

Manufacturing French Canadian Tradition: *tabac canadien* and the Construction of French-Canadian Identity, 1880–1950

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From the late nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, several tobacco companies in Quebec produced and marketed domestic pipe tobacco specifically for the French-Canadian market. While these tabac canadien brands were rooted in pre-industrial French-Canadian economic and cultural life, by the time this traditional tobacco was being commercially manufactured, smoking rituals had already been transformed by the separation of production and consumption and by the increasing restriction of smoking to only a male activity. The urbanization of the francophone population and the appearance of industrially produced foreign tobacco gave the French-Canadian brands a new, nationalist symbolism. Companies producing tabac canadien sought in various ways to present their tobacco as authentically French Canadian while distancing themselves from the pre-industrial, supposedly inferior, product. The decline of these brands was linked to business-promoted changes in tariff policy and broader changes in Quebec culture following the Second World War.

De la fin du XIX^e siècle à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, plusieurs compagnies de tabac du Québec ont produit et mis en marché du tabac à pipe d'ici à l'intention expresse du marché canadien français. Bien que ces marques de tabac canadien étaient enracinées dans la vie économique et culturelle préindustrielle des Canadiens français, au moment où l'on a commencé à commercialiser ce tabac traditionnel, la séparation de la production et de la consommation avait déjà modifié les rituels d'usage du tabac, cantonnant de plus en plus le tabagisme au seul camp masculin. L'urbanisation de la population francophone et l'apparition de tabacs industriels d'origine étrangère ont conféré aux marques canadiennes françaises une valeur de symbole national. Les fabricants de tabac canadien ont cherché par divers moyens à présenter leur tabac comme un produit authentiquement canadien

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français tout en se distançant du produit prétendument inférieur d'avant l'industrialisation. Les changements aux politiques tarifaires souhaités par l'entreprise et l'évolution générale du Québec sur le plan culturel après la Seconde Guerre mondiale ont sonné le glas de ces marques.

FROM THE LATE nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, several tobacco companies in Quebec industrially produced, packaged, and marketed domestic pipe tobacco specifically for French Canadians. Their product, known as *tabac canadien*, had a particular place within French-Canadian smoking rituals. Until at least the 1920s, smoking the pipe was the most popular way to consume tobacco.¹ Although these *tabac canadien* brands were likely not the most popular of brands among pipe smokers, this tobacco still deserves our attention, as its use and promotion provide insights into how the transition from a pre-industrial, rural culture to a modern, industrial culture was negotiated in Quebec.² First, *tabac canadien* sheds light on shared rituals and traditions that unified people into recognizable groups or an “imagined community” (often called a “nation”). Rituals to help imagine community were particularly important in this era in Quebec when group identity was in question, as urbanization and industrial capitalism were reorganizing the very foundations of social relationships and categories of culture.³ Secondly, the story of these brands highlights the roles of business and the state in reshaping and ending this cultural ritual.⁴ Lastly, this study elucidates the politics of respectability behind smoking traditions and how these traditions fit into broader constructions of race, class, and gender.⁵

While *tabac canadien* brands were rooted in pre-industrial French-Canadian economic and cultural life, by the time this traditional tobacco was being commercially manufactured, French-Canadian smoking rituals had already been transformed by the separation of production and consumption and by

1 While there are no statistics gauging tobacco consumption in Quebec, excise statistics suggest that in Canada pipe smoking predominated until at least the late 1920s. Jan Rogozinski, *Smokeless Tobacco in the Western World, 1550–1950* (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 129–130.

2 This is not to say that Quebec in the period studied here is pre-industrial or to enter into the debates popular some years ago which tried to judge whether Quebec during the nineteenth century was “feudal” or “rural” or “pre” or “proto” industrial or simply industrial. Here I feel it is necessary to stress transition, especially when discussing cultural traditions.

3 The 1921 Census found that the majority of Quebecers lived in urban centres, though it was not until after the Second World War that the majority of francophones lived in cities or significantly sized towns.

4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1982).

5 On the politics of gesture, see John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Mary P. Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order”, in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 131–153, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), and *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-century New York”, *Social History* (May 1992), pp. 203–227.

the increasing gender exclusivity of smoking. Furthermore, the concomitant urbanization of francophones and industrial production in Quebec of almost exclusively foreign pipe tobacco gave French-Canadian tobacco a new, nationalist symbolism. The state, as well as the companies who produced this tobacco, took a role in promoting the domestic consumption of *tabac canadien*. Key issues include tariff policy, the roles of long-standing French-Canadian tobacco merchants, and the arrival in Canada of James Buchanan Duke's American Tobacco Company. All of the companies were aware of the open criticism heaped on *tabac canadien* by connoisseurs and sought to distance themselves from the pre-industrial economic practices and conditions in which *tabac canadien* had been born. At the same time, they sought to present an image of their products being "authentically" French Canadian.⁶ How they did so differed from company to company and depended on how far the company was from *tabac canadien*'s origins. The decline of these brands was linked both to business-promoted government taxation of homegrown *tabac canadien* and to a broader change in Quebec culture following the Second World War.

The Taste of *la patrie*

The longstanding tradition of smoking *tabac canadien* was rooted in the pre-industrial rural French-Canadian economy.⁷ Numerous histories of Quebec tobacco written at the turn of the twentieth century claimed that these tobaccos were grown using the methods of the local Native peoples.⁸ While the tobacco grown by the habitants may well have been similar to that grown by Native peoples, the ebb and flow of the habitant household economy established the traditions and much of the taste associated with their own *tabac canadien*. Outside their primary crops, French-Canadian farmers grew small amounts of strong tobaccos such as Quesnel, Parfum d'Italie, Big Havana, or Canelle, which were frequently mixed together for household consumption and sold on local markets, as surpluses allowed. The tobacco would also be transformed into a number of finished products, if farmers had the time. To make Canada Twist, Canadian Roll, or plug, the tobacco was tightly twisted together into "hands" and then compressed in a tobacco press.⁹ Most often

6 Cultural historians and anthropologists have problematized claims of "authenticity". See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Erik Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 15 (1988), pp. 371–386.

7 This section provides a partial summary of chapters 1–3 of my book, *The Freedom to Smoke: Tobacco Consumption and the Construction of Identity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

8 F. Charlan, "Tobacco Culture in Canada", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, May 1910, p. 31; Louis Lewis, "The World's Tobacco Crops: A Description of the Types of Leaf Grown all over the World," *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, October 1898, p. 359.

9 A. D. Porcheron, "Traitement et culture du tabac canadien", Montreal, Cie d'Impr. Canadien, 1882 [Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions no. 12126].

tobacco was smoked by a farmer and his family, who chopped their tobacco on a daily basis, a tradition in many Quebec households that carried on into the twentieth century. Moreover, because tobacco was grown for household consumption, the federal government exempted farmers from excise taxes, provided they did not sell their crops to licensed manufacturers.¹⁰

By the turn of the century, local production and consumption separated as farmers sold to middlemen who eagerly bought up this tax-free commodity to undersell manufacturers and stake out a significant market among French Canadians. These middlemen developed infrastructures to distribute tobacco to farmers' markets and tobacconists in urban Quebec. One such example was tobacco dealer Charles Frenette of Bellechase and St. Charles, who had begun his business in 1902 handling 50,000 pounds a year. By 1933 he was dealing 950,000 pounds annually. Nor was he alone in this trade. In the same year, he told the Price Spreads Royal Commission that in his region there were 25 to 30 dealers like him.¹¹ Indeed, by the 1930s federal government officials estimated that some 10 million pounds of French-Canadian tobacco were circulating on Quebec markets — tax free.¹²

During the nineteenth century, not only did the production and consumption of *tabac canadien* separate, but smoking became a gender-specific practice: only men could respectably smoke. It is not clear whether, before the 1850s, smoking was an exclusively male ritual in French-Canadian culture. Numerous sources suggest that in the early nineteenth century at least some rural French-Canadian women smoked publicly without being stigmatized. By the late nineteenth century, however, women who dared defy the prevailing men-only smoking etiquette¹³ were seen as prostitutes or barbarians, or, in the case of elderly French-Canadian *fumeuses*, were belittled as throwbacks from a backward, bygone era.¹⁴ Indeed, when smoking became a gender-exclusive ritual, it was not the result of government regulations or anti-smoking campaigns, but took place as part of a broader cultural transformation in the grammar of gender difference.¹⁵ This new gendering of rural French-Canadian smoking rituals could be seen, for example, in the tradition

10 For the legislation that exempted home-grown tobacco from taxation, see 43 *Victoria*, Chapter 19, "An Act to Consolidate and amend the Acts respecting the Inland Revenue" (1880) and 60–61 *Victoria*, Chapter 19, "An Act respecting the Departments of Customs and Inland Revenue" (1897).

