



# A Conversation with Marcel Moussette

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## Introduction

By virtue of his past recognition by the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), the history committee invited Marcel Moussette (Fig. 1) for an oral-history interview to bear witness to his distinguished contributions to historical archaeology. Marcel is a soft-spoken and modest person, but his words and deeds carry far. He is one of the founding practitioners of historical archaeology in Canada and, more particularly, for the practice of that discipline in French, for which he received an SHA Award of Merit in 2000 and the J. C. Harrington Medal in 2005. Among other acknowledgements, he was presented with the Province of Québec's Prix Gérard-Morisset in 2009 and the Canadian Archaeological Association's Smith-Wintemberg Award in 2012.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 1** Marcel Moussette. (Photo by William Moss, 2021.)

<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the J. C. Harrington Medal testimonial, see Moss (2005). The Prix Gérard-Morisset is the highest distinction conferred on a person for an exceptional contribution to the protection and diffusion of the province of Québec's cultural heritage. The testimonial can be consulted at <<https://prixduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/recipientaires/marcel-moussette>>. The Smith-Wintemberg Award honors professional members of the Canadian archaeological community who have made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of the discipline of archaeology and the knowledge of the archaeological past of Canada. The full text of the testimonial to Marcel can be consulted at <<https://canadianarchaeology.com/caa/about/awards/recipients/smith-wintemberg-award/dr-marcel-moussette>>.

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Marcel first trained and worked as a biologist before going on to graduate studies in anthropology at the Université de Montréal and completing his doctoral degree in ethnology at Université Laval. He worked for Parks Canada from 1968 to 1980 and for several years was the director of the newly created regional material culture laboratories in Quebec City. He went on to teach at Université Laval in 1982, where he was a faculty member in the Department of History until his retirement in 2007. Marcel was instrumental in fostering the development of historical archaeology at Université Laval in the early days of the emergence of the discipline. He was an active participant in the training of one

of the country's first generations of historical archaeologists and of succeeding generations after that.

Marcel was born in 1940 and raised in La Prairie, a small town founded in the 17th century as a Jesuit mission on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, across the Lachine Rapids from Montreal and next door to the Mohawk community of Kahnawake. Many recurring themes in his work resonate with that time and place, and with the “fleuve Saint-Laurent,” as he would call it, especially as the concept of “*fleuve*”—a mighty watercourse flowing into the sea—does not exist in English. His achievements go beyond the world of archaeology to include published fiction and the translation of well-known Canadian folk-rock songs into French.

The interview was conducted in Marcel's Quebec City home on 20 October 2021 during the final throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. What follows is an edited transcript of that conversation.

### The Interview

**MOSS:** *Hello, Marcel. I'm very pleased to do this interview for the Society for Historical Archaeology. We haven't seen each other for quite some time because of the pandemic, among other things, so it's really a pleasure. We have known each other for so long as well. We first met in 1980, when you were at Parks Canada, where I was beginning as a young professional, and we have had the occasion to work together many times over the past 40 years. We'll be going back over many aspects of your life and career. I'm really looking forward to doing this with you.*

**MOUSSETTE:** Thank you, William. How should we start? With when I was born? I think it's very important, the background of somebody's life now that I'm 81 years old! I was born in La Prairie, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, across from Montreal. At that time, La Prairie was a small town of about 3,000 people. Most of the people earned their living working in one of the town's two brickyards. I was raised in one of the company houses. Our lives were completely dominated by work at the brickyard. So, when I was an adolescent, like my friends, I was supposed to live my life there and work in the brickyards like my father and grandfather before me. But things were different in my family. I was lucky that my parents wanted me to have more

education, so I went to college. My father wanted me and my sister to earn a living in a different way than he had after all those years in the company.

At that time, the education we were getting was called a “*cours classic*,” mostly in the humanities and sciences. So I was at college for seven years in the nearby town of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, which was about 18 mi. from La Prairie. I graduated with a specialization in biology and philosophy. My first orientation was in science. I took biology with a specialization in physiology and biochemistry.

I intended to work in a laboratory, probably for the rest of my life. But after I got my bachelor's degree in science, I was a very different person than when I started. I was interested in fieldwork in biology. I worked for a while as a biologist in an oceanographic station on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but I was not happy with what I was doing. I discovered that I was more interested in fishermen than in fish! The fishermen would always talk about the sea and what was happening to them. What I turned out to be doing was learning an oral tradition! I discovered there that it was anthropology that I was really interested in. So I decided to go into anthropology at the Université de Montréal.

The anthropology department was very young, founded just five years earlier. Luckily, the number of students was still not very large and every student had a tutor, a professor with whom we could meet. That was not something that was credited, just somebody we could talk with about the orientation of our interests. I was lucky to meet Paul Tolstoy, an archaeologist. Tolstoy had very broad interests; he was digging in Mexico, but he was interested in transpacific contact. He invited me to one of his seminars, and that's how I discovered archaeology. With my interest in fishing, I decided to do a master's about all the different methods of fishing that were being used.

