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It's the real thing

Map proving age of Otho Robichaud house authenticated

by Joanne Cadogan

NEGUAC - The controversy over the age and authenticity of Otho Robichaud house in Neguac may finally be resolved.

Brian Lindblom is a forensic document examiner with DocumentExamination Consultants Inc. in Ottawa.

He has determined a map of the community believed to date to 1793 - and including the house in the location where it now stands definitely was written by Stephen Millage, the sheriff in the area at the time.

This adds powerful ammunition to the Société Historique de Neguac's argument that the building they are restoring and developing into a tourist destination is the home of one of the founding father's of the community and one of the most powerful men in the area near the turn of the 18th century.

That history was brought into question by Fidèle Thériault. He's an historian with the heritage branch of the provincial Economic Development, Tourism and Culture department.

He wrote an article in La Revue de la Société Historique Nicolas-Denys two years ago challenging the long accepted provenance of the building.

Thériault's article contended the house was really part of an old chapel which Otho Robichaud's son Louis moved to a new foundation and turned into a home in 1848, a claim he supported with oral history in the family.

Thériault's challenge resulted in a freeze of provincial funds which had been allocated to the restoration process pending an independent study by Jean

Daigle, the former holder of the chair for Acadian Studies at Université de Moncton.

Daigler couldn't find any conclusive information to support the Société Historique de Neguac's claims about the age of the building, so his report found it was more likely the building was a later construction.

Here's the proof

However Société Historique de Neguac's president, Ferdinand Robichaud - himself a descendant of Otho Robichaud - said Lindblom's finding should provide all the proof Daigle said he needed, and should be sufficient to free the funds frozen by the controversy.

In an interview from his office in Ottawa on Monday morning, Lindblom said he went to the New Brunswick archives in Fredericton to study the map and other documents from the period.

"There are various approaches one can take in authenticating a document depending on what components you have - ink, typewriting, paper etc.," he said.

"In this case it was possible to determine the handwriting on the map was definitely that of Mr. Millage, who was the sheriff at that time and whose handwriting was contained on several other documents located at the archives."

Lindblom said he found the document contained an initial tracing in pencil which was retraced in two types of ink - both Indian and iron galtnic.

Critics of the document indicated it contained two forms of handwriting and suggested the Otho Robichaud house may have been added to the map later.

Lindblom said there's no indication any element of the map was a much later addition.

He said it wasn't uncommon for survey maps to contain two different styles of writing as this one did - one obviously the regular handwriting of the sheriff done in the field - the other more formal writing denoting the name of the bay and the river, added later in the sheriff office.

Lindblom said he was fortunate to see another document at the archives in which Stephen Millage was requesting a land grant for Otho Robichaud in Bay du Vin.

That conclusively put the two men in the same community at the same time.

Ferdinand Robichaud said the historical society shared its happy news with area MLA and Fisheries and Aquaculture minister Danny Gay last week.

He has set up a meeting to present Lindblom's authentication to officials in heritage branch on April 29.

At that time the society will be ready to answer all other previously raised questions about the construction of the building as it relates to its age.

Robichaud said there is nothing in the house inconsistent with 1790s construction, save some nails which were cut and which he has documentation to explain.

"We are very happy with this news," he said, noting he hopes the authentication will clear the way for the speedy resumption of work on the restoration project.