

Historica Canada Education Portal

Adam Dollard des Ormeaux

Overview

In 1660, Dollard des Ormeaux died in a battle with the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) while attempting to avert an Iroquois siege of Ville Marie (now Montréal). His importance to French Canadians has been a subject of longstanding debate.

Aims

Activities will engage students in a discovery of the history of New France in the 1660s. Students will also consider how varying political and societal conditions have influenced the interpretations of Adam Dollard des Ormeaux's actions and contributions to history.

Background

In 1660 Adam Dollard des Ormeaux led a small group of 16 volunteers up the Ottawa River outside Montréal in an aborted attempt to ambush the Iroquois threatening the city. Hopelessly outnumbered, he and all his men died in the attempt, but the expected attack on Montréal was averted.

Dollard des Ormeaux is either the forgotten saviour of Montréal – martyred in the cause – or a naive opportunist seeking only the spoils of war. Whoever he really was, the fickle nature of history first touted him as a national hero, and then abandoned him as an anti-hero of Québec's Quiet Revolution. He left France to escape a mysterious dark past, and arrived in Ville Marie (Montréal), population 600, ready to begin anew. A new life in the New World suited him, and amid the tumultuous backdrop of potential famine and war, he managed to carve out an auspicious career, becoming garrison commander within a few short years.

By 1660, the threat of a full-scale Iroquois attack on Ville Marie seemed imminent. Rumours of war affected daily life, and a siege mentality began. Dollard des Ormeaux, against the advice of more seasoned men, set out with his group of very green volunteers to stop it. Before they left, they wrote their wills and received the Blessed Sacrament – as if they foresaw the events that would follow.

After a ten day canoe trip up the Ottawa River, Dollard des Ormeaux and his men disembarked, and waited. Despite their advantage of high ground and surprise, they were vastly outnumbered as 700 Iroquois approached. What ensued was a rout, though Dollard des Ormeaux and his men did manage to hang on, essentially under siege, for seven days before they perished. The Iroquois did not attack Montréal.

The deaths of Dollard des Ormeaux and his men were recounted by Catholic nuns and entered into official Church history. For over a century Dollard des Ormeaux became a heroic figure who exemplified personal sacrifice. But, there were other versions of the story, even then, that raised questions about his intentions and actions. Much later, when English Canada touted Dollard des Ormeaux as a poster boy for conscription in the Second World War, his French Canadian constituents

abandoned him. When the Church lost its role as primary guardian of history during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960's, Dollard des Ormeaux's importance to French Canadians again became a subject of debate.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

1. Write a letter, in the first person from the perspective of Dollard des Ormeaux, to a friend in France describing life in New France. What have you seen? What are you looking for?
2. Make a timeline of the days leading up to Dollard des Ormeaux's battle with the Iroquois, and of the days when his men were held "hostage" in their own camp. What event was the turning point in the battle? Why?
3. Create a plan of escape for Dollard des Ormeaux and his men during their days under siege. What were their resources? Who could help them? Where would they go?
4. List various symbols found in the video (i.e., flag, cross, fleur de lys). Create a shield (including a motto) for Dollard des Ormeaux, a newly established community in New France.
5. Using the video and additional research, create a balance sheet for Dollard des Ormeaux to illustrate both his positive and negative images at various times in history (in the 1660s, the nineteenth century, the Second World War, and during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s). As an extension of this activity, write an essay analyzing the differing historical

views of Dollard des Ormeaux, or write a convincing argument for whether or not he should be regarded as a hero.

Resources

[Adam Dollard des Ormeaux Worksheet](#)

[Adam Dollard des Ormeaux - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

Massicotte, E.-Z. *Dollard des Ormeaux et ses compagnons, notes et documents*. Montréal, Le comité de monument Dollard des Ormeaux, 1920.

Hollier, Robert. *Dollard: héros ou aventurier?* Montréal, Éditions de l'Horizon, 1963.