I was also lucky to meet the director of the provincial heritage division of cultural affairs in Quebec City who was giving grants for research and careers. That person was very interested in my work about fishing because not much was known about it. Nobody had written anything on a broad subject like fishing. I got a grant for \$3,000, which was good in those days. You could make a living out of it for more than a year, even including travel to New York to work in the library of the American Museum of Natural History. That's how I wrote my first book, *La pêche sur le Saint-Laurent, répertoire des méthodes et des engins de capture*

(Moussette 1979). At that time I was more interested in material culture than archaeology, but my idea was to do fieldwork.

When I finished my master's, Tolstoy had left the Université de Montréal. There was a new professor, Jacques Bordaz who had been teaching at Columbia before coming to Montreal in 1968. [Bordaz earned a Ph.D. at Columbia University and taught at New York University from 1964 to 1966.] Bordaz was digging in Turkey; he was very interested in sites related to the beginning of agriculture. With my background in biology, I was also interested in the subject, so he took me on his team. We were supposed to dig in Turkey; we did all the necessary preparation, I got a visa, but the money for the grant never came in. Fortunately a friend had persuaded me to have an interview with Parks Canada. They had a big project digging in Fort Beauséjour in New Brunswick.

***So you started with Parks Canada in 1968, and up to then you had been a student with the Université de Montréal doing your B.A. in biology and a master's in anthropology. And the St. Lawrence River was always present in the work that you were doing up to that point. Even as a child, the St. Lawrence was always a major part of your life and of your professional work as well?***

MOUSSETTE: Yes. When I went to Beauséjour in the Maritimes, I was not sure what I would find, as I didn't have any background in historical archaeology. But I discovered the combination of history and archaeology in fieldwork, and the work in the archives pleased me. In the fall, they asked me if I would be willing to come and work in Ottawa, and I said yes. Even though I had been accepted as a Ph.D. student at Montréal, I left the whole thing behind me. I said no, I'm not doing a Ph.D. right now, as I had a chance to do very concrete work in archaeology. That's really what oriented my interest towards historical archaeology.

***So that was in 1968, beginning in Ottawa, as it was all centralized there.***

MOUSSETTE: It was all centralized in Ottawa. I did some fieldwork in Manitoba, and, then, since I was French speaking, in Quebec City at the Cartier-Brébeuf Park. They were supposed to do an interpretation center there because they thought Jacques Cartier had been there. I didn't find any traces of Jacques Cartier, but I

found 17th-century pottery. Just no Jacques Cartier! I did fieldwork for two-and-a-half years, but realized that what I lacked was knowledge of materials. So when they opened a section on material culture research in Parks Canada, I joined them. I also did some work in the archives over the next four years. At that time, big projects like the Forges du Saint-Maurice were starting. I was very involved in the material culture research for that project over quite a few years, until 1975 when the whole structure of Parks Canada changed.

***The Forges du Saint-Maurice was one of the major sites from the French regime in Quebec, and it's a national park for Parks Canada as well. What type of site was it?***

MOUSSETTE: It was a huge site. I think, at some point, the team working there was about 60 people, something that we don't see very much these days. It was an industrial site that started in the 18th century, late in the French regime in the 1730s. In the 19th century, it became one of the main ironworks in Canada. There is a huge collection of rejects from the site, that is, products from the ironworks, as well as the house of one of the owners—a really big structure—and remnants of the village for the workers, who were living there with their families. All this was there to be found! People would come back from the field in the fall with 400 boxes of artifacts to work on. At that time, with the decentralization, I was in charge of the material culture research. I had five people doing research on material culture on the Forges and other people doing research on other sites, like the Parc de l'Artillerie in Quebec City or Fort Chambly. I was there until 1980.

***You were directing the material culture research on Parks Canada's major sites from Quebec. You must have worked with different people that made important contributions to historical archaeology in Quebec and beyond Quebec as well.***

MOUSSETTE: That's where I met Françoise Niellon and Claire Mousseau, who became very involved in the archaeology of Montreal, and our director at the time, Bruce Fry, who had been at Louisbourg and went on to teach at Cape Breton University. We communicated with the other researchers in other centers in Canada; there was a real network through which we could exchange a lot of information. We got lots of help from the

people in Louisbourg and other sites with similar material culture to Quebec City's—from the people who actually dug the sites that were the same types as the ones here. So that was very, very nice.

***So it was a very rich network then?***

MOUSSETTE: Oh, yes!

***Was it still centered in Ottawa at that time? Or had the decentralization taken place?***

MOUSSETTE: The decentralization took place in '75, that's when I moved to Quebec City.

***How large was the setup in Quebec City then? How many employees, what type of research staff was there?***

MOUSSETTE: Research was divided into history and archaeology. In archaeology there were over 20 people doing research, including technicians and archaeologists. We don't have that kind of investment in heritage anymore. It makes me rather sad.

