

Stereoscopic map

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Photographs of winter ice near the Victoria Bridge linking Montreal Island and the town of Saint-Lambert.

Accession Number 2010.42

Period 1st quarter of the 20th century, 3rd quarter of the 19th century

Materials paper

Technique glued

Measurements 8,6 x 17,7 cm

Historical context

This stereoscopic card features two almost identical photographs, produced in the early 20th century and depicting a group of people perched on the ice of the St. Lawrence River in late winter. This accumulated ice was known as “ice jams” and, at the time, heralded the imminent release of the river’s waters and the resumption of navigation. As Montreal’s economy was based on maritime and rail transport, spring meant the end of seasonal unemployment for thousands of people – so the appearance of ice jams on the river was celebrated. But in the 19th and early 20th centuries, spring also meant floods, which could wreak havoc. Caused by the weight of ice jams, the rapid melting of snow and the appearance of frazil ice, this temporary ice could block smaller watercourses. Flooding in Montreal could be severe, eroding riverbanks, drowning streets and weakening bridges. To combat flooding, the Montreal Harbour Commissioners erected a wall in 1841 along what would become Rue de la Commune, as well as the MacKay Pier (1891-1898), which still acts as an immobile icebreaker today.