



METROPOLITAN NATURES

Environmental Histories of Montreal

Edited by STÉPHANE CASTONGUAY and MICHÈLE DAGENAIS



One of the oldest metropolitan areas in North America, Montreal has evolved from a remote fur-trading post in New France into an international center for services and technology. A city and an island located at the confluence of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers, it is uniquely situated to serve as an international port while also providing rail access to the Canadian interior. The historic capital of the Province of Canada, and once Canada's foremost metropolis, Montreal has a multifaceted cultural heritage drawn from European and North American influences. Thanks to its rich past, the city offers an ideal setting for the study of an evolving urban environment.

Metropolitan Natures presents original histories of the diverse environments that constitute Montreal and its region. It explores the agricultural and industrial transformation of the metropolitan area, the interaction of city and hinterland, and the interplay of humans and nature. The fourteen chapters cover a wide range of issues, from landscape representations during the colonial era to urban encroachments on the Kahnawake Mohawk reservation on the south shore of the island, from the 1918–1920 Spanish flu epidemic and its ensuing human

(continued on back flap)

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Stéphane Castonguay and **Michèle Dagenais**

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When Bridges Become Barriers Montreal and Kahnawake Mohawk Territory

Daniel Rueck

During the height of the Oka Crisis in 1990, Kahnawake Mohawks demonstrated support for their beleaguered brothers and sisters at Kanesatake by blocking the Honoré Mercier Bridge, one end of which rests on Kahnawake territory.¹ They maintained the blockade of this bridge, the third busiest in the Montreal area, for nearly two months, impeding the crossings of about five million vehicles and putting enormous pressure on federal, provincial, and municipal authorities.² Ninety-two years earlier, another Kahnawake bridge was blocked; in that case it was the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Bridge, which, like the Mercier Bridge, spans the St. Lawrence River from Lachine to Kahnawake, and it was the CPR that was blocking Mohawks from crossing. The *Herald* newspaper reported it this way:

C.P.R. officials have issued strict orders to forbid anyone to cross afoot on their bridge between here and Lachine. Three policemen are detailed to carry out the order. Since the bridge was built about thirteen years ago, Indians crossed every day without any hindrance, and find the closing of the bridge a great hardship. Many are employed in Lachine, and crossed on the bridge to go to their place of work. For the present they use boats, but cannot do so in winter when through the act of the C.P.R. officials they will be compelled to remain in idleness at home. There being no factory here, nor any work for laborers,

except in Lachine, this new order will be cause of severe hardship to a large number of Indian families.³

For Montreal, the 1887 construction of the CPR Bridge represented increased connection to the world, a new conduit for trade and travel, but for the people of Kahnawake (hereafter Kahnawakehrónon) the bridge tended instead to disrupt connections and lives. Living less than ten miles from the core of Montreal, Kahnawakehrónon had always been connected geographically, economically, and politically to the city and to regions beyond, but they never asked for bridges, railroads, or canals to further the connections. These structures were built to serve the vested interests of Montreal and other urban centers, and if Kahnawakehrónon benefited from them it was purely incidental. For railroad builders and policy makers, Kahnawake was merely a place between, a space to be crossed. The CPR Bridge was built for railroads, not for pedestrians. Kahnawake workers were able to make its presence work to their advantage but only until the CPR felt the pedestrian presence interfered with the “real” purpose of the bridge, namely, to carry trains.

The city’s need for transportation infrastructure in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to undermine traditional control and distribution of resources at Kahnawake, and this chapter explores how the community responded to this predicament. Two strands of Kahnawake environmental history are critical to this exploration: incursions of early Montreal transportation infrastructure into Mohawk territory and attempts to introduce a Eurocentric and urban understanding of landownership in Kahnawake. The first involves the arrival of railways and construction of bridges on Mohawk land against Mohawk wishes. The second strand involves how the growth of Montreal caused resource and land pressures, how Kahnawake leaders attempted to adjust to these new conditions, and how the federal government brought on a “tragedy of the commons” by undermining their authority and attempting to impose a gridlike agricultural landscape.

This chapter represents the first effort to integrate Kahnawake into the history of Montreal. Historians of the latter have had little to say about nearby indigenous communities, but neither have historians and anthropologists of Kahnawake paid much attention to the importance of Montreal for the community. More broadly speaking, this chapter is a contribution to the scholarly literature on the relationship between indigenous people and nature, a literature that in North America has tended to focus on the pre-industrial period. It also contributes to the historiography of North American cities by incorporating a long-established indigenous community into the narrative of an industrializing metropolis and by arguing that its ecological uniqueness in the

region has been due to cultural practices such as Mohawk communal resource ownership, Montreal railway building, and Ottawa-imposed land practices.

A Brief History of Kahnawake Livelihoods

The Kahnawake of today is a community of about eight thousand people with a land base of just over twelve thousand acres. Although the entire region from Montreal to Albany is the Mohawks' ancestral homeland, the current Kahnawake land base has its origin (in Canadian legal-political terms) in a 1680 seigneurial grant by Louis XIV of more than forty thousand acres (the seigneurie of Sault St. Louis). Founded as a multiethnic indigenous community in the 1660s, it soon took on a predominantly Mohawk character. Much of the territory was lost over the following centuries through questionable land concessions by Jesuit and government managers and gradual encroachment of neighboring farmers. Culturally distinct, confident in its identity, and never hesitant to assert its independence and difference, Kahnawake was the most populous Native community in Canada by the mid-nineteenth century, with about fifteen hundred people.⁴