***Yes, that was a big change. So you were with Parks until 1980? And, at that time, you started to work on your Ph.D. on heating in Canada?***

MOUSSETTE: Yes, my Ph.D. is a product of the research I had been doing in the material culture section when I was in Ottawa. All the research was done between 1972 and 1975. I was in contact with Laval University when I moved to Quebec City. They were interested in starting a master's program in historical archaeology with Parks Canada. They would send some of their students—three, sometimes four—to our labs in Quebec. I was in contact with the Department of History at Laval. It was a multidisciplinary department, with ethnology, the history of art, museology, and archaeology, which at that time was classical archaeology. There was collaboration, but an integrated program didn't exist yet. They had one course in historical archaeology given by Jean-Pierre Chrétien. It was just the beginning.

***Jean-Pierre went on to the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) after that.***

MOUSSETTE: I met an ethnologist—Jean-Claude Dupont—who was interested in material culture and who had done his Ph.D. thesis on ironsmiths. So he was interested in the work we were doing on the Forges du Saint-Maurice. He had some knowledge of the research I was doing on heating techniques in Canada, and he suggested I take this material and turn it into a Ph.D. thesis. That's how I ended up getting my Ph.D. in ethnology.

***That was at Université Laval. What year was that published?***

MOUSSETTE: I got my Ph.D. in 1980, and it was published in 1983 (Moussette 1983).

***Were you already part of the faculty at Laval then?***

MOUSSETTE: Yes. I began in '82.

***You were with Laval University until your retirement in 2007. So you were there for 25 years! You must have worked with a lot of people: colleagues, students. Who were some of the people that were there through your career?***

MOUSSETTE: At first, my position was to teach ethnology and archaeology. That was the way we started historical archaeology. I met people who were very interested in oral history and oral tradition, like Jean Du Berger, Jocelyne Mathieu, and Jean Simard. That was very rich. Also historians, like Jacques Mathieu.

***Were there other archaeologists?***

MOUSSETTE: There was a program in classics. I worked with Michel Fortin at the beginning, as he was one of the classical archaeologists who was interested in the work I was doing. I was hired to organize a field school for the students in classics. There was no formal field school for them. If they wanted to pursue the field in Quebec, they wouldn't be hired as historical archaeologists, as they didn't have field training. So we started a field school with Michel Fortin. That's how we came to work on the Intendant's Palace site.

***That was the period when there was no formal training in historical archaeology in Quebec and in French. I believe there wasn't any elsewhere in Canada, either,***



***except Parks Canada. For all intents and purposes, you were part of the creation of the first program of formal training in historical archaeology in Canada.***

MOUSSETTE: Probably! I didn't really think about it. We were lucky enough to have the collaboration of the provincial culture department with Michel Gaumond. Gaumond had fantastic knowledge of the history and the sites in the province. I contacted him in 1982, and he said: "Well, I dug something in 1971, the first Intendant's Palace, and it could be a very important site; I found remains from the French regime, maybe you should go there with your students and see what can be found!" We had about 20 students, a pretty big number, who were very interested. We did four trenches measuring 4 × 4 m, and we found remains of the French regime in all four, extending right up to the present. It was the site of a brewery that had been active until the 1960s. For the students in classics, it was a very complex site. There were about eight layers before getting to the bottom. So it was a site you could compare with those of antiquity for the degree of difficulty and the technical knowledge that it would take for your notes. Everybody was happy with it.

We had the support of the city, because this site was on the property of the City of Quebec. So we were directly in contact with the people who were in charge of heritage, such as Michel Bonnette, who was the director of the Division du Vieux-Québec.

***I was one of your students at Laval at that period, and I later went on to work for the city. We worked together on the Intendant's Palace site for many years. That was an important training ground, as the Forges du Saint-Maurice had been 10 or 15 years earlier, for a whole generation of historical archaeologists in Quebec. A very important publication came out of it as well, several actually, with articles and your monograph on the Intendant's Palace (Moussette 1994).***

MOUSSETTE: Yes, we started with the intention to publish as much as possible, so master's degrees were done with the aim of producing a synthesis. At the same time, everybody was gaining knowledge from the site, not just digging, but interpreting and going through all the different phases of the project right up to the publication of the results. They could practice being professionals, they could do the whole thing from the very first shovel in the ground to the conclusion of the part of the

site they were studying. That was the idea.

***That was the model that you developed at Université Laval, and you went on to use it for field schools on other projects, such as l'Île-aux-Oies or La Prairie. What were those projects?***

MOUSSETTE: Sometimes we were getting too many students for the site. There was a limit, so we had to expand and have two sites or two field schools at the same time. It was always with the same model. When we went to La Prairie, it was a heritage site in the historic district with 17th-century and prehistoric remains. So it was the same model, but what was important during all those years was the collaboration we had had with the City of Quebec. The first few years of the Intendant's Palace were subsidized with grants from the federal or provincial governments, and we were getting money from Université Laval as well. The technical and logistical support from the city was very important. We worked with agreements with the Department of Culture and the city: Laval did the research and the results went back to the city and the province.

