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Asbestos, Quebec: The Town, the Mineral, and the Local-Global Balance Between the Two

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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ASBESTOS, QUEBEC: THE TOWN, THE MINERAL, AND THE LOCAL-GLOBAL
BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO

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By

Jessica van Horssen

Graduate Program in History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
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Abstract

From the late 19th to the late 20th century, the cities and industries of the world became increasingly reliant on fireproof materials made from asbestos. As asbestos was used more and more in building materials and household appliances, its harmful effect on human health, such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma, became apparent. The dangers surrounding the mineral led to the collapse of the industry in the 1980s. While the market demand and medical rejection of asbestos were international, they were also experienced in the mining and processing communities at the core of the global industry. In the town of Asbestos, Quebec, home of the largest chrysotile asbestos mine in the world, we can see how this process of market boom and bust shaped a fierce local cultural identity.

This dissertation examines the global asbestos industry from a local perspective, showing how the people of Asbestos, Quebec had international reach through the work they did and the industry they continue to support today. This thesis explores how the boundaries between humans and the environment were blurred in Asbestos as a strong cultural identity was created through the interaction between people and the natural world. This work advances our understanding of the interdependence of the local-global relationship between resource industries and international trade networks, illustrating the ways it shapes communities and how communities shape it. Bringing bodies of land, human bodies, and the body politic of Asbestos, Quebec into the history of the global asbestos trade helps demonstrate how this local cultural identity grew to influence national policy and global debates on commodity flows, occupational health, and environmental justice.

Keywords: Asbestos (Quebec), asbestos, Johns-Manville Co., mining, asbestosis, mesothelioma, lung cancer, chrysotile, Asbestos Strike, 1949, history, cultural identity, Canada, Jeffrey Mine, environmental history, medical history.

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This being a doctoral dissertation, I had a tremendous amount of help from my advisor, Alan MacEachern, whose thorough editing of drafts challenged me to look at my subject and my role as historian from new perspectives. His consideration and patience were—and still are—greatly appreciated. In addition to Alan, I was fortunate to have a community of scholars around me at the University of Western Ontario and through the Network in Canadian History and Environment, including Shelley McKellar, Robert Wardhaugh, and Stéphane Castonguay, who sat on my defence committee and offered invaluable insight into this dissertation. These scholars also encouraged me to think and write about Asbestos from new angles, and their suggestions were always inspiring. Of

particular note is Joy Parr, who also sat on my committee and who taught me to trust my instincts as a historian and motivated me to always think creatively, compassionately, and constructively.

My friends and family have been heroically understanding over the past five years, acting as sounding-boards, cheerleaders, proofreaders, and chefs. Radha-Prema McAllister brought this dissertation to life through her illustrations of the graphic novel based on my research, and helped me keep my sanity during the writing process with sauciness, hilarity, and a genuine interest in rocks. The generosity of Ang and Rich Waterton continues to astound me and I will never be able to thank them enough for putting a roof over my head, food in my stomach, and laughter in my heart. Rebecca Jane Woods and Teresa Iacobelli have been comrades in the academic trenches and very dear friends, as have Priya Raju, Sarah Doran, Mike Eamon, Jennine Hurl-Eamon, and the Lost Boys of Lavington Court. My parents, Frank and Theresa have supported me throughout this project, and taught me fundamental life lessons while showing unimagined patience and love for their stressed-out daughter. My Oma, Johanna, offered constant support, motivation, and ice cream throughout this process and remains my sunshine on a cloudy day. All of these people now know far more about Asbestos than they probably ever hoped to, and without them, this dissertation would not be complete and I would not be where I am today.

Table of Contents

List of Photographs.....	vii
List of Appendices.....	viii
List of Abbreviations.....	ix
Introduction: Asbestos and Cultural Identity.....	1
Chapter 1: Creation Stories, 1791-1918.....	22
Chapter 2: Land With a Future, Not a Past: Bodies of Land, 1918-1949.....	57
Chapter 3: Negotiating Risk: Human Bodies, 1918-1949.....	84
Chapter 4: Essential Characteristics: The Body Politic, 1918-1949.....	116
Chapter 5: Bodies Collide, The Strike of 1949.....	141
Chapter 6: “Une ville qui se deplace”: Bodies of Land, 1949-1983.....	185
Chapter 7: Useful Tools: Human Bodies, 1949-1983.....	211
Chapter 8: Altered Authority: The Body Politic, 1949-1983.....	247
Conclusion: Surviving Collapse: Asbestos Post-1983.....	272
Bibliography.....	280
Appendix.....	297
Curriculum Vitae.....	299

List of Photographs

1. The Jeffrey Mine and the town of Asbestos, Quebec, 1909, p. 51.
2. Mining and haulage arrangement of levels and approaches at the Jeffrey Mine, 1939, p. 72.
3. Moving homes in Asbestos, Quebec, circa 1940, p. 76.
4. Editorial Cartoon distributed to Jeffrey Mine workers, June 1942, p. 134
5. “L’amiante-jeu” dealing with the issues of the 1949 strike, p. 157
6. Showing the past and future expansions of the Jeffrey Mine, 1967, p. 196
7. The float made by Jeffrey Mine workers, 1967, p. 199
8. Editorial cartoon illustrating the streets of Asbestos, 1971, p. 235

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Confidential Sources, p. 297

List of Abbreviations

ACRF: Asbestos Claims Research Facility
BAL Co.: British American Land Company
BANQ: Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec
CGS: Canadian Geological Survey
CJM: Canadian Johns-Manville
CLC: Canadian Labour Congress
CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal
CSD: Centrale des syndicats démocratiques
CSN: Confédération des syndicats nationaux
CTCC: Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada
EPA: Environmental Protection Agency
FLQ: Front de libération du Québec
JM: Johns-Manville Corporation
LAC: Library and Archives Canada
PQ: Parti Québécois
QAMA: Quebec Asbestos Mining Association
SNA: Syndicat national d'Asbestos
UN: United Nations
WHO: World Health Organization
WTO: World Trade Organization

Introduction: Asbestos and Cultural Identity

If you want to understand Asbestos, the place, you have to understand asbestos the mineral. While I was researching Asbestos in December 2007, G. Claude Théroux of the Société d'Histoire d'Asbestos took a piece of raw asbestos from his pocket and threw it onto the table between us. "You want to know Asbestos? Now you know it." Looking at the table in shock, I asked, "Aren't you afraid of getting sick?" At the start of my research, before I had begun to understand the strong connection the townspeople had to asbestos, this was an understandable question. The people of Asbestos are unafraid of the mineral that not only gives the town its name, but also its past, its cultural identity, and its hope for the future. A retired history teacher who put himself through university by working at the Jeffrey Mine, Théroux handled the mineral with a familiarity passed down to him through generations who made Asbestos their home. His actions attest to something I quickly learned: Asbestos and asbestos, the people and the place, are unpredictable and interconnected.

Asbestos is a small community located in the l'Estrie region¹ of Quebec, halfway between Montreal and Quebec City, north of Sherbrooke and south of the St. Lawrence River. It is the site of the Jeffrey Mine, the largest chrysotile asbestos mine in the world, which once met 80% of the global demand for the mineral and was owned for a large part of its history by the American Johns-Manville Company (JM).² The mine is the source of the community's pride and sorrow, success and collapse, but to those from outside Asbestos, the town is widely known for two other reasons. Within a historical context, it is known as the scene of a dramatic strike that occurred there from February to June 1949, which some historians claim started Quebec's Quiet Revolution, which was a socio-political movement during the 1950s and 1960s in which the French Canadian majority in the province became increasingly secular, gained control of the province's major industries and businesses, and rallied their political strength and ambitions to affect major changes within Quebec and the rest of Canada through waves of neonationalism and

¹ This region of Quebec has been referred to in a number of different ways, starting with the "Eastern Townships" in 1806. Then, with the increased French Canadian population due to extremely high birth rates and a need for new land later in the 19th century it became the "Cantons de l'Est," and finally, in the 1940s, what it is known as today, "l'Estrie."

² *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 22 January 1919, p. 31.

reform liberalism.³ Within a more contemporary context, Asbestos is known for the support it continues to receive from the federal and provincial governments in order to keep the Jeffrey Mine, and therefore the community, alive.⁴ While both associations mention Asbestos, neither of these perspectives adequately take into account the complex history of the community and how this history informs present realities and debate.⁵ Just as Thérout explained that in order to know Asbestos I had to understand the mineral, one cannot fully understand the current asbestos debate in Canada without understanding the cultural identity and history of the community.

Cultural identity is an important element of this dissertation. The term refers to the constantly developing common values, expectations, and ambitions that were shaped through shared experiences, success, and failure in Asbestos. Theorist Patrick Colm Hogen writes that cultural identity is at the centre of both world politics and everyday life,⁶ and this dissertation will show how this local-global relationship was negotiated in Asbestos to shape the ways the local population saw itself in the community and in the world. Social philosopher Stuart Hall also reminds us that cultural identity is constantly changing with shifting situations and aspirations,⁷ and I will argue that in Asbestos, this was also community identity, undergoing constant change as townspeople balanced local needs with global industry. While it is often understood within a larger national or ethnic context, a local cultural identity developed in Asbestos through a lived system of common beliefs and practices. This system was informed and influenced by how the working class French Canadian majority and the upper class Anglophone elite interacted with each other

³ Historical perspectives on the Quiet Revolution vary. See, for example, Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism Versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, Robert Chodos, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1983), Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), and Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec Terrorist*, Joan Pinkham, trans. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

⁴ The industry collapsed in the early 1980s, but as recent as 2010, the federal government gave pro-asbestos lobby groups a quarter of a million dollars, promoted the mineral in international markets, and prevented the United Nations from banning trading of the mineral. The Quebec government also supports the industry, and in June 2010 it backed a \$58 million bank loan to further develop the Jeffrey Mine and sustain the dwindling local workforce for at least 25 more years. See, "Asbestos Mine Workers to Build Reserve Fund," *CBC News*, 14 June 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2010/06/14/asbestos-jeffrey-mine.html>, accessed 15 June 2010, and Kathleen Ruff, "Deathbed Reprieve for Killer Industry?" *Toronto Star*, 6 June 2010, p. 1.

⁵ This assertion is based on a thorough survey of the published materials on Asbestos, Quebec. The historical studies on the community deal entirely with the 1949 strike and contemporary news items about Asbestos focus solely on government subsidies of the industry.

⁶ Patrick Colm Hogen, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. xi.

⁷ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds. (London: SAGE, 2003), p. 4.

and the natural world, giving character and purpose to the land, the people, and the politics of the community. While townspeople were often divided, their actions and reactions were rooted in this cultural identity, and by tracing its development in Asbestos, this dissertation will advance our understanding of the ways in which boundaries between people and the natural world dissolve in resource communities.

What follows is a history detailing the lifecycle of a resource community, but more than that, this dissertation will show how at a very local level, the people of Asbestos developed a strong cultural identity by interacting with the natural world through work, which they used as an important tool of global political influence. I intend to advance our understanding of the interdependence of this local-global relationship and illustrate the ways it shapes resource communities and how resource communities shape it.

Origins of the mineral, the community, and the industry

Much of this dissertation is rooted in the mineral found deep inside the Jeffrey Mine and how its extraction and production created a community and supported a global industry. The term “asbestos” encompasses six different types of the mineral found throughout the world. The chemical makeup changes due to origins and eras, and the chrysotile, white asbestos found in North America and parts of Russia and South Africa—Quebec’s two main competitors—is the only type that was made from geological shifts of serpentine rock. The other five, amosite, athophyllite, crocidolite, tremolite, and actinolite, were formed in amphibole rock, and while some of these possess longer fibres that are more easily woven, they are more difficult to access and in some cases, much more harmful to human health. The chrysotile found in Asbestos has a chemical makeup of $Mg_3Si_2O_5(OH)_4$: magnesium, silicon, and oxygen.⁸ The magnesium makes the mineral fireproof, able to withstand heat up to 3000°F and higher,⁹ but it also makes asbestos carcinogenic.

The fact that asbestos causes cancer has severely damaged the marketability of the mineral and is what makes the Canadian government’s continued support of the industry so unsettling, but the mineral was once considered both magical and modern because of

⁸ Cornelis Klein, “Rocks, Minerals, and a Dusty World,” in *Reviews in Mineralogy: Health Effects of Mineral Dusts*, Brooke T. Mossman and George D. Guthrie Jr., eds. (Chelsea: Mineralogical Society of America, 1993), p. 17.

⁹ W.E. Sinclair, *Asbestos: Its Origin, Production and Utilization*, Mining Publications Ltd., ed. (London: Salisbury House, 1959), p. 11.

its fireproof qualities. A fibrous rock that can be broken apart by hand until it resembles raw cotton, asbestos was woven into a variety of goods that would not burn, rust, or decay with age. Because it was fireproof and relatively easy to weave, asbestos was used historically as a tool against the hazards of fire, to fortify ceramic cooking pots in the Neolithic Age, as a wick in candles burning on holy alters, as the fabric of death shrouds for ancient kings on funeral pyres, and as a prop in a parlour trick by Charlemagne, who threw asbestos tablecloths into fires at parties, pulling them out clean and unscathed.¹⁰

The magical qualities of asbestos made the mineral an oddity until the invention of electricity, which caused widespread fires throughout the major cities of the world. The First World War also illustrated the importance of fireproof buildings, and the mineral was a key component in reconstruction efforts following the conflict. Asbestos promised safety and a better life for those who used it, and profits for those who sold it. This combination of magical and modern has influenced the development of the cultural identity in Asbestos, fully entwined with the mineral found in the Jeffrey Mine.