The lives of Kahnawakehrónon were intertwined with Montreal in a number of ways. With the small French population along the St. Lawrence River vulnerable to attack by Anglo Americans and their Native allies, pragmatic colonial administrators encouraged Native allies to settle near the largest French towns: Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal. Early historians emphasized Kahnawakehrónon's religious motives in settling there since the early population was ostensibly made up of Christian converts who wanted to live near a Jesuit mission. Recent scholars have placed more emphasis on their political and economic reasons for choosing this place above the Lachine Rapids, which at that time was the limit of inland navigation. Montreal merchants could make big profits selling furs to Anglo American traders in Albany when the St. Lawrence River was frozen (the Hudson River rarely froze), and Albany merchants found ready markets for their manufactured items in Montreal. Kahnawake traders used their legally protected mobility in both jurisdictions, the location of their community, and their knowledge of the land to facilitate this lucrative trade.⁵

Following the regional decline in fur-bearing animals and the defeat of the French in North America, Kahnawake men began to work as hunters, fur traders, and canoe men on the Prairies and farther west, sometimes in the employ of large companies such as the Montreal-based Northwest Company, and sometimes working independently.⁶ The fur trade declined rapidly during the first half of the nineteenth century, and by midcentury many

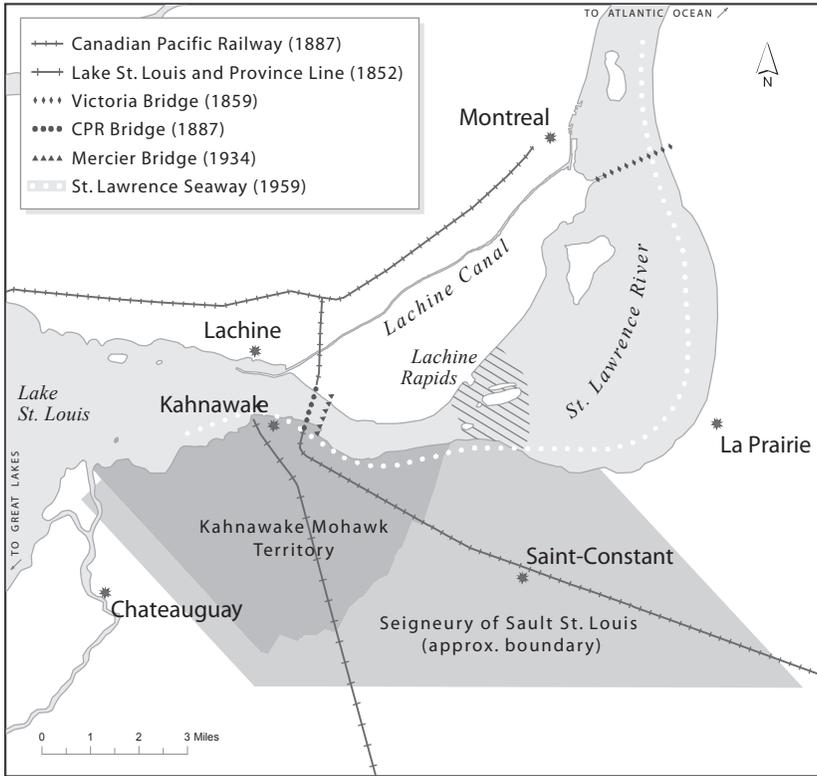


Fig. 13.1. Composite map of the region, including Kahnawake Mohawk territory. Map by Louis-Jean Faucher.

Kahnawakehrónon had made the transition to working in growing sectors of the Montreal economy, especially in lumbering and wood transport. They were heavily involved in provisioning Montreal with firewood and quickly gained a reputation as capable and courageous pilots who could guide ships and log rafts down the dangerous rapids of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers. Building on this reputation, Mohawks distinguished themselves as skilled and fearless ironworkers during the construction of the CPR Bridge in 1887. In the early twentieth century, steelwork became the most common waged occupation for Kahnawake men, so that by 1914 about 90 percent of adult males—651 in total—belonged to the National Structural Steel Workers Union.⁷

The CPR Bridge afforded a pedestrian crossing that, for the first time, allowed Kahnawakehrónon to live at home year round while working in locomotive, glass, and steel mills across the water. In 1898, the CPR counted 1,054 bridge crossings per week, which would translate into eighty-eight people (if the same people were counted twice per day, six days running). At the same



Fig. 13.2. Postcard showing a view of the village of Kahnawake from the church steeple, ca. 1907. Courtesy Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

time, Kahnawake men who worked in Lachine estimated that they collectively brought home more than two thousand dollars in wages every month.⁸ It would have taken these workers about an hour to walk the approximately three miles to work, including twenty minutes to cross the near-mile long bridge.

Although some Mohawk men pursued livelihoods that allowed them to stay close to home, many chose what Mohawk political scientist Gerald Alfred calls “mobile employment,” or seasonal work that required travel far from the village.⁹ Kahnawake men had always traveled long distances in their role as warriors and hunters, and many continued this tradition by enlisting in the British, Canadian, or American military. Their experience as river pilots and canoe men served them well in expeditions and military ventures the world over.¹⁰ Kahnawake performers also began putting on shows of their own design in Europe and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century and then toured with Wild West shows and circuses from the 1890s until World War I.¹¹

Regardless of their other livelihood choices, many Kahnawakehrónon continued to supplement their cash income with hunting, fishing, and gathering. Mohawk women traditionally managed the fields, and it is likely that they were still responsible for many gardens and small farms in late-nineteenth-century Kahnawake. They also produced the majority of bead- and feather-

work, basketry, moccasins, snowshoes, and lacrosse sticks for sale to visitors to Montreal for whom “exotic” Kahnawake had become an obligatory stop.¹² These items were sold by Kahnawake salespeople across the continent as far away as New York, California, and the Yukon.