***So there were memoranda of agreement between the university, the city—first Quebec City, then, later, the City of La Prairie—and the provincial government's culture department?***

MOUSSETTE: Yes. We were there for 10 years. And then we worked on the other sites in Quebec City: l'îlot Hunt, the Maizerets site, and then back to the Intendant's Palace.

***That's a model that you first began in 1982, I believe, and it's still operating that way now in 2021. So, yes, 40 years on, an efficient and productive approach for urban archaeology, at least. But l'Île-aux-Oies, that wasn't urban archaeology.***

MOUSSETTE: L'Île-aux-Oies was a dream. I really learned a lot from doing urban archaeology, it was really complex, and I enjoyed the challenges. But with my background in biology, I was particularly interested in environmental archaeology, how the Europeans coming here to North America would adapt to such a situation. For quite a few years I was on the committee for archaeological permits with the Commission des biens culturels ...

***You were on the provincial cultural properties commission, which gave permits for archaeological research?***

MOUSSETTE: Yes. Another commissioner knew I was interested in all kinds of sites. He suggested I look at l'Île-aux-Grues and l'Île-aux-Oies, two islands in the St. Lawrence. There had only been eight farms on the islands. The property belonged to the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital in Quebec who had owned it from the 1740s. In 1964, they sold it to a group of businessmen from Quebec City who used it for hunting geese. So the site hadn't been touched at all. I met the owners and the provincial cultural affairs department, who were interested, but didn't have much money. They put \$5,000 into the project. The group of businessmen was interested to know about their property, so they allowed us to use one of their houses, which was only used by hunters in the fall—nobody went there in the summer because there were so many mosquitoes!—so we could stay as long as we wanted during the summer. We worked there from 1987 to 1997. We found the site of the first settlers in 1645 that had been attacked by a group of Iroquois and destroyed by fire. And we were able to find remains of the occupations from 1645 up to the 19th century on the site. It had never been touched or disturbed since it had been abandoned. I put a lot of energy into that project to try to understand why they chose that site and the way they were living.

***Your first monograph was on an urban site, the Intendant's Palace (Moussette 1994). And your second monograph was on a rural site on an island in the middle of the St. Lawrence River (Moussette 2009). Those were very interesting projects. While you were doing these projects, you were the director of the CÉLAT, a research center at Université Laval and also the Université du Québec à Montréal, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, and the Université de Montréal.<sup>2</sup> What did that involve?***

MOUSSETTE: I had been a member of the CÉLAT since I started my Ph.D. at Laval. At that time, my thesis director, Jean-Claude Dupont, was the director of the CÉLAT, which is a multidisciplinary center with geographers, linguists, historians, and ethnologists. They

were happy to have me as an archaeologist. That was important, because when I started in the department I felt that I was just one of a kind as a historical archaeologist, but I found the interdisciplinary center provided lots of exchanges, with lots of contact with the outside. When I became the director of CELAT in 2003, I was 63 and thought I would probably not be there for long. At first, I accepted for three years.

***What were some of the achievements of the CÉLAT during that period?***

MOUSSETTE: It's so diverse that it's difficult to say. You had people like Jocelyn Létourneau in history who works with people in the United States; he was invited to Princeton recently and is still there. The ethnologists at that time were also in contact with people in France and at the Smithsonian. I had the possibility to invite people from the United States, from elsewhere in Canada when we really started to have programs in archaeology. It was a lively place. I'm still in contact with them, I just don't contribute anymore. It's fantastic to see the younger generation with subjects we wouldn't have dared researching 10 years ago; the vitality is still there! It's probably at the CÉLAT where I got the energy to start my projects.

***It was at that period that you became a member of the Société des Dix, the Society of Ten, which was an elite learned society.***

MOUSSETTE: [Laughing] You have to be asked to become one of the 10 members! It's an old learned society that started in the 1930s. At that time it was mostly archivists, a few members of the clergy, just people interested in history, not necessarily from universities. They could be in charge of an archive or just a priest with a knowledge of history. When I arrived there it was different. Most of the members were from different French-speaking universities, like the Université d'Ottawa or the Université de Sherbrooke, but mostly from Montreal and Quebec City. I accepted the invitation because you have to write one paper every year. That's your only commitment. It could be very long or very short. It's your paper, your copyright. There is a lot of respect for the publication. I was the only archaeologist, but there were ethnologists, like Jocelyne Mathieu and Jean Simard, historians, art historians, even a musicologist, so it's very rich. The 10 members meet a few times a year, have a good meal together, and exchange ideas. Then you go back home and work on your article!

<sup>2</sup> CÉLAT is the Centre de recherche Cultures—Arts—Sociétés, formerly the Centre interuniversitaire d'études sur les lettres, les arts et les traditions; see <<http://www.celat.ulaval.ca>>.