11 See his testimony at the Price Spreads Commission, pp. 1694–1696. Volume consulted at the Imperial Tobacco Reading Room, Montreal and hereafter referred to as "Evidence, Price Spreads".

12 T. G. Major, "Trends in the Canadian Market", *The Lighter/ Le briquet*, March 18, 1933.

13 Women who transgressed the norms of respectable comportment could pay dearly with prospective employers or court judges, who took a dim view of such delinquency. See Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880–1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *Walk Towards the Gallows: The Tragedy of Hilda Blake, Hanged 1899* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joan Sangster, "Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923–1960", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 32 (Fall 1993), pp. 167–199.

14 For an example of this discourse, see Dr. L. J. Lemieux in "Evidence, Price Spreads", p. 82.

15 My central argument in *The Freedom to Smoke*.

of the *veillée d'hiver* as recounted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. French Canadians would visit family and friends on winter evenings, jigging to the violin, playing cards, and flirting. Later in the evening the genders separated: women socialized in one room and the men sat in another, smoking their pipes of *tabac canadien*.¹⁶ In terms of gender, it is notable that acceptable French-Canadian smoking rituals were similar to those in much of the western world.¹⁷

Beyond the gendering of smoking rituals, the cultural symbolism of men smoking French-Canadian homegrown tobacco was also transformed. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as French Canada urbanized and French-Canadian men were faced with new industrially produced foreign tobaccos that differed in taste and smell from their traditional tobacco, *tabac canadien* took on new national significance.¹⁸ The smoking of *tabac canadien* became a declaration of allegiance to French Canada, used by French-Canadian men to set themselves apart from others. For some, it was simply the taste of *la patrie*. In an attempt that was likely designed to attract new francophone members who had recently migrated from the countryside, Montreal trade unions advertising their events in francophone newspapers announced that *tabac canadien* would be given out for free at their social events.¹⁹ The habitant tobacco was used to symbolize inclusion in the French-Canadian nation. An article in the Montreal middle-class journal *Le Monde illustré* offers two examples. Immediately after the 1891 elections, journalist Léon Ledieu wrote that he had listened to a French-Canadian farmer expressing his feelings about the minister elected in his constituency. The farmer had remarked, "I caught a look at our member of parliament. I had thought he was someone who set himself apart from us until I saw him smoke French Canadian tobacco." Not only was the MP's character redeemed, but he was held to be part of "his people" because he smoked *tabac canadien*. Smoking preference, while being a private decision, was read as a public declaration that the politician was part of the habitant's community. The urban editor Ledieu was also using this story to associate himself

16 See, for example, Octave Cuisset, "Le père Coulange : ou, Entretiens sur la culture et la préparation du Tabac", Quebec, Imprimerie A. Coté et Cie., 1876 [CIHM no. 04193]; "Les Veillées", *La Presse*, January 28, 1905, p. 1.

17 Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800–2000* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000); Didier Nourrisson, *Histoire sociale du tabac* (Paris: Editions Christian, 1999). For an example of elderly women smoking at the turn of the century in the Canadian Maritimes, see Suzanne Morton and Janet Guildford, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), front cover and p. 7.

18 In an analogous comparison, Eric Hobsbawm points out that "the wigs of lawyers could hardly acquire their modern significance until other people stopped wearing wigs". See his "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 4.

19 For examples of such social events, see "Nouvelles Ouvrières", *La Presse*, January 13 and 15, 1913, p. 7; December 27, 1921, p. 3; March 18, 1922, p. 35.

with rural French Canada, the ideological home of the French-Canadian nation during this period. Aptly entitled “Entre nous” (Between Us), Ledieu’s article demonstrates one way in which choices in tobacco constructed the “nous” in Quebec.²⁰

That some consciously used this symbolism to nationalist ends is likely. The most prominent French-Canadian nationalist of the day, Henri Bourassa, was a noted smoker of *tabac canadien*, writing about it in his newspaper and smoking it in public.²¹ Following Bourassa’s death, many friends remembered him smoking the strong tobacco in clay pipes and thought this habit memorable enough to record in a collection of reminiscences on his life.²² There is little question that Bourassa could have afforded more expensive tobacco or pipes. Whether he intended it or not, people used Bourassa’s choice in tobaccos and pipes to understand his identity, much as both the habitants and Léon Ledieu constructed the identity of the politician discussed earlier. Indeed, when Bourassa sat on stage smoking his short clay pipe as he waited to give a speech at a nationalist rally in Rimouski in 1907, his nationalist oratory had likely already begun with him smoking his pipe of *tabac canadien*, a fact commented upon in the above mentioned reminiscences.²³

It is important to understand that, during the same period, many people did not view the smoking of *tabac canadien* as a proud symbol of patriotism but rather as a sign of rural French-Canadian backwardness. This opinion was not based on ethnicity. Both anglophones and francophones expressed their distaste for *tabac canadien*, though probably more anglophones than francophones held it in low regard. Critics of *tabac canadien* adhered to hierarchical norms of taste deemed by them to be the very foundations of connoisseurship. Connoisseurs posited themselves as “rational men” in their consumption of tobacco — the antithesis of women consumers, whom they regarded as being irrational, and even hysterical, shoppers.²⁴ Among men, hierarchies of taste distanced gentlemen from the poor and *nouveaux riches* and helped differen-

20 Léon Ledieu, “Entre Nous”, *Le Monde illustré*, April 4, 1891, p. 766.

21 “Le Tabac du Proletaire”, *Le Devoir*, March 2, 1915, p. 8.

22 Ernest Bilodeau, “Cinquante années de souvenirs”, Louis Robillard, “ ‘Monsieur’ Bourassa, solennel et familier”, and Lionel Groulx, “Henri Bourassa ou le causeur prestigieux”, all in *Hommage à Henri Bourassa* (reproduced from a memorial edition of *Le Devoir*), October 25, 1952, pp. 158, 142, 91, respectively.

23 Bilodeau, “Cinquante années de souvenirs”, in *Hommage à Henri Bourassa*, p. 158.

24 On the creation of the “Straw Woman” consumer, see Jill Greenfield, Sean O’Donnell, and Chris Reid, “Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male, 1918–1939”, and Christopher P. Hosgood, “Mrs. Pooter’s Purchase: Lower-Middle-Class Consumerism and the Sales, 1870–1914”, both in Alan Kidd and David Nichols, eds., *Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 183–197, 146–163 respectively. For a Canadian example, see Cynthia Wright, “ ‘Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance’ : Writing Gender into the History of Consumption”, in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) pp. 229–260.

tiate the “civilized” from the “uncivilized” in the construction of racial ideologies.²⁵ Central to the connoisseurship of tobacco was a belief in the superiority of modern agriculture, guided by the logic of the capitalist marketplace and late-nineteenth-century views about race.²⁶ The argument against *tabac canadien* was made on three grounds. First, connoisseurs pointed out that it was not a pure strain of tobacco, so not only did it vary in taste, but its production was also less efficient than that of tobacco grown in the United States.²⁷ Secondly, others believed that the homegrown tobacco’s very strong, distinct smell and taste were attributable to an unsystematic drying and curing process. In point of fact, within the habitant economy, tobacco was an accessory crop whose production schedules were always at the mercy of weather conditions, seasonal variations, and time devoted to cultivating main crops. This meant that busy farmers might harvest *tabac canadien* too early or too late; drying, curing, or any other processing before sale to consumers might well be incomplete, resulting in unintended pungent smells in a smoker’s pipe.²⁸ The third grounds for denigrating Canadian homegrown tobacco was its supposedly questionable *terroir*. Tobacco connoisseurs, experts, and manufacturers insisted that quality tobacco required “intelligent” labour, climate, and soil, the *terroir* of a tobacco being the *sine qua non* of its value.²⁹ The French-Canadian *terroir* was found lacking because French Canadians had supposedly adopted Native practices for growing tobacco, which were regarded as uncivilized and incongruous with the production of fine tobacco. Underlying these beliefs about “proper” agriculture were assumptions about the innate intelligence of different “races”, which relegated French Canadians, Native North Americans, Mexicans, and non-white

25 The literature on masculinity is voluminous. This article draws on discussions of masculinity and consumption that largely have focused on connoisseurship. See Leora Auslander, “The Gendering of Consumer Practices”, in Victoria de Grazia, ed., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996); Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*, pp. 17–59.

