

The 225th Anniversary of Quebec's Parliamentary Institutions

To celebrate and commemorate the 225th anniversary of Quebec's parliamentary institutions, the National Assembly launched an exhibit entitled "1792. *La naissance d'un Parlement.*" In this article, the author presents some highlights from the exhibit and explains why cartoons were such a central part of it.

Christian Blais



On April 4, 2017, in Quebec's Parliament Building, National Assembly President Jacques Chagnon officially launched the celebrations marking the 225th anniversary of Quebec's parliamentary institutions. In his speech, he noted, "It's not every day that we take the time to recall the extent to which the National Assembly, its authority, its areas of jurisdiction and all the powers it now holds are the result of events that played out here 225 years ago and helped shape democracy in Quebec." [TRANSLATION]

Other parliamentarians then took the floor. Ms. Rita de Santis, Minister responsible for Access to Information and the Reform of Democratic Institutions; Ms. Carole Poirier, Chief Official Opposition Whip and MNA for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve; and Mr. Benoit Charette, member of the Second Opposition Group and MNA for Deux-Montagnes, spoke about pivotal moments in our parliamentary history.

Exhibit: 1792. *La naissance d'un Parlement*

The official launch of celebrations marking the 225th anniversary of Quebec's parliamentary institutions also marked the opening of an exhibit entitled "1792. *La naissance d'un Parlement.*" The exhibit, located in the National Assembly's visitor centre, paints a picture of the parliamentary history of Lower Canada from 1792 to 1841. Visitors will discover that the major issues of our democracy were debated in Lower Canada's House

of Assembly. They will also learn that the prerogatives that the members of the National Assembly exercise today were won by the members of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada, who refused to cave in.

The 1792. *La naissance d'un Parlement* exhibit revolves around comic strips. Why comic strips? Because the first comic strip to come out of Quebec and the first election to be held in the province took place in the same year. In fact, this first comic strip is about the 1792 election. It is a cartoon entitled "*À tous les électeurs [to all voters]*," which seeks to win support for merchants from the Haute-Ville de Québec riding. To boot, two candidates, Mathew Macnider and William Grant, were responsible for printing this cartoon. Both won and were elected to the first Parliament of Lower Canada. The only surviving original copy of the 1792 cartoon is featured in the exhibit.

Above: The line drawing that sits at the top of the logo of the 225th anniversary of Quebec's parliamentary institutions represents the main parliament buildings of Lower Canada and Quebec City. The Episcopal Palace, which served as the Parliament Building in 1792, flows into the Parliament Building of Lower Canada, which was built in 1830 and burnt down in 1854, and in turn flows into the current Parliament Building. The gradient shades from green to blue evoke a timeline from the past to the present. In the past, the walls of the National Assembly were painted green, the colour traditionally associated with legislative power. The room was repainted blue in 1978, and is now referred to as the "Blue Chamber."

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Launch of the celebrations marking the 225th anniversary of Quebec’s parliamentary institutions. Left to right: Carole Poirier, Rita de Santis, Christian Blais, Vincent Giard, Magali Paquin, Réal Godbout, Vanessa Lalonde (VAN), Vincent Rioux (VoRo), Michel Giguère, Jacques Chagnon and Benoit Charrette.

Other rare and precious artifacts featured in the exhibit relate to the political and parliamentary history of Lower Canada. For example, visitors can see the handwritten proceedings of the 1792–1793 parliamentary session, the 1793 bylaws of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada, a globe dating from 1792–1805, several 18th- and 19th-century *ceintures fléchées*, an election poster supporting the election of Montreal patriots in 1827, and an original copy of the 92 Resolutions.

Some of the objects—like the head from the bust of King George III, the first monument erected in Montreal in 1766—have a unique story. During the American invasion in 1775, it was painted black and a rosary made of potatoes was hung around the king’s neck, with a cross bearing the inscription: “Behold the pope of Canada and the English fool.” Shortly

afterwards, the bust was thrown down a well in the Place d’Armes. It was recovered in 1834.

These magnificent pieces come from the National Assembly’s collections, and from the Stewart Museum, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Library and Archives Canada, the McCord Museum, McGill University, the Musée Pierre-Boucher, the City of Quebec and the Ministry of Culture and Communications.

The exhibit also includes multimedia presentations and a timeline. Visitors can learn more about the origins of our democratic history. A capsule entitled *L’histoire du Bas-Canada en 60 secondes* [the Story of Lower Canada in 60 seconds] provides a one minute summary! The 1792. *La naissance d’un Parlement* exhibit runs until April 4, 2018. Those unable to visit in person

can view the online version on the National Assembly's website at <http://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/expositionsvirtuelles/index.html>.