***Your inaugural article was on Samuel de Champlain’s tomb, which has been a constantly recurring question in Quebec archaeology since the 1850s (Moussette 2000). Did you try and settle that issue? How did you approach that question?***

MOUSSETTE: I would never approach an answer to the question, although I thought about it! Just three weeks ago I was asked to talk to some artists from the Intendant’s Palace site who are installed in the old fire station. They wanted to know about the history of the site. The first question they asked was about Champlain’s tomb. The interest is still there.

***You looked at the symbolic interest of that site, rather than to try and say, well, it should be here or it could be there. You didn’t develop another hypothesis to go with the 15 or 16 other hypotheses? You were always too wise to get into that!***

MOUSSETTE: No, I wouldn’t waste my time on that. If you find Champlain, it’s his bones. Maybe there could be some interest in the bones of Champlain, but I’m not interested in relics. For some people it’s like a cult.

***One of your subsequent publications with the Société des Dix was on religious medallions (Moussette 2001), which has been a recurring interest for you as well, in terms of your research and your publications.***

MOUSSETTE: I became interested because we found a good collection of them, about 30 religious medallions, very well dated from the 1713 fire at the first Intendant’s Palace. It started with my interest in the baroque. We also found a lot of brass gun parts, highly decorated in the rococo style, which is an emanation of the baroque. There were 2,000 gun parts, complete or broken pieces, all in the same context. When I did the research on them, I found that the decoration was in the same style as the same type of gun parts that were found at the Lower North Shore in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, here in Quebec City, in Montreal, and in the Great Lakes. Michilimackinac has a very good collection of them. They have also been found along the Mississippi River, some in Amerindian graves. These were probably made to be on guns that were exchanged in the fur trade. Then I started to ask why Amerindians were asking for that kind of decorated gun? The decorations were similar to floral motifs that were embroidered on Amerindian coats and things like that. So I thought the

similarity could explain the relation between the French and the Amerindians—they had something in common. That’s when I started to read about the baroque and also the rococo baroque. I saw that there appeared to be a whole mentality and a worldview that was expressed in these decorations. After I published my monograph on the first Intendant’s Palace, I really went deeper into the meaning of the decorations, and religious medals are an expression of that period. The missionaries gave the medals to the Amerindians. I published bits and pieces about this, and at a meeting of the SHA I talked about an encounter in the baroque age; it was just an intuition.

I became the director of the CÉLAT and then I retired. But I always had the idea that I should do something with this. And that’s what I’m doing now! I’ve been working for the last three years on a monograph in which I try to document these ideas and go as deep as possible into them. Religious medallions are just one part of this work.

***I look forward to seeing the publication.***

MOUSSETTE: I can show you the manuscript!

***The plenary address that you gave for the 2002 SHA conference (Moussette 2002) was an example of your collaboration with Greg [Gregory A.] Waselkov from the University of Alabama. You two have had a very long collaboration that resulted in one of the seminal publications on colonial archaeology in the Americas.***

MOUSSETTE: I guess, and the collaboration is still happening! Every year we have a ritual. Greg sends me a very nice box of fresh pecans from Alabama, and I send him maple syrup and maple sugar. The collaboration with Greg resulted in the book we published on the archaeology of French colonial America (Moussette and Waselkov 2014).

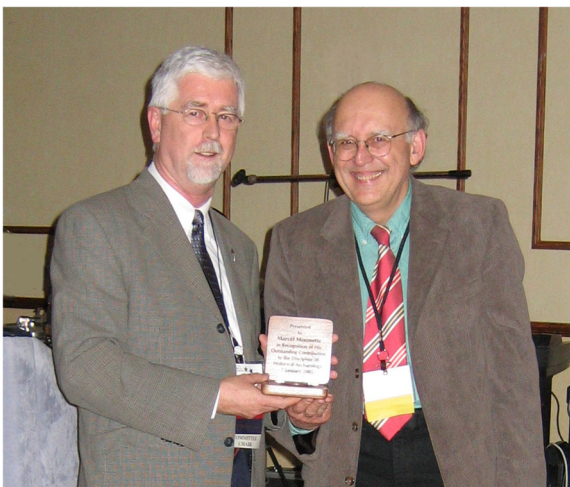
***It’s a very comprehensive compendium of that archaeology in the Americas. It’s an incredible work. I’ve used it many times, and I always enjoy reading it when I get to a new section, depending on what subject I’m developing. It was a seminal work, very important for the subject.***

MOUSSETTE: It began like a dream. When I had my first sabbatical in 1988, I started to work on something comprehensive. I started with the historical archaeology of Quebec and Canada. I wrote quite a bit, but I wasn’t happy with the manuscript. At another SHA conference in the 1990s, Greg organized a session on Old Mobile and French-period sites

in the Mississippi Valley with people like John [A.] Walthall. He asked me to chair the session. When I put these papers together, I realized these presentations would give a very good picture of that region. Talking with Greg, one thing led to another and we saw that a synthesis would be possible. We started with Acadia, then Canada, and then on to the Pays d'En Haut, and then the French West Indies. I couldn't have done it by myself, but the two of us—we knew each other very well—could divide it up. Greg did the Pays d'En Haut and then Louisiana.