26 The classic statement on this degrading of pre-capitalist agriculture is Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973).

27 Charlan, “Tobacco Culture in Canada”, pp. 31–33. E. A. Heaman has shown that habitant cows were criticized on similar grounds; see her *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society during the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 40.

28 Porcheron, “Traitement et culture du tabac canadien”, section I; Louis V. Labelle, “Traité de la culture et de l’industrie du tabac” [CIHM no. 08362], St-Jacques, April 11, 1898, p. 106.

29 Wine was evaluated in the same way. Historian Kolleen M. Guy argues that the concept of *terroir* was central to nineteenth-century views of French geography and equally important to the way champagne got its value. See her paper, “Rituals of Pleasure”. She draws on the work of nineteenth-century French geographer Vidal de La Blanche. See Jean-Yves Guiomar, “Vidal de La Blanche’s *Geography of France*”, in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 187–209.

tobacco growers to the same denigrated category of ignorant, outmoded farmers.³⁰

By the late nineteenth century, almost no Canadian-grown crops were used by Canadian pipe tobacco manufacturers, who believed one or several of these arguments. Consequently, the gold standard in quality tobacco in Canada became the pipe tobaccos imported from Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri.³¹ Significantly, the Montreal-based tobacco industrialist William Macdonald, who dominated the Canadian industry during the second half of the nineteenth century, refused to use French-Canadian tobacco because of its *terroir*. Through his massive distribution system, he set standards that made industrially produced American tobacco the dominant publicly accepted taste of tobacco in much of Canada.³²

For smokers of *tabac canadien*, the realm of cultural relations would never be the same. Not only was the production of French-Canadian tobacco seen as backward, but the smokers of *tabac canadien* were seen as tasteless, undiscerning consumers whose choice reflected badly on their character. For example, John Todd, a McGill medical student who regularly sent carefully selected tobacco home to his father in Ontario, recounted in a letter to his mother what he considered to be the “disgusting” smoking habits of rural French Canadians. Barnum and Bailey’s circus had come to Montreal, and every “Canuck paysan and paysanne too, who could scrape together the ‘necessary’ took in the circus”. He complained of one family “consisting of Papa, Maman, Bébé, two little girls and four boys, the eldest perhaps fifteen. Papa and the sons all smoked common, clay pipes, crammed full of vile smelling ‘tabac rouge’.”³³ Disgust for this national ritual was also shared by some French Canadians, as illustrated in a cartoon in *L’Album Universel* (Figure 1).³⁴ The cartoon “Une bonne pipe de tabac canadien!” equates the strong smell of homegrown tobacco with a dirty, poorly dressed street person. It plays on respectability, as *tabac canadien* gives the itinerant lounge

30 Lewis, “The World’s Tobacco Crops”, p. 359; Labelle, “Traité de la culture”, p. 13; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p. 1039. This racist theory proved difficult for anyone trying to explain why Cuba grew the best tobacco in the world. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* avoided the problem by claiming that Cuban tobacco had been a white man’s crop even during slave times. See “Cuba”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p. 599.

31 Labelle, “Traité de la culture”, p. 13.

32 “The Tobacco Kings of Canada before the Tobacco Inquiry”, *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, December 1902, p. 719. For Macdonald, see Stanley Brice Frost and Robert H. Michel, “Sir William Christopher Macdonald”, in Ramsay Cook and Jean Hamelin, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 689–694.

33 John F. Todd to Rosanna Todd, June 20, 1895 in *John L. Todd Letters, 1876–1949*, p. 62; see also John F. Todd to Rosanna Todd, February 6, 1895, p. 55.

34 *L’Album Universel*, October 20, 1906, p. 845. For other examples, see Benjamin Sulte, “Le Tabac”, *Le Manitoba*, May 15, 1895, p. 1; on Médéric Martin, see “Le Tabac du Proletaire”, *Le Devoir*, March 2, 1915, p. 8.

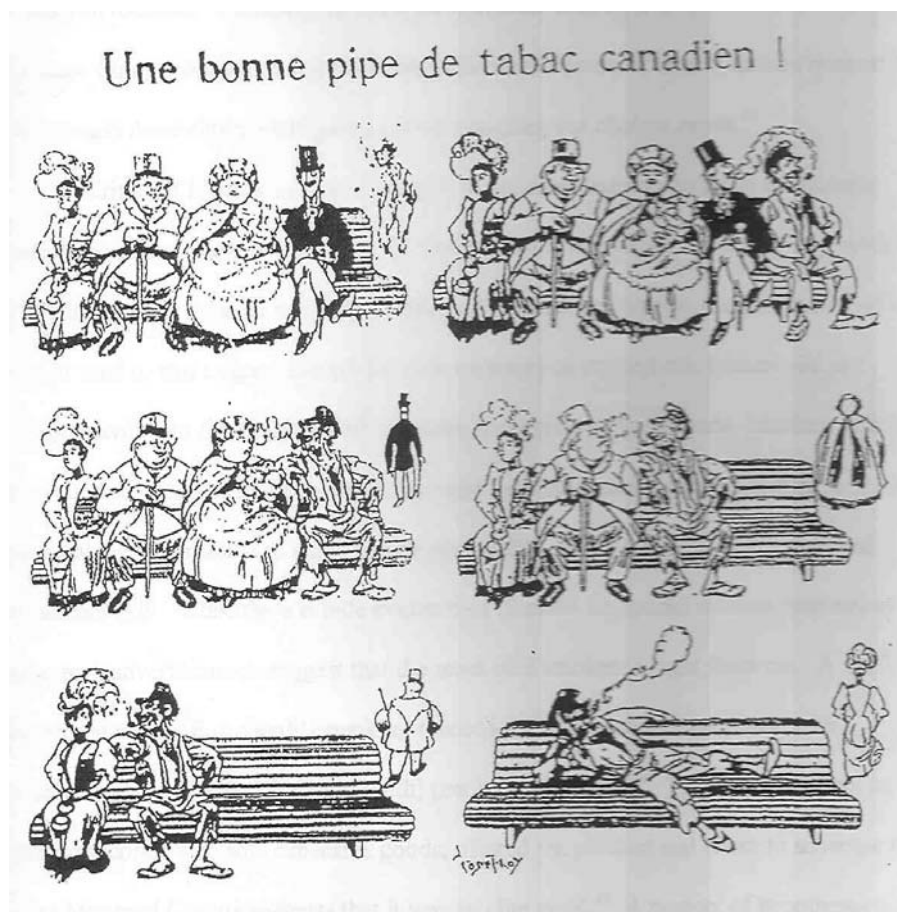


Figure 1: The cartoon “Une bonne pipe de tabac canadien” equates the strong smell of homegrown tobacco with a street person. His *tabac canadien* allows him to appropriate middle-class space (*L’Album Universel*, October 20, 1906, p. 845).

the means to appropriate middle-class public space (symbolically evoked through the clothing of those seated).

Mass producers

Despite these dominant beliefs, at the turn of the twentieth century numerous manufacturers tried to cater to smokers who enjoyed French-Canadian tobacco. The industrialization of *tabac canadien* was structured by three factors: state tariff protection, expansion of pre-existing family enterprises in the tobacco trades, and the arrival of multinational companies producing American tobacco. The industrialization of French-Canadian tobacco began in 1897, when the federal government applied high tariffs to foreign tobacco,

offering significant profits to tobacco companies that switched to Canadian tobacco.³⁵ The tobacco manufacturers who refused to use Canadian-grown tobacco (including the king of the Canadian tobacco industry, William Macdonald) complained bitterly that meeting the price of Canadian tobacco products was eating into their profits.³⁶ Throughout this period, manufactured Canadian tobacco products sold for substantially less than smoking tobacco made in Canada with American tobacco.³⁷

Manufacturers took two different approaches in their production and promotion of Canadian tobacco. Several companies promoted new strains of tobacco and new growing methods among farmers in both Ontario and Quebec, subsequently substituting Canadian tobacco for the tobacco they had previously used. This tobacco differed little from that grown in the United States, and these companies hid the fact that they were manufacturing Canadian tobacco.³⁸ The second approach, and the subject of this article, consisted of an aggressive remarketing of new brands of distinctly French-Canadian tobacco.