1792 : à main levée – a comic book

On April 5, 2017, at the Salon international du livre de Québec, National Assembly President Jacques Chagnon launched the comic book entitled *1792 : à main levée*. "Whether you're simply curious, passionate about history or comics, or both, you'll be delighted by this captivating book," he said.

The book echoes the 1792 cartoon entitled "*À tous les électeurs*." The National Assembly has used the comic strip – the ninth art – to recount key points in the parliamentary history of Lower Canada.

Four cartoonists, namely Vincent Giard, Réal Godbout, VAN (Vanessa Lalonde) and VoRo (Vincent Rioux) were recruited by the National Assembly. The choice of these talented artists was guided by the desire to pull together a sample of artists who are representative of the diversity of comic strips in Quebec today. In the book *1792 : à main levée*, they tell us about the first general election in 1792, the language debate, the political engagement of Pierre-Stanislas Bédard and the adoption of the 92 Resolutions.

Short texts, abundantly illustrated, describing the highlights of the parliamentary history of Lower Canada precede each of the four comic strips. The cartoonists then reconstruct the "key moments" of these parliamentary stories, paying particular attention to atmosphere, emotion and setting the scene. The editorial approach, developed by Michel Giguère, a comic strip consultant, makes it possible to make a variety of profiles and styles complement each other. The last section of the book takes the form of a *catalogue raisonné*. Certain works of art from the 19th century, which served as inspiration for the cartoonists, are presented opposite story boards, pencil sketches and final inked versions from the book.

History buffs and comic strip lovers can purchase this impressive book in bookstores across Quebec or online from the Publications du Québec website.

Other commemorative projects

Various activities will complement the celebrations marking the 225th anniversary of our parliamentary

institutions. For example, the National Assembly will revive a tradition established by Eugène-Étienne Taché, the designer of the Parliament Building, that of inscribing the names of historical figures on the wood panelling inside the building.

The first floor of the Parliament Building features individuals from the time of Lower Canada. While the collection includes patriots and bureaucrats, the figures who stand out the most are moderate reformists. The individuals commemorated include individuals who demonstrated an attachment to British parliamentary institutions and who defended the interests of the French Canadian nation.

Taché's choices reflect his father's political values. Étienne-Paschal Taché was a patriot who defended French Canadians in the political institutions of his day. It is also interesting to note that most of the politicians whose names are inscribed in the wood panelling opposed the constitutional reforms proposed by Lord Durham, who recommended the merger of Upper Canada and Lower Canada.

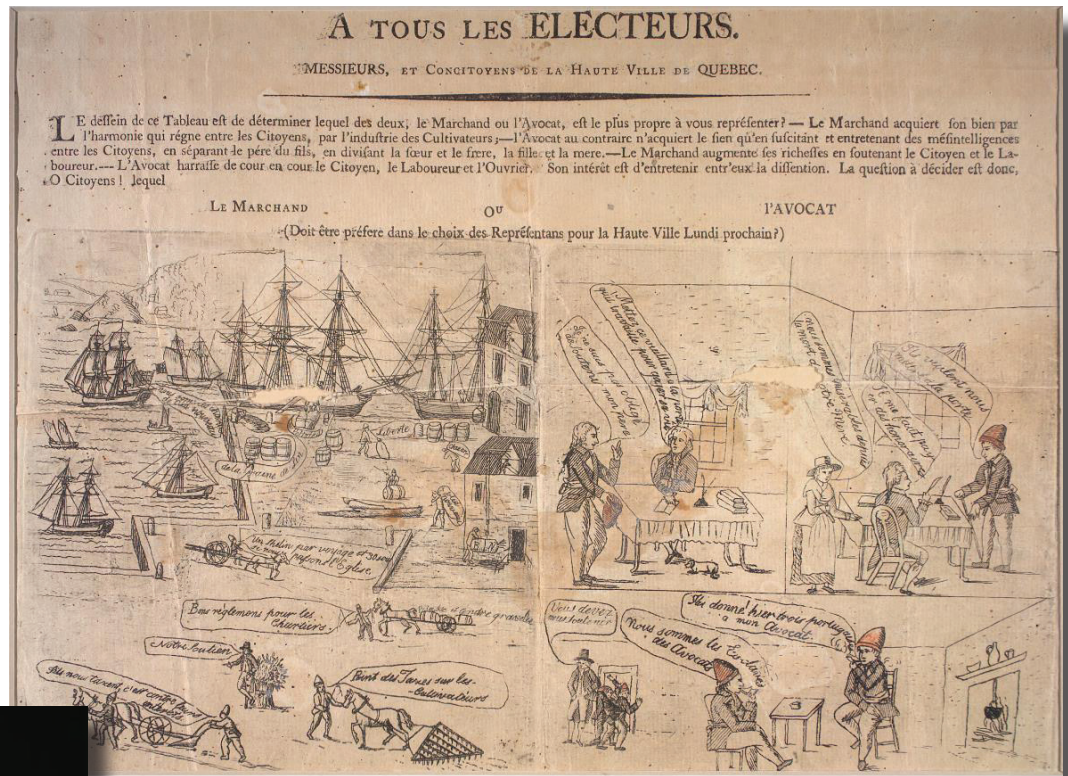
It is in keeping with that original plan that the names of MNAs William Grant and Augustin-Norbert Morin as well as legislative councilors Thomas Dunn and Joseph-Octave Plessis will be added to those already inscribed in the wood panels. To mark the occasion, short biographies of the parliamentarians of Lower Canada whose names are inscribed in the woodwork of the Parliament Building will be published in a brochure that will also be available on the National Assembly's website.