*An incredible work. It's only available in French, which is a very important point for the encouragement of historical archaeology in French, but it would be useful for our colleagues if it were available in English. Your contribution was recognized twice by the SHA, first with an award of merit at the Quebec City conference in 2000, then with the J. C. Harrington Medal, which I had the honor of presenting to you as SHA president in York, England, in 2005 (Fig. 2). One of the things that was underlined was your contribution to the development of historical archaeology in French. How do you see that?*

MOUSSETTE: That's something that came naturally because I express myself in French, especially in writing. When I was in Ottawa, it was a very bilingual research environment, and I acquired the ability to express myself writing in English, but not enough. I prefer to write in French. My first reports were written in French, and when I moved to Quebec City it was a completely French



**Fig. 2** Marcel Moussette, right, receiving the J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology from SHA president William Moss. (Photo by William B. Lees, 2005.)

environment. It was the same at Université Laval. My interest at the time was the archaeology of the French period. I write in French and then I translate into English later. I'm lucky that my wife Jane [Macaulay] is a translator. It's the same with students, most are French-speaking and express themselves in French.

*You published at least 12 books—I don't know if you have been counting them recently or not, the list that I was able to see is from 2012—and over 70 articles. You directed the publication of 27 volumes at the CÉLAT. You supervised about 40 master's students and several doctoral students as well. All of that was largely done in French, so that was a contribution to archaeology in that language, as was recognized by the SHA when you received the J. C. Harrington Medal and by the Canadian Archaeological Association when you received the Smith-Wintemberg Award in 2012. So how would you qualify your contribution to historical archaeology: contextual archaeology, environmental archaeology?*

MOUSSETTE: Difficult question! In retrospect, there are many directions. With the monograph on the Intendant's Palace I wanted to show how a site developed in the context of the development of the whole city, so I see it as urban archaeology. Île-aux-Oies is different, the environmental aspect is very important, but I didn't get the money to complete the analyses. I was very disappointed by that, I'm still disappointed. What I'm doing now is mostly contextual archaeology, trying to understand two visions of the world in their broad contexts. That's why it is taking me so many years to tackle it. I have a manuscript, but I'm still not sure if my conclusions are well established, so I'm still working on it.

*Besides contextual archaeology, you have done material culture studies as well. While you were at Parks Canada you developed a material culture guide that is still in use now.*

MOUSSETTE: Yes, Laetitia Métreau (2016) recently published an updated version of one of the guides. I still see material culture as the basis, it's something that's absolutely necessary in terms of knowledge if you are in archaeology. If you want to do archaeology, you have to know how to dig, then you have to know your materials. It's the basis, it has to be part of what a professional knows. You also have to know how to work in archives and what to do with historical documents. You just can't take every document



for granted. They always represent an interpretation of reality. You have to look at historical documents with a critical eye. That's why being with the Société des Dix was important to me because it was mostly with historians. One of the things that made me very happy was that the book Greg and I wrote together got a prize from the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française. The Prix Lionel-Groulx<sup>3</sup> is given by historians, not archaeologists. Our book was recognized by them as a very good monograph!

*That book was also very well received by colleagues, such as Jean Chapelot (2014).*

MOUSSETTE: Yes, Chapelot is a medieval-studies specialist, so I felt this was an excellent review.

*You and Waselkov considered Kathy Deagan's approach to historical archaeology, where archaeologists can contribute through five different subjects—the cultural contexts of colonization; the reconstruction of physical environments; materials from palaeobotany and zooarchaeology; the paleoanthropology of health, nutrition, and foodways; and marginalized groups—important questions, but you preferred to have your analysis structured by three other concepts that are largely based on relationships to the environment and to Indigenous societies: accommodating to other groups, adapting to new environments, and exploiting the New World.*

MOUSSETTE: Those are the broad concepts that we used when we wrote the book. I agree that the subjects Deagan defines contribute to the acquisition of knowledge, but the theoretical direction of our book is different. The book we were writing needed shared aspects so that we would have the same approach.

*Is that the type of approach that you would use with your numerous collaborations with the Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History (Pointe-à-Callière), where you have participated in several committees?*

MOUSSETTE: I always make a point to be involved with museums or cities if they need expertise. It's a way for me to give back to society. I think we should do it. A book is one thing, but to work with people on committees is also a contribution.

<sup>3</sup> This prize was bestowed in 2014, see <<https://ihaf.qc.ca/prix-dexcellence/prix-lionel-groulx/recipiendaire>>.

