

## Cultural landscapes of the Rouge River Valley, Québec

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[See table of contents](#)

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## **CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF THE ROUGE RIVER VALLEY, QUÉBEC**

*par*

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The diversification of the cultural landscape is a result of man's activities within the framework of possibilities provided by the physical environment. These cultural influences have visual expression in assemblages of different forms of land holdings, field shapes, field boundaries, settlement forms and styles of building, which, taken together, allow the delimitation of relatively homogeneous « cultural areas » distinct from those abutting on them. These are best distinguished in rural areas, where the strength of tradition and natural conservatism ensure that the rate of change (for example, in building techniques and styles) is low.

The valley of the River Rouge, a north bank tributary of the Ottawa lying almost wholly within the Laurentians, is today a declining rural area. First settled between 1830 and 1880, it has remained a backwater, further settlement or economic changes having been unimportant after the 1920's, and the impress of the two main groups of settlers, British and French, still remains. In spite of topographical differences between the north and south of the valley (the northern sector is wider, with stretches of flat land, while arable land in the south is restricted to scattered basins), the types of farm holdings and field shapes are derived more from the cultural provenance of the original settlers than from the physical geography.

The degree of formal organization within the two ethnic groups varied considerably at the time of settlement, with concomitant differences in the landscape. English-speaking settlers entered the southern part of the valley, comprising the townships of Grenville, Harrington and Arundel, from the 1830's onwards, long before the Department of Colonisation was set up to control pioneer settlement (1880). They were under no political or social pressure to conform to a plan of settlement and their penetration of the forest was sporadic and irregular, resulting in a scattered pattern of farms and villages. In the north the French colonists, moving up the valley of the Rivière du Nord and entering the Rouge Valley near the site of Saint-Jovite, took up land under the auspices of the Québec government and the Roman Catholic Church (figure 2). Village sites were often selected before any land was granted, and the young settlements were guided from the beginning by « missionnaires-colonisateurs ». The social organization of the older French areas, orientated towards religion and the family, was reproduced here and explains the growth of quite large villages centred upon the church.

Physical environment, regional and ethnic traditions and the degree of organization contribute to the individuality of the English culture area in the south of the Rouge Valley and the French area in the north. Other minor

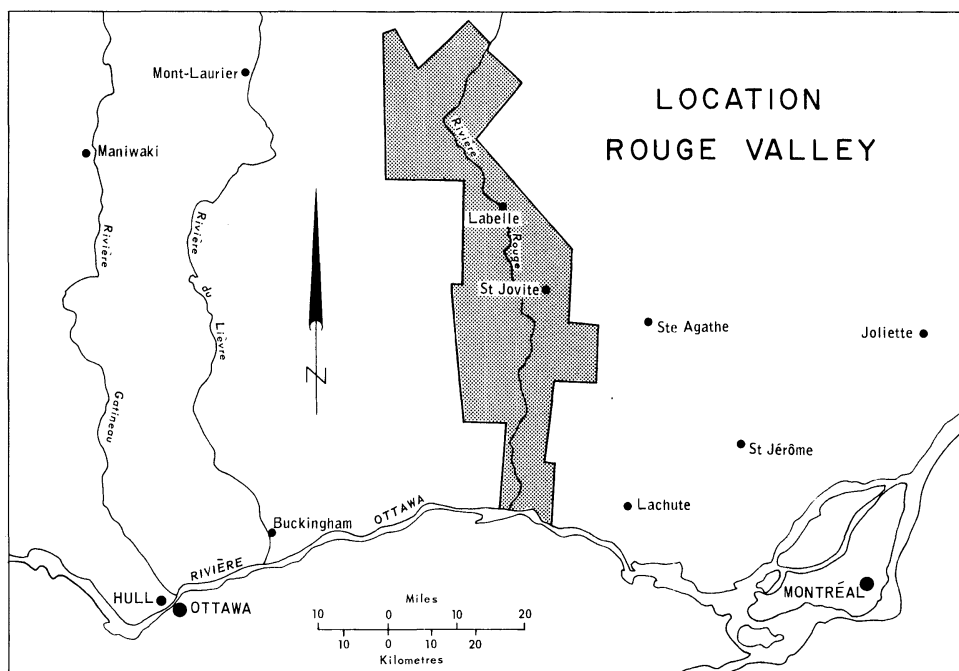


Figure 1

influences have been the date of first settlement, the availability of factory-produced building materials at a later date, and the intangible element of individual preference.