While many tobacco manufacturers came and went, the efforts of three companies stood out.³⁹ The first was Forest Frères Limitée of Montreal. The Forest brothers had been born and raised in St-Jacques-l'Achigan, the heart of the Quebec tobacco belt, just north of Montreal. In 1893 Roch, who was the driving force behind the company, moved to Montreal and established himself as a Canadian tobacco buyer. In 1899, shortly after the protective tariff came into force, Roch and his brothers Narcisse, Georges, and Alfred formed a partnership. Probably dealing in both leaf tobacco and industrial *tabac canadien*, the company remained small until 1916, when it was incorporated with financier Gaspard DeSerres as president and J. O. DeSerres as general manager. Of the brothers, only Roch remained with the company as vice-president and superintendent. By the 1920s the company advertised its brands

35 The specific revision to the *Inland Revenue Act* to change these excise duties was an amendment to Victoria 60–61, Chapter 19, No. 13 (m) and (n). This amendment put an excise tax of 14 cents per pound on stemmed foreign leaf tobacco and 10 cents per pound on non-stemmed.

36 For Macdonald's complaints, see "The Tobacco Kings of Canada before the Tobacco Inquiry", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, December 1902, pp. 719–721.

37 This assertion is based on a comparison of "Current Trade Prices" listings in the *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal* in January 1904, 1924, 1934, and 1944. The year 1924 provides the most fruitful comparison of "Domestic Brands" and other brands of Cut Smoking Tobaccos as prices are listed "per pound" rather than by the various sizes of packages on offer. A representative example is the popular Macdonald "Cut Brier" made with Virginia tobacco, which wholesaled for \$1.28 per pound, while a pound of Houde's most advertised brand "Alouette" sold for 76¢ per pound. Forest Frères' main brands wholesaled from 78¢ to \$1.38 per pound for the company's special aromatic brand. Rock City's most advertised *tabac canadien*, "Rose Quesnel", wholesaled for \$1.04 per pound.

38 For a more detailed discussion of this approach, see Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, chap. 5.

39 Others included the St-Jacques Tobacco Packing Co. Limited and its brand "Hero", as well as Lemesurier Tobacco Co. of Quebec City with its brand "Pioneer" and the Colonial Tobacco Corporation of Montreal with "Colonial". See *Le Soleil*, March 8, 1917, p. 7; March 3, 1926, p. 11; and March 4, 1921, p. 3.

extensively, had seven travelling salesmen on the road in Ontario and Quebec, and sold bails of unmanufactured *tabac canadien* and five types of industrial *tabac canadien*. In 1936 the company signed a distribution agreement with Benson and Hedges and eventually was entirely taken over by the British company. Well into the 1950s, Benson and Hedges continued to carry a diminishing number of *tabac canadien* brands.⁴⁰ The second and third producers of industrial *tabac canadien* were both from Quebec City. The Rock City Tobacco Company developed out of the Drouin family grocery and wholesale trade, which included tobacco sales. It incorporated in 1899 with intentions of manufacturing *tabac canadien*. At the same time, Joseph Picard joined the firm as a prominent figure, later to be followed by his sons. The company remained independent until 1936, when Carreras of London bought 70 per cent of Rock City shares. The company also continued to sell *tabac canadien* brands into the 1950s.⁴¹ Finally, B. Houde and Company was established by Houde in 1841, but by the late 1890s was run by J. Alphonse and J. Ernest Dussault. When tariff provisions changed, B. Houde, in addition to manufacturing a wide assortment of cigarettes, began to produce several brands of *tabac canadien* and, by the turn of the twentieth century, claimed to be the largest cut-tobacco manufacturer in Canada.⁴²

Besides the tariff on tobacco, the other landmark event that shaped the industrial *tabac canadien* market was the arrival of the American Tobacco Company in Canada. James Buchanan Duke's international tobacco monopoly came to Canada in 1895, purchasing two Montreal cigarette and tobacco manufacturers, D. Ritchie and Co. and the American Cigarette Company, to found the American Tobacco Company of Canada (ATCC). Headed by Mortimer Davis, the former head of D. Ritchie and Co. and the eldest son of a long-time cigar manufacturing family, the operation was relatively independent from its American parent, albeit Davis frequently used the same kind of tactics as Duke did in the United States.⁴³ Such was the case when the company attempted to break into the French-Canadian tobacco market in Quebec

40 "Forest Frères Limitée", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, February 1925, p. 29; "Benson and Hedges Sell Forest Products", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, February 1936, p. 22; "Current Trade Prices", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, January 1950, p. 33.

41 It is worth noting that the Drouin family had long been involved in Quebec City politics, with oldest son Napoléon elected to city council in 1896 and eventually elected mayor in 1910. On Rock City and the Drouin family, see Nathalie Bouchard and Réjean Lemoine, *The Rothmans, Benson & Hedges Factory: In the Heart of Quebec City for the Past 100 Years* (Quebec: L. G. Chabot Inc., 1999); "Current Trade Prices", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, January 1956, p. 25.

42 On B. Houde, see Library and Archives Canada, Royal Commission Re: The Tobacco Trade of Canada, Minutes [hereafter RCTT], RG 13 box 2317 file 349/1903, Evidence of Alphonse Dussault, p. 581; Ernest J. Chalmers, *The Book of Canada: Illustrating the Great Dominion* (Toronto, 1905), p. 203.

43 Howard Cox, *The Global Cigarette: Origins and Evolution of British American Tobacco, 1880–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101–103; P. G. Porter, "Origins of the American Tobacco Company", *Business History Review* (Spring 1969), pp. 59–76.

City. In April 1899 the ATCC attempted to purchase B. Houde, but, when the price was too high, Davis told owner Alphonse Dussault that he would “crush” him.⁴⁴ The ATCC re-introduced an old brand, “Brown Shag”, to compete with Houde’s “Carillon” and went on a campaign of price slashing that targeted Houde’s home market of Quebec City. The price of “Brown Shag” dropped from 30 to 20 cents a pound, while “Carillon” remained at 40 cents a pound.⁴⁵ The company also promoted “Brown Shag” by giving away sample packages on street corners and at factory doors.⁴⁶

The most important response to the ATCC’s arrival in Quebec City came from the city’s organized labour. Ernest Cinq-Mars, a journalist and first vice-president of the Trades and Labour Council of Quebec City, interviewed the heads of Rock City and B. Houde tobacco companies and wrote a pamphlet about the dangers of the tobacco monopoly. Cinq-Mars called for a boycott of “Brown Shag”, arguing that in a monopoly situation consumers would have less variety in their tobaccos. Moreover, he contended that local industry would be threatened, evoking the spectre of factory closures and job losses. Rock City and B. Houde then financed the printing of the pamphlet, which was distributed at labour meetings and outside churches.⁴⁷ One ATCC representative went so far as to claim that in a number of places his travelling salesmen were forced to leave the sales premises when they tried to sell “Brown Shag”, and he surmised, “It was nothing but a war.”⁴⁸ While the ATCC did not win this war immediately, victory was within reach. Different sources reveal conflicting timelines, but at some point between 1905 and 1908 (when the ATCC changed its name to Imperial), the ATCC took control of B. Houde and Company. It retained the B. Houde name to market its *tabac canadien* brands.⁴⁹ The company’s ability to claim status as a “local manufacturer” was important. Indeed, during the 1920s and 1930s, many of its competitors in Quebec, including L. O. Grothé (makers of cigars, cigarettes, and chewing and Virginian pipe tobacco) and Rock City Tobacco, promoted themselves and their products as part of the *Achat Chez Nous* campaigns. For Imperial, having a French-Canadian name with a long history in the tobacco business would therefore surely have been a useful front.⁵⁰

44 For Houde’s management’s response to a rumour that the company had been taken over by the ATCC, see “Le combine du tabac”, *Le Soleil*, April 7, 1899, p. 6. For Dussault’s account, see RCTT, p. 582.

45 RCTT, p. 608.

46 Evidence of Alphonse Dussault, RCTT, p. 584.

47 Evidence of Ernest E. Cinq-Mars, RCTT, pp. 729–732.

48 Evidence of Louis Samenhof, RCTT, p. 719.

49 At the Price Spreads Royal Commission, Gray Miller, president of Imperial Tobacco in the 1930s, testified that in 1908 the ATCC purchased 87% of B. Houde and Company shares for \$435,200. Yet a 1922 biography of the company in the *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal* claims that Louis Samenhof, an ATCC employee, was general manager of the firm from 1905. See evidence of Gray Miller, “Evidence, Price Spreads”, p. 1467; “The B. Houde Company, Limited”, *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, February 1925, p. 17.

