

Contrecoeur windmill



The Contrecoeur windmill is of heritage interest for its historic value. Built between 1742 and 1745, on the site of a first windmill erected in 1686 and demolished in 1695, this mill evokes the seigniorial regime and certain disputes which have surrounded the exercise of the right of banality. In order to stimulate the settlement of the colony, the lord is obliged to build a flour mill for his censitaires and, by virtue of the banality law, he is the only one who can do it. In return, the censitaires must have their grains milled there and pay the lord a royalty. The construction of the Contrecoeur mill follows an order issued in 1742 by the intendant Gilles Hocquart (1694-

1783), in response to requests from the censitaires who remained without a mill for almost fifty years. This ordinance obliges the co-designers to honor their duty and grants the right of banality to Claude-Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur (1705-1775), who undertakes to build the mill within one year. Jean-Baptiste Martel, owner of the Saint-Antoine fief, went against the right of banality by erecting his own mill, but was disowned in 1757 by an order of the Conseil Souverain. The Contrecoeur mill, rented in 1762 to the miller Joseph Périgord, also recalls that these buildings were sometimes leased against the payment of annual rents. The events surrounding the construction and operation of the Contrecoeur mill therefore illustrate the socio-economic importance of the common mill within the seigneuries.

The Contrecoeur windmill is also of heritage interest for its historical and architectural values linked to its representativeness as a flour mill. The first flour mills in the Saint-Laurent valley date back to the middle of the 17th century, when the seigneuries began to populate. At the beginning of the 18th century, a hundred windmills (wind or water) were in operation. The most common type in New France is the tower mill, designed according to European traditions and conforming to age-old technology. That of Contrecoeur is an illustration in particular of its stocky cylindrical tower, its three levels, its vertical or very slightly inclined exterior wall as well as its conical roof. Originally, this roof was pivoting and equipped, among other things, with a propeller made up of four or six blades. Powered by the wind, these blades transmitted energy to the wheel thanks to a mechanism of which only the impeller remains, located on the third level. The two doors are diametrically opposite and placed in the axis of the prevailing winds to ensure good ventilation. The location with the flat and clear relief, on the banks of the Saint-Laurent river, also makes it possible to take advantage of the prevailing winds, in addition to being accessible to the colonists who use the river as main route. Windmills disappeared during the first half of the 19th century, due to competition from water mills and the arrival of new industrial milling techniques, such as the use of the steam engine as a driving force, steel rollers to replace the stone wheels and the gradual reduction system. The Contrecoeur mill is therefore one of the rare examples of windmills that still exist in Quebec.

Source: Ministry of Culture and Communications of Quebec, 2006.

Historical Information

The Contrecoeur windmill is built in the seigneurie of the same name. This seigneurie, located on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, east of Montreal, was conceded in 1672 by Jean Talon (1626-1694), first intendant of New France, to Antoine Pécaudy de Contrecoeur (1596- 1688), officer of the Carignan-Salières regiment. In order to stimulate the settlement of the colony, the Seigneur (landlord) is obliged to build a flour mill for his censitaires (working tenants on the Landlordship) and, by virtue of the banality law, he is the only one who can do it. In return, the censitaires must have their grains milled there and pay the lord a royalty. Antoine Pécaudy de Contrecoeur (1596-1688) built a mill in 1686, the year during which a decree of the sovereign council transformed this duty of the lords into law and fixed the deadline for the construction of the mills within one year, failing which the lord loses his banality right. In 1695, the Contrecoeur mill was dismantled due to its poor condition. The censitaires had to wait fifty years before a second mill was erected in the same place.

It was in response to requests from the censitaires that the intendant Gilles Hocquart (1694-1783) obliged, by an order issued in 1742, the co-designers of Contrecoeur to erect a new mill. This ordinance grants the right of banality to Claude-Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur (1705-1775), son of the first lord, who undertakes to build the mill within one year. The mill was erected before 1745. Jean-Baptiste Martel, owner of the Saint-Antoine fief, went against the right of banality by erecting his own mill, but was disowned in 1757 by an order of the Sovereign Council. The Contrecoeur mill was leased to miller Joseph Périgord in 1762. Subsequently, it passed into the hands of several owners, including François-Xavier Malhiot (1781-1854) and John James Fraser (1829-1896). It no longer works when Hormidas Chaput acquires it in 1913. The Chaput family modifies it in order to make it habitable. In particular, it replaces the internal mechanism, of which only the spinning wheel remains today, with a water pump actuated by a wind turbine.

The Contrecoeur windmill was classified in 1983. It has been owned by the City of Contrecoeur since 1999. The windmill was restored in 2009. It is open to visitors for a brief period during the summer.

Source: Ministry of Culture and Communications of Quebec, 2006