Transportation Infrastructure

In the hundred years before 1900, Montreal was transformed from a fur trading town of nine thousand on the colonial margin to an economic powerhouse with a population of nearly three hundred thousand. In the 1850s, as the city was becoming the most important transfer point, depot, and manufacturing center in British North America, it experienced spectacular population growth, with rates averaging 5 percent per year. This rapid urban development was made possible by significant increases in public spending on transportation infrastructure such as canals and railroads as well as political and judicial reforms that favored growth.¹³ Economic expansion went hand in hand with geographical expansion as the city spread across the island and nearby towns became suburbs. Land prices rose dramatically throughout the region. Although situated several miles from the city core and separated from it by a large river, Kahnawake experienced significant impacts because of its proximity to Montreal. Like most developments associated with industrial and urban expansion, these were not all negative: there were opportunities for entrepreneurship, new jobs, and easier river crossings for a time. But the breaking of the relative isolation also brought new anxieties, problems, and hazards.

The advent of quarrying represented the first major impact of Montreal development on Kahnawake territory. The Trenton limestone found near the city was not hard enough for cutting large construction stones, whereas the gray, medium- to coarse-grained Chazy limestone found at Kahnawake was ideal for this purpose.¹⁴ As early as 1822, the area behind the village was being quarried for the construction of the Lachine Canal. The work was done by non-Mohawk laborers who were housed in and near the village because of the lack of fast transportation facilities between Montreal and Kahnawake.¹⁵ Kahnawake stone was utilized in many structures used for transportation, including the Cornwall Canal and the piers of the Victoria Bridge.¹⁶ On the latter project, Mohawk boat men were hired to transport stone to the building site.¹⁷ The quarries were in operation until the middle of the twentieth century, and most today are filled with water.

The next major impact of the growth of Montreal on Kahnawake was the construction of the Lake St. Louis and Province Line (LSL&PL) railroad in 1852. Running thirty-five miles from Plattsburgh, New York, to Kahnawake,

it facilitated the portage from Lake Champlain to the St. Lawrence River. At the Kahnawake terminus, the aptly named ferry, *Iroquois*, carried railway cars to Lachine; from there they were pulled to Montreal along an eight-mile rail line running a route parallel to the Lachine Canal. The LSL&PL was financed by Montreal businessmen who believed their trade was threatened by recently completed lines in New York State, such as the Northern Railroad, which ran from Ogdensburg to Rouses Point (connecting the Upper St. Lawrence to Lake Champlain) and cut Montreal out of the trade between New England and the Great Lakes.¹⁸ By the time the first train ran from Montreal to Plattsburgh, however, there were already several companies competing for essentially the same route, each hoping to capture the traffic between Montreal and the eastern seaboard. The advantage of the LSL&PL over its downstream (and down-rapids) competitors was that goods arriving at Lachine could be shipped south without paying Lachine Canal tolls, but its competitive disadvantage was that Plattsburgh did not yet have rail connections to the south.¹⁹ This meant that rail cars had to be transported by steamer across Lake Champlain to the nearest railway terminus. After several unprofitable years, a merger, and a bankruptcy, the LSL&PL was swallowed by the Grand Trunk Railway, which thus gained control of the line serving Kahnawake in 1863.²⁰ With the completion of the Victoria Bridge in 1859, bridgeless lines like the one ending in Kahnawake became much less valuable. It was used less and less frequently until it was abandoned in the early 1880s and turned into a public road.²¹ The wharf associated with the railway continued to be used as a ferry terminus and for loading quarried stone onto barges, and the abandoned Grand Trunk warehouses and workshops were taken over and used by Kahnawake for a variety of purposes, including residences.²²

Alfred calls the arrival of the LSL&PL in 1852 the time when “Kahnawake’s modern era began in earnest.”²³ This could be said of the arrival of a railroad in any nineteenth-century town, but Kahnawake was the end of the line, so the impact was much greater. Piers, docks, and other structures were built to accommodate freight and passengers, and the village became a “bustling railway terminus.”²⁴ Aside from changing the character of the village, the railroad also caused damage to land and landowners all along its path. Kahnawake farmers were so infuriated by the way the company had treated them that they refused to have any more dealings with it after construction was completed. The last straw was when the company demanded thirteen acres for a terminal at the village waterfront, which some interpreted as a plot to gain possession of the village. Tension and threats of violence ensued.²⁵ With the gradual abandonment of the line, however, the village must have returned to a less frantic state

until this renewed sense of quiet was interrupted by another railway in the mid-1880s.

The “Last Spike,” the driving of the final spike into the CPR track linking British Columbia with eastern Canada, is one of the most celebrated moments in Canadian history. The November 7, 1885, event marked the completion of the first Canadian transcontinental railway, which was both a symbolic and practical precondition for nationhood. What textbooks have generally failed to mention, however, is that while the CPR had “bridged” the Rocky Mountains, it had not bridged the St. Lawrence. The only existing span, the Victoria Bridge, was controlled by the Grand Trunk Railway, which had no intention of allowing its competitor to use the bridge. Having foreseen such an eventuality, the CPR commissioned a survey in 1881 to find a relatively shallow and narrow part of the river. The site selected was on the narrows between Lachine and Kahnawake, and the distance to be spanned was about 3,500 feet (about 0.7 mile). The span, completed in August 1887, consisted of ten steel bridges resting on masonry piers plus two longer cantilever spans with a 60-foot clearance for boats and rafts below.²⁶ Three years later, CPR trains passing through Kahnawake could reach the port of Saint John, New Brunswick, by way of northern Maine.