50 *Le Soleil*, March 27, 1924, special supplement “Chez-Nous”, p. 2.

Branding *tabac canadien*

Tobacco manufacturers who sought to capture the *tabac canadien* market had to convince smokers of the pre-industrial commodity that these new products were “authentically” *canadien*. The fact that this tobacco was industrially produced was hard to hide, largely because of its packaging. Indeed, the new industrial products came in thin cardboard packs and metal containers, whereas the traditional *tabac canadien* was usually sold without packaging. Packaging, a key part of the transformation of mass marketing in the late nineteenth century, was used by manufacturers to sooth fears of disease being transmitted through products and allowed retailers to display products in new appealing ways. It permitted easy storage of the product and, finally, it moved the spotlight from retailer to manufacturer, whose reputation then was on the line for the product’s quality.⁵¹ Unlike the pre-industrial tobacco that could be immediately inspected by potential smokers, industrially produced *tabac canadien* was sealed in packages, so smokers relied on word of mouth and the reputation of the manufacturer to make their decisions. Manufacturers of *tabac canadien* attempted to convince smokers that their packages contained authentic French-Canadian tobacco through advertising heavily in the largest francophone dailies: Montreal’s *La Presse* and *La Patrie* and Quebec City’s *Le Soleil*.⁵² It should be noted that other Virginia pipe tobacco brands, cigars, and cigarettes were being advertised in the same newspapers at the same time. This was also true for *Le Devoir* and *L’Action nationale*, two nationalist newspapers that clearly had no nationalist advertising policies.⁵³

In these advertising campaigns, tobacco manufacturers claimed that their producers were “authentically” French Canadian in a number of different ways. Some companies made this claim by emphasizing their connections to local agriculture. An early advertisement (1905) for the Rock City brand “Rose Quesnel” claimed that its product came from a single farmer whose annual harvest had yielded an enormous 300,000 pounds of tobacco — the sheer mass of the crop being sold as a sure sign of success.⁵⁴ In an age when the link between consumers and producers was increasingly tenuous as a result of industry middlemen, this advertising strategy aimed to reassure smokers that the quality of the tobacco remained the same. The campaign drew on a recent past, when *tabac canadien* smokers bought directly from a

51 David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 149–194.

52 I had two sampling techniques for these papers. *La Patrie* and *La Presse* were sampled one week per month (starting with week one in January, week two in February, and so on) between 1920 and 1960. *Le Soleil* was read in February and March from 1917 to 1948. Pre-1914 advertising was surveyed in January and February 1900, 1905, 1910, and 1914. While this study focuses on newspaper advertising, store window displays were also important to legitimizing new industrial products like these brands. See Keith Walden, “Speaking Modern: Language, Culture, and Hegemony in Grocery Window Displays, 1887–1920”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 70 (September 1989), pp. 285–310.

53 See these papers, for example, in February 1925 and 1935.

54 Rose Quesnel advertisement, *Le Soleil*, March 1, 1905, p. 3.

farmer's surplus and the tobacco had little chance of being mixed with that of another farmer.

Yet in many ways this appeal to the past relationship between consumer and producer was atypical. Most advertising of industrial *tabac canadien* claimed it was vastly improved from the pre-industrial commodity. Indeed, according to Luc Côté and Jean-Guy Daigle, discourses of scientific improvement were frequent in Quebec advertising during much of this period.⁵⁵ The new industrial *tabac canadien* was rationalized and scientifically upgraded by isolating different strains of tobacco, thus providing a greater variety of tastes to smokers. The fact that different strains could at last be identified and isolated (in contrast to past practices of growing varieties side by side, making cross-pollination a likely occurrence), meant that the new *tabac canadien* was increasingly different from the habitants' home-grown versions. Imperial's B. Houde brand, "Alouette", was advertised with the claim: "This renowned natural tobacco is the product of three centuries of cultivation and selection. [It has been] sorted, ripened and mixed under the careful supervision of specialists."⁵⁶ Forest Frères advertised to tobacconists that its tobacco was "cultivated, scientifically cured and skilfully blended under the direction of the Forest Brothers who have made a special study of Canadian tobacco", and Rock City advertised its "Rose Quesnel" as being "produced and scientifically processed in fully equipped, hygienic workshops".⁵⁷

While all of these companies claimed to have improved upon the original *tabac canadien*, they all also emphasized the "French Canadianness" of their products. The Forest Frères' claims to authenticity for its brands relied on a different logic than did the other two companies, owing to the company's rural roots. The Forests had developed their company by promoting its ties to Quebec's tobacco belt and the fact that, even when the company took on partners from 1916 until its merger with Carreras, it never sold anything but *tabac canadien*. This link to the French-Canadian farm (albeit somewhat "improved" and "rationalized" in its agriculture) was reflected in the fact that Forest Frères' brand names featured either the types of tobacco used or its strength.

Forest Frères' advertisements sought to show a diversity of French-Canadian experiences through many depictions of modern and industrial settings. Advertisers understood that their customers would know what *tabac canadien* was and would link it directly to their former ways of life as well as their

55 Luc Côté and Jean-Guy Daigle, *Publicité de masse et masse publicité : le marché québécois des années 1920 aux années 1960* (Ottawa: Les presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1999), pp. 303–330.

56 "Ce fameux tabac naturel est le produit de trois siècles de culture et de sélection" as well as "triée, mûrie, et mélangée par les soins de spécialistes". Alouette advertisements, *Le Soleil*, April 24, 1924, p. 13; March 17, 1932, p. 19.

57 "...produit et scientifiquement traité en des ateliers propres et bien aménagés", *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, October 1923, p. 41; Rose Quesnel advertisement, *Le Soleil*, March 7, 1936, p. 2.

living and transforming traditions. In some cases, farmers were depicted in these advertisements. One advertisement for Forest Frères' "Fort" (strong) tobacco featured a sketch of an older man with a corncob pipe (a reference to a farmer) and used the slogan, "The preference of old-time smokers" (Figure 2).⁵⁸ But farmers (or retired farmers) represented only one segment of the market. In the early 1930s the urban working class was also targeted by an advertisement that featured groups of working men discussing Forest Frères tobacco, noting it did not hurt the throat the way other tobaccos did (Figure 3).⁵⁹ Other urban images were used by Forest Frères to reach what the company clearly understood to be a markedly segmented urban market. For the most part, Forest Frères' ads presented highly gendered images of the middle class. For example, its "Parfum d'Italie" was advertised as being popular among professional men who smoked at the office and at home. The image of domesticity in the advertisement is used to suggest that this tobacco had such an "arôme délicat" (delicate aroma) that a man's wife would not object to it in the home. Indeed, men's smoking in the house, part of a larger gendering of space, was a subject of frequent debate during the period before it became more acceptable for women to smoke.⁶⁰ Another series of advertisements centred on the same middle-class man in numerous scenarios. In one ad, he is about to miss his tram because he left his tobacco either at home or at work; in another, he is seen getting his shoes shined and being complimented on his tobacco.⁶¹

This middle-class symbolism is distinctly French Canadian when contextualized within the prevailing hierarchies of taste in tobaccos of the times. As discussed earlier, connoisseurs argued that there was a hierarchy of tobaccos and that the quality of tobacco smoked reflected on the character (masculinity) of the smoker. Forest Frères' advertising put forward a less hierarchical vision of connoisseurship, contending that for each type of man there was a tobacco and that "you can't argue taste". Forest Frères was clearly indicating that contempt for others based on choice of tobacco was not even worth arguing about. This said, to this day character differentiation though smoking choices have remained a symbolic mainstay in tobacco advertising.⁶²

Frequently, choice in tobacco was seen as a question of masculine strength. Forest Frères' "Faible" (mild) was advertised as healthy tobacco — "Even the sick can smoke this tobacco" ("Même les malades peuvent le fumer"). This bold assertion reflected the dominant belief that smoking could be done in a healthy way, provided that the strength of the tobacco matched the phys-

58 "Le préféré des vieux fumeurs", Forest Frères advertisement, *Le Soleil*, April 12, 1924, p. 27.

59 *Le Soleil*, April 20, 1931, p. 16; for the same campaign, but with firemen, see *La Presse*, May 2, 1931, p. 23.

60 Forest Frères advertisement, *Le Soleil*, March 15, 1923, p. 9. On smoking and the gendering of space, see Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, chap. 1.