#### *Land holding and field systems*

The different forms of land holding in the Rouge Valley represent the crystallization of French and English antecedents elsewhere in Québec. The early settlement of the seigneuries of New France took the form of long lots running back perpendicular to the Saint Lawrence for an undefined distance, and together forming the *rang* or range. Later, further ranges were added behind the first, divided from each other by a range road and with houses on either side, forming a *rang double*<sup>1</sup>. Each range was divided into long lots perpendicular to the rangelines and the river.

The townships (*cantons*) into which the Province of Québec is now largely divided are an English form, common in Ontario, and superimposed on the French system after 1763. The land was divided into townships six to ten miles square subdivided into square or rectangular holdings. When French Canadian settlers infiltrated these areas they retained the geometrical pattern and reconstituted the range system, giving a more rectilinear pattern than previously, all the range roads being straight lines and all the lots being of the same size irrespective of the terrain. This became the normal form of cadastral division in the late eighteenth century, its advantages lying in

<sup>1</sup> DEFFONTAINES, P., *Le Rang, type de peuplement rural du Canada français*. Cahiers de Géographie, anc. série, n° 5, 1953.

the ease of surveying and the shorter road mileage needed to serve all the farms on a range than is necessary in an area of square holdings <sup>2</sup>.

The Rouge area was progressively surveyed through the nineteenth century and laid out in townships, which, with some exceptions, approximated to a square or rectangle. The traditional size of the lot is 100 acres, but in the southern, English townships of Grenville and Harrington they are twice the normal width of those in the north and 200 acres in area, reflecting the English preference for larger and more compact holdings. It is also true that in these townships agricultural land is scarce and even with the larger holding subsistence was difficult for the early settlers. Within the English area square fields predominate, though they vary in size. In the Harrington basin they are large and generally used for field crops, and some mechanisation is possible. The Arundel basin also has large square fields in mixed farming. In Rockway Valley, near the northern limit of English settlement, the fields are square but much smaller, and used for stock-rearing and dairy farming with controlled grazing.

In the area of predominantly French settlement the characteristic field shape is that of the long lot, although the Rouge Valley does not exhibit the extremes of geometrical layout found in the Clay Belt of Ontario and Québec <sup>3</sup>. Traditionally the long lot abuts onto the waterfront and this form is found along the middle Rouge between Brébeuf and L'Annonciation, where the cadastral lines depart from the prevalent north-south pattern. The imprint of the lots on the landscape is also found away from the river, where regular orientation of lots is resumed in small cleared areas, after being broken by forest or rock knob topography.

Similarly, field shapes repeat the long narrow pattern. Longitudinal division of lots into extremely narrow fields is not found in the Rouge area, but the transverse divisions are generally few and enclose fields much longer than they are wide. Near Brébeuf the average field has sides in the ratio of 1:3.5, and near Saint-Jovite fields with sides of 1:6 are found. In both Britain and Western France the ratio is normally 1:1.5 <sup>4</sup>.

Field shapes have been mapped for the entire valley and the marked predominance of square fields in the south and long fields in the north is very clear (figure 3). The area between Arundel and Saint Jovite is a zone of contact between French and English, and here both field forms are found interdigitated. Small, isolated areas of square fields are found among the long lots of the north, in most cases associated with groups of settlers other than French Canadians. The Québec « Terrier » shows a series of grants to Ukrainian settlers near La Macaza and to English settlers at L'Annonciation, both coinciding with areas of square fields.

The correspondence between field shape and the provenance of the original grantees is still maintained in the landscape, even where the ownership has changed hands from English to French or vice versa. These field patterns contribute markedly to the individuality of the landscapes of the English and French settled areas of the valley.

<sup>2</sup> BARNES, *Economics of the Long Lot Farm*. Geog. Review, 25, 1935, pp. 248-301.

<sup>3</sup> INNES, F.C., *Land Use and Settlement of the Québec Clay Belts*. Unpubl. M.A. thesis, 1960, McGill Univ.