*Your contribution is evident in the recent series published by Pointe-à-Callière, L'archéologie du Québec (The archaeology of Québec). Four of the five titles have already been published (Pintal et al. 2015; Musée Pointe-à-Callière 2016; Laroche and Plourde 2017; Balac et al. 2019; Gates St-Pierre and Monette 2022).*

MOUSSETTE: I hope the last one will come out; it was supposed to be out last spring.<sup>4</sup> But that's something I like to do because it keeps me aware of what other people are doing, especially now that we are so isolated by the pandemic. I work on my own projects, other people are working on theirs, but I don't think we have communicated very much these past two years.

*I believe you also work with the Musée régional de Roussillon in La Prairie?*

MOUSSETTE: Yes, it was my birthplace! I have been interested in the history of La Prairie since I was an adolescent. I even wrote a small text when I was about 15. The people of the provincial cultural affairs department office in Montreal, especially Anne-Marie Balac, were in contact with La Prairie—there is a historical district there—and they planned on creating a regional museum. So she asked me if I would like to be on that committee, since I knew the city. We did the Université Laval field school there for four years, and that gave an impetus to the authorities and the mayor. The mayor became very interested and realized it would be possible to create a larger museum for the nine towns in the regional municipality. It's very important to have that kind of institution; I would like them to be all over the province! I think there is something similar in Abitibi. It's important because you have to educate the politicians who are in charge. That's a way, maybe the only way, they get it.

*You were also involved in the scientific committee for the Cartier-Roberval Project, which is a major site in North America, the first attempt by France to settle in the New World from 1534 to 1536.<sup>5</sup> What was your participation on that committee?*

<sup>3</sup> The fifth title (Gates St-Pierre and Monette 2022) was published subsequent to this interview.

<sup>4</sup> The official description of this project can be consulted on the Commission de la Capitale-Nationale du Québec's Webpage at <<https://www.capitale.gouv.qc.ca/sites-de-la-capitale/sites/site-archeologique-cartier-roberval/>>.

MOUSSETTE: To use our professional expertise to see how research was progressing and discuss it with the Commission de la Capitale-Nationale du Québec. But they made their own decisions. We did not have any say in the decisions ...

*No, we weren't decisional! I was on the committee with you and we didn't decide what was going to be done!*

MOUSSETTE: ... which is too bad.

*I believe you're still in contact with many of your former students—myself for example. Many have had important roles in historical archaeology: Céline Cloutier; Allison Bain, who is now at Université Laval; Hélène Côté, who is an important consulting archaeologist; Louise Pothier from Pointe-à-Callière ...*

MOUSSETTE: I still have contact with them. Yes, that's the whole point. I'm very happy when somebody comes and we talk about their sites and such, but I get a lot of advice from them too. They have different experiences, and all this is very enriching. But now it's from a distance with Pointe-à-Callière. Allison and I talk quite often about what she's doing. And she invites me on site, things like that. The contact I had with graduate students has been very important for me. With the Intendant's Palace, they were really the base from which I could write the monograph. But the main pleasure I had was to see them go on and become very good professionals. You never know when you teach what your influence will be, but I am very proud of what many of my former students are doing and very happy for them. One example is really fantastic. Last year I saw a picture on the front page of the *Guardian Weekly* of Maxime Aubert, one of the B.A. students I had. He did his Ph.D. in Australia and specialized in carbon dating. He dated one of the oldest cave paintings in Indonesia, 40,000 years old. His first dig was the Intendant's Palace field school. Maxime was always the one with questions when I was teaching the analytical archaeology course!

*Louise Pothier is now one of the Société des Dix members. It's good to see another archaeologist in that position.*

MOUSSETTE: Yes, Louise works at the Pointe-à-Callière Museum and is responsible for the Archéologie du Québec publication series.

*What changes have you seen to archaeology, or what significant developments have you seen for historical archaeology during your career? You noted when you received the Prix Gérard-Morisset from the government of Quebec in 2009, and I translate, that "[t]he approach to historical archaeology has evolved. Initially influenced by the humanities, it turned progressively towards the physical sciences in Quebec during the 1990s. This is a welcome change, but I believe it's important to maintain an equilibrium between the humanistic approach and the more technical aspects of archaeometry" (Les Prix du Québec 2009).*

MOUSSETTE: I still think that. Archaeometry is new and it's very important. Just think of DNA analysis. But it can't be just that. The context—the social context, the historical context—is also extremely important. That's where your interpretation will come from; you can't just rely on analysis. These analyses should be seen as a tool to give a broader meaning to the object. For example, when the metal tools from a 17th- and 18th-century Jesuit mission site in the Guyana were analyzed we could demonstrate that the iron came from the Forges du Saint-Maurice in Quebec. And that's powerful—it tells you the power that kind of analysis has—you have to have the context to interpret it well. Archaeometry and environmental archaeology are really important. Just look at the work of Allison Bain with insects. One of her students just did a Ph.D. on the insects found on the Intendant's Palace (Rousseau 2017). What it tells about the changing environment is fantastic!