The construction of the bridge and rail line provided employment for some Kahnawakehrónon but was the cause of much trouble for others. For example, during construction, the owner of a riverfront lot complained that the CPR had placed large quantities of wood on his shoreline property without his permission. Another landowner complained that the railroad had constructed a water pipe and windmill on his property without his permission. Two years after construction was completed, several farmers found their fields flooded due to poorly maintained railroad ditches.²⁷ Three years after construction, the railway began to fill in the trestles of the part of the bridge that rested on Kahnawake territory, blocking one of the main roads into the village.²⁸ Kahnawakehrónon also made claims for damage to crops and fences from fires started by train engine sparks and for valuable animals killed by trains when the railway did not maintain its fences.²⁹ Mohawks who worked as wage laborers across the river did not have the money to ride the train every day, and even when they did take the train, the schedule was not reliable enough to get them to work on time.³⁰ Their only long-term benefit was the possibility of walking across the bridge, until that right was revoked. At that point, they had to choose between giving up their jobs and finding a place to rent on the other side of the river, neither one of which was an attractive prospect.³¹

A development that could have severely disrupted the lives of Kahna-

wakehrónon in the mid-nineteenth century was the construction of a canal to connect the St. Lawrence with the Richelieu River. This idea was seriously discussed from the 1840s until the 1870s, the most ardent proponent being John Young, a steamship entrepreneur, longtime president of the Montreal Harbour Commission, and lifelong proponent of harbor and waterway modernization. Several studies were commissioned midcentury, most recommending that the canal be constructed from Kahnawake to the already extant Chambly Canal, which led to Lake Champlain. Because Kahnawake is located above the Lachine Rapids, it is only 29 feet below Lake Champlain compared to Montreal, which is 73.5 feet below. Locating the terminus at Kahnawake would mean fewer locks, and thus lower construction and operational costs. The canal was to have been about 32.5 miles long, and the cost of construction was estimated at \$1,814,408 in 1848 and \$4,267,890 in 1855.³² Although engineers declared the plan perfectly feasible and although Young kept bringing it to the attention of the prime minister as late as 1871, it was never carried out.³³

Landownership, Land Use, and Authority

In aerial and satellite photographs today, Kahnawake appears as a biogeographical island. It is a dark-green splotch of forest, scrub, and wetland surrounded by the gray of concrete and the light green of fields and lawns. In fact, it was wild enough in 2008 for sightings of bears to be taken seriously.³⁴ In the nineteenth century, more of the land was cleared than today, but even then it was more wooded than surrounding areas, and contemporary observers often remarked on the contrast. One of the first to do so was the surveyor and cartographer Joseph Bouchette, who in 1815 described the nearby areas occupied by French Canadians as cleared and cultivated whereas most of the rest was covered with trees.³⁵ His 1815 and 1831 maps of Quebec also show the territory occupied by Mohawks as wooded whereas the surrounding lands are farmed. Though Bouchette did not speculate as to why this was so, several contemporary observers commented on their lack of enthusiasm for agriculture. These observers were correct in identifying a cultural reason for the ecological difference but incorrect in saying Mohawks did not farm. When the priest Joseph Marcoux, who lived and worked in Kahnawake from the 1820s to the 1850s, was asked to describe the day of a typical Kahnawakehrónon, he described the day of a farmer. The average family at that time cultivated approximately ten acres, and a few cultivated more than thirty acres.³⁶ As a point of comparison, the average midcentury Quebec farmer cultivated between thirty and forty-five acres.³⁷ Kahnawake averages were decidedly smaller, but nearly every family cultivated plots of land, many of which were larger than

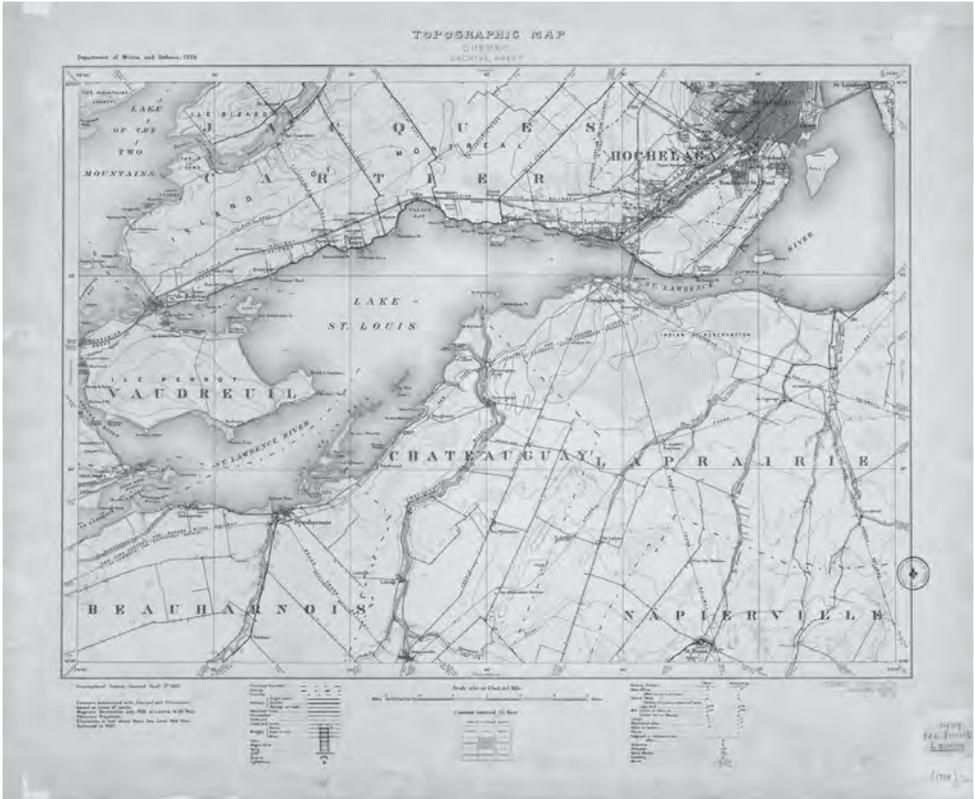


Fig. 13.3. Topographical map of the region, 1909. Kahnawake territory is in the center-right and mostly shaded green in the original to signify forested land. Courtesy Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

ten acres and some of which matched the Quebec average. Thus, apart from the difference of scale, the issue was not that Mohawks did not farm. Rather, they had different relationships with the land than did their neighbors, and this difference led to the creation of different ecological communities. One important cultural difference was the regulation of landownership.