The Jeffrey Mine is the largest chrysotile asbestos mine in the world because of how the mineral is laid out in the land on which the community was built. The deposit in Asbestos was shaped during a process of geological shifts and collisions that began during the Precambrian period 750 million years ago, when the supercontinent of Rodinia broke into smaller landmasses that clashed together, then separated again.¹¹ Major tectonic shifts pushed mountain chains that were once part of the ocean floor into the landmass that was to become North America during the Devonian period between 410 and 355 million years ago, creating the Appalachian mountain range that extends from Greenland to the southern United States, passing through what was to become Asbestos.¹² The intense heat and friction of this process splintered the serpentine rock at this

¹⁰ Rachel P. Maines, *Asbestos and Fire: Technological Trade-Offs and the Body at Risk* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2005), pp. 27-28, and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 2.

¹¹ Paul D. Ryan, "Caledonides," in *The Oxford Companion to the Earth*, Paul Hancock and Brian J. Skinner, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca:2048/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t112.e99>. Accessed 5 October 2007.

¹² David A. Rothery, "Obduction," in *The Oxford Companion to the Earth*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca:2048/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t112.e622>, and D.L. Dineley, "Devonian," in *The Oxford Companion to the Earth*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca:2048/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t112.e215>. Accessed 5 October 2007.

particular site,¹³ and in its re-crystallization, the chemical composition was changed and veins of asbestos fibre were formed.

The majority of asbestos deposits throughout the world are found along a linear plane, with veins usually several metres in length, which means that several mines need to be established in the same area, often beside each other and by multiple companies, in order to reach the entire deposit. Contrary to the norm, the mineral deposit in Asbestos is found in veins that run in a circular pattern, forming a rounded knoll. This meant that the Jeffrey Mine was the only pit needed in Asbestos to extract the rich mineral deposit, which cut back on costs and time. From the beginning, the land at what would become Asbestos was unique.

The knoll at Asbestos made the town one of the most profitable asbestos mining communities in the world. Quebec chrysotile at one point made up 95% of the global trade of the mineral and the Jeffrey Mine produced the majority of this supply.¹⁴ By focusing on the massive movement of land and people that was required to extract this quantity of mineral, amounting to 30,000 tonnes a day by 1960,¹⁵ I will show how the focused examination of a small resource community can advance our understanding of the ways in which people interact with the natural world. In doing so, I will challenge the historiography of bodies, resource communities, occupational health and safety, the asbestos industry, and working class-managing class relations in 19th and 20th century Quebec.

Historiography

This study is rooted in the idea that bodies are historical, shaped by both time and place. Bodies are also inherently physical, and this physicality and tangibility is a recurring theme in the history of Asbestos. Medical historians M.S.R. Jenner and B.O. Taihe criticize the historiography of human body studies for being too abstract and narrowly focusing on the authority scientists, doctors, and politicians appear to have over disease and disease management.¹⁶ This dissertation provides a more holistic examination of different, yet complimentary bodies in Asbestos in order to highlight the ways in which

¹³ David S. O'Hanley, "The Origin of the Chrysotile Asbestos Veins in Southwestern Quebec," *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 1-3 (January 1987), p. 8.

¹⁴ Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust*, p. 2.

¹⁵ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1960, p. 160.

¹⁶ M.S. R. Jenner and B.O. Taihe, "The Historiographical Body," *Medicine in the Twentieth Century* Roger Cooter and Johns Pickstone, eds. (Newark: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 193.

they participate in a process of mutual exchange that contributes to the complex local cultural identity: bodies of land, human bodies, and the body politic.

“Bodies of land” refers to three interconnected physical realities in Asbestos: the mineral, the Jeffrey Mine, and the property on which the community was built. The global demand for the mineral relied on high extraction levels at the Jeffrey Mine, and this level of production required the mine to continually expand into the community, which was built on land rich with asbestos deposits. The need for more workable and liveable land meant that the people of Asbestos were frequently moving away from the edges of the Jeffrey Mine as it grew to eclipse homes, businesses, and neighbourhoods. The examination of bodies of land in Asbestos establishes a foundation for how the community interacted with the natural environment in such an intensely familiar way, passed on by generations, that a cultural identity was formed. I will use a combination of surveyor reports, engineer analyses, industry assessments, town council minutes, and local newspaper articles to reveal how the land in Asbestos was managed and understood in the community.

Historical studies of land have been fundamental to the field of environmental history, which has the relationship between culture and the natural world as a key pillar. In his article, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” historian Richard White urges scholars to re-examine the connection between work and nature to recognize that through labour, resource workers have “achieved a bodily knowledge of the natural world.”¹⁷ In *The Organic Machine*, White asserts that through labour, humans and the natural world become inseparable, and argues that we cannot understand human history without understanding natural history because of this connection.¹⁸ Using White’s assertions as a foundation, I will take his idea further, showing that bodily knowledge of nature is gained not only by those who work directly with it, such as the men and women at the Jeffrey Mine, but also by those who lived around it. The people of Asbestos not only knew the land through work, they—men, women, children, young and old—knew it intimately, simply by living in the community: hearing the sounds of the machines in the pit, seeing and breathing in the asbestos dust that hovered over neighbourhoods,

¹⁷ Richard White, ““Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature,” *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1995), p. 172.

¹⁸ Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 113.

experiencing the terror of rocks crashing through their homes during blasting, and using the mine as a focal point of celebration, community spirit, and play. In *Clearcutting the Pacific Rainforest*, historian Richard A. Rajala describes how the rapid industrialization of British Columbia's forestry industry turned the forest into a "giant factory without a roof."¹⁹ This was true for Asbestos as well, but where Rajala's factory occurred in the distant woods, the one in Asbestos was in the heart of the community.

In making the Jeffrey Mine a "factory," Johns-Manville constantly increased its reliance on new technologies to improve extraction rates. In *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada*, environmental historian Liza Piper writes that international markets commoditized the land and separated it from local mining populations,²⁰ but this dissertation will question her assertion about how people in resource communities were distanced from the resources they worked with and the ways in which they challenged this distance. Piper's northern mining communities differ from Asbestos, and this study will further our understanding of how international markets can work to strengthen and politicize the connection between people and the natural world and influence a proud local identity.

While pride is a strong element in the cultural identity of Asbestos, so too is risk, and this dissertation will lead to a renewed perspective on how pride and risk can complement each other in resource communities. It will do so by showing how the connection between people and land can negatively affect human bodies, and how those affected can choose to confront or ignore this reality. My use of the term "human bodies," refers to the workers at the Jeffrey Mine who extracted and processed asbestos, and the internal medical effects the mineral had on them and the community. Historian David Cantor criticizes many medical histories because they tend to treat "the body and the disease as two distinct entities,"²¹ but this study will humanize the diseases asbestos

¹⁹ Richard A. Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rainforest: Production, Science, and Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), p. 30.

²⁰ Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), p. 9.

²¹ David Cantor, "The Diseased Body," *Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, p. 347. For more studies on occupational health and industrial medicine that attempt to get away from this historiographical trend, see, Daniel M. Berman, *Death on the Job: Occupational Health and Safety Struggles in the United States* (Monthly Review Press, 1980), Claudia Clark, *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), Alan Derickson, *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster* (Cornell University Press, 1998), Alan Derickson, *Workers' Health: Workers' Democracy: The Western Miners' Struggle, 1891-1925* (Cornell University Press, 1988), Bennett M. Judkins, *We Offer Ourselves as Evidence: Toward Workers' Control of Occupational Health* (Greenwood Press, 1986), George Rosen, *The History of Miners' Diseases: A Medical and Social Interpretation* (Schuman's Press,

causes, analyzing the lived experiences of those whose health was directly affected by the mineral and of those who were left to reconcile a cultural identity based on interaction with toxic land. I will achieve this by relying on confidential medical files and reports, never before used in studies of Asbestos, and international medical journals to bring crucial context and perspective to the history of health in the community.

The three main diseases asbestos causes are asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma. Asbestosis is a fibrosis, or hardening, of the fluid in the lungs that happens when microscopic asbestos fibres are inhaled over an extended period of time and build up in the lining of the lungs, preventing them from expanding and contracting as they should, leading to death by suffocation. Lung cancer is something most people are familiar with, but because of its association with the tobacco industry, asbestos historically has been overlooked as a causal factor. Mesothelioma is another asbestos-related cancer that manifests on the linings of major organs, resulting in a fast-acting, rarely curable disease. All three take between 15 and 30 years to develop, and all three have led to many deaths in Asbestos.

Environmental contamination and its effects on human health have been explored in many disciplines including geography, natural science, history, and sociology. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* focuses on the harmful effects of pesticides on the natural world and urges us to rethink the connection between people and the environment. Her personal experience with cancer also illustrates how the contamination of nature can negatively affect human health.²² Since then, scholars have attempted to bring large corporations that are responsible for environmental contamination to account, often employing an "us vs. them" dichotomy. Within this framework, asbestos workers are victims to industry leaders who exploit the land and the people who work it.

Investigative reporter Paul Brodeur has published several monographs on the asbestos industry using this dichotomy, including *Expendable Americans* and *Outrageous Misconduct*, and German reporter Günter Wallraff has followed suit with *Lowest of the Low*.²³ Historians Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner have also published on the

1943), James Whiteside, *Regulating Danger: The Struggle for Mine Safety in the Rocky Mountain Coal Industry* (University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

²² Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1992). Original edition published 1964.

²³ Paul Brodeur, *Expendable Americans* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), Paul Brodeur, *Outrageous Misconduct* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), Günter Wallraff, *Lowest of the Low* (London: Methuen, 1988).

negative health effects industry has on its workers and the environment, including *Deadly Dust* and *Deceit and Denial*.²⁴ Markowitz and Rosner write that, “the linking of health issues with traditional environmental and labor [*sic*] concerns may be a potent force in stimulating a new, grass-roots opposition to corporate power.”²⁵ They hope that through a reorganization of traditional American corporate structure, the health of the environment and the working class will be improved. These studies are important in helping us understand issues of environmental justice and how companies and governments make decisions that put marginalized communities, minorities, and the working class at direct bodily risk.

In her examinations of the South African asbestos industry, historian Nancy Jacobs explains that, “it is necessary to recognize that environmental and social justice are linked and that power imbalances will determine the ways men and women, rich and poor, and blacks and whites live with each other and the natural world.”²⁶ In the case of Asbestos, this power imbalance could be seen between the working class majority and the elite managing class of JM officials. This dissertation will show that as early as the 1920s, JM knew of the severe health risks asbestos posed to human bodies, but actively prevented this knowledge from reaching its workers and the general public. I will demonstrate how the company intentionally treated the people of Asbestos as experimental bodies to determine the full extent of how the mineral found in the Jeffrey Mine can affect human health: the community became a perfectly contained test laboratory.²⁷

Because of the traditional lack of political influence people from lower classes have had, medical and social philosopher Michel Foucault explains that they have always been “the most suitable subjects for an experimental course,”²⁸ and it is easy to see how

²⁴ See, for example, Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Industrial Disease in Twentieth Century America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Environmental Pollution* (Berkeley: UofC Press, 2002).

²⁵ Markowitz and Rosner, *Deceit and Denial*, p. 286.

²⁶ Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 221.

²⁷ Although shocking to learn of, medical professionals have used contained communities and people in this way in the past to monitor the progression of disease, the most known incidence being the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment in Alabama from 1932 to 1972. See, Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and its Legacy* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1994), p. 83.

this could apply in Asbestos. With this study, however, I intend to broaden our understanding of environmental and social justice through a close examination of how the people of Asbestos came to know of the risks they were subject to, and how they chose to internalize this knowledge as a part of their cultural identity. In doing so, this dissertation will show that, while important, studies such as Brodeur's, Jacobs', and Markowitz and Roser's, have put environmental and social justice in a "black box." Philosopher of science Bruno Latour explains that black boxes are often used to simplify complex issues, and that instead of offering an explanation, scientists and scholars "draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output."²⁹ At the moment, environmental injustice is in a black box that tells us that corporations and governments put marginalized and working class communities at risk for the sake of industry. This dissertation will challenge this simplification.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as being "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people...with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies...It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."³⁰ Johns-Manville has a history of suppressing medical knowledge and gaining government allies to ensure industrial profits, while it knowingly put its workers at environmental and occupational risk. By examining how the people of Asbestos internalized their knowledge of the land and their own bodies in order to deal with the risks the industry posed to their health, this dissertation will show that for much of its history, this was a community where environmental justice was achieved. This assertion does not mean that I will excuse JM's deceitful practices, as it is clear from this study that company officials intentionally and continuously put workers at risk. By giving the people of Asbestos agency over their own bodies, showing when they learned about the negative health effects of the mineral and how they internalized this knowledge as part of their complex

²⁹ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 3.