BIAYS, P., *Les marges de l'oekoumène dans l'est du Canada*. Travaux et documents du Centre d'études nordiques, n° 2, 1964, Université Laval, Québec.

<sup>4</sup> FLATRÈS, P., *Réflexions sur la géographie des champs dans la province de Québec*. Rév. Can. de Géog. 14, 1960, pp. 37-43.

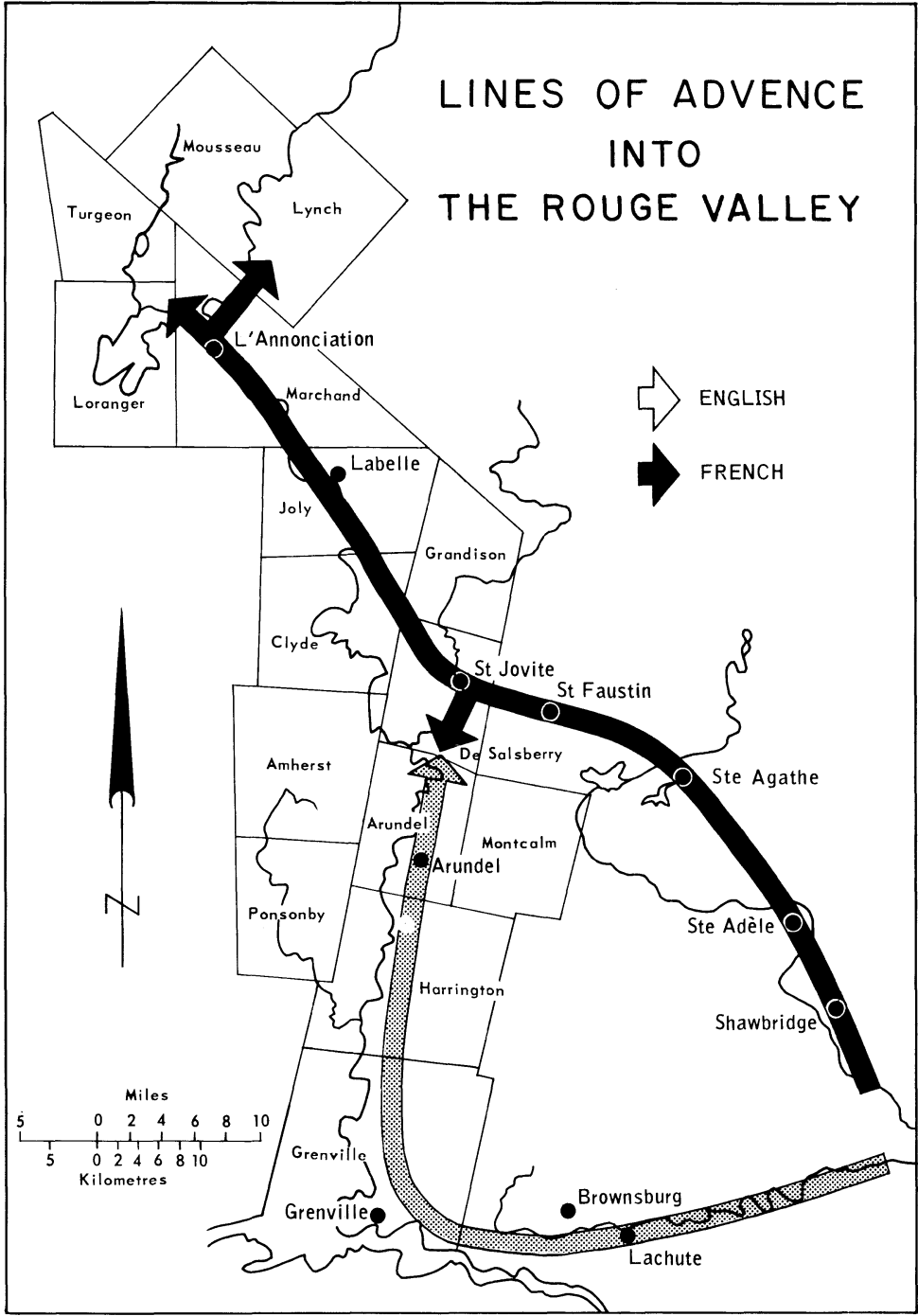


Figure 2

### *Field boundaries*

Forms of fencing are capable of great variations, depending upon the availability of fencing materials and the skills and traditions of the farmer. In the Rouge Valley it seems that the former has been the stronger influence on fence or boundary types.