Until late in the nineteenth century, landownership at Kahnawake was regulated by customary law. A plot of wooded land could belong to anyone who cleared it for the purpose of cultivation, but if the land was abandoned for three years, it reverted to communal ownership.³⁸ This practice was succinctly described by Father Marcoux: “The standing forest belongs to no one; they can clear land wherever they want and sell the improvements they have made but not the surrounding land.”³⁹ Recent interviews with Mohawk elders confirm that ownership was indeed tied to use. In 2003, Ernie Kaientaron:kwen Bene-

dict of Akwesasne recounted that in the days before European interference, “when a man wished to build a home and take some land for his family, he simply went to the desired location and indicated that this was to be his property.”⁴⁰ Tom Shakokwanion:kwas Porter of Kahnatsohare:ke explained in 2002 that, according to traditional principles, a person who owns a certain number of horses has a right to use an area of land appropriate for that number of horses, but no more.⁴¹ Audrey Shenandoah, an elder at Onondaga, reported in 2004 that landownership in her community was still much the same as it has always been: there were no professional land surveys, certificates of possession, or other such “White complications,” and land disputes were resolved by clan mothers.⁴² Landownership at Kahnawake was organized along similar lines.

Casual nineteenth-century observers assumed either that Mohawk land was held in common or that land was individually owned, when in fact both of these observations were true. Evidence for individual ownership lies in petitions, letters, and depositions by Kahnawakehró:nnon who made reference to lots they owned. By 1839, so much land had already been taken up by individuals that it would have been impossible to lay out a new hundred-acre farm without infringing on several already existing possessions.⁴³ In the 1880s, the Walbank survey classified 95 percent of reserve land as privately owned.⁴⁴ On the other hand, one must consider that private landownership at Kahnawake did not hold the same meaning as it did elsewhere.

First, the system was invisible or obscure to outsiders and thus regarded as “irregular.” In some cases, sales were transacted without a paper record; in others, deeds of sale were drawn up by participants without the help of a notary. The following is an example of the latter: an 1894 Mohawk-language deed stating, “The land is now yours, maybe an acre and maybe more, for \$200 that was paid to Warisose, and the property went from the Railroad Street to the creek and then east to the road.”⁴⁵ Such an agreement assumed a great deal of local knowledge and was adequate for the Kahnawakehró:nnon who possessed such knowledge, but it poorly served a surveyor who did not know the land or the people.

Another distinguishing feature was the lack of professionally surveyed property boundaries and fences. Such was the case in 1882, when surveyor William McLea Walbank informed the Department of Indian Affairs that “the locations of the Reserve today are unfenced, ill defined and of very irregular shape.”⁴⁶ This lack of visible boundaries likely had its origins in early Iroquoian land-holding and land-use traditions. Joseph François Lafitau, a Jesuit priest who lived at Kahnawake in the early eighteenth century, remarked that Mohawk farmers could efficiently move from field to field because the fields were



Fig. 13.4. Postcard showing a Kahnawake man walking along a split-rail fence and stone wall toward a rural dwelling, ca. 1910. Courtesy Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

not separated by hedges and ditches. He went on to say that “all together these [fields] give the appearance of only a single farm where there are no disputes over boundaries because every one knows how to recognize them clearly.”⁴⁷ By the late nineteenth century the properties that were fenced or walled tended to be small garden plots near homes (fig. 13.4) while most of the land on the territory remained unfenced.

Lafitau observed also that it was the women who were farmers and “owners” of plots of land. “All the women of the village,” he wrote, “join together for the heavy work. They make numerous different bands according to the different quarters where they have their fields and pass from one field to the other helping each other.”⁴⁸ According to Lafitau, men played no part except in land clearing. By the nineteenth century, observers described young men plowing the fields and women and old men tending the crops.⁴⁹ It is not clear, however, whether men or women owned the land at the moment when Ottawa stepped in to survey the land. Walbank acknowledged women as owners only if they were widows, a practice that was in line with land tenure law in Quebec, and Mohawk petitioners during this period also generally referred to men as land-owners. We do not know, however, if men were commonly acknowledged by the community as owners or if this was merely the way it was represented to Ottawa.

An important aspect of landowning at Kahnawake was an owner's lack of jurisdiction over the trees on his or her property. According to custom, any Kahnawake Mohawk had the right to cut and remove timber without the consent of the owner of the property as long as it was not taken off the territory to be sold. Only sugar maples were exempt from this rule. "As in our general rule," wrote four chiefs in 1875, "a man has sugar-bush as long as he kept the maple for making a sugar [*sic*]," but if he stopped collecting sugar or started cutting the maples himself, everyone would have "rights to chop or cut down the maples of our own use [*sic*]."⁵⁰ The custom favored those who owned little or no land (which was the majority of the population) because it gave them access to free wood. The largest landowners were, not surprisingly, opposed to it, but the Indian agent was certain that, were the issue put to a referendum, the custom would be upheld by the vast majority. Kahnawake chiefs tended to stand with the majority on this matter, repeatedly refusing measures that would undermine the custom. In 1875, they represented to Ottawa that it was their role to uphold the customs and to protect the least powerful members of the community—those who did not possess a farm or sugar bush.⁵¹

The question of wood was brought to the fore because its value rose steeply throughout the nineteenth century as Montreal and surrounding towns grew and free local wood became scarce. Wood-fuel production per capita in the entire Montreal region decreased significantly between 1871 and 1891 (presumably due to lack of mature trees), which meant that people were increasingly forced to buy wood that came from forests upriver.⁵² Simultaneously, Kahnawakehrónon complained more and more frequently about trees being cut for sale in nearby communities (in a rare concurrence between federal law and Kahnawake custom, both prohibited the sale of locally cut wood off reserve), and the chiefs had to hire young men to keep guard over trees during the winter months.⁵³ When the chiefs identified several Mohawks as having illegally sold Kahnawake wood off reserve, they asked Indian Affairs to have them expelled, but nothing of the sort was ever done. By this point the chiefs no longer had the authority to put a stop to it, and the mostly absent Indian agent was not willing to exercise his authority.⁵⁴