³⁰ The United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Environmental Justice," <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/>, accessed 3 June 2010.

cultural identity, I will argue that the understanding of risk in Asbestos is partly what has given the local body politic global influence.

“Body politic” refers to the community of Asbestos, which has historically been made up of three different factions sharply divided by class: workers, middle class community leaders, and upper class company officials. I have used government documents, town council minutes, company correspondence and local newspaper reports to show how a dynamic body politic was formed through conflict and cooperation. This body politic relied, and continues to rely, heavily on a local understanding of the connection between people and the natural world. The symptoms of asbestos-related disease are difficult to overlook or ignore, and this study will show that the people of Asbestos knew the mineral they extracted from the Jeffrey Mine was negatively affecting their bodies by 1949 at the very latest. Markowitz and Rosner write “at the heart of the current struggle [for environmental justice] is the very difficult question of how industry or the government decides what is safe,”³¹ but this dissertation will show that the body politic in Asbestos—the people themselves—decided what was and what was not safe. They did this through a community understanding of bodily risk.

The study of risk has a rich historiography that illuminate how the community reacted to the health threats of the mineral.³² Theorist Mary Douglas emphasizes that the question is not whether risks are real, but rather how they are politicized, and the importance of local knowledge and accountability when it comes to the understanding of risk.³³ This dissertation will show that the people of Asbestos were aware of the dangers the mineral posed to their bodies long before the general public was, but chose to accept the risks rather than reject the industry and the cultural identity they had created around it. Douglas’ analysis supports this argument, and she writes that people accept risk not because they lack the knowledge necessary to properly assess danger, but rather because

³¹ Markowitz and Rosner, *Deceit and Denial*, p. 6.

³² See, for example, Newton H. Copp and Andrew W. Zanella, *Discovery, Innovation, and Risk: Case Studies in Science and Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), Deborah Lupton, *Risk* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), Rachel P. Maines, *Asbestos and Fire: Technological Trade-offs and the Body at Risk* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2005), *Risk and Morality*, Richard V. Ericson and Aaron Doyle, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), *Risk, Environment, and Modernity*, Scott Lash, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Brian Wynne, eds. (London: SAGE, 1996)

³³ Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 30 and Mary Douglas, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 9.

risk is a fundamental element of their community that can be ignored by focusing on the benefits that come with living in a successful resource town.³⁴

The understanding of risk in Asbestos can be attributed to the community being what theorist Ulrich Beck describes as a “risk society:” a society organized in response to the risks that it faces. For Beck, this requires a reorganization of local power and authority to allow the exceptional condition—in this case, the people of Asbestos choosing to live and work with a dangerous mineral—to become the norm.³⁵ An examination of the local body politic shows how the “exceptional condition” was accepted in Asbestos and worked into the community’s cultural identity. In doing so, I will further our understanding of how people in resource communities internalize the connection between humans and the natural world, to show that the risk of a lost identity can be more threatening than the bodily risk of a toxic land and industry.

The commitment to community survival in Asbestos is one articulated in actions, not words. While the community does have a historical society, its archive consists mainly of maps, company newsletters, and local newspapers. Private papers and personal diaries are not available to researchers. Furthermore, the people of Asbestos have a history of being wary of outsiders, which has become more pronounced since the industry collapsed and the community has been attacked in the press for continuing to support the Jeffrey Mine. Because of this, I was unable to obtain oral histories from community members, despite their general support of my work, shown through telephone calls, emails, and Christmas cards sent, checking in on how my study was progressing, and possibly making sure I was not writing a scathing anti-Asbestos piece. The lack of oral interviews and personal diaries is a problem cultural history has constantly come up against, but despite this challenge, I have used the words of townspeople whenever I have found them in newspaper articles or letters to government officials, and the other sources I use have allowed me to closely examine how the actions of the people of Asbestos reveal the shaping of a strong cultural identity.

Aside from source availability, my focus on actions in this study is largely due to the belief that actions reveal a lived experience. Oral history can often tell how an event is remembered, but by examining actions within their historical context, we can advance our

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

³⁵ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Mark Ritter, trans. (London: SAGE, 1992), p. 24.

understanding of how the people of Asbestos internalized their experiences as individuals and as a community. Historian Joy Parr explains that this internalization is often done through the human body. In *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday*, Parr writes that bodies “are not only being conditioned by circumstances, they are also enduring reservoirs of past practice, which actively influence subsequent responses.”³⁶ The people of Asbestos continue to lobby the provincial and federal governments to support the industry despite the dangers of the mineral and their knowledge of what it does to their bodies. I will argue that they do so because the local cultural identity was formed through a complex history of their bodies interacting with the natural world, the mineral, and the Jeffrey Mine.

This connection and resulting identity is not one that is expressed in words, and Parr reminds us that, “Our senses are the conduits through which knowledge of technology and the environment flow and, through retuning habit and reflex...Most of these adaptations are held beyond speech, often outside conscious awareness.”³⁷ Studying the actions of the people of Asbestos will allow me to access the thoughts and feelings of community members that they may not even realize they had. Foucault calls this “unconscious knowledge,”³⁸ and it describes the way people instinctively react to the situations that surround them every day. The way the people of Asbestos instinctively react to events and ideas in this history will contribute to our understanding of resource communities and how local identities are formed through a connection between humans and the natural environment.

The focus on bodies and the unconscious knowledge they can reveal distinguishes this study from other histories of mining communities.³⁹ I have used these studies as a foundation for my own, but the differences between the communities other scholars examine and Asbestos are striking and help us understand the development of a complex local cultural identity. Like many other mining towns, Asbestos began with a transient

³⁶ Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, Vintage Press, 1973), p. xi.

³⁹ See, for example, Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2008), Karen Buckley, *Danger, Death, and Disaster in the Crownsnest Pass Mines, 1902-1928* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Digging Our Own Graves: Coal Miners and the Struggle Over Black Lung Disease* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

male-dominated population, but quickly grew into a community of families.⁴⁰ The way Asbestos differs from these other histories, however, is that the Jeffrey Mine was a place for both male and female labour. In her study of Arizona mining communities, Linda Gordon discusses the militancy of miners' wives in reinforcing white family values and racial divisions,⁴¹ but the inclusion of women workers in Asbestos created a different community character than the one Gordon describes. Female employees were restricted to the dusty textile department at the factory beside the pit, but the Jeffrey Mine quickly became a place of romance, with JM newsletters advertising the attractiveness of its single female workers—referred to as “Asbestos beauties,”—and the habit of its male employees to look to the department to find wives.⁴² Families often began at the Jeffrey Mine, and many local women were not completely dependent on the wages of their fathers or husbands for their wellbeing. Women were also actively involved in the politics of the community, participating in strikes, protests, and even violence. The action and inclusion of the women of Asbestos in traditionally male realms of class conflict affected the entire community and influenced the development of the local cultural identity.

In addition to the inclusion of women in the Jeffrey Mine's workforce, Asbestos differed from other mining towns in that although it was a single company and single industry community, the major decisions regarding the mine and those who depended on it were not always made from head offices far away.⁴³ JM did have its headquarters in New York City, with an office in Montreal, but because of the strong cultural identity in Asbestos, decisions regarding the operations of the Jeffrey Mine were often negotiated in the community amongst workers, town council, and company officials. The people of Asbestos insisted again and again on keeping issues surrounding land and people local, resenting any action that breached the community's borders. According to labour historian Gregory S. Kealey, “[c]lass is to be studied as a relationship, an effect of

⁴⁰ See, for example, Charlie Angus and Brit Griffin, *We Lived a Life and then Some: The Life, Death, and Life of a Mining Town* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1996), John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2002), and Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 307.

⁴² See, for example, *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, December 1938, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1, and January-February 1939, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 3.

⁴³ See, for example, Michael A. Amundson, *Yellowcake Towns: Uranium Mining Communities in the American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), Larry Lankton, *Cradle to Grave: Life, Work, and Death at the Lake Superior Copper Mines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Anthony F.C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

struggles, in constant motion and reorganization,”⁴⁴ and this study of Asbestos will show us that class relationships are also time and place dependent, with the balance of power continuously shifting.

The shifting balance of power influenced the local cultural identity, and in 1949 Pierre Elliott Trudeau noticed, “the whole working class at Asbestos seems to possess an unprecedented self-confidence.”⁴⁵ This dissertation will show that confidence of Jeffrey Mine workers during the 1949 strike Trudeau was referring to was a direct result of the historically grounded cultural identity that was formed in Asbestos through the interaction of people and the natural world. Their confidence has since grown and the community has maintained a common front in their global pursuit of industrial success. Although Trudeau was impressed by the confidence of the workers, this is the first study that examines its roots. In fact, aside from a local history produced by the community in 1999, this is the first study on Asbestos that focuses on more than the five-month strike of 1949, and it is the only one that examines the subject from a holistic perspective. Despite the occasional reference in labour and Quebec history textbooks,⁴⁶ Asbestos remains absent from historical analyses that are not focused solely on the 1949 labour dispute, and even then, the community is barely present.

Trudeau’s 1956 collection on the strike is a reason for this absence, as he wrote that, “It is the date, rather than the particular place or the industry that is decisive. The strike might well have happened elsewhere...”⁴⁷ Although he diminished the importance of the community, Trudeau acknowledged that the “foundations of Quebec society were shaken at Asbestos,”⁴⁸ due in part, to the confidence of Jeffrey Mine workers. He also stated that the conflict was “a violent announcement that a new era had begun...[and] a turning point in the entire religious, political, social, and economic history of the Province of Quebec.”⁴⁹ Although his rhetoric was powerful, the context I provide in this dissertation shows that Trudeau was wrong: the people, the place, and the industry involved in the 1949 strike were what made the dispute matter, not just in the history of

⁴⁴ Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), p. 164.

⁴⁵ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, “Epilogue,” *The Asbestos Strike*, p. 344.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Bryan D. Palmer, *The Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

⁴⁷ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, “Introduction,” *The Asbestos Strike*, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Trudeau, “Epilogue,” p. 344

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

Quebec, but also in the history of Canada and the history of international trade and labour issues. The strike was a local conflict with global ramifications because of the industry's global reach, and the goals of Jeffrey Mine workers differed greatly from the ones Trudeau described.

Because of Trudeau's attention-garnering personality and politics, however, studies of Asbestos since 1956 have been overshadowed by his interpretation of the strike, which has led to a historiographical pattern that has placed the community on the periphery of the conflict and Quebec history. Very little scholarship has been produced on the strike since 1956, with nothing adequately contradicting Trudeau's conclusions. In 2004, Esther Delisle and Pierre K. Malouf wrote *Le Quatuor d'Asbestos: Autour de la grève de l'amiante*, which focuses on the political battle that arose over asbestos-related disease rather than on the strike or the community.⁵⁰ Although bearing the name of the town in its title, *Le Quatuor* had little to do with the land or the people of Asbestos, focusing instead on the mining community of East Broughton and the political discourse of the era. Suzanne Clavette followed this publication in 2005 with *Les Dessous d'Asbestos: Une lutte idéologique contre la participation des travailleurs*, which promised to reveal the community's experience of the strike, but again focused on events and opinions happening outside of Asbestos, bringing community members into an abstract ideological battle they were not concerned with.⁵¹ Even leading Quebec labour historian Jacques Rouillard focuses his studies on the socio-political impact the strike had on the province, not on the community,⁵² and Quebec historian Jocelyn Létourneau provides a study of Asbestos focusing only on the historical memory of the 1949 strike, not the lived experience.⁵³

An explanation of this historiography is simple: the people involved in initially publicizing the 1949 strike became major figures in Québécois and Canadian politics and history. Maurice Duplessis, often taking on the villain's role in these accounts, was

⁵⁰ Esther Delisle and Pierre K. Malouf, *Le Quatuor d'Asbestos: Autour de la Grève d'Amiante* (Montreal: Les Éditions Varia, 2004).

⁵¹ Suzanne Clavette, *Les Dessous d'Asbestos: Une Lutte Idéologique Contre la Participation des Travailleurs* (Quebec: Les presses de l'université Laval, 2005).

⁵² See, for example, Jacques Rouillard, "La Grève de l'Amiante de 1949 et le Projet de Réforme de l'Entreprise. Comment le Patronat a Défendu son Droit de Gérance," *Labour/Le travail* (Fall 2000), and Jacques Rouillard, "La Grève de l'Amiante, Mythe et Symbolique," *L'Action nationale* (September 1999).

⁵³ Jocelyn Létourneau, "La Grève de l'Amiante Entre ses Mémoires et l'Histoire," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal*, vol. 11 (1991).

Quebec premier for 18 years and had a major impact on the development of the province. Jean Marchand, secretary for the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC), slept in the homes of the workers during the strike⁵⁴ and went on to become a federal cabinet minister, a senator, and a Companion of the Order of Canada. Gérard Pelletier, university friend of Marchand and reporter for *Le Devoir*, also became a federal cabinet minister, a Canadian ambassador and Companion of the Order of Canada. Pierre Trudeau, who briefly joined Pelletier in Asbestos, was Prime Minister of Canada for 15 years. Both André Laurendeau and Pierre Laporte wrote on the provincial implications of the strike for *Le Devoir* and later served in the Quebec legislature.