In earlier times wooden fences were probably universal in the valley because of the abundance of timber during clearing, but today the total length of fencing entirely of wood is relatively small. The Rouge area lacks the great variety of wood fences found in similar parts of Ontario where snake fences and tripod fences are found over wide areas, as well as the chock-and-log and double upright forms<sup>5</sup>. The most common form in the Rouge is the modified chock-and-log fence with additional vertical supports, massive in form, and for which entire trunks of small trees were used as the cross pieces, with logs for the supports. As the timber did not have to be squared or sawn or even barked these fences are probably associated with the pioneering phase in the valley. Today their distribution is patchy. They would appear to be associated mainly with the areas settled by French Canadians between 1870-1890, being found near the confluence of the Rouge and Diable, in the region between Labelle and L'Annonciation, and near Lac Nominingue. They are characteristically found in the upland areas of marginal farming where the cost of replacing them is prohibitive. Post and rail fences are very rarely found.

In spite of the prevalence of field stone, stone walls are not found in the valley, probably because the Québec farmer, in contrast to his fellows in New England, has no tradition of building drystone walls<sup>6</sup>. The stones removed from the fields are piled up at the edge of the field, or, more rarely, in the centre.

The most widespread field boundary in the Rouge today is post and wire, either single strands or woven. In the northern areas settled since 1890, these are probably the original fences, for settlement in Marchand, Mousseau and Lynch was preceded or accompanied by the construction of colonisation roads, and inexpensively produced fencing wire could be brought in from Montreal cheaply enough for the colonists to prefer it to timber. The pattern of fence types in the valley does not reveal any regional differences between north and south, for the availability of this cheap, mass-produced fencing has destroyed any evidence of traditional differences. Today, generally speaking, both the French long lot and the English square field are demarcated by the same kind of wire fence.

### *Settlement forms*

The characteristics of land holding in the two cultural regions of the Rouge Valley are also reflected in the landscape by different settlement patterns. The regularity of land holdings in the ranges of the French area has formalized the distribution of farms and the forms of villages, especially close to the river. The location of farmsteads along the range road at the end of the lot gives the familiar linear rural settlement so frequently seen in French Canada, representing a compromise between nucleated and dis-

<sup>5</sup> LEECHMAN, D., *Good Fences make Good Neighbours*. Can. Geog. J. 47, 1953, pp. 218-235.

<sup>6</sup> FLATRÈS, P., op. cit.