*The way that archaeology is done has changed as well. You started in the civil service with Parks Canada in Ottawa, then it was regionalized. Then the regional offices were all dismantled and then centralized again. What do you think about that type of evolution in practice?*

MOUSSETTE: I feel sad about it because we have lost the labs for Parks Canada. They are being moved again to the Ottawa region, the national capital. Research that was done by the provincial government isn't done anymore, they are simply managing archaeology. So archaeology goes in all kinds of directions without links between them. This might explain why there haven't been very many fundamental contributions over the past few years. Maybe it's just a cycle that's over, then we'll start a new cycle.

But the institutions seem to lack the will to do something. The provincial government, when it had its ethnology and archaeology section, was doing its own research and it was really fantastic. I think we should go back to the system with institutions being more involved than now. The Parks Canada labs here in Quebec City were so alive, there was so much coming out of it. Now, there are no publications, and sometimes the work that has been done has not really been promoted. I have the five volumes of the report from the Fort-and-Chateau-St. Louis dig downstairs in my library. It was a very important dig, but the report was only printed in 15 copies. I was able to get one from one of my students who said: “Marcel, you need this, I will get you one!” Imagine all the energy put into that research. There have been some articles published. And then we have that fantastic research in these five volumes, which could of course be condensed into one and made public. But 15 copies! It’s a scandal.

*That’s a comment that you made in your publication with Greg about the Cartier-Roberval site, that there was no synthesis produced for the 10 years of research on that site. So, on the one hand, you have money that’s put into archaeology, but analyses aren’t always done, syntheses aren’t done. Research isn’t made available. But, on the other hand, as you noted in a recent interview that was published in Archéologiques (Gates St-Pierre 2018), one of your former colleagues said—and I will both quote and translate here: “Bernard Arcand told me that my books could have been used to publish dozens of articles instead.” So there is pressure to produce short articles rather than monographs or books.*

MOUSSETTE: Yes. That’s a big problem, the capacity to do something synthetic. That’s why I am concentrating on my present project. When I write articles, it’s material that will be able to be used in a synthesis.

*What areas in historical archaeology still need further development? What still needs to be done?*

MOUSSETTE: What needs to be done? Environmental archaeology. We have all these fantastic analyses, but we should use them a lot more in syntheses than we are doing now. I think it’s important to go in depth in that direction. The question I ask myself is, though there is lots of digging done on a contract

basis, there is no institution that can put all this knowledge together. This is a problem for society, not just a problem for archaeology. Parks Canada’s collections are leaving Quebec City—the decision was made in 2012—what will we do now for research on them? The provincial cultural affairs department made fantastic contributions with their ethnology and archaeology section, but that doesn’t exist anymore. People count on universities, but it’s very difficult to get funds to do research. I think that governments should be more involved. You must have been stuck with the same problem when you worked at the City of Quebec. You saw all the research that had been done by the city, but it has to be better known. I just don’t know how we can get out of this. It may just be a phase, but we will see.

*You have been very active, not just in archaeology. You have published three novels (Moussette 1974, 1992, 2012), you have translated songs that are well known to many of our readers, Bruce Coburn’s songs. You translated them into French!*

MOUSSETTE: With my wife Jane. Our two names are on the record credits. I like writing. With archaeology, you make your artifacts talk to you and then you translate that into a kind of story. But I like writing fiction, it’s a very liberating act, just writing about people.

*The last of your novels wasn’t purely fiction, it was based on your family story.*

MOUSSETTE: Yes, a family picture was given to me by my mother, who said: “That’s your father’s family.” That’s it. I had the picture for quite a few years. When my mother died, I inherited some other pictures, and I realized that my grandmother, my father’s mother, had a baby on her knee: my father. And so that was the context, a whole world was revealed to me.

My father never liked his name because it was old fashioned, something from the Bible. He was supposed to be called Marcel, but my great-grandmother said the name of the baby should be Ozias. My great-great-grandfather had been killed in a fire when there was trouble on the reserve. He had married a girl from Kahnawake, but he was white. The Mohawks decided that whites couldn’t stay on the reserve, but he decided to stay there with his

family. He was locked in the stable one night and the building was set on fire. It was very dramatic. His name was Ozias Meloche. His wife was pregnant, and she gave birth to a son two months after he died. The son was named Ozias. He was my grandmother's uncle. There was a thread leading me in that direction, but I decided I couldn't do something historical, as it touched me too closely. So I filled in the gaps with what I knew of these people. I could see these people and give them life again. I didn't tell everyone in the family, so I was nervous when I published the novel. But the response was fantastic because they said it brought them all back to life.

***It was an excellent novel, even for someone who isn't familiar with your family. I read it as I did your other novels, which I really enjoyed. I hope you have the opportunity to write another.***

MOUSSETTE: I have written quite a few, but it's difficult to publish fiction.

***I am looking forward to seeing your book on the baroque period.***

MOUSSETTE: Okay. Let's go and take a look at the manuscript in my library downstairs!

***Thank you very much for the interview, Marcel.***

MOUSSETTE: It was my pleasure, a nice opportunity to talk about these things.

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