61 *Le Soleil*, March 5, 1923, p. 9; March 24, 1923, p. 2; March 31, 1923, p. 3.

62 "[L]es goûts ne se discutent pas", *Le Soleil*, March 15, 1923, p. 9.

*Un bon tabac
Canadien*



*Pur Canadien
Naturel
Fort
FOREST FRÈRES*

10¢
partout

*Le Préféré des
Vieux Fumeurs.
Fort, mais agréable
à fumer - ne brûle pas
la bouche ni
n'assèche la gorge.*



FOREST FRÈRES
Limitée

Figure 2: One ad for Forest Frères “Fort” tobacco featured a sketch of an older man with a corn-cob pipe, with the slogan “The preference of old-time smokers” (*Le Soleil*, April 12, 1924, p. 27).



Figure 3: A Forest Frères ad features working men discussing Forest Frères tobacco, noting that it did not hurt the throat the way other tobaccos did (*Le Soleil*, April 20, 1931, p. 16).

ical strength of the smoker. According to this reasoning, a natural barrier existed, stopping physically immature boys from smoking (since it was thought that they would get sick because the tobacco was too strong) and maintaining that women could not smoke safely (since they purportedly did not have the strength of will to avoid an unhealthy addiction).⁶³ Indeed, another advertisement for the same strength of tobacco showed a woman taking a drag from her husband's pipe. The husband, somewhat shocked, looks up from his newspaper and says, "Oh! My little wife, you are smoking! Good thing it is Forest Frères' mild tobacco!" (Figure 4).⁶⁴ In both of these cases, the tobacco is presented as being so light that even unhealthy or weak-willed smokers (men and women alike) could puff away to their heart's content.

63 Rudy, *Freedom to Smoke*, chap. 1.

64 "Ah! Ma petite femme tu fumes! Heureusement que c'est du tabac faible Forest Frères!"

Le Tabac Canadien Pur Forest Frères

Il existe une classe de fumeurs qui ne veulent pas fumer de tabac Canadien pur, parcequ'ils croient que tous les tabacs canadiens sont forts. Nous invitons ces fumeurs-là à essayer le tabac Naturel



PUR CANADIEN
très faible

Forest Frères



(Paquet vert)

Ils le trouveront doux, agréable et satisfaisant. Voyez la liste des autres Tabacs Canadiens Forest Frères — il y en a un pour tous les goût.

10c

OH! MA PETITE FEMME TU FUMES!
HEUREUSEMENT QUE C'EST DU
TABAC FAIBLE FOREST FRÈRES

FORT, paque.
blanc, un très
bon tabac qui
dure longtemps
même en plein
air - - - 10c
ROUGE QUEB.
N.E.L., paquet
rouge. Mélange
excellent. force
moyenne - 10c
PUR QUEB.
N.E.L., paquet
jaune. Très aro-
matique doux à
fumer - - 15c
PARFUM D'I-
TALIE, paquet
brun. Doux, aro-



Figure 4: "Oh, my little wife, you are smoking! Good thing it is Forest Frères' mild tobacco!" The tobacco is presented as being so light that even a woman could smoke safely (*Le Soleil*, March 15, 1923, p. 9).

In contrast to Forest Frères' brands, Imperial's B. Houde and, to a lesser extent, Rock City used French-Canadian folk nationalism to promote their products. This marketing approach was particularly clear in the 1920s and 1930s when their advertisements featured more images. During this period a renewed interest in locally produced arts and crafts was part of a larger concern over the disappearance of regional cultures due to competition with mass-produced industrial products.⁶⁵ Advertisers likely drew on this kind of interest in local cultures, whether authentic or not, to sell their tobacco. Yet these tobacco advertisers drew on French-Canadian history and culture, not nineteenth-century French culture, as was the case with the invention of "traditional" regional dress.⁶⁶

"Donacona" smoking and chewing tobacco remains the best example of a Rock City Tobacco brand that drew heavily upon French-Canadian culture to claim its authenticity (Figure 5). The brand was advertised in the 1920s, at the same time as French-Canadian arts and crafts were being promoted by the Quebec government, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the Cercles de fermières.⁶⁷ The "Donacona" advertisement featured images of a Native man (presumably Donacona) chatting warmly with a European (presumably Jacques Cartier). Indeed, according to the ad, chief Donacona, like his eponymous tobacco, "makes friends all over" ("fait des amis partout"). In stark contrast to the real tragic story of the Native chief (who was held captive by Cartier and met his tragic demise in France), this advertisement recast a brutal chapter in Native-European contact as a story of Natives making friends with the French. Even assuming that most French Canadians did not know the real story of Donacona, personifying *tabac canadien* with a Native figure when Native tobacco was held to be of inferior quality could have been a risky strategy. Perhaps in an effort to distance the brand from Native tobacco, the advertisement also stressed that "Donacona" was made with the best tobaccos and mixed by experts.⁶⁸

While the Donacona advertisement cast French Canadians in the role of Cartier (evoking French-Canadian history to attract consumers), this approach was somewhat of an anomaly for Rock City. Although several other Rock City *tabac canadien* brands evoked French-Canadian culture and history by using names like "Cloche Rouge" and "Champlain", they were not extensively advertised in newspapers. For the most part, Rock City tobacco advertisements resembled the modern scenes portrayed in Forest Frères ads. One example is the brand "Bon Bourgeois" (Figure 6). While it is possible that the name made reference to the voyageur's superior in the fur trade, the

65 Nathalie Hamel, "Coordonner l'artisanat et le tourisme, ou comment mettre en valeur le visage pittoresque du Québec (1915–1960)", *Histoire social/ Social History*, vol. 34, no. 67 (May 2001), pp. 97–114; McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*.

66 Hamel, "Coordonner l'artisanat et le tourisme".

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Le Soleil*, April 16, 1923, p. 8.

DONACONA



Le Tabac à Deux Fins

(à fumer et à chiquer)

Fabriqué avec des tabacs de choix, mélangés par des experts, empaqueté à l'épreuve de l'air, pour assurer la conservation de sa saveur exquise et son arôme séduisant, le

TABAC DONACONA

fait des amis partout où il est introduit.

Employé comme un tabac à chiquer, il est non seulement juteux, savoureux, satisfaisant, mais il est aussi très économique parcequ'une petite quantité dure plus longtemps que les tabacs ordinaires.

Rock City Tobacco Co. Inc.

D5.



Figure 5: Rock City drew heavily upon French-Canadian culture to claim its authenticity. In this ad, a Native man (presumably Donacona) chats with a European (presumably Jacques Cartier) (*Le Soleil*, April 16, 1923, p. 8).

Valeur Colossale

BON BOURGEOIS
Tabac
TURCO QUESNEL
MANUFACTURE PAR
ROCK CITY TOBACCO
QUEBEC

FAIT de QUESNEL naturel

Seulement
10 \$
le paquet

Un gros paquet d'un véritable quesnel naturel de la meilleure qualité—pour dix sous seulement.
C'EST POURQUOI BON BOURGEOIS EST SI BIEN VU DES FUMEURS DE QUESNEL.
Si vous voulez la plus grande valeur de quesnel sur le marché—demandez **BON BOURGEOIS.**

Rock City Tobacco Co.

BON BOURGEOIS
TURCO QUESNEL

En boîte métallique
d'une 1/2 lb.
60c

Figure 6: Rock City's "Bon Bourgeois" tobacco ad depicts a modern, well-to-do farmer in his field and, on the package, in his Sunday best (*Le Soleil*, May 2, 1923, p. 2).



UNE *Saveur*
EN VOGUE
TOUTE L'ANNÉE DURANT!

TABAC À PIPE AROMATIQUE

ROSE QUESNEL

DOUX ET NATUREL

Le riche tabac à pipe Rose Quesnel, produit et scientifiquement traité en des ateliers propres et bien aménagés, ne se connaît pas de saison! Les amateurs de bon tabac Canadien en reconnaissent les excellentes qualités, et le préfèrent à tout autre. Fumez-le . . . vous n'en voudrez jamais d'autre quand vous aurez goûté son parfum enchanteur!

ROCK CITY TOBACCO CO., LIMITED

Paquets de 104 et boîtes métalliques d'une demi-livre.