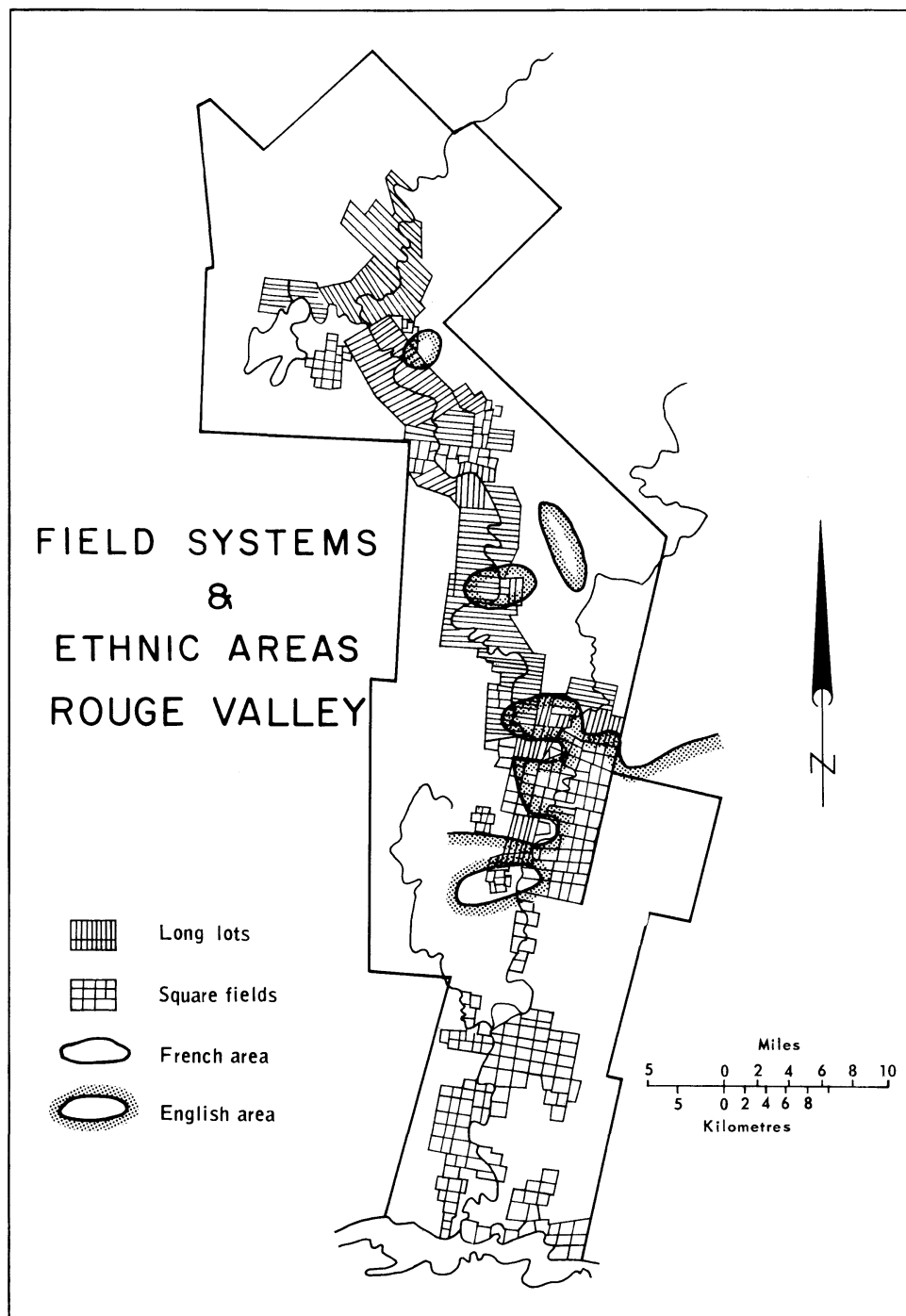


Figure 3

persed settlement. The linear patterns still survive, although the extreme social self-sufficiency of the range has disappeared in the Rouge Valley following the centralization of schools and other services.

There are few areas where the river lowland is wide enough to accommodate two ranges, so the *rang double* is poorly developed and the *rang simple* more common. The latter is particularly evident along Route 11 from La Conception northwards to beyond L'Annonciation, where a continuous line of farms flanks the road, running down to the river. In the uplands and upon morainic and other poor soils this pattern is less well developed.

The villages within the French region are more regular in form than those of the English sector. They are an outgrowth of the range system and represent an intensification of the normal range settlement pattern. The most common form is the *strassendorf* or street village, formed by the infilling of the gaps between farms on the road. The central point is often the church which represents the religious and social fulcrum of community life. L'Annonciation, over one mile long and following the line of Route 11 and the Canadian Pacific Railway, is the finest example of the developed linear village, with parallel and cross streets added as it grew in size. Huberdeau (figure 4) and Saint-Jovite have similar orientations along roads; La Conception extends along both sides of the river, and Sainte-Véronique along the margin of Lac Tibériade. Secondary clusters of houses are few and lack the amenities of the village such as shops, a chapel, or a post office.

The southern, or English, part of the valley lacks this regularity, and reflects the haphazard settlement by individual colonists on isolated farms. Although the Arundel basin has a regular pattern of square holdings bounded by range roads, other areas such as Harrington, Avoca and Lost River lack regularly arranged fields, and the farmsteads are rarely located on the roads. They conform to the British practice, so common in Ontario, of building near the centre of the holding, oriented not toward the main road but rather with regard to aspect, and are served by a track or access road running from the main road to the farmyard. On the ground this open and scattered distribution gives the impression of a much lower density of rural settlement than in the French areas, with their lines of farms strung out along the roads.

