetime. The notion was floated - revolutionary at the time - that communications can be coordinated and that national objectives can be advanced through collaboration between government and business.

Lester B. Pearson, then Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, worked with other officials from the departments of External Affairs and Industry and Trade on the planning. Mr. Pearson was the keynote speaker at the first meeting on March 4 and 5, 1947. Geoff Andrew, Senior Director of the Canadian Information Service, External Affairs, chaired the meeting and set out the first objective of the conference: to enhance Canada's overall reputation as a trading nation and to deepen understanding between Canadians and people from other countries. The documents mention other founding members, including Carl Reinke, president of the second conference, Rielle Thompson, Ernie Bushnell, Herb Lash and Glen Bannerman.

The conference was initially the *Club Seigneurie Conference on Canadian Information Abroad* and, for a number of years, the Director of Information at External Affairs and his counterpart in Industry and Commerce were to report on Canada's image abroad and on the government's efforts to promote and improve it. These reports were becoming increasingly summary and painful for those who had to submit them.

The government eventually stopped sending its news directors to Montebello to submit official reports. The conference's organizing committees no longer automatically considered foreign information as the first point of interest and took the opportunity to determine just about any topic of national interest.

The conference was overdrawn in 1969 when the organizing committee conducted a thorough soul-search, considered the idea of ending the conference, finally decided to persist, broaden its horizon and make it more representative, and quadrupled the fee from \$5 to \$20.

It was decided to remove the term "abroad" from the title of the conference partly to discourage the tendency to scapegoat External Affairs for the problems discussed, and partly perhaps also because the Canadian Conference on Information Abroad (CIA) was confused by some with a United States intelligence agency. It has therefore become the *Canadian Information Conference* and then, the *Montebello Conference*.

The annual meeting of the *Montebello Conference* took place until 1977 at the historic Manoir Papineau, then at the main pavilion where simultaneous interpretation was offered starting in 1978. While there has always been equal Anglophone and Francophone participation, the conference has in fact been held entirely in English for over 25 years. Guy D'Avignon first participated in 1972, opposed its unilingual English character and since 1978 the conference has been fully bilingual. The Montebello Lecture was reserved for men until Betty Zimmerman of Radio-Canada was invited (apparently in the 1960s). The representation of women has increased significantly and reached 45 per cent in 1992. Hilda Wilson was the first president in 1987, Ruth Cardinal was president in 1989, Terry Keleher in 1995 and Katita Stark in 1997.

One element characterizes the conference: it is the opportunity provided at each session to open the door to questions, answers, questioning and discussion. The extraordinary role that Imasco continues to play is another. Over 20 years ago, the late Norman Dann d'Imasco pioneered receptions that took people out of their suites, he made sure newcomers were introduced and he sparked serious conversations about the conference topic late into the night.

John Francis, Western Canada's first president, His part launched in 1982 the innovative idea of the Friday morning round table. It helps to deepen the lessons of the conference and allows for discussion of the ongoing roles that participants can play when addressing the issues raised. During the 40th Conference in 1986, President Pierre Henry presented a cheque for \$10,000 to Lester B. Pearson Pacific College in honour of the former Prime Minister.

In 1996, the Conference offered similar support to educational institutions and students in the areas of communications and public relations. 50th Conference President André Villeneuve presented similar

donations to Mount St. Vincent University for its scholarship program for public relations students.

A similar amount was awarded to the UNESCO-BELL Chair in Communications and International Development at the Université du Québec à Montréal to help a Canadian graduate student or a young communications professional.

The installation of a commemorative plaque at Château Montebello and the planting of twin trees on site marked our 50th anniversary.

Let's not forget

- The late Glen Bannerman, co-founder of the conference and two-time president, who attended for many years after retiring from government, always dressed in gaiters and a three-piece suit, his eyesight fading, kindly accompanied in recent years to his seat in the front row where he slept or took a deep breath from his pipe.
- The late Norman Dann who was the soul of the conference for many years, giving the indispensable support of Imasco, casual with his goatee, leather jacket and tie-lace, and who asked questions in the room eliciting reactions.

THE GUESTS PRESENT, THE TOPICS DISCUSSED

There have been countless personalities who have spoken at the Montebello Conference over the years: former prime ministers, cabinet ministers (but, by tradition, never while in office), senior civil servants, bankers, business leaders, diplomats, publishers, journalists, commissioners of royal commissions, academics, pollsters, experts. Some names are well known: Jean Chrétien, Joe Clark, Robert Bourassa, Robert René de Cotret, David MacDonald, William Hamilton, Paul Tellier, Michael Pitfield, A.W. Johnson, Tom Kent, Bernard Ostry, W.O. Twaits, Rowland Frazee, Guy Saint-Pierre, Carol Corcoran, David Culver, Ken Taylor, Paul Paré, Allan Gotlieb, Clark Davey, Arnold Edinborough, Dian Cohen, Peter Desbarats, Allan Gregg, Jeffrey Simpson, Patrick Watson, Allan Fotheringham, Kristin Shannon, Andrée Ruffo, Lise Bissonnette, Pierre-Marc Johnson, Robert Mandell, Adrienne Clarkson, Hervé Serieyx, Thomas P. D'Aquino, Jean-François Lépine and Charles Taylor.

The conference is always interested in Canada's place in the world and often chooses international themes. For the past 20 years, she has dealt with many issues, including the management of Canadian resources, institutions in transition, communications profiles, constitutional reforms, media implications and influence, many aspects of leadership, Canada's position as a power in the world, Canada and the global marketplace, social marketing, intercultural communications, ethics and the marketplace, globalization, and the knowledge society. It was said that the Montebello Conference was not incorporated, had no by-laws, membership requirements, dues, elected directors, reports, briefs, minutes or communiqués. This is still true - with the exception of its recent incorporation to avoid tax complications. Private and invisible in the media, it is nevertheless well known to decision-makers and national leaders.

The Montebello Conference continues to monitor the evolution of the country and its concerns and helps shape the vision of what communications can be in Canada.

THE MONTEBELLO CASTLE... HAT!

The unwavering success of our Conference is due in part to the fact that it is held in the historic Château Montebello, whose relaxed atmosphere contributes to our reflection and discussions. The staff members, some of whom belong to families that have worked at the Château for two or three generations, leave no stone unturned to make our conference nothing short of memorable. In addition, the management of the institution invites delegates each year to a reception, just before the banquet, during which speakers and participants can continue the discussion in an atmosphere of relaxation and pleasure. To the hotel and all its staff, a big thank you for the always warm welcome reserved for all those who attend the Montebello Conferences.

June 15, 1998

The Society « La Conférence Montebello » abandoned its charter and Letters Patent in 2003.