The role of these historical figures in the 1949 strike has dominated studies of the conflict, overshadowing the real people and reasons behind the labour dispute, and turning Asbestos into a place of symbols and myths concerning the state of Quebec on the eve of the Quiet Revolution.⁵⁵ The people of Asbestos are uncomfortable with this reputation and this dissertation will bring them back into the history of the strike to show how a local perspective can tell a broader history about resource communities, industrialization, health, risk, and political influence. Asbestos was and is much more than a labour dispute: it reveals the mutual exchange between humans and the natural world, and the ways in which this connection can be internalized to shape an internationally powerful cultural identity rooted in place.

Throughout this study, the term “place” will be used to describe the geographic area of Quebec now known as Asbestos, as well as the various socio-historical constructions of it that were created, debated, and championed. Place is a characterization that reveals political, social, and cultural expectations and values,⁵⁶ and it meant and continues to mean different things to different people in Asbestos. Despite these differences, what remains central is physical engagement with the land. Anthropologist Tim Ingold notes that, “cultural knowledge and bodily substance...undergo continuous generation in the context of an ongoing engagement with the land.”⁵⁷ Expanding on

⁵⁴ English, p. 201.

⁵⁵ See for example, Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution*, and Rouillard, “La Grève de l’Amiante, Mythe et Symbolique.”

⁵⁶ G.J. Ashworth and Brian Graham, “Introduction,” *Senses of Place: Senses of Time, Heritage, Culture and Identity*, G.J. Ashworth and Brian Graham, eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 12.

Ingold's understanding, this study will use place to show how bodies interact, change, and grow within the framework outlined by anthropologist Keith H. Basso, who explains that the way people understand the land influences how they understand themselves.⁵⁸ In a place named Asbestos, site of the largest chrysotile mine in the world, people use their historical conceptions of bodies of land and human bodies to inform and influence their collective body politic. Because of the way bodies interact throughout the history of Asbestos, I will use these three entities—land, people, politics—as organizational tools in order to frame this analysis in time and place.

Methodology

The main sources I employ in my analysis of how bodies interact in Asbestos are local resources that have always been available to the public yet rarely used in previous studies. In addition, I use confidential JM documents obtained through the Johns-Manville Claims Resolution Management Corporation's Asbestos Claims Research Facility (ACRF) established by the company to facilitate workers compensation legislation. The local sources have been invaluable to gaining an understanding of the people who lived and worked in Asbestos, especially the local newspaper, *L'Asbestos*, later *Le Citoyen*, and the town council minutes, which reveal the community's growth, triumphs, fears, and slow collapse. These sources bring the bodies of Asbestos to life.

For the confidential JM documents, I am indebted to David Egilman, an American doctor and scholar working to ensure the success of class action lawsuits launched by labour groups against asbestos companies, and Geoffrey Tweedale, a global asbestos trade historian based in the United Kingdom. Both Egilman and Tweedale allowed me access to the files they had collected via subpoenas throughout the course of their own research, a great deal of which focused on Asbestos. The files Egilman provided mostly come from JM's ACRF in Denver, Colorado. These include confidential medical reports concerning the workers at the Jeffrey Mine and the people of Asbestos, but others, compiled in an "Asbestos Chronology" document, reveal the systematic pattern of discovery, panic, and denial that JM officials practiced in Asbestos between 1918 and 1983. The documents Tweedale provided were of a similar nature, and included the confidential files of the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association (QAMA)—a lobby group

⁵⁸ Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 67.

made up of company heads—which reveal secret medical studies, cover-ups, and attempts by company officials to prevent the industry from collapsing. QAMA has destroyed these files, but Tweedale was able to subpoena copies of them first. Tweedale also provided me with the private collection of Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, who led Mount Sinai Hospital’s Environmental and Occupational Health Division and was seen as one of the biggest threats to the asbestos industry because of his commitment to exposing the negative health effects of the mineral in the 1960s and 1970s. Neither Egilman nor Tweedale have used the documents relating to Asbestos in their work because they focused on different aspects of the global industry,⁵⁹ thus this study is the first time much of this information will be used. Following the lead of both Egilman and Tweedale, I have given these documents to Thérroux at the Société d’Histoire d’Asbestos, who gave me one of my first lessons on how to “know” the community.

This study advances our understanding of how we can know Asbestos by illuminating the ways people and the natural environment connect in the community and how this connection becomes the backbone of a local cultural identity with global repercussions. Chapter 1 will provide an analysis of how the Jeffrey Mine and the town of Asbestos were established via geological shifts, human migration, and the development of a local community completely reliant on one natural resource. This chapter will end in 1918, when JM purchased the Jeffrey Mine and irrevocably changed the character and direction of the community. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each cover the same time period, 1918-1949, but from different points of view: the history of Asbestos as told from the perspective of the land in Chapter 2, human bodies in Chapter 3, and the community in Chapter 4. This division in perspective will help illustrate how the people and the land became interconnected in Asbestos and the ways this connection influenced community dynamics and identity. Chapter 5 will unite these three perspectives once again in a close examination of the 1949 strike, told from the point of view of the people of Asbestos. The strike, much like JM’s arrival in 1918, fundamentally changed the community, and

⁵⁹ See, for example, David Egilman and Candace M. Horn, “Corruption of the Medical Literature: A Second Visit,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 34 (1998), David Egilman, Corey Fehnel, and Susanna Rankin Bohme, “Exposing the ‘Myth’ of ABC: ‘Anything But Chrysotile.’ A Critique of the Canadian Asbestos Mining Industry and McGill University Chrysotile Studies,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 44 (2003), Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

impacted the development of the local cultural identity that had the survival of the community as a fundamental characteristic. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will follow the pattern of Chapters 2, 3, and 4, each from the perspective of a different “bodily” aspect of Asbestos: the land, the people, and the community. These chapters will cover the period following the strike of 1949 until 1983, when the industry collapsed and JM filed for bankruptcy and left the town. These final chapters will show how the local population internalized the industrial collapse of their community from the perspective of the land they worked and lived on, their own bodies, and their collective identity, built on generations interacting with the Jeffrey Mine.

In telling the history of Asbestos in this way, I will rely on the methodological frame laid out in Judith Walzer Leavitt’s *Typhoid Mary*,⁶⁰ in which she describes the same history in each chapter, told from differing perspectives. I chose to do this to emphasize the importance of each of these bodies in the history of Asbestos. Taken together, these chapters form a cohesive, chronological understanding of the ways bodies interact to shape a local cultural identity with global reach that has been greatly neglected in previous studies, and adds texture and depth to the past and present of Asbestos. I hope, as Leavitt does, to “encourage readers to engage, as I have, in the process of interpretation, and to find their own integrated meanings”⁶¹ within these perspectives, and each chapter will begin with a brief look at Asbestos today, showing how the past is reflected in the present. The effects of the connection between people and the natural world on the body politic are not contained in Asbestos, and the mutual exchange of bodies can be seen in resource communities throughout Quebec, Canada, and the world. By using Asbestos as an example, we as a society can re-evaluate other resource communities, past and present, with a fuller understanding of the challenges, dangers, and triumphs they must confront. We can also reassess Canada’s continued support of the asbestos industry with a more holistic, physical, and local understanding of what it was, what it is, and what it should become.

Through the process of working the Jeffrey Mine and establishing a community around it, the people of Asbestos entered into a relationship of mutual exchange with the land, shaping it, and being shaped by it. This relationship, driven by global markets yet

⁶⁰ Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public’s Health* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

intensely local, produced a complex cultural identity in Asbestos that has been politicized on national and international levels. How does a connection to the natural environment develop into a strong cultural identity? How does a local identity develop global influence? Can one small community affect national and international politics? To answer these questions, this study will examine the history of the Jeffrey Mine and the culture the people of Asbestos created around it by balancing their needs with the needs of the land, and developing a connection to the Jeffrey Mine that surpassed the comforts of a steady paycheck. By analyzing the land, the people, and the politics of the community in this history of place, we will see how people with a fierce local cultural identity came to influence national policy and global debates on commodity flows, occupational health, and environmental justice.

Chapter 1: Creation Stories, 1791-1918

In the beginning, there was asbestos. Well, not exactly, but looking at the Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos today, it is easy to think that the land has looked like this forever, waiting beneath a surface of trees and grass, the mineral deposits running as deep as the surrounding Appalachians are high. Asbestos, Quebec and the massive deposits of the mineral that gave the town its name had many “beginnings” that depend on which creation story you align yourself with, as they have undergone several starting points that rely on differing perspectives and change according to people, time, and agendas. The land has not always looked like it does now, as it was shaped and reshaped over long periods of time.

The multiple creation stories of Asbestos reveal the changing values and aspirations of the people who took interest in the land where the community would be built, ranging from surveyor assessments to the expectations of families. This chapter will show how the foundations for the community that would become Asbestos were constantly changing as the land was defined and redefined time and again. I will bring this change into a larger context of evolving land, people, and community, in order to establish the beginnings of a complicated and complementary local cultural identity. In doing so, I will establish a foundation for this history of Asbestos and trace the foundations of how people and the natural world interact to create a resource community with a strong identity that influences how the local population sees its past, present, and future.

While working through the ways land, people, and politics interacted to form these stories, this chapter will address broader histories and larger contexts when conflicting creation stories built upon each other from 1791 to 1918. I will show how radically the land was changed in order to establish the Jeffrey Mine, and how much physical human effort was required to do so. The period covered by this chapter was one of struggle for the waves of migrating workers who attempted to make the Jeffrey Mine profitable. Much of this history is one of disappointment, but when a fuller understanding of the land and how people should work it was achieved, the local industry and community began to thrive. Asbestos fibre was born of geological friction and heat.

Asbestos the place would follow suit, being created and re-created with the friction and heat of clashing cultures, ideologies, and aspirations.

Ownership and Purpose, 1791-1879

After the land of Asbestos was formed by massive geological shifts, what is now the province of Quebec became a place on which diverse peoples would imprint their conceptions of what the environment could offer. While these conceptions often differed from culture to culture, person to person, they all believed in the benefits the natural environment would bring them. Now 21,400 square kilometres,⁶² l’Estrie has been somewhat of a “floating” region with boundaries fluctuating in the space south of the St. Lawrence River, north of the American border, west of the Chaudière River, and east of the Richelieu region.⁶³ The Abenaki First Nations, who had been pushed northward from the eastern United States due to an increase of white settlers in the early 18th century, were one of the first peoples to place cultural expectations and aspirations on the region. The Abenaki used this territory as hunting and fishing grounds and a village was established on the banks of the St. Francis River. The British attacked the village in 1759 during the Seven Years War and kept prisoners there after killing 200 Aborigines.⁶⁴ As the territory switched hands from the French Crown to the British with the Treaty of Paris of 1763, the Abenaki population went into rapid decline due to disease and war. L’Estrie was about to be redefined based on distinctly British cultural values.

While the British won the vast territory of New France in the Conquest of 1763, its management of the area was cautious. Confronted by a growing Francophone population in the area surrounding what was to become l’Estrie, and an increasingly restless American colony to the south that was about to break into revolution, British officials remade the region a “buffer-zone” between the two groups,⁶⁵ afraid of what would happen if they were to meet. The natural resources of the territory went largely

⁶² Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam, and Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons de l’est, Les Régions du Québec* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’université Laval, 1998), p. 15.

⁶³ Gilles Parent, *Deux Efforts de Colonisation Française dans les Cantons de l’Est, 1848 et 1851*, Département d’histoire, université de Sherbrooke, Groupe de recherche en histoire des Cantons de l’Est, ed (Sherbrooke: Librairie Dussault et de René Prince, 1980), p. 9.

⁶⁴ Catherine Matilda Day, *History of the Eastern Townships, Province of Quebec, Dominion of Canada, Civil and Descriptive in Three Parts* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1869), p. 137.

⁶⁵ J. Derek Booth, *Les Cantons de la Saint-François/Townships of the St. Francis* (Montreal: McCord Museum, McGill University, 1984), p. 22.

unexplored as the Abenaki population dwindled and the region became a deliberately unsettled space under British rule.

The way the region was used by the colonial government was changed after the American Revolution. British Loyalists headed north in search of territory still held by the Crown and colonial officials were confronted by the problem of finding them a place to settle while keeping a firm hold on the rest of their North American colonies. This led to the Royal Constitution Act of 1791, which established elected houses of assembly in Upper and Lower Canada to appease any rebellious sentiments that may have been prevalent following the American and French Revolutions. British officials decided that the unsettled buffer-zone was the ideal place for a strong and loyal Anglophone settlement to neutralize radical American sentiments and the growing French Canadian population. In many ways, the British saw this region as “empty land” waiting for what they believed to be the proper type of settlers. The presence of the Abenaki was negligible. Lower Canada was to become pacified and civilized through a British understanding of the land in l’Estrrie.