The villages in this part of the valley also show more variation in form than their French counterparts. Arundel is a nucleated settlement with no well-defined centre (Photo 1). Although the United church has a central position it is not a focal point of village life, and the Anglican church is situated in an isolated position near the extremity of the village. The fragmentation of allegiance between different churches results in the lack of a true centre for the community. Other areas which form natural units, such as Avoca, Harrington and Rivington, are completely lacking in villages. The latter does not even have a post office, being served from Calumet 15 miles away, and the three stores in the area are widely separated. The lack of a focal point can again be explained by religious diversity, for there are four small churches (Roman Catholic, United, Baptist and Pentecostal) and none of them has the potent attraction of the Catholic church in the French settlements.

There has been further settlement in the valley in more recent years in the form of the company village of Kilmar, associated with the Canadian Refractories' magnesite mine, and in a scatter of tourist cottages. Contributing little to the indigenous life of the regions, the cottages of the week-



**Photo 1** *The nucleated English village of Arundel (centre of photograph) and the linear French settlement of Huberdeau (to the left). The square fields that appear are characteristic of the English settled townships.*

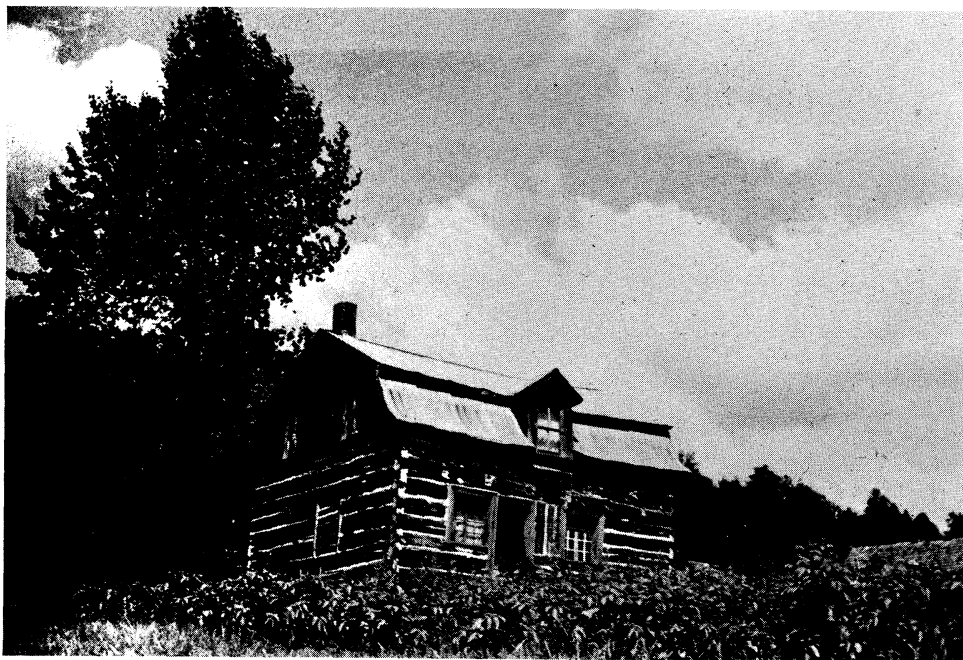
end visitors represent the disturbing effect of an urban and industrial society upon a landscape consisting of traditional settlement forms.

#### *Building materials and techniques*

Despite marked differences between north and south in other facets of the cultural landscape, a study of the use of different building materials and of house and barn types remains inconclusive. Although there are isolated examples of buildings showing typically English or French form or technique, they are not numerous enough to distinguish English or French culture areas on the basis of building types alone, though they do contribute to cultural differentiation.

In the south of the valley timber is the almost universal material used for building. Houses and barns are of frame construction with plank or clapboard siding. In the townships of Grenville, Harrington and Arundel, four log buildings and seven of squared timber survive from the early days of pioneer settlement, before sawmills were established in the valley to provide planks. The survival of this relatively large number of early buildings reflects the greater isolation of the original English settlers and the lack of colonisation roads in the area, for new materials were only brought with difficulty into Avoca, where two of the log barns are found, and into other areas. Just north of Lac Matilda in the rugged back ranges of Harrington a farmhouse and outbuildings survive from the pioneer period. The house itself (Photo 2) is of adze-squared timber with crudely dovetailed cornering, and one of the barns is also of squared logs but with a simple square lap keying. The wide spaces between the logs are chinked with clay or lime mortar. Another, and possibly earlier, barn on the site, now demolished, was built of massive logs, while an outhouse was roofed with strips of bark. A remarkable survival of pioneer forms of building, these fine examples are lacking in the later-settled northern area.