Figure 7: Modern social settings were depicted in the corner of Rock City's ads for "Rose Quesnel" tobacco, in this case people listening to the radio, with men smoking in the presence of women (*Le Soleil*, March 7, 1936).

images used in its advertising were of a modern, well-to-do farmer shown both in the field and in his Sunday best on the package label.⁶⁹ The modern characteristics of advertising for *tabac canadien* are also found in Rock City's leading brand of French-Canadian tobacco, "Rose Quesnel". The name "Quesnel" sufficed to identify it as a French-Canadian tobacco and the small images in the corner of each advertisement depicted modern social settings.⁷⁰ The example from 1936 (Figure 7) is particularly modern, showing people listening to the radio. Moreover, men are smoking in the presence of women, a practice viewed as a social *faux pas* until at least after World War I.

Imperial Tobacco went the furthest in evoking French-Canadian authenticity by using French-Canadian history and culture to advertise B. Houde brands such as "Alouette", "Montcalm", "Richelieu", and "Patriote". Not

69 Bon Bourgeois advertisements, *Le Soleil*, April 4, 1923, p. 3; April 18, 1923, p. 12; May 2, 1923, p. 2 (Figure 6).

70 Rose Quesnel advertisement, *Le Soleil*, March 7, 1936 (Figure 7); also March 12, 1937, p. 23; April 2, 1937, p. 11.

only did Imperial evoke French-Canadian national symbolism in its advertising, but it used recent iconic French-Canadian heroes. B. Houde's "Hercule" brand tobacco advertisements featured drawings of nineteenth-century strong men like Louis Cyr (Figure 8).⁷¹ The bulk of B. Houde advertising, however, drew on a more distant past. From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, advertising for "Alouette" brand tobacco frequently evoked *tabac canadien*'s link to New France. The origin of the brand name was no doubt inspired by the popular folk song of the same name, with one advertisement clearly hoping that smokers would sing the well-known song, complete with a slight variation in the lyrics: "Alouette, gentille Alouette! Alouette, je te *fumerai!*"⁷² The brand's advertising reminded French Canadians of the long-standing place of tobacco in their history: even when their ancestors were wearing wigs and ruffled shirts, "the brave men of New France were already smoking Quebec's excellent tobacco."⁷³ Another claimed, "When Jacques-Cartier came to Canada in the bygone year of 1535, he found tobacco plantations."⁷⁴ All of these advertisements described French-Canadian colonists using the plural possessive "nos", making the company part of the French-Canadian collective identity. Notably, much of this "Alouette" advertising targeted urban French-Canadian smokers. Several advertisements specifically recalled the history of urban Quebec: "When Trois-Rivières was nothing but an outpost", "When Montreal was nothing but a forest", "When Sherbrooke was nothing but a tiny village", "When Hull was a camp for rum runners", "...our valliant ancestors" enjoyed this proud Quebec tobacco.⁷⁵

In contrast to Forest Frères' advertising, B. Houde harkened back to a distant past to prove the authenticity of its *tabac canadien*. Similar to those of Rock City Tobacco, on occasion B. Houde advertisements even embraced the tobacco's Native origins. One "Alouette" ad, for example, waxed romantic regarding the fact that 200 years ago "our [French-Canadian] ancestors traded with the Indian" for tobacco.⁷⁶ Another pointed to a rockier moment of Native-French relations, claiming that Dollard and his "troop of heroes" smoked *tabac canadien* when they set off on their journey "to head off the progression of the Iroquois at Long Sault".⁷⁷ Like those for Rock City brands, "Alouette" ads took pains to mention that its tobacco was "infinitely superior

71 Hercule advertisements, *La Presse*, October 27, 1925, p. 20 (Figure 8); November 3, 1925, p. 14; December 5, 1925, p. 25.

72 Alouette advertisement, *Le Soleil*, March 24, 1932, p. 19.

73 "...les braves de la Nouvelle-France fumaient déjà le bon tabac de Québec", *Ibid.*

74 "Quand Jacques-Cartier vint au Canada aux lointains de 1535, il trouva des plantations de tabac...", *Le Soleil*, March 17, 1932, p. 19.

75 "Quand Trois-Rivières n'était qu'un avant-poste...", *Le Soleil*, March 29, 1934, p. 17; "Quand Montréal n'était qu'une forêt...", March 22, 1934, p. 12; "Quand Sherbrooke n'était qu'une Bourgade ...", April 13, 1934, p. 10; "Quand Hull était un camp de trafiquants" — "nos vaillants ancêtres", April 25, 1934, p. 11.

76 Alouette advertisement, *Le Soleil*, April 10, 1924, p. 11.

77 Alouette advertisement, *Le Soleil*, July 9, 1930, p. 4.



LOUIS CYR

Cyr est probablement le plus célèbre des athlètes canadiens-français. Ses hauts faits ont étonné tout le monde à tour le Canada, les États-Unis et l'Europe. L'incident figuré ici rappelle un de ses premiers exploits. Un marin de stature gigantesque, un certain capitaine Beers, qui se glorifiait de porter sur son épaule une ancre du modeste poids de 700 livres, paria \$50.00 (somme considérable à cette époque) que Cyr n'en ferait pas autant. Cyr chargea l'ancre, puis invita notre vaillant capitaine à grimper dessus, et sans même ployer sous ce double fardeau il fit gaillardement le tour du pont. Qui est-ce qui riait? Pas le capitaine assurément.

**ATHLÈTES
CANADIENS FRANÇAIS**

**TABAC NATUREL
HERCULE**

10¢

Ce merveilleux tabac naturel est digne de la vigueur physique du Canadien-Français. C'est un mélange des feuilles les plus réputées du terroir. Il a la force qui plaît à l'homme fort.

Chaque Paquet Contient



Figure 8: B. Houde's "Hercule" brand tobacco ads featured drawings of nineteenth-century strong men like Louis Cyr (*La Presse*, October 27, 1925, p. 20).

to any tobacco known to our forebears".⁷⁸ For the most part, however, in B. Houde advertisements, tobacco is portrayed as French Canadian and Natives appear as secondary figures. One example of this approach is found in advertising for B. Houde's strong-tasting brand, "Voyageur". Frequently these ads summoned images of a frontier life of rugged masculinity: "the very word

⁷⁸ "...est infiniment supérieur à tous les tabacs connus de nos aïeux", Alouette advertisement, *Le Soleil*, April 10, 1924, p. 11.

Fumez le
VOYAGEUR

L'usage du bon tabac canadien remonte aux jours où les voyageurs, les coureurs des bois et les braves Indiens faisaient cercle autour du feu de camp pour fumer le calumet de la paix.
Le VOYAGEUR, est bien fait pour enchanter tous ceux qui aiment notre odorant tabac naturel, car c'est le meilleur de tous les tabacs du Québec: riche, substantiel, fort.

Le VOYAGEUR s'offre en paquets commodes pour le gousset, sous enveloppe ciree qui le conserve en parfaite condition.




Figure 9: A series of ads for B. Houde's brand "Voyageur" included images of Natives and voyageurs smoking the peace pipe (*La Presse*, July 30, 1930, p. 19).

evokes the Romans, and visions of robust, virile men", its publicity claimed.⁷⁹ This series of ads included images of Natives and voyageurs gathered together "around a camp fire to smoke the peace pipe" (Figure 9).⁸⁰ The play on words in this advertisement conflates the depicted voyageur with the brand name of the tobacco. The voyageur, profoundly French Canadian like the

⁷⁹ "Il y a du roman dans le mot même – et quelles visions d'hommes robustes et virils", Voyageur advertisement *La Presse*, October 8, 1930, p. 25.

⁸⁰ "... autour du feu de camp pour fumer le calumet de la paix", *La Presse*, July 30, 1930, p. 19.

tobacco, enchants all who have a taste for “our pungent natural [French-Canadian] tobacco”, asserting ownership over the commodity.⁸¹

The Decline of a Transformed Tradition

Though many brands of *tabac canadien* were available well into the 1950s, by the end of the Second World War tobacco companies had ceased to advertise their traditional French-Canadian tobacco brands. There are numerous possible explanations for this shift in marketing strategies. For one thing, by the end of the 1930s, all of the companies that had sold *tabac canadien* were owned or partnered with multinational corporations. These multinationals may have shown less enthusiasm for promoting “national” tastes, though that was certainly not the case for Imperial Tobacco until the 1930s.