The Abenaki used the land for small hunting and fishing communal settlements along rivers, but the British method was more widespread and focused on individual land ownership and use. In addition to these two systems was yet another land-based ideology in the surrounding area based on the French seigneurial system. British officials wanted the region to be in sharp contrast with the Francophone seigneuries found in Lower Canada, which they saw as the product of an antiquated land management system.⁶⁶ Seigneuries were rectangular tracts of land lining the banks of the St. Lawrence and other rivers, which were necessary for communication and transportation. No new seigneuries were formed after the Conquest as British officials were committed to a strict land management system in which land was purchased rather than granted, and square lots were sold far from access roads and rivers. Townships were established in the buffer-zone region of l’Estrrie, and showed the British Crown’s determination to bring its North American colonies into a different type of order.

⁶⁶ Dominion of Canada Legislature, “First Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Causes Which Retard the Settlement of the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada,” (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1851), p. 34.

The townships of l’Etrie were first surveyed and mapped between 1792 and 1808,⁶⁷ just before the region was opened to Anglophone settlers. The number of British Loyalists who moved to the townships is disputed in the literature. Historian J.I. Little writes that the region was a place where “land-hungry Americans,” not Loyalists, settled.⁶⁸ However, historian Gilles Parent claims, “l’arpentage des townships, terminé vers 1796, est suivi par l’établissement de centaines de Loyalists en provenance des Etats-Unis.”⁶⁹ Despite these conflicting perspectives, Americans, both loyal and independent, settled in the region in the early 19th century and the boundary between the new United States and British Lower Canada was blurred.

Settlement in the region was a complicated and slow process that involved a leader-associate system of land purchasing,⁷⁰ which required a group of interested settlers to designate a “leader” who would make the journey to l’Etrie to survey the township he and his fellow associates wanted to purchase. Purchasers were often overwhelmed by the “wild” nature of the region.⁷¹ With its dense, dark forests, the land seemed too rugged, too secluded, and certainly not ideal for farming because of the amount of work it would take to clear fields. British officials needed to tame the region in order to draw people to it.

The construction of roads was intended to make the region less isolated and more accessible. The first of these was cleared by the British Army in 1810 and ran from Shipton Township down to the American border where it connected with a more complex transportation network.⁷² Named after James Craig, the Governor of Lower Canada, Craig’s Road ran past the future site of Asbestos. However, both the Governor and the road quickly became unpopular with French Canadians. Craig was removed from office while the road was being constructed because of his vocal mistrust of the Francophone population,⁷³ and the road became unusable after the first thaw in 1811 washed it out. British plans to use roads and immigration to tame the land of l’Etrie had failed.

⁶⁷ Edward Cleveland, “A Sketch of the Early Settlement and History of Shipton, Canada East,” *Richmond County Advocate*, 1858, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁸ J.I. Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition and Regional Identity in the Eastern Townships of Quebec*, Canadian Historical Association, ed., *Canada’s Ethnic Groups*, vol. 13 (Ottawa: Keystone Printing & Lithographing Ltd., 1989), p. 6.

⁶⁹ Parent, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Kesteman, et al, p. 89.

⁷¹ Day, pp. 164-165.

⁷² Cleveland, p. 25.

⁷³ Yvan Lamonde, *Histoire Sociale des Idées au Québec, 1760-1896*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Éditions Fides, 2000), p. 57.

Following the Conquest of 1763 the Francophone population of Lower Canada doubled approximately every twenty-five years.⁷⁴ Because of this growth and the subsequent overcrowding of seigneuries, the population looked towards l’Etrie as a new place to settle, but the unfamiliar township system, the isolation of the region, and the presence of British and American settlers prevented many from doing so.⁷⁵ By 1839, the British American Land Company (BAL Co.), in possession of 1,250,000 acres, had a monopoly over the region’s land sales.⁷⁶ In accordance with the colonial aspirations for l’Etrie, BAL Co. was not interested in selling township land to Francophone farmers and instead advertised heavily in major British urban centres during the 1830s.

BAL Co. promotional literature contained no reference to transportation problems or the ruggedness of the land and instead focused on, “[t]he undulating nature of the ground, and the fertility of irrigation from the numerous streams of running water...in which respect its superiority over other parts of Canada and the United States is distinctly established.”⁷⁷ Settlers lured by these descriptions were confronted by a crude reality when they arrived in the region, but it was often too late to back out of the sale.

While this was an effective way to sell land in l’Etrie, the Rebellion of 1837-38 in Lower Canada put a freeze on British immigration⁷⁸ and gave the growing French Canadian population a chance to respond to the colonial government’s township system. Patriot leader Louis-Joseph Papineau drew up 92 Resolutions in order to advocate radical changes in how Lower Canada was managed. Resolution 84 was an attack on how land was sold in l’Etrie, and an insistence that seigneuries replace the townships.⁷⁹ These demands were discussed and debated throughout the province. Although the rebellion failed, many of its goals were soon fulfilled. By 1840 the Francophone population in Lower Canada had risen to 600,000 from 335,000 in 1815 and needed the land available in l’Etrie to expand on.⁸⁰ The rebellion was over, but the issues it raised remained.

⁷⁴ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, Robert Chodos, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1983), p. 18.

⁷⁵ Kesteman, et al, p. 116.

⁷⁶ Parent, p. 12.

⁷⁷ British American Land Company, *Lands for Sale in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada* (London: 1837), p. 2.

⁷⁸ Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Parent, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, “Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century Quebec,” in Michael D. Behiels, ed., *Quebec Since 1800: Selected Readings*, New Canadian Readings (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2002), p. 65.

Rather than address the pressing issue of overpopulation in Lower Canada, the colonial government focused on establishing the Canadian Geological Survey (CGS). The CGS began in 1842 with the global recognition of the earth sciences and the wealth that could come from understanding what lay beneath the land. The fact that gold was found along the border of l'Estrie and the Chaudière River in 1823 also contributed to the shift in how the region was understood by colonial officials: moving from a place of settlement struggles and rebellious targets, the area became a potential gold mine.

This new way of looking at and using the land added to the colonial government's creation story of l'Estrie and reclassified the region according to new ideas of practicality and use. William Edmund Logan, a Montrealer schooled in Britain, was appointed head of the CGS in 1842 and he explored l'Estrie until his death in 1875.⁸¹ The region had a geological past that captured his curiosity, and Logan submitted the CGS's first survey report on Quebec in 1849, offering a detailed description of the land where Asbestos would be founded.

In charge of the survey assignments, Logan chose l'Estrie as his area of focus because of the wide variety of minerals found throughout the region. His report focused on the region's most distinctive feature, the Appalachians, and what the land surrounding the mountains offered to settlers and the colonial government.⁸² Fellow surveyor Alexander Murray concentrated on what lay below the earth's crust and examined the geological history of l'Estrie, focusing solely on finding rocks and minerals that could be of value. This was why, when he became the first to discover asbestos in the region, he gave it only a brief mention in his report before moving on. The mineral held little practical application and no economic value in this period. When Murray wrote about the mineral's presence in Shipton Township, where Asbestos came to be located, he stated,

The ranges of serpentine and some of their immediately associated strata would probably afford a large amount and variety of material for ornamental architecture and purposes of decoration...this rock, when free

⁸¹ Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécois des Origines au Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), p. 63.

⁸² W.E. Logan, "Geological Survey of Canada: Report of Progress for the Year 1847-48," Canadian Geological Survey (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1849), p. 362.

from veins of asbestos [sic], is in general susceptible of a very high polish, and in the district displays a great diversity of the richest green colours.⁸³

Murray's dismissal of asbestos in favour of an ornamental rock demonstrates its lack of value in the mid-19th century, but his observations offer a detailed description of how asbestos appeared in its rawest form, deep within the earth. Asbestos hindered what Murray otherwise considered valuable rocks and minerals, but his descriptions would be crucial for prospectors looking for the fibre later in the century when it had increased in value, because they gave key geologically-based indicators as to where it could be found.

Murray did not mention the mineral in his list of "various substances capable of application to useful purposes,"⁸⁴ and because he did not have the technology to dig deeper beneath the surface and trace the asbestos deposits, the veins of fibre running through the serpentine rock did not appear extensive. The winding nature of the asbestos veins through and around more desirable rocks and minerals meant that the land in this area of the region had little value. Logan's and Murray's surveys did not launch the start of an asbestos industry in Quebec, but they did have an impact on how l'Estrie would be reshaped to accommodate new aspirations for the region.

One of the initial goals of the colonial government when opening l'Estrie for settlement, aside from creating a "truly patriotic" Anglophone presence in French Canada,⁸⁵ was to create a thriving agricultural community based on the British land management system. After exploring l'Estrie, Logan reported that the region's agricultural prospects were limited because of the type of soil found there and the difficulties that came with being so far from reliable transportation links and markets.⁸⁶ Just five years earlier, BAL Co. had revised its promotional literature to highlight the improvements that had been made to the roadways in the region, as well as the close proximity of the townships to major cities like Montreal and Quebec, Boston and New York,⁸⁷ but Logan's report challenged these claims, as it cost approximately fifty percent

⁸³ Alexander Murray, "Report of Alexander Murray, Esq., Assistant Provincial Geologist, Addressed to W.E. Logan, Esq., Provincial Geologist," *Canadian Geological Survey* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1849), p. 388. "Asbestos" was an alternative spelling of "asbestos" at this time.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁸⁵ Dominion of Canada Legislature, "First Report of the Special Committee," p. 42.

⁸⁶ Logan, "Geological Survey of Canada: Report of Progress for the Year 1847-48," p. 363.

⁸⁷ British American Land Company, *Lands for Sale in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada* (London: 1842), p. 2.

more to ship grain from l'Estrie to larger markets.⁸⁸ Lack of access continued to hinder the region's economic success, and without major improvements to the transportation network it would not meet the aspirations of the colonial government.

Acknowledging this problem in his report, Logan believed that seasonal fluxes that made the land too wet or too dry were the main obstacle to maintaining reliable transportation networks in the region until a railway could be established.⁸⁹ Roads had to be cleared and re-cleared every season to retain shape and structure on land that was in constant motion, but a railway running through specific, well-suited parts of the region could overpower the land. This idea complemented what colonial officials had already been deliberating,⁹⁰ and plans were made to bring the train to l'Estrie.

The decision to build railways through the region was made with a commitment to social, economic, and environmental progress and change. The land would be radically reshaped to fit new technologies that could withstand seasonal changes that had existed for millennia. Although people traditionally settled new territory along riverbanks, the technological changes the railway brought to the land trumped the advantages of living by a river. With the opening of the Grand Trunk Railway in 1852, people flocked to l'Estrie to settle along the line, which bypassed the future site of Asbestos by four miles.⁹¹ The colonial government hoped that this improvement to the region's transportation system would help increase the Anglophone population in the area⁹² and high hopes were placed on the "most gigantic railway in the world"⁹³ as it spread throughout the region, reaching the ports at Montreal, Quebec City, and Portland, Maine. The line ensured that agricultural goods produced in the townships could reach larger markets, but more important than the goods the Grand Trunk exported from the region were the people and industry the railway brought into it.

As the CGS made its way through l'Estrie, the population crisis in the rest of Lower Canada was worsening. No longer having any room to expand the seigneuries, French Canadians of the area began to emigrate to the north-eastern United States en masse because land was easy to purchase and the obstacles that made settling in l'Estrie

⁸⁸ Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ Logan, "Geological Survey of Canada: Report of Progress for the Year 1847-48," p. 363.

⁹⁰ Dominion of Canada Legislature, "First Report of the Special Committee," p. 34.

⁹¹ "Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1886," (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1886), p. 30A.

⁹² Dominion of Legislature Canada, "First Report of the Special Committee, p. 11

⁹³ Henry H. Miles, *Canada East at the International Exhibition* (London: 1862), p. 55.

difficult were not present. In a report to the Legislative Assembly of the United Canadas, a special committee on the issues of settlement in l'Estrie reported positively that, "before thirty years are past, we may find more French Canadians in the States of Vermont and of Maine, than in the Eastern Townships."⁹⁴ While this was something the government applauded, the Catholic clergy feared that living among revolutionary Americans would negatively influence French Canadians, and priests urged them to settle in l'Estrie instead.⁹⁵ Because of this, the region went from being sixty-six percent Anglophone before the Grand Trunk, to a French Canadian majority just twenty years later.⁹⁶

The change in the population of l'Estrie during the second half of the 19th century was termed a "conquête pacifique" at the time by Quebec nationalist Jules-Paul Tardivel.⁹⁷ Although peaceful, this conquest over the land and the population that controlled it revolutionized the way l'Estrie was perceived by those who had aspirations for it to be an Anglophone safe-haven in Quebec, especially because it coincided with a transformation of the environment. By 1862 the region had reached a population of 200,000 largely due to the influx of French Canadians,⁹⁸ but although these new settlers came from agricultural communities, the economic focus of l'Estrie was shifting towards the industrialization of the land and new creation story.