This wood crisis will no doubt remind some readers of Garrett Hardin's well-known 1968 article "The Tragedy of the Commons," in which he used the example of a pasture "open to all." In Hardin's scenario, each herdsman is out to maximize his own profits and therefore puts as many cattle as possible on the pasture to graze. Since everyone using the pasture is similarly motivated, he argued, the pasture will soon be overgrazed and everyone will suffer as a result.⁵⁵ J. V. de Boucherville, an Indian Affairs official who visited Kahnawake in 1872, had a similar interpretation of the wood crisis, reporting that "the

Indians themselves are a great deal to blame for they themselves sell wood to White people.”⁵⁶ He felt that if nothing were done to protect the wood it would all soon be gone. His report made it clear that the fault lay with the Kahnawakehró:non and their system of common resource ownership, which was not, according to him, able to conserve the trees for future generations. His understanding of the problem was soon standard in the Department of Indian Affairs.

Kahnawake chiefs saw the problem quite differently. For them, the problem lay not in the customary laws but in lack of enforcement. The government had not shown itself willing to take the necessary action to preserve the wood nor would it stand behind the chiefs as they tried to expel the worst offenders. In 1874, the chiefs again petitioned Indian Affairs, this time asking for the right to seize illegally cut wood and punish the perpetrators. The request was refused, and the unsustainable logging continued.⁵⁷ These governmental actions and inactions had long-term consequences for Kahnawake that were not only ecological but also political, in that they encouraged the kind of factionalism that continues to this day.⁵⁸ It is likely that the wood crisis could have been alleviated had Ottawa backed up the chiefs. In refusing to do so, Ottawa became party to the “tragedy of the commons” that played itself out on the doorstep of Montreal.⁵⁹

From the perspective of Indian Affairs officials, the problem was not only the set of retrogressive customs but also the lack of professionally surveyed boundaries. Lacking the local knowledge of Kahnawake leaders, and with no idea of existing property lines, the government was essentially blind in its efforts to adjudicate land disputes. The idea of defining boundaries was supported by at least a part of the population, but it soon became clear that Indian Affairs wanted to go even further. Starting in the 1870s, the department began to push the chiefs to agree to a subdivision survey, one that would eliminate existing boundary lines and redistribute the land among all band members. The chiefs consistently rejected this idea, not only because such a survey would be expensive (the community would bear the costs) but also because the redistribution was bound to be unjust. They pointed out that due to the small size of the reserve and the varying quality of available land, some people were bound to be allotted poor land and would be forced to leave in order to survive.⁶⁰

Most Kahnawakehró:non were utterly opposed to the subdivision survey because, according to the Indian agent, “that majority is composed of Indians who have no wood, and who consequently cannot be in favor of that distribution as they would thus be obliged to buy firewood.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, Indian Affairs decided to go ahead with it, claiming to be acting in the best interests

of Kahnawake. The ultimate goal, it can now be argued, was the elimination of the reserve and the community through the “regularizing” of both landownership and the status of Mohawks themselves (since it would result in the first official band membership list). Walbank was hired to conduct the survey in the spring of 1882, and, by 1885, he had produced a map detailing existing lots, improvements, land use, and the projected subdivision lots. He organized a tribunal to determine which Kahnawakehrónon would be eligible for one of the projected thirty-acre lots, but soon thereafter, the band’s funds ran out, and when the department was forced to spend money from its own budget, it lost enthusiasm for the project. Thus, the redistribution plan was halted by unforeseen costs, which were due in large part to the active and passive opposition from many Kahnawakehrónon. The Walbank survey became the legal reference point for real estate transactions in the twentieth century, but its unfinished nature meant that many lots were more ambiguously owned than ever. In 1982, 57.3 percent of private lands were held under conditions of poorly defined title or disputed ownership.⁶² Since no one was authorized to use these lands, forests sprang up on them, intensifying the islandlike nature of the territory. Another legacy of the survey was an enduring antipathy toward land surveyors, such that the authors of a report on a 1969 federal land survey were explicitly relieved that the invention of photogrammetry (use of aerial photographs for surveying) had minimized contact between surveyors and hostile Kahnawake landowners.⁶³

Government and railway officials hoped that the survey would “regularize” landholding in time to facilitate the process of expropriation for the CPR Bridge and line. When the company graded the bridge access in the fall of 1886 (without authorization from Kahnawake leaders or Indian Affairs until after the fact, as was the practice), it paid farmers compensation for damaged crops immediately, but the more complicated matter of determining compensation for expropriated land and improvements was left to Indian Affairs after the fact. It hired James Dawes of Lachine to act as arbitrator in this matter, as it had often done in the previous decade in conflicts over wood. Dawes, an active booster of Lachine industrial development with interests in banking, insurance, and hotels, was also vice president of the Dominion Bridge Company, the company constructing the bridge in question.⁶⁴ His overt interest in the matter made him an astonishingly poor choice as arbitrator, but Indian Affairs correspondence makes no mention of such a conflict of interest. Dawes was told that this job would require “special care” because of the incomplete survey and the fact that the rail line “cuts the new lots in a very awkward manner.”⁶⁵ This suggests that railroad engineers were not included in the decision-making process for the subdivision survey, which in turn suggests a poorly

planned survey operation. Dawes was told to guide himself by the old division lines, because the redistribution had not yet taken place (and never would). When Dawes asked how he was to give the land a standard value, seeing as it was not of even quality, he was informed that the differences in land quality would not matter because individual Mohawk “locatees” did not own the land itself and would be compensated only for improvements, not for the land. According to federal law, ultimate title to all Indian reserve land rests with the Canadian government, and thus compensation to individuals for such was apparently out of the question. Money for expropriated land was paid into the band’s account, which had recently been drained to pay for the survey.⁶⁶