Three factors offer more satisfactory explanations for these changes. First, fewer people were smoking non-industrial *tabac canadien*, the taste upon which these brands were based.⁸² Since the taste for industrial *tabac canadien* was most often acquired through the tradition of smoking the non-industrial product, its decreased consumption would adversely affect the popularity of the commercial brands. This decrease was no accident. Rather, it was a result of long years of tobacco industry campaigns and a federal government looking to finance the Second World War. The industry’s drive to end the consumption of *tabac canadien* began in late 1933, when Imperial Tobacco tried to make it appear that Quebec tobacco farmers supported an excise duty on their tobacco. Imperial paid these farmers 10 cents each to sign a petition in favour of the tax, then added the promise that the company would buy the farmers’ tobacco crops if they signed.⁸³ Shortly thereafter at hearings of the Royal Commission on Price Spreads, Imperial officials as well as others in the tobacco industry argued that untaxed *tabac canadien* was competing directly and unfairly with manufactured tobacco and that jobs in the tobacco industry had been lost because of this competition. In their opinion, the only way to remedy the situation was to tax French-Canadian homegrown.⁸⁴ The federal government refused to give in to this pressure until 1940 when a tax was levied to finance the war effort. The tax was stringently enforced and it became too much trouble for many tobacconists to continue to stock *tabac canadien*. Ultimately, these excise measures put to an end to the ability of Quebec tobacco farmers to distribute their tobacco to dealers in Montreal and other urban areas.⁸⁵

81 “... notre odorant tabac naturel”, *La Presse*, July 30, 1930, p. 19.

82 For a more detailed discussion, see Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, pp. 117–120.

83 Joseph Marion, “Evidence, Price Spreads”, p. 1687.

84 Gray Miller, “Evidence, Price Spreads”, p. 1630; LAC, RG 33–18 Vol. 36, file “General Correspondence of Tobacco Companies”, Subject Rock City, A. E. Picard to H. H. Stevens, May 3, 1934.

85 Homegrown tobacco had briefly been excised and licensed in 1918, but the tax was removed in 1923 and the licensing system ended at the same time. See “Growers Must be Licensed Now”, *Canadian Cigar and Tobacco Journal*, September 1918, pp. 49, 51; Ferland, *Debates of the House of Commons*, July 24, 1942, p. 4640; McGill University, Government Documents, *Report of the Minister of Agriculture, 1941–42*, “Tobacco Section”, p. 71.

A second contributing factor to the decline of these brands was the rise of the cigarette in French Canada. As in its advertising of *tabac canadien*, in the interwar years, Imperial Tobacco used nationalist images and themes to target its French-Canadian clientele. In the mid-1920s, the company bought the rights to “Millbank” cigarettes, a British brand, and used popular French-Canadian folk songs to promote its new product. That the British-American multinational was using traditional French-Canadian music to promote a British brand of cigarettes — made with Virginia tobacco — marked an ironic high point in its advertising. The most stunning example from this campaign shows a man, alone with a dog, writing a variation of the French-Canadian folk song, “Un Canadien errant”. While the song has been related to numerous historical events such as the Acadian Deportation (beginning in 1755) and migration of French-Canadian workers to New England to work in textile factories, the original lyrics were penned by Antoine Gérin-Lajoie shortly after the deportation of rebels involved in the 1837–1838 rebellions.⁸⁶ The man in the “Millbank” ad, however, is not lamenting the sorry fate of the French-Canadian nation or pining for his family and friends, as in the original song. Instead, he is longing for the taste of “Millbank” cigarettes (Figure 10)!⁸⁷ In a later campaign, Imperial Tobacco marketed its “Turret” cigarettes by linking the popularity of the French-Canadian folk song “En roulant ma boule” with the supposed popularity of “Turret” cigarettes. What is more, Imperial would send a free record of French-Canadian folk songs to anyone who sent the company his or her name, address, and the necessary postage. Imperial Tobacco thereby positioned itself as patron and promoter of French-Canadian culture, pitching the cigarette as patriotic.⁸⁸

While it is not clear how successful this advertising was in convincing French-Canadian smokers to take up the cigarette, it is clear that following the Second World War the cigarette was gaining new symbolic legitimacy in Quebec, and the nationalist symbolism of *tabac canadien* was fading. This was the third factor in the decline of these brands. As Quebec become increasingly urban, the rural vision of French-Canadian society held by conservative nationalists no longer spoke to francophone realities as it once had. The consequent shifting symbolic function of *tabac canadien* is most striking in the social realist novels of Quebec. In these predominantly urban novels, *tabac canadien* either disappears or is relegated as a pleasure of old men. Only old men chew *tabac canadien* in Roger Lemelin’s Quebec City novel, *Au pied de la pente douce* (1944), and in his *Les Plouffe* (1948) old men smoke pipes while young men smoke cigarettes. In André Langevin’s small-

86 On the song, see Hélène Plouffe, “Un Canadien errant”, *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 155.

87 Millbank advertisement, *Le Soleil*, April 21, 1924, p. 3. For other examples of this Millbank campaign, see *Le Soleil*, March 3, 1924, p. 5 (“Les Montagnards”); March 17, 1924, p. 13 (“Vive la Canadienne”); April 28, 1924, p. 7 (“La Madelon”).

88 Turret cigarette advertisement, *Le Soleil*, April 20, 1932, p. 10.



Figure 10: An ad for “Millbank” cigarettes adapts a French-Canadian folksong to market its product (*Le Soleil*, April 21, 1924, p. 3).

town Quebec *Poussière sur la ville* (1953) and Gabrielle Roy’s *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954), set in Montreal, cigarette smoking is rampant and no one smokes *tabac canadien*. When the enormously popular televised version of *Les Plouffe* (1953) hit the airwaves, Imperial Tobacco was the main sponsor, and Roger Lemelin made sure that the company’s cigarette brands were strategically placed in the show.⁸⁹

The disappearance of *tabac canadien* was part of a broader cultural transformation in Quebec. Francophones were becoming increasingly urban, and

⁸⁹ Roger Lemelin, *Autopsie d’un fumeur* (Montreal: Alain Stanké, 1988).

new modern symbols of identity were coalescing. This identity resonated in the *joual* of Michel Tremblay's *Les belles soeurs*, the music of Beau Domage, and the use of a new name for the people of a would-be country: *les Québécois*.⁹⁰

Conclusion

The invention and decline of industrially produced and packaged brands of *tabac canadien* provide a unique window on the negotiation of the transition to modernity in Quebec. Indeed, manufacturers of French-Canadian tobacco recognized the relationship between smoking and identity in a society transformed by urbanization and industrialization. On one level this meant presenting images of respectability that drew on dominant ideas about gender, class, and race. As elsewhere in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century, smoking had become a ritual only respectably done by men. For the most part, the advertising for these brands pictured male smokers, reifying this prescription. It portrayed a variety of masculine ideals such as the particularly muscular images of B. Houde's "Hercule" or "Voyageur" brands and the class-segmented images and notions of connoisseurship of tobacco in Forest Frères' advertising. In the case of connoisseurship, Forest Frères responded to a belief that the quality of tobacco was significantly based on the "race" of the farmer. This notion had brought about the debasing of *tabac canadien* since French Canadians had been classed with supposedly barbarous groups as not being able to grow good-quality tobacco. Yet, for similar racist logic, most of these advertisements distanced themselves from Native tobaccos. To stress that these tobaccos had been scientifically improved from traditional French-Canadian or Native tobacco created at the same time a challenge to maintain that this tobacco was authentic *tabac canadien*. The further the manufacturer was from the rural traditions of this tobacco, the more it relied upon nationalist folklore to make its claim to authenticity.

While these brands were invented after the Canadian government made their production profitable through tariff protection, they were also part of an effort to transform a pre-industrial cultural tradition into a ritual more structured by capitalist market relations. During this period, tobacco multinationals attempted to do this around the world with varying degrees of success.⁹¹ The case of *tabac canadien* demonstrates both the tenacity of French Canadians not to give up their traditions and the lengths to which businesses were willing to go to attempt to ensure that French Canadians were buying their products. In fact, the tobacco industry was willing to invent new brands that co-opted local tastes. French-Canadian nationalism could be profitable. At

90 See, for example, Michèle Martin, "Modulating Popular Culture: Cultural Critics on Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*", *Labour/ Le Travail* (Fall 2003), pp. 109–135.

91 Cox, *The Global Cigarette*.

the same time as it marketed these brands using national symbols, Imperial was also pressuring the Canadian government to stop this local tradition. In the end, however, government and business activities cannot entirely explain the disappearance of these brands. Their symbolism, after all, had grown out of pre-industrial agricultural life, and an increasingly industrial and urban Quebec had less and less use for the symbolism of *tabac canadien*. Indeed, if culture played a part in the rise of these brands, it also played a part in their demise.