

THE MILLS OF THE DESCHAMBAULT/GRONDINES REGION

Quebec has had different types of mills. Water, wind, flour and saw mills. Several ancestral mills date back to the 18th century and are protected. Their vocation has evolved a lot over time. Some have become museums, interpretation centres, residences and even business offices.

THE MILL OF GRONDINES

In 1686, in New France, the Conseil Souverain imposed the construction of the flour mill, called the banal mill where all “censitaires” (residents of the Seigneurie) were obliged to grind their grain. They had to pay a grinding fee, the banality fee.

The mill of Grondines was built in 1674 by the miller Pierre Mercereau. This mill would be the oldest windmill in Quebec.

It has the shape of a cylindrical tower of 3 floors located flat at the edge of the river. It also served as a lighthouse for navigation.

It was classified as a cultural property in 1984. I encourage you to go and see this mill that will transport you to another time.

THE MILL OF LA CHEVROTIÈRE

The mill of La Chevrotière was built in 1802 and an outbuilding dating from 1766 is part of it. This magnificent water mill is classified as a historical

monument. It currently houses a permanent exhibition on traditional trades, craftsmen of wood, iron, stone. It tells the story of the know-how of the St. Lawrence pilots. The name of the first owner was Joseph Chavigny de la Chevrotière.

THE MILLS OF ST-CASIMIR

I have a special connection with the now defunct mills that were in St-Casimir on the point of land that separates the Black River and the Ste-Anne River. My third great-grandfather Wilbrod Demers, who was a lumber merchant in St-Pierre-les-Becquets, had taken out a 12-year lease in 1854 with Peter Burnett, the Seigneur of the Grondines. The contract was signed at the notary Dury.

The contract states that Wilbrod Demers was to make functional a "sawmill with all the movements that depend on it as well as the roadway that is built to retain water, and a bridge that is over the said mill."

On the west side of the Black River at the bottom of the roadway, "a flour mill of stone of good masonry with a good attic of good wood, which mill will be built of the same size and proportion as the flour mill of Sainte-Anne-de-la Pérade." The text specifies that "as soon as it is done and in progress to grind to the satisfaction of the lessor, the lessee Wilbrod Demers will have full and complete enjoyment of all profits and revenues for his own property until the expiry of this lease. The circular saw he installed belongs to him. The lessee undertakes to pay 200 pounds a year, in August." "He will be allowed to take

a quantity of 12-foot-10-inch and white pine and spruce logs." These "boom" logs were transported to Quebec City via the Black and Sainte-Anne rivers.

Sadly, Wilbrod died in 1864 two years before the end of his lease, but his mission was accomplished. The research I have done says that Wilbrod did a lot of business with important merchants in Quebec He had offered his house in St-Pierre-les Becquets as collateral on the lease of Grondines.

His son Philippe Wilbrod, who could have taken over, died the following year in 1865 at the age of 26. His widow, Mary-Jane Marchildon was left alone with three young children. The house in St-Pierre-Les-Bequets was sold at auction at the doors of the church and, for the good of her children, she asked for a waiver of the estate.

The sawmills and flour mills no longer exist but a period photo kept images of them. The mills were then rented by Pierre Hubert Grandbois according to a lease signed at the notary Louis Guillet on October 6, 1866. It is specified in the text that "everything is currently in the possession of the representatives of the late Wilbrod Demers".

The mill was situated on the land around the point called The Boat, where a statue of the virgin is installed. This story has now reached us thanks to notarial deeds.