Many communities fought tooth and nail for a railway to pass through, but the Kahnawake response to the arrival of the LSL&PL was decidedly the opposite. When Lord Elgin stepped in to resolve the situation, he informed the Kahnawake community that nothing could stand in the way of progress. The LSL&PL had acted with “fairness and liberality,” and opponents’ views were narrow and prejudiced, he explained. Once Kahnawakehrónon realized that governments would not consider their interests over the interests of the Montreal business elite, they took serious steps toward abandoning the territory. Some immediately began negotiating with the Saugeen Ojibway and Indian Affairs to move five hundred miles west, to Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron. About twenty families settled there, but most returned to Kahnawake before 1858.⁶⁷ In the years that followed, the community attempted to exchange its territory for one more distant from the intrusions of Montreal. Between 1860 and 1875, Kahnawakehrónon made four documented efforts to sell the entire reserve. The last was a petition from four chiefs representing at least eight hundred people, well over half of the population, asking the government to buy their reserve for twenty-five dollars per acre.⁶⁸ The chiefs noted they had made arrangements “to be settled of Indian Territory or Charekee [*sic*] Nation” and were ready to commence preparations as soon as the sale of the reserve was approved.⁶⁹ When the government did not respond to their requests, however, Kahnawakehrónon recommitted themselves to their existing territory.⁷⁰

Bridges are not always what they seem. For Kahnawake, bridges, rails, and canals proved to be more profound barriers to communication than the rivers, portages, and rapids they were built to overcome. Over the course of the twentieth century, Kahnawake continued to experience incursions into its already greatly reduced territory, most of them related to the transportation demands of Montreal and North America. The Mercier Bridge was constructed parallel to the CPR Bridge in 1934 for use by motor vehicles, and highways were built through Kahnawake to give suburban commuters bridge access. The

most traumatic event in the history of the community, and the ultimate territorial incursion, was the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s. Although the community vigorously resisted its construction in a number of ways, they found little sympathy in the courts, in public opinion, or in international forums. The 300-foot wide canal cut through the village, eliminating direct access to the river, degrading valuable land, and reducing the territory by a further 1,300 acres.⁷¹ Furthermore, the new canal required the rebuilding of the existing bridges so that oceangoing ships could pass on their way to and from the Great Lakes. As a consequence, the village lost additional land and now sits virtually underneath the hulking 110-foot high Mercier Bridge with its multiple access ramps. The accumulation of these incursions and disruptions destroyed Kahnawakehró:non trust in outside governments, and the memory of these offenses fuels a determination to recover what was lost. The blockade of the Mercier Bridge in 1990 only gave Montrealers a taste of the kind of interruption Kahnawake Mohawks have been living with for 150 years.

See Lovell's *Montreal Directory, For 1899–1900* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1899), 82; Club d'Équitation et de Chasse à Courre de Québec, *Constitution et Règlements* (n.p., 1905).

Chapter 13. When Bridges Become Barriers

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1. The Oka Crisis was an extended armed confrontation with the Quebec provincial police and Canadian army over the planned construction of a golf course on Mohawk land. For more, see Geoffrey York, *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* (Toronto: Little, Brown, 1991).

2. *Annual Report of the Federal Bridge Corporation Limited, 2006–2007*, http://www.federalbridge.ca/Portals/0/annual_reports/fbcl_report_2006-07_eng.pdf (accessed July 22, 2009).

3. "A Large Number Take [in] the Annual Pilgrimage to Oka—A New Hardship," *Montreal Herald*, August 24, 1898.

4. R. T. Pennefather, Fromme Talfourd, and Tho. Worthington, "Report of the Special Commissioners . . . to Investigate Indian Affairs in Canada," *Appendix to 16th Vol. of Journals of Legislative Assembly*, Province of Canada, 1st Session of Parliament, February 25–August 16, 1858.

5. Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713–60," *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 18, no. 1 (1939): 61–76.

6. For more on Mohawk involvement in the western fur trade, see Trudy Nicks, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade in Western Canada," in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 85–101; and Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 161.

7. Most were irregularly employed. Bruce Katzer, "The Caughnawaga Mohawks: The Other Side of Ironwork," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15, no. 4 (1988): 39–55. To this day, steelwork is a common career choice for Kahnawake men. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, at least fifty of some two hundred Mohawk steelworkers who had been working on various New York construction sites took part in the recovery effort. David Johnston, "Seeing the Unthinkable: Mohawk Ironworkers Who Helped the World Trade Center Return for a Grim Task," *Montreal Gazette*, September 15, 2001, A3.

8. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds (hereafter RG10), vol. 2951, file 201, 404, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

9. Gerald Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

10. For more on Mohawk involvement in international expeditions, see Jack A. Frisch, "The Iroquois Indians and the 1855 Franklin Search Expedition of the Arctic," *Indian Historian* 8, no. 1 (1975): 27–30; and Carl Benn, *Mohawks on the Nile: Natives among the Canadian Voyagers in Egypt, 1884–1885* (Toronto: National Heritage Books, 2009).

11. David Blanchard, "Entertainment, Dance, and Northern Mohawk Showmanship," *American Indian Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1983): 2–26.

12. For impressions of visitors, see Erminnie Smith, "Life among the Mohawks of the Catholic Missions of Quebec Province," *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science* 32 (1883), 398; and George Augustin Sala, *Under the Sun: Essays Mainly Written in Hot Countries* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1886), chap. 17.

13. Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montreal: Art global/Libre Expression, 1994), 58, 78-79, 92.
14. Thomas Henry Clark, *Rapport géologique: région de Montréal/Geological Report: Montreal Area* (Quebec City: Ministère des richesses naturelles, Direction générale des mines, Service de l'exploration géologique, 1972), 54, 60, 63.
15. Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Construction of the First Lachine Canal, 1815-1826" (MA thesis, McGill University, 1960), 104.
16. Department of Justice fonds RG13-A-2, file 1890-149, LAC.
17. Jim Rasenberger, *High Steel: The Daring Men Who Built the World's Greatest Skyline* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 136.
18. G. R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways*, vol. 1, *Sixty Years of Trial and Error (1836-1896)* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1960), 30, 38.
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21. RG10, vol. 7749, file 27005-1, LAC.
22. RG10, vol. 7661, file 22005-1, LAC.
23. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors*, 52.
24. E. J. Devine, *Historic Caughnawaga* (Montreal: Messenger Press, 1922), 390.
25. *Ibid.*, 392.
26. Gerald Tulchinsky, "Across the Rivers with Steel: The First Decade of Dominion Bridge: 1882-1892," unpublished manuscript, 1976, Dominion Bridge (MG28 III 100), vol. 21, file 6, pp. 50-52, LAC.
27. RG10, vol. 7661, file 22005, LAC.
28. RG10, vol. 2532, file 110,237, LAC.
29. RG10, vol. 7661, file 22005, LAC.
30. Petitioners from Laprairie to Mayor and Counsellor of Caughnawaga, July 20, 1917, RG10, file 373/31-2-3-14, LAC.
31. RG10, vol. 7558, file 2005-2, LAC.
32. Canada, "Survey of a Projected Canal between the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain," in "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Works," *Sessional Papers*, June 30, 1867, vol. 5:1867-68, 68-69.
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54. Caughnawaga Chiefs to Howe, [1872], RG10, vol. 1880, file 1081, LAC.

55. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243–48.

56. J. V. de Boucherville to Howe, February 9, 1873, RG10, vol. 1880, file 1081, LAC.

57. Caughnawaga Chiefs to Laird, March 11, 1874, RG10, vol. 1924, file 3055, LAC.

58. Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*.

59. Historical studies have shown that common access resources have rarely been a free-for-all and that users are not simply a collection of individuals. Commons are used by people who are connected to each other in a variety of ways, capable of communicating with each other, and able to adjust to new conditions. At Kahnawake, the users of the common were unable to adjust to the new conditions due to interference by Ottawa. For more, see Carl Folke and Fikret Berkes, "Mechanisms to Link Property Rights to Ecological Systems," in *Property Rights and the Environment: Social and Ecological Issues*, ed. Susan Hanna and Mohan Munasinghe (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1995), 121–37.

60. Pinsonneault to Laird, January 9, 1875; Chiefs to Merideth, May 14, 1875, RG10, vol. 1917, file 2764, LAC.

61. Pinsonneault to Laird (trans. from French by government translator), May 17, 1875, RG10, vol. 1917, file 2764, LAC.

62. "This Is Indian Land: An Exhibit on the State of Kahnawake Lands," report, Socio-Economic Development Program of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, 1982, 20.

63. Gérard Raymond and Pierre Aubé, "La photogrammétrie au service de l'arpentage légal dans la réserve indienne de Caughnawaga, P. Québec," *Canadian Surveyor* 23, no. 4 (1969): 351.

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65. Vankoughnet to Dawes, February 18, 1887, RG10, vol. 7661, file 22005, LAC.

66. RG10, vol. 7661, file 22005, LAC.

67. Devine, *Historic Caughnawaga*, 392–93.

68. Caughnawaga Chiefs to Superintendent General, June 17, 1875, RG10, vol. 1963, file 5029, LAC.

69. Chiefs to Merideth, May 14, 1875, RG10, vol. 1917, file 2764, LAC.
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Chapter 14. The Destruction of the Rural Hinterland

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3. Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study* (Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1984), 84–89, 174–75.
4. Marcel Trudel, “Le régime seigneurial,” in *Initiation à la Nouvelle-France* (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 183–96.
5. Copy of a resolution from the municipality of Village Saint-Joseph de Soulanges attached to letter from R. A. C. Henry to G. H. Montgomery, K. C. Brown, Montgomery & McMichael, November 7, 1935, Papers of Beauharnois Light, Heat, and Power (hereafter F2), series 2155-4, Hydro-Québec Archives, Montreal (hereafter HQA); *Le Progrès de Valleyfield*, March 21, 1929, April 25, 1929, and November 7, 1929.
6. Filon et al., *Histoire du Haut-Saint-Laurent*, 92–93; Raoul Blanchard, *Louest du Canada français: Montréal et sa région* (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1953), 92.
7. Filon et al., *Histoire du Haut-Saint-Laurent*, 92, 107, 209.
8. *Ibid.*, 113–14, 218–19.
9. Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montreal: Art global/Libre Expression, 1994), 100.
10. See the map titled “Électrification de la région montréalaise vers 1920,” in Jean-François Larose, *L’électrification de la région montréalaise: synthèse historique* (Montreal: privately published by Hydro-Québec, Vice-présidence Environnement – service d’exploitation, région Maisonnette – service appareillage, 1991).
11. M. V. Sauer, “St. Lawrence River Control and Remedial Dams: Soulanges Section,” *Engineering Journal*, December 1943, 667.
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13. Clarence Hogue, André Bolduc, and Daniel Larouche, *Québec, un siècle d’électricité* (Montreal: Libre Expression, 1979).
14. Memoirs presented to the 1934 Commission de l’électricité de la province de Québec (better known as the Commission Lapointe).
15. Hogue et al., *Québec, un siècle d’électricité*, 99–100, 102.
16. Bernard L. Vigod, *Quebec before Duplessis: The Political Career of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau* (Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1986), 129.
17. *Le Progrès de Valleyfield*, March 1, 1928.
18. The full diversion of the St. Lawrence was the dominating characteristic of the project as early as May 1927. See Frederick B. Brown, “Report on Proposed Hydro-Electric Power