



ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES ON THE SITE OF THE AUGUSTINIAN SISTERS' FIRST MONASTERY-HOSPITAL

300 year-old cisterns and water supply system

Quebec, August 22, 2014 – Today, *la Fiducie du patrimoine culturel des Augustines* will be revealing the preliminary findings from archaeological digs that took place over the last several months on the historic site of the *Hôtel-Dieu de Québec* monastery, the first hospital on the continent north of Mexico. Since 2013, the oldest buildings on the site have been undergoing major restoration and renovation work, an important step in bringing *Le Monastère des Augustines* to life. The foundations of the oldest wings date back to 1695. These buildings, known as the *l'aile du Jardin* and *l'aile du Noviciat* (the garden and noviciate wings), needed excavation work that was carried out under archaeological supervision.

One of the archaeological findings was uncovered during excavation of the basement where *l'aile du Jardin* and *l'aile du Noviciat* intersect: a construction with four stone walls approximately 16 metres square and 2 metres high. The Augustinian Sisters' archives make no mention of anything being erected in that location, and it was only through careful observation that the structure revealed its secrets.

“The stone masonry walls were deformed, curving outwards, a sign that they had withstood enormous pressure from the inside”, explained Nathalie Gaudreau, an archaeologist with *Artefactuel, coop de travail* and supervisor of work on the site. “Furthermore, the mortar joints were all covered with very compact clay, both on the inside and on the outside, clearly the result of wanting to seal the entire structure. Our review of available documentation and field analysis led us to the conclusion that the construction once served as a cistern for storing water”, Gaudreau explained.

These vestiges of the past witness to the organizational skill and ingenuity of the Augustinian Sisters, particularly with respect to water supply and conservation. For these hospital sisters – who founded 12 of the province's hospitals – water was an indispensable resource and essential to their mission of caring for the sick. The dig in the basement of the *Hôtel-Dieu de Québec* monastery also revealed a stonework pipeline system that predates the foundations (1695) and that once supplied the monastery-hospital with water.

The archaeological excavations also uncovered two additional cisterns. One dates back to the early years of the Augustinian Sisters' presence on the site (prior to 1695). The other was integrated into the monastery's former kitchens during construction work to expand the *aile du Noviciat* (between 1739 and 1742). Finally,

the excavation of the latrines uncovered a significant number of artefacts, including bullets, rifle decorations and military buttons dating back to the occupation of the building by British soldiers (between 1759 and 1784).

The discoveries made to date help us to better understand the fabric of life in the first monastery-hospital founded by the Augustinian Sisters in North America, from the early years to the present day. At the same time, the vestiges of the past illustrate the value of buried heritage as material that is unique and that allows us to better understand the history of Quebec and of Canada. The artefacts that have been found will be analysed at the *Centre de conservation du Québec*, a government agency within the province's Ministry of Culture and Communications, before being returned to *la Fiducie du patrimoine culturel des Augustines* that is now the rightful owner.

When work on the site is completed in 2015, a report on the operations, including all of the scientific documentation compiled by the archaeologists, will be submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Communications.

La Fiducie du patrimoine culturel des Augustines is a social trust with charitable status that was created by the *Fédération des Augustines*. Its mission is to preserve and share the heritage and memory of the Augustinian Sisters of Quebec for the benefit of the entire population and for generations to come. Since January 1, 2013, the Fiducie has been the owner of the *Hôtel-Dieu de Québec* monastery, out of which was founded the first hospital on the continent north of Mexico (1639). The Fiducie will also progressively be entrusted with the collections and archives of all 12 of the Augustinian Sisters' monasteries. The Fiducie is presently overseeing significant restoration and renovation work to the monastery - one of Canada's National Historic Sites and a Heritage Site under Quebec's Cultural Heritage Act - as an important step in bringing to life its current priority projects: *Le Monastère des Augustines*, *le Centre Catherine-de-Saint-Augustin*, as well as programs to support caregivers, those accompanying hospital patients, and healthcare workers.

Le Monastère des Augustines will offer visitors a unique experience in total health and direct contact with the Augustinian Sisters' heritage in a non-confessional approach: experiential accommodations, a museum and archives, programming, a restaurant, a boutique and specialized services, all available after the grand opening in the summer of 2015.

— 30 —

SOURCE: **La Fiducie du patrimoine culturel des Augustines**

INFORMATION: Marc Deschênes
Campaign Manager
75 rue des Remparts Quebec (Quebec) G1R 3R9
T [418.780.4800 x 102](tel:418.780.4800) | **C** [418.455.9005](tel:418.455.9005) | **F** [418.692.2668](tel:418.692.2668)
augustines.ca

Video material available:

Mini-documentary (in French only)

Des fouilles archéologiques révèlent une citerne de 300 ans (length: 6:00)

YouTube channel for la Fiducie du patrimoine culturel des Augustines

Photos and captions:

Photo no. 1

Stonework pipeline system that supplied water to the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec monastery, constructed prior to 1695.

Photo no. 2

Cistern composed of four stone walls approximately 16 metres square and 2 metres high, constructed between 1695 and 1755.

Photo no. 3

Military artefacts found in the latrines of the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec monastery, attesting to the military occupation of the building between 1759 and 1784.