In the north there is a much greater variety of building materials. Log and square timber buildings are found, but in smaller numbers than in the English area. Together with wooden fencing, they are entirely lacking in the area north of L'Annonciation, a result of better communications during the colonization period. Plank and clapboard are widespread, and shingle-sided barns are found here though absent in the south. « Stovewood » construction is also characteristic of the French area and is found from Saint-Jovite in



**Photo 2** *Square-timbered house near Lac Matilda, Harrington, with asymmetrical plan and gambrel roof.*



**Photo 3** *Stove-wood (or log-but) construction. A barn north of Saint-Jovite.*



**Photo 4** *Saddle-notched cornering in a barn in Clyde Township, an area of French settlement.*

the south to L'Ascension (on the edge of the settled area) in the north (Photo 3). It takes the form of billets of wood eight to ten inches long set into mortar, the whole being supported by a timber frame. Perrin's work on similar buildings in Wisconsin connects it with the lumber camp cabins of Québec, so it may be indigenous to this Province<sup>7</sup>. The abundant unsaleable pieces left at the sawmill make a convenient building material, and construction is easy for each billet weighs only about 10 lbs. and can be handled by one person. It does not require the skill needed for log construction and for this reason it has been a favoured mode of building despite its poor resistance to frost and weathering<sup>8</sup>. There is also a widespread use of factory-produced materials. Brick houses are found near Saint-Jovite, which had a brickworks from 1879, and brick- and stone-patterned sidings and concrete blocks are also used instead of traditional materials. There are, however, no stone houses in the valley.

The older buildings of the north show a greater mastery of the technique of building in timber than those of the south, particularly noticeable in the cornering of log- and squared-timber buildings. In the south, log barns were constructed simply by overlapping the logs at the corners and leaving wide gaps to be chinked with wooden wedges or clay and lime mortar.

<sup>7</sup> PERRIN, R., *Wisconsin « Stove Wood » Walls : Ingenuous Forms of Early Log Construction*. Wisconsin Mag. of Hist. 46, 1963, pp. 215-222.

<sup>8</sup> DEFFONTAINES, P., *Evolution du type d'habitation rurale du Canada français*, Cahiers de Géog. de Qué. 24, 1967, pp. 497-522.

In the north the individual logs are saddle-notched at the corners and fit tightly and securely. The good condition of a small log barn in Clyde Township (Photo 4) and another two miles south of La Macaza demonstrates that these structures, though up to 80 years old, are well constructed and weather proof. The cornering of a square timber house in Grenville Village in the south is a simple overlap, and, at best, only simple mortising is found in the English area (Photo 5). In the French region, complicated dovetailing, such as that found in a small farmhouse west of L'Annonciation, replaces these crude methods, suggesting considerable skill in timber construction among the French colonists.



**Photo 5** Squared - log construction with simple square lapped cornering and wide, chinked spaces between logs. Barn near Lac Matilda in Arundel Township.

In one case *pièce sur pièce* construction, also known as the « Red River Frame », is found in the north. The uprights of the frame are grooved with a continuous mortise, and heavy timbers with the ends tenoned

are slid horizontally down between them. Séguin<sup>9</sup> finds this a favourite mode of construction for barns in French Canada in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has been suggested that it was a technique known to the Norsemen in Scandinavia, adopted in Northern France and introduced to New France by Norman settlers. It was only very rarely used by British settlers.

The great difference in the development of techniques of building in the two culture areas of the valley suggests only one explanation: that the French pioneers were drawn largely from the surrounding counties such as Terrebonne, and from the St. Lawrence Lowland, and had absorbed the traditions of a rural society which built in wood. The English-speaking settlers, however, were a mixed group, including Scottish crofters, Irish navvies and English city dwellers, many of whom had no experience of building in timber, and who made do with the simplest of techniques.