While some of the French Canadians who emigrated to l'Estrie in the second half of the 19th century began farms within the township system, many followed the railway lines around the region, getting temporary seasonal work in the new industrial centres that grew along them.⁹⁹ This marked a radical shift in how the Francophone population of Lower Canada chose to earn a living and use the land. The Grand Trunk brought a new culture to the region in the form of French Canadians, while subsequent lines brought industries that would exploit the land in new ways. The construction of a railroad tears up the landscape, smoothes it down, and makes it "efficient." Land in l'Estrie was altered and built up so that seasonal fluxes in water levels would not sink or flood the tracks as

⁹⁴ Dominion of Canada Legislature, "First Report of the Special Committee," p. 42.

⁹⁵ Parent, p. 23.

⁹⁶ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History*, p. 40.

⁹⁷ J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism, and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), p. 6.

⁹⁸ Miles, p. 37.

⁹⁹ J.I. Little, "Watching the Frontier Disappear: English-Speaking Reaction to French-Canadian Colonization in the Eastern Townships, 1844-1890," in Behiels, ed., *Quebec Since 1800*, p. 386, and Susan Mann, *The Dream of a Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), p. 133.

they had done to the roads. This process mirrored the work of Logan and Murray during their surveys of the region because it once again uncovered the valuable rocks and minerals under the earth's crust.

The construction of the Quebec Central railway, which ran through l'Estrie on its way from Lake Huron to Quebec City,¹⁰⁰ uncovered massive amounts of asbestos in the northeastern portion of the region near the community of Thetford in the 1870s. The claim to this discovery was contested between an Anglophone named Robert Ward and a Francophone named Fecteau,¹⁰¹ which illustrated how the region was changing in the second half of the 19th century with a new population and a new way of using the land. The discovery at Thetford coincided with a growing marketability for the fireproof mineral. While it was relatively valueless in 1848, by the time it was uncovered along the tracks of the Quebec Central, American manufacturers had started to specialize in asbestos-based building products to meet the growing demands of industrializing America.¹⁰² L'Estrie was quickly becoming a region in which different factions of the population—English, French, upper class, working class—would fight over who controlled the land, and asbestos would often be central to this struggle.

For many years the deposits at Thetford, 100km away from Asbestos, were considered the largest in the world and the area surrounding the growing community was known as the “asbestos belt.”¹⁰³ By the 1850s, the presence of asbestos was well known in l'Estrie, and because of Murray's detailed descriptions, the mineral was easily identifiable to those without geological training, especially because it often appeared in outcroppings of serpentine rock and required no digging. This was how gentleman farmer William H. Jeffrey discovered the mineral at the site of Asbestos today in the late 1870s and convinced Charles Webb, who owned the land, to go into business with him. Jeffrey controlled the mine operations and Webb controlled the budget.¹⁰⁴ While neither knew they would be carving out what would become the world's largest asbestos mine, Jeffrey and Webb's efforts in 1879 began a major redefinition of the land on which the town of Asbestos would be established.

¹⁰⁰ Canadian Legislative Assembly, “An Act to Incorporate the Canada Central Railway Industry,” Session 3, 6th Parliament, Bill 161 (Ottawa: Canadian Legislative Assembly, 12 April 1860), p. 1.

¹⁰¹ “Geological Survey of Canada, Report for the Year 1888-1889,” (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1888-1889), p. 140K.

¹⁰² Vallières, p. 95.

¹⁰³ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1919,” (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1919), p. 5A.

¹⁰⁴ Kesteman, et al, p. 325.

A Land Revolution, 1879-1899

The sharp influx of French Canadians into the region led to a rapid rise in urbanization and industrialization. The asbestos industry was one of the major factors in this radical change to how the land was seen and used, as it altered the township system and created small mining communities that grew and shrank according to profits. Changes to the land and how people used it came quickly as farmers turned into industrial entrepreneurs and drastically altered the ecology of the region by ripping up trees and crops, and digging deep into the rock underneath. A year following Jeffrey's discovery of asbestos, the *Acte général des mines du Québec* was put in place to monitor the new industries of the region and ensure the government received a portion of any profits that came from the land.¹⁰⁵ In 1881, the Quebec government appointed Joseph Obalski as director of mining services. Obalski would help redefine how people and land interacted in the region: if l'Estrie was not going to succeed as an agrarian, English society that would eventually dominate French Canada, it would be a region where the land and the people would be used to their fullest economic potential.

The way the Jeffrey Mine was created illustrated this new philosophy. Work began in 1881, with Jeffrey and Webb employing fourteen men: seven French Canadians and seven British immigrants.¹⁰⁶ Although it is unclear which of these men were in supervisory roles, and if one linguistic group was favoured over another, the blend of English and French cultures in the 1880s established a foundation for the development of a local cultural identity in Asbestos. The work was slow and arduous, and while asbestos can be extracted via underground shafts, the Jeffrey Mine was to be opencast, an economically practical method¹⁰⁷ that had a tremendous ecological effect on the land and landscape, and changed how it was understood by the people who lived around it.

The creation of the Jeffrey Mine was a long process that involved a real physical struggle with the land. Operations could only be carried out in the summer months when the earth was not frozen due to the extreme cold of winter, or soaking wet due to the

¹⁰⁵ Robert Armstrong, "Le Développement des Droits Miniers au Québec à la Fin du XIXe Siècle," *L'Actualité économique*, vol. 59, no. 3 (September 1983), p. 581.

¹⁰⁶ Réjean Lampron, Marc Cantin, and Élise Grimard, *Asbestos: Filons d'histoire, 1899-1999* (Asbestos: Centenaire de la ville d'Asbestos, 1999), p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ Fritz Cirkel, *Asbestos: Its Occurrence, Exploitation and Uses* (Ottawa: Mines Branch, Department of the Interior, 1905), p. 30.

thaws of the spring.¹⁰⁸ The first stage in the process involved a crew of men clearing the land of its surface soil with picks, shovels, and the occasional ox-driven scraping cart. They dug between five and twenty five feet down into the land until the bottle-green serpentine rock housing the veins of asbestos was uncovered. One man holding a drill-bit and three or four others hitting the bit with sledgehammers then drilled holes into the rock. Young boys were always present in mining operations at this time, and at the Jeffrey Mine, they carried buckets of drinking water from crew to crew. Explosives were then packed into these holes and large pieces of rock surrounded by asbestos veins were blasted free.¹⁰⁹ This was labour-intensive, hard physical work that allowed these men to gain a firm understanding of the land from the inside out. Once the serpentine was twice broken apart by explosives, “the pieces containing the asbestos are then removed to the cobbing shop, where boys break them up with small hammers and assort the asbestos according to quality.”¹¹⁰ The presence of boys during the creation of a mine illustrates how a new mining culture was being created in the region: these boys were coming of age as they helped industrialize the region and this was how they were taught land should be used. No longer raised on farms, these young men came to know the land through mining, and this knowledge influenced how the local cultural identity developed.

The dangers involved with blasting large rocks out of the ground also meant that the culture growing around the Jeffrey Mine was one that understood physical risk from the very beginning. In the 19th century, the medical profession in Quebec was deeply divided along linguistic lines. Although the province was the first in Canada to form a regulated medical society,¹¹¹ until 1843 McGill University was the only institution in Quebec with the ability to grant medical degrees in English.¹¹² This limited the accessibility of the profession until Francophone institutions were given the same granting rights, but because of continued linguistic barriers, their Association des

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Armstrong, “The Quebec Asbestos Industry: Technological Change, 1878-1929,” in *Explorations in Canadian Economic History: Essays in Honour of Irene M. Spry*, Duncan Cameron, ed. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), p. 191.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Obalski, *Mines and Minerals of the Province of Quebec* (Quebec: Province of Quebec, 1889), p. 97.

¹¹¹ H.E. MacDermot, *History of the Canadian Medical Association, 1867-1921*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Murray Printing Co., 1935), p. 138.

¹¹² Guy Grenier, *100 Ans de Médecine: Histoire de l'Association des Médecins de Langue Française de Canada* (Montreal: Éditions MultiMondes, 2002), p. 9.

médecins de langue française de l'Amérique du Nord, established in 1902,¹¹³ exchanged knowledge and theories with the medical community in France, not North America.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, because the Catholic Church was responsible for establishing and running hospitals and clinics in Quebec,¹¹⁵ medical knowledge was often overpowered by religious ideology, which distanced health care from the scientific method.¹¹⁶ Health care was not a prime concern for the workers carving out the Jeffrey Mine and access to doctors was limited in the region. Miners had to accept the risks that came with their occupation and if they were injured, there was a chance they would die. The major health threat associated with asbestos was the act of mining itself; there was no awareness of the specific dangers the mineral posed to human health.

It was time-consuming and dangerous to create the opencast Jeffrey Mine. The mineral can and has been mined using both underground and opencast methods, largely depending on the technology available at the time and the way the deposit is laid out in the land. Because market prices for asbestos were based on fibre length—with the longest being the most valuable—opencast mining often provided the best access to full veins of the mineral. Hard rock resources, such as coal and silver, have traditionally been mined underground because their market value was based on quantity, not size.¹¹⁷ Underground mining has historically only been used for the major asbestos deposits found in Canada, Russia, and South Africa when opencast methods could not be employed due to lack of physical space. In the time and place the Jeffrey Mine was being established, opencast mining had strong advantages over underground. Engineer Fritz Cirkel explained to the Canadian Department of Mines that opencast pits allowed for easier supervision, made total extraction of the asbestos fibre possible due to the lack of underground structural pillars, and provided clean air for workers to breathe, which suggests that the Jeffrey

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ Aleck Ostry, *Change and Continuity in Canada's Health Care System* (Ottawa: CHA Press, 2006), p. 167.

¹¹⁶ Michael Bliss, "Growth, Progress, and the Quest for Salvation: Confessions of a Medical Historian," in *Essays in Honour of Michael Bliss: Figuring the Social*, E.A. Heaman, Alison Li, and Shelley McKellar, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Charlie Angus and Brit Griffin, *We Lived a Life and then Some: The Life, Death, and Life of a Mining Town* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1996), Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), and Anthony F.C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry*, 3rd edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

Mine did not threaten human health as underground mines did.¹¹⁸ The disadvantages of opencast mining were that it was difficult to remove barren serpentine rock, operations were often halted because of poor weather, and there was a limited amount of space where waste rock and fibre could be dumped.¹¹⁹ Because of the amount of unused farm land available to them, Jeffrey and Webb committed to the opencast method and a community was created around the mine.

By 1884, a post office had been built close to the pit with a sign on the front of it that read “Asbestos.”¹²⁰ The town of Asbestos had officially begun, and the fact that it was given an English name by a government agency, rather than the French equivalent, “amiante,” suggests the extent to which Anglophone land ownership and government connections dominated the increasingly Francophone-worked region. Change came quickly to the new community and the families of the miners that once lived four miles away in Danville slowly began to move to Asbestos as production increased and a local identity began to take shape. As this happened, a renewed interest in the land grew. The mineral’s valueless image of the 1840s had changed, and the CGS reported, “[n]ear Danville, four miles from the Grand Trunk railway, a mine of considerable extent has been operated for several years....This industry has already grown to large proportions, and bids fair to become one of the most important in the Dominion.”¹²¹ Inspired by the economic potential of the Jeffrey Mine described in the CGS, surveyors and prospectors in the 1880s scoured l’Estrie for untapped asbestos deposits with which to earn their fortunes, and they used the CGS to search for a more detailed understanding of how and where asbestos occurred in the land. The CGS Report of 1885 noted that the deposits “are extensive and probably continuous at certain depths nor far from the surface [as] evidenced by the frequent outcrops, which often comprise large areas of twelve to twenty square miles in extent.”¹²² This was promising information to those interested in taking a lead role in the industrialization of l’Estrie, but making the region’s land useful and profitable continued to be a challenge.

¹¹⁸ Cirkel, *Asbestos*, p. 30.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁰ Lampron, et al, p. 63.

¹²¹ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1886,” p. 30A.

¹²² “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1885,” (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1885), p. 50A.

The Jeffrey Mine was thriving, and went from employing 14 men working during the summer months in 1881, to 70 men working all seasons and extracting 15 tonnes of the mineral each week in 1885.¹²³ This created a less transient community at Asbestos than was common in the other industrial towns of l'Estrie and the mine's constant use drastically changed the rhythms of the land. While 15 tonnes a week was enough to ensure the Jeffrey Mine was economically viable, it was a small amount compared to the extraction levels at the mines near Thetford, where the real asbestos fever was centred. The CGS reported in 1885 that in the four mines surrounding Thetford there were 250 men employed in "the largest and most important operations" in the region, extracting 1,100 tonnes during the summer months alone.¹²⁴ The Jeffrey Mine was decidedly second rate in comparison and was constantly being referred to as "the small mine near Danville" long after Asbestos was incorporated as a village in 1899. No one had yet assessed the true value of the land at Asbestos.

In 1886 Canada showcased the dominion's natural resources at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, England. Referring to the Thetford display, the official report noted that, "much attention was attracted by it, and many enquiries were made concerning it. Several asbestos properties were sold as a result of the information given."¹²⁵ This was a positive reception, but the properties sold were far away from Asbestos because surveyors believed that although the Jeffrey Mine's output was "considerable,"

the serpentine [t]here is quite limited, with steep sides all round, and contains a number of veins of asbestos, mostly of small size, though the quality of the fibre is good. Faults have affected the value of this property considerably, some very good veins with a thickness reaching two inches having been cut off completely at a depth of 50 feet from the surface.¹²⁶

The linear mineral deposits laid out like unrolled yarn at Thetford required multiple mines to access the extent of the fibre, but the fibres at Asbestos, almost 100km west of the region's "asbestos belt," swirled through a rounded serpentine knoll,¹²⁷ resulting in short, broken veins that resembled a brittle bird's nest—and required only one mine. Because

¹²³ Ibid, p. 50A.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 50A.