Finally, to cap the celebrations marking the 225th anniversary of our parliamentary institutions, the President will install a time capsule in the Parliament Building. The capsule will contain various objects for future generations. It will be opened in 2092, the 300th anniversary of the 1792 election. Its contents will be known to only a few individuals. The mystery surrounding the capsule and its contents will arouse interest and fascination.

The National Assembly is once again showing originality and boldness! Future generations will have to take up the challenge so that they, too, can celebrate Quebec's parliamentary history and, above all, keep this tradition of historical, legal and political culture alive in the National Assembly.

The cartoon entitled “À tous les électeurs” was printed in Quebec City by Samuel Neilson. It is Quebec’s oldest French-language cartoon and was published during the first election in 1792. This work was, in all likelihood, created by John George Hochstetter, a German born engraver.

Credit: McGill University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Lande Collection #1934



Created in 1765 by Joseph Wilton (1722–1803), official sculptor to the king, the bust of George III arrived in the colony on the same ship that brought the colony’s new lieutenant governor, Guy Carleton.

Credit: McCord Museum
M15885



Tea was a rare commodity in New France. However, by the mid 1780s, following contact with the British, the inhabitants began adopting this drink. At the time, the British drank their tea with a little bit of milk and a lot of sugar. Before the Conquest, sugar was shunned by the settlers of New France.

Credit: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1929. Dp. 1a-b.

This powder horn belonged to a patriot before it was taken by William Parker of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards Regiment during the insurrections of 1838. In fact, that is what was engraved on the horn.

Credit: Stewart Museum 1965.14



NOUS POURRONS BIEN TÔT NOUS GOUVERNER EN ACCORD AVEC NOS TRADITIONS !

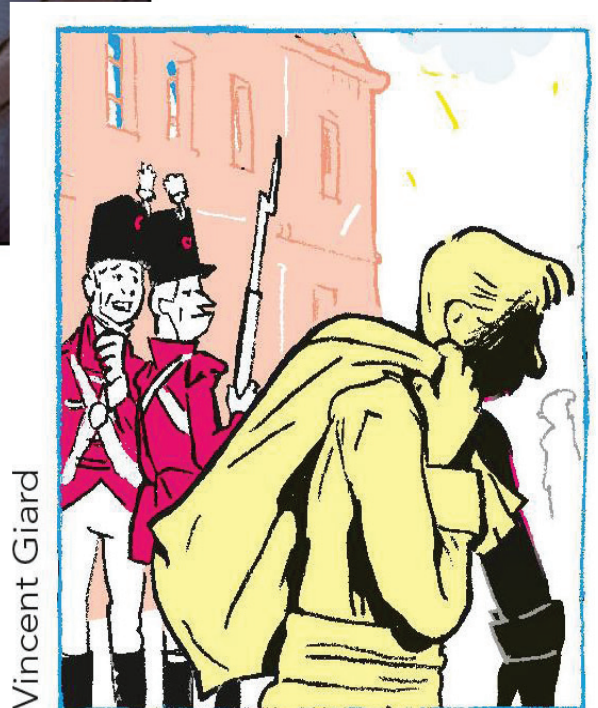
VoRo (Vincent Rioux) has a distinctive style that combines realism, rigour and aesthetic qualities.

VoRo



...des résolutions? Adressées à Londres?

Je suis convaincu que c'est la meilleure option qui vaille !



Vincent Giard

Vincent Giard, active on the alternative scene, creates visual poetry through form and colour.

Réal Godbout

Born of the counter-culture and influenced by Hergé, Réal Godbout combines a biting tone with perfect graphics and narrative clarity.

Influenced by her work in animated movies, VAN (Vanessa Lalonde) conveys energy with her stagings and the expressiveness of her characters.



MAIS QU'EST-CE QUI VOUS PREND?

IMBÉCILES!!

VAN