### *Building styles*

It is much more difficult to distinguish between French and English house or barn styles in the valley than between standards of technique, as settlement by large numbers only began in the 1850's. It was at about this

<sup>9</sup> SEGUIN, R.L., *Les Granges du Québec*. Mus. Nat. du Canada, Bulletin n° 142, 1963, Min. N. Affairs and Nat. Res., Ottawa.

time that the tradition of vernacular building was dying out, as new materials and techniques became available.<sup>10</sup>

Two aspects which are significant in any consideration of the style of rural building are plan and roof type. The asymmetrical plan is generally indicative of an early building, and is found only in the southern part of the valley, there being a very fine example in a square-timbered house in Grenville village. The door is not in the centre of the facade, and the lower windows in massive hewn window frames are at different levels; the roof, dormer and porch are, however, all later additions. The first settler in Grenville is recorded in 1810 and the house probably dates from the 1820's or 30's. In the north all the houses have the symmetrical elevation associated with a later period.

The style of the roof often suggests the date of building and the origin of the settler, but in the Rouge there is an overall similarity of house types which contributes little towards the differentiation of the cultural landscape. The ordinary straight, pitched roof is found throughout, as is the flat roof and false front characteristic of houses of the 1920's. The latter is more common in the later-settled areas of the north. There are only two examples of the gambrel roof in the valley, one on the farmhouse already mentioned near Lac Matilda in Harrington, where it is probably a later addition, and the other far in the north at L'Ascension on a lot granted in the 1900's. The gambrel roof is a relatively late form in French Canada, but it appeared there before the Rouge was settled and is therefore of little help in dating buildings in the valley. The bell-cast roof, despite its wide-spread distribution in the St. Lawrence Plain, is almost entirely absent from the valley, there being only one very late example near Lac Nominique in the French area. The only conclusion that can be reached is that the entire Rouge region was settled too late and within too narrow a time range for there to be significant differences between French and English house styles or between buildings of different dates.

A similar conclusion can be reached from a study of barn types. Both English and Dutch roofs are found throughout, as are wooden silos. There are some isolated examples of features that are specifically French-Canadian. There are some barns near L'Annonciation with the feature known as a *campanile* permitting ventilation of the loft, but this is not found in the south. A barn with an extended ridge pole is situated near La Macaza (Photo 6), this too being a French rather than an English feature.

### Conclusion

The Rouge Valley, although settled no longer than 150 years ago, and in most areas for a much shorter time, reveals deeply ingrained traits which distinguish the French north from the English-speaking south. The boundary between the two different cultural landscapes may be tentatively drawn some miles north of Arundel and Rockway Valley (with a French enclave at Huberdeau) and thence north-east for the Arundel / de Salaberry boundary. Brébeuf and Saint-Jovite just to the north are markedly French. There is a considerable body of French-speaking settlers within the English

<sup>10</sup> CARLESS, W., *The Architecture of French Canada*. McGill Univ. Publics. ser. 13 (Art and Architecture) n° 3, 1925, Montréal.

BARKHAM, B., *The Development of Land Settlement and Rural Architecture in the Province of Québec*. Unpubl. M.A. thesis, 1955, McGill Univ.



**Photo 6** *Barn with extended ridge-pole at La Macaza, Joly.*

section but the landscape remains English in texture, for if the French are present in small numbers they are assimilated, anglicised and protestantised, and even if found in larger numbers, the patterns of land holding and field shape are strongly enough entrenched to survive.

The most obviously distinctive features of the two landscapes are those which are least flexible and most rooted in the traditions of the two ethnic groups. Land holdings, field shapes and settlement patterns are deeply imprinted and subject to little change, and these show sharp differences between north and south. Other features are, by their nature, more ephemeral and change with the advent of new materials and techniques. Fences and buildings are today less useful indicators of cultural differences, in spite of several good examples of traditional forms, because they are most affected by increasing industrialization with its effect on the materials available, and by urbanisation, effecting the breakdown of traditional rural ways of life and styles of building. Although buildings are an important part of the total cultural landscape, they are of secondary importance for the delimitation of the two cultural areas in the Rouge Valley.