¹²⁵ "Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1886," p. 2A.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 35A.

¹²⁷ "Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1888-1889," p. 144K.

the value of asbestos in the late 19th century was based on fibre length to ensure quicker processing and spinning into a wool-like yarn that could be woven into fabric, Thetford's mineral was more desirable.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the area surrounding the Jeffrey Mine was still used for farming even though land ripe for industrialization was being purchased at \$5 an acre.¹²⁹ This was why the CGS stressed that "there is no apparent reason why [asbestos] should not be found in paying quantity at other points, and it is possible that subsequent exploration will largely extend the area where profitable mining operations can be carried on."¹³⁰

Quebec's Director of Mines matched this encouragement. Since his appointment in 1881, Joseph Obalski had visited mines throughout Quebec and released a book in 1889 that promoted the province's minerals to international markets.¹³¹ Because Obalski was an engineer and not a geologist, his publications differed somewhat from those of the CGS, but shared with them an overall excitement about the asbestos industry, that "has already assumed so much development that the output, which only amounted at the outset to a few hundred tons had risen...to 6,000 in 1889."¹³² The Jeffrey Mine contributed 207 tonnes to this total, and 400 tonnes the following year, but these were insignificant figures compared to those coming from Thetford, which mined 4,803 tonnes in 1890.¹³³

The exponential increase in the amount of asbestos extracted in l'Estrie fuelled Obalski's excitement over its importance to the economic future of Quebec. He wrote that the people of the region produced more asbestos than anywhere else in the world, because of its sophisticated transportation network and abundance of the mineral. He also expressed his enthusiasm for the industry when he stated that a "remarkable fact...is that, while the production has increased with the demand, prices have also risen, so that, of late years, asbestos lands have been eagerly sought after. This is owing to the new uses which

¹²⁸ Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, p. 92.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 107-108, and 159.

¹³⁰ "Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1886," p. 31A.

¹³¹ Morris Zaslow, *Reading the Rocks: The Story of the Geological Survey of Canada, 1842-1972* (Ottawa: Macmillan, in association with the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and Information Canada, 1975), p. 231.

¹³² Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, p. 91.

¹³³ *The Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 9 (February 1890), p. 16. This dissertation will rely on metric "tonnes" because it is the unit of measurement most commonly used in the sources I employ and is more specific than "ton," which refers to three different units of measurement.

are being daily discovered.”¹³⁴ Because of rising prices and demand, there was a sharp increase in prospectors throughout l’Estrie who hoped to take advantage of the land.

Although the Jeffrey Mine was profitable, by 1887 ambition had exceeded ability and the amount of men employed in the pit was reduced.¹³⁵ The industry was not growing because it focused only on the extraction of the raw mineral, which when taken from the Jeffrey Mine, was sent to the more industrialized United States or Great Britain to be further processed,¹³⁶ limiting the type and extent of employment in the mining communities of l’Estrie. What happened to the fibres after they were extracted did not interest mine owners or the Canadian government, and geologists constantly urged the development of more asbestos pits, not factories. The industrialization of the region only focused on the potential wealth of natural resources in their raw form, and factories did not yet complement how people saw and used the land in l’Estrie. The lack of factories remained even as the asbestos industry led the region in new extraction technologies to boost the amount of fibre mined.¹³⁷

The first mechanization of the industry came in the late 1880s with the introduction of compressed air and steam power for drilling blasting holes and hoisting ore in Thetford, not Asbestos.¹³⁸ Production at the Jeffrey Mine had dwindled, and when Obalski visited in 1889, he noted that the pit was approximately 100 feet deep and,

located on a plateau about 180 feet above the surrounding lands. The mine has...yielded in all about 3,080 tons of asbestos. Its present annual output is about 325 tons, with an average staff of 35 workmen. It is altogether worked by hand labor, without the help of any machinery. The asbestos is of very good quality, although the fibres appear short. This mine...is not worked in winter time.¹³⁹

In 1885, the Jeffrey Mine had employed 70 men, extracted over 700 tonnes of asbestos annually, and was worked yearlong. Four years later, operations had not advanced technologically and production had sharply declined in every other respect. Half of the mine’s workforce had moved on, and while this was in part because the distance between Asbestos and the Grand Trunk meant transportation costs were high, the main reason was

¹³⁴ Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, p. 91.

¹³⁵ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1887,” (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1887), p. 113K.

¹³⁶ Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, pp. 97-98.

¹³⁷ Armstrong, “Le Développement des Droits Miniers au Québec,” p. 585.

¹³⁸ Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, p. 96.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

that the mine was poorly managed. Neither Jeffrey nor Webb was an engineer or a geologist and their understanding of the land at Asbestos was too rudimentary for it to be worked to its fullest potential. However, their lack of knowledge was indicative of the time, and British geologist Robert H. Jones wrote of them in his 1897 book on global asbestos deposits, “it must not be supposed, that [Jeffrey and Webb’s] want of knowledge was in any way blameable, because if this were so, then it must be said that all those commercial and scientific men who had, year after year, examined the property, or viewed it mineralogically, were equally so. Nothing of the peculiar nature and quality of the serpentine in which [they] worked was then known.”¹⁴⁰ Those who ran the Jeffrey Mine—and the government engineers who studied it—did not yet know the economic value of the land at Asbestos.

Despite the example of the dwindling Jeffrey Mine, surveyors and prospectors continued to have faith in the land of l’Etrie. The Canadian economy was undergoing a depression from 1873-1896,¹⁴¹ and the dominion had only its natural resources on which to rely. Seeing an opportunity, the CGS report of 1887 stressed, “a thorough re-survey of these areas is of great importance, since lands which now have a comparatively small value may in a very short time be valued at very large sums.”¹⁴² Although it appeared that some mines were failing, the rising value of asbestos in international markets made prospectors look at the land in l’Etrie again. The result was an asbestos rush that left many of those untrained in identifying profitable deposits financially ruined and the land torn apart.

Obalski urged caution to those in search of asbestos when he wrote, “serpentine fills a great place in the Eastern Townships, but workable asbestos only occurs in a very small section.”¹⁴³ Many prospectors wrongly believed that if they found a serpentine outcropping, large asbestos deposits were not far away, which resulted in many failed mines scarring the region. In response, Thetford engineer L.A. Klein wrote,

it takes more than the finding of the serpentine to have a paying asbestus [sic] mine...While the undoubted success of some of the existing mines, in combination with erroneous ideas...nursed by speculators, lead many to

¹⁴⁰ Robert H. Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic: Their Properties, Occurrence, and Use* (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1897), p. 171.

¹⁴¹ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History*, p. 65.

¹⁴² Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1887, p. 112K.

¹⁴³ Obalski, *Mines and Minerals*, p. 95.

believe that they struck a fortune when a locality was shown to them which contained serpentine...with occasionally a small asbestus seam in it...not one enterprise has proved successful in this industry which has not had anything else to look on than...a good colour.¹⁴⁴

As though to reinforce Klein's point, in 1892, just as the American asbestos manufacturing companies amalgamated under the H.W. Johns Manufacturing Co., the Jeffrey Mine went bankrupt and was shut down,¹⁴⁵ despite the fact that just one year earlier, it was known in the industry as "one of the best" producers of asbestos.¹⁴⁶ Examples like this closure led Commissioner of Crown Lands E.S. Flynn to announce that the mining industry in Canada had not reached a point in which it could be considered profitable.¹⁴⁷

One reason for the Jeffrey Mine's closing was Jeffrey himself. He was not well-connected and chose not to belong to the Asbestos Club, an association of mine owners around Thetford who met monthly and who would have exposed him to new connections and technologies that would have allowed him to mine the land more successfully.¹⁴⁸ The Asbestos Club was an important factor in the success of the Thetford Mines because it facilitated an exchange of knowledge and extraction techniques among mine owners and created a strong community identity amongst the local miners, regardless of which company they worked for. The fact that Asbestos was located 70km away from Thetford and that Jeffrey Mine owners never joined the regional collective, meant that the community was both isolated and individual, which helped shape the local-global cultural identity this dissertation will trace, despite the mine's closure. Furthermore, Jeffrey was a farmer, and did not understand the geology behind the unique deposits at Asbestos, compared to later owners of the mine who would help channel this distinctiveness to make the mine the largest of its kind in the world. Jones described Jeffrey as being "somewhat obstinate and self-willed, and strictly a man of the old school—independent in

¹⁴⁴ L.A. Klein, "Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1890-1891," (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1891), p. 14SS.

¹⁴⁵ Lampron, et al, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴⁶ *Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (January 1891), p. 210.

¹⁴⁷ Armstrong, "Le Développement des Droits Miniers au Québec," p. 591.

¹⁴⁸ *Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (January 1891), p. 329.

his ideas, by no means highly educated, and never much inclined to move out of the old grooves.”¹⁴⁹

By 1892, Jeffrey was 83 years old and the four and a half to five tonnes of asbestos extracted daily from his mine were not enough to pay the \$4,000 in monthly wages.¹⁵⁰ Liquidators W. Farwell and F.C Thompson took possession of the land.¹⁵¹ This was a shock to many in the region, as months earlier the *Richmond Guardian* visited Asbestos and reported that

five or six years ago, Mr. Webb’s farm house, Mr. Morrill’s, and the school house near by, were then the only buildings near the mine, while at the mine itself, the office, a small slight wooden structure for the manager, a blacksmith’s shop, and a couple of rough sheds for sheltering the men... were all that was to be seen; there is now a village crowding round...and substantial houses 80 in number...and between 600 and 700 people, all dependent on the mine, inhabit them...¹⁵²

A community had been established next to the Jeffrey Mine, but being completely dependent on the industrial success of the land, families and single workers quickly left Asbestos. The character of the optimistic mining town changed quickly in 1892 along with the other failed mines in l’Estrie, as the workforce in the region became transient, flocking to new pits when they opened and retreating back to the more stable mines at Thetford when they closed. As the land became increasingly industrialized in l’Estrie, worker transiency became widespread as industries rose and fell according to market demand and successful management of land and people. Although Asbestos had a school, a general store and a post office, when the mine closed, the community did as well.

Mine closures were common in late-19th century Quebec, and many industry leaders blamed closures like the one at the Jeffrey Mine on the provincial government’s management of the land.¹⁵³ According to Honoré Mercier, premier from 1887 to 1891, provincial revenue belonged to the Francophone population, not English colonizers who controlled industrial development.¹⁵⁴ The success of the province would lie in its ability to do what it wished with its natural resources and reap the profits that resulted from these

¹⁴⁹ Robert H. Jones, “Asbestos and Asbestic: with some Account of the Recent Discovery of the Latter at Danville, in Lower Canada,” *The Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review* 16 (1897), p. 187.

¹⁵⁰ *Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 11 (1892), p. 32 and p. 149.

¹⁵¹ Vallières, p. 96.

¹⁵² “A Visit to the Shipton Mines,” *Richmond Guardian* (9 July 1892), p. 1.

¹⁵³ *The Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1891), p. 204.

¹⁵⁴ Armstrong, “Le Développement des Droits Miniers au Québec,” p. 586.

ventures. In 1890, Mercier imposed a 3% tax on the output of Quebec mines and a new bill that mandated all mining land lying idle for more than two years would become the possession of the state.¹⁵⁵ This was widely unpopular with industry leaders who believed it would “convert the Quebec mining men into straight anarchists”¹⁵⁶ because of their objection to government intervention in business. The Mining Bill amendments were repealed under the new government in 1892 because of this outrage, which the *Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review* deemed part of Mercier’s “race and revenge”¹⁵⁷ style of governing. Following in the tradition of Louis-Joseph Papineau, Mercier was not the first leader in Quebec who emphasized the importance of the land to French Canadians, nor would he be the last.

Despite new taxes and political disagreements, the Jeffrey Mine did not remain closed for long. In 1893 the Danville Slate Co. bought the 75 acres of land given up by Jeffrey and Webb the year before. Despite its previous bankruptcy, industry reports indicated that this “property is one of exceptional value, and will be exploited vigorously.”¹⁵⁸ A new workforce was called to Asbestos and operations at the mine began once more, but with a much different dynamic. After Confederation in 1867, the provincial government of Quebec introduced policies to deter British immigration, which resulted in a Francophone majority of 69% in the region by 1890.¹⁵⁹ Another reason for this was the increased development of factory and mining communities in the region that drew young French Canadians away from the overcrowded farms of their fathers and into an urban environment.¹⁶⁰ L’Estrie was now being created as an industrialized, Francophone region largely due to mining, and both Thetford and Asbestos were home to French Canadian majorities by the 1890s.

This majority influenced the local cultural identity formed in the years of Jeffrey and Webb by establishing a divided, yet connected, Francophone working-class majority and Anglophone managing elite. As the Danville Slate Co. took over the Jeffrey Mine in 1893, Feodor Boas became the new man in charge operations and brought a different understanding of the land than Jeffrey, Webb, or any of the engineers and geologists who

¹⁵⁵ “The Quebec Mining Bill,” *Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1891), p. 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ “The Quebec Mining Bill,” p. 32.

¹⁵⁸ *The Canadian Mining Review*, vol. 13 (1894), p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ J.I. Little, “Watching the Frontier Disappear,” p. 367.

¹⁶⁰ Kesteman, et al, p. 276.

had previously studied the deposit. Jones wrote that Boas was “not an asbestos man, nor did he make any pretence to a knowledge of mineralogy, but all throughout the province he was highly esteemed for his uprightness, shrewdness, and sound common sense.”¹⁶¹ His way of looking at the land created an asbestos revolution and impacted the local cultural identity of Asbestos in ways still seen today.

Along with the pit, the Danville Slate Co. inherited all the waste rock that had been taken from the mine over the previous fifteen years.¹⁶² While Jeffrey believed this to be useless rock that hindered the success of the mine, Boas saw it as the source of its future wealth. He discovered what Jeffrey did not notice because of his lack of training: the piles of waste taken from the Jeffrey Mine since 1881 were actually piles of asbestic, asbestos fibres thought to have little value because they were too short to be woven.¹⁶³ The presence of asbestic was one of the reasons Jeffrey, who prided himself on his strict grading system while being unaware of the wealth he was discarding,¹⁶⁴ struggled and why geologists did not believe the mine was as valuable as the pits around Thetford. The way Boas looked at the rounded knoll in which the deposit was found led to yet another redefinition of the land, the people, and the town of Asbestos.

Although asbestic could not be woven into cloth, it could, among other things, be added to lead paint to fireproof walls and applied to roofing shingles to contain fires in communities where houses were built close together. The once paltry demand for asbestic had risen so much in international markets by the time Boas discovered it in Asbestos that for years he had the workforce at the Jeffrey Mine focus exclusively on the piles of waste that surrounded the pit.¹⁶⁵ Boas’ discovery produced an asbestos revolution. He found that once the surface rock was removed, up to 90% of the Jeffrey Mine was long asbestos fibres surrounded by asbestic,¹⁶⁶ which meant that most of what was taken from the pit could be extracted and sold with little waste. The land was transformed into a place of extraordinary value, even surpassing the deposits at Thetford.

Because of the sudden demand for asbestic, work at the Jeffrey Mine began again and old employees mixed with new as the population of Asbestos rapidly doubled in

¹⁶¹ Jones, “Asbestos and Asbestic,” p. 187.

¹⁶² Cirkel, *Asbestos*, pp. 101-102.

¹⁶³ Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic*, p. 175.

¹⁶⁴ *The Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review* (1891), p. 206.

¹⁶⁵ Cirkel, *Asbestos*, pp. 101-102.

¹⁶⁶ *The Canadian Mining Review* (October 1896), p. 218.

size.¹⁶⁷ After one year, Boas employed 150 men, and by 1895, 400 men worked the mine.¹⁶⁸ The village was home to 1,100 people, a chapel was built to accommodate the growing community, and Feodor Boas' discovery of asbestic began a period of marked prosperity. As other mines in l'Estrée continued to fail due to misunderstood deposits and poor extraction techniques, the Jeffrey Mine's success increased exponentially, which contrasted with the steady growth and gradual collapse of other mines in the region and the communities established around them.

The discovery of asbestic at the Jeffrey Mine coincided with a boom in the market for the product, and a "golden age of capitalism" in Quebec based on the rapid growth of industries that exploited the province's natural resources.¹⁶⁹ This growth reflected the new way the land was being used in the province and increased industrialization had a strong impact on the ecology of l'Estrée. These changes could all be seen at the Jeffrey Mine, which quickly grew to become the most profitable asbestos mine in the province:

this mine never till now attained any special significance, [but] it has suddenly sprung into great importance, attaining also considerable scientific interest...[I]n the shortest possible space of time, it has stepped in front of all the other mines previously named, and effectually [sic] revolutionized the whole asbestos industry, by bringing the use of the important mineral it deals with within the reach of the whole world. Many very important mines throughout the district are in consequence of the discoveries here, now closed.¹⁷⁰

By 1896, the Jeffrey Mine produced the most asbestos in the province.¹⁷¹

The dramatic increase in population and production at the end of the 19th century radically altered the land at Asbestos and how people understood it. Bigger and better factories were constructed, a railway line was built that connected the mine to the Grand Trunk, and blocks of new houses, stores, and churches framed the outskirts of the pit as a community was formed.¹⁷² This was not a mining town that anyone believed would go bust again, and this sense of permanence was inspired by the success of the Jeffrey Mine, which influenced a growing local cultural identity.

¹⁶⁷ Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic*, p. 173.

¹⁶⁸ *The Canadian Mining Review*, vol. 14 (1895), p. 182.

¹⁶⁹ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History*, p. 305.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic*, p. 170.

¹⁷¹ *The Canadian Mining Review* (October 1896), p. 218.

¹⁷² Lampron, et al, p. 50.

In 1896, Boas continued his efforts to make the Jeffrey Mine profitable and he applied to the United States Patent Office for his invention of asbestic wall plaster. He found that when mixed with quicklime, asbestic forms a wall plaster that “is fireproof to the highest degree and will not crack or curl under the action of heat...It is also...a bad conductor of sound. As it is stronger than any other plaster, it is not necessary to have as thick a coating applied as usual, and additional economy, with a reduction of weight on the building, result.”¹⁷³ The plaster Boas invented using Jeffrey Mine asbestic revolutionized building materials at the turn of the 20th century, with hospitals, schools, and homes containing this fireproof, soundproof, long-lasting mineral.

Boas went to Britain to secure new contracts and wrote that his invention was based on the issue of land use: “[t]his waste material accumulates at the mines and around the factories, and is a trouble and expense to the industry. Many attempts have been made to utilize this waste, but previous to my invention without success. My invention therefore provides a useful outlet for this waste material.”¹⁷⁴ The overseas contracts committed the Jeffrey Mine to extracting 5,000 tonnes of fibre a year¹⁷⁵ and the new uses Boas found for the ore extracted from the mine, now under the control of the British Asbestos and Asbestic Co., complemented other innovations and assured community members that they had a prosperous future ahead of them. When the pit was connected to the Grand Trunk in 1897, this belief was confirmed in the minds of the 300 employees and their families who had made Asbestos their home.¹⁷⁶

The confidence in prosperity was the result of a sudden rise in the use of electricity in industry and other walks of life at the end of the 19th century. Early electrical technology was a major fire hazard and short asbestic fibres packed to make fireproof insulation, combined with a layer of Boas’ wall plaster, was the perfect solution to the problem. Electricity and asbestos, both readily available in Quebec, grew rapidly side by side and changed Asbestos from a transient mining camp to a permanent community. The local cultural identity was greatly affected by their industrial success, which only continued to grow with the construction of a five-storey mill beside the open pit. Jones described the mill as being “arranged by the hillside [so] that the laden wagons may drive

¹⁷³ Feodor Boas, “Composition of Matter for Wall-Plaster,” United States Patent Office, ed. (Washington: 1896), p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ *The Canadian Mining Review* (October 1896), p. 218.

¹⁷⁶ *The Canadian Mining Review* (November 1897), p. 324.

straight through the doorways and along the passages, to deliver and take up their loads at the required points, on four out of the five stories, the building in every part being excellently ventilated, and well lighted by electricity.”¹⁷⁷ The mill and its size were indicators of how successful the land had become through the labour of the local population. The fact that a mill was now present in Asbestos also demonstrated that the ways workers interacted with the mineral were growing, allowing for a broader local knowledge of asbestos, and a stronger connection to the land.

Due to these advancements, in 1899 the community was incorporated as a village of 700 acres.¹⁷⁸ While this was not the first time the area surrounding the Jeffrey Mine was called “Asbestos,” there was a significant difference between an unofficial sign in 1884 and a solid declaration of place as the community experienced its first major boom. Calling the village Asbestos symbolized how much the town was controlled by its minority Anglophone population, which ensured that the name was English, not the French equivalent, “amiante.” It also acknowledged how completely the local population and the natural world were connected through labour and community life. Asbestos was not just what its citizens mined; it was becoming who they were.

The Boom Before the Boom, 1900-1918

Industries that suddenly appear in the wilderness accelerate the process of turning the land and the people who live and work with it into factories of change.¹⁷⁹ In 1900 the new village of Asbestos began to change rapidly as the demand for the mineral in international markets sharply increased and, as Obalski wrote, “l’amiante est devenue dans l’industrie mécanique un produit de première nécessité.”¹⁸⁰ The international demand for the mineral added to the cultural identity in Asbestos and gave the local population a confidence not yet seen in the community. This confidence was expressed when the townspeople was faced with tragedy: on 22 March 1900, the five-storey mill at the Jeffrey Mine burned to the ground due to an electrical fire despite the fact that its roof was made of asbestos.¹⁸¹ While this was a costly setback, it was the Jeffrey Mine that

¹⁷⁷ Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic*, pp. 183-184.

¹⁷⁸ *L’Asbestos*, 21 January 1949, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 34.

¹⁸⁰ Obalski wrote reports in both French and English. Joseph Obalski, *Province de Québec: Industries Minérales: Préparé Spécialement pour l’Exposition de Liège, Belgique* (Quebec: Dussault & Proulx, 1905), p. 35.

¹⁸¹ Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic*, p. 184.

brought the people of Asbestos their success and identity, not the mill. Production was increased at the mine and even more of the seemingly limitless deposit was extracted, helping the community survive the economic threat that the destroyed mill posed. After six months of stalled activity, weekly extraction levels were maintained and shifts were worked in the mine day and night six days a week in order to meet market demands.¹⁸² When disaster struck the community, the people of Asbestos learned that the Jeffrey Mine would carry them through. Because of this dedication to production, New York's H.W. Johns-Manville Co. began to financially back the Asbestos and Asbestic Co.,¹⁸³ and the majority of the fibre extracted from the Jeffrey Mine went directly to the American company's factories to be processed.

The company had initially become invested in l'Estrie in 1892 when it purchased Lot 20, Range A in Coleraine Township, near Thetford¹⁸⁴ during an economic trend at the turn of the 20th century when Canada's export of raw goods to Britain had dropped to 31%, and its exports to the United States had risen to 51%.¹⁸⁵ By 1898, the Jeffrey Mine was sending the majority of its fibre to the H.W. Johns-Manville Co. As the value of asbestos continued to rise, it became an even more reliable industry in which to invest. While Britain imported \$106,989 worth of raw Canadian asbestos in 1892, the United States purchased \$375,956 worth, and became the leading manufacturer of asbestos-based products.¹⁸⁶ The H.W. Johns-Manville Co. made a deal with the Asbestos and Asbestic Co. in 1898 to secure the Jeffrey Mine's asbestic at a higher-than-market rate for its manufacturing pursuits.¹⁸⁷ Striving to capitalize on this deal, in 1901 Boas applied for a patent for artificial stone, yet another asbestos-based innovation. Because of its ability to contain sound and fire, this stone, made of asbestic, sand, and lime carbonate, was "a great advantage in the manufacture of building materials, bricks, slabs,"¹⁸⁸ and was particularly desirable in the rapidly urbanizing United States.

The shift towards American markets inspired many Quebec nationalists, led by Henri Bourassa, to lobby in favour of breaking away from the British Empire. Grandson

¹⁸² "Asbestos Mines," *The Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 13 September 1901, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Vallières, p. 96.

¹⁸⁴ *The Canadian Mining and Mechanical Review*, vol. 11 (September 1892), p. 162.

¹⁸⁵ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁶ *The Canadian Mining Review*, vol. 12 (January 1893), p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ *The Canadian Mining Review*, vol. 17 (1898), p. 196.

¹⁸⁸ Feodor Boas, "Artificial Stone," United States Patent Office, ed. (Washington: 1901), p. 1.

of Louis-Joseph Papineau and follower of Honoré Mercier, Bourassa believed that all empires, not just the British, were “hateful” because they restricted the “liberty and intellectual and moral progress” of their dominions.¹⁸⁹ A closer association with the United States appealed to Bourassa because it suggested a break with Britain, but it also made him worry that Canada, and Quebec specifically, was trading one empire for another.¹⁹⁰ Bourassa believed that the province’s natural resources were vital to Quebec’s industrial revolution and so they had to be controlled by French Canadians, not an Anglophone elite, regardless of where they came from.¹⁹¹ While foreign control seemed wrong to nationalists, the people of Asbestos, having reached a population of 10,000 in 1901,¹⁹² saw the benefits of international investment. Their local identity was tied to international demand. In 1902 the newly built mill was the largest structure in the district, and facilitated a considerable increase in production as the global demand for the mineral rose.¹⁹³

With the financial support of the H.W. Johns-Manville Co., the Jeffrey Mine grew at a rapid pace at the beginning of the 20th century, largely due to asbestic becoming fundamental to a wide variety of manufactured goods. By 1905, mining had radically altered the land and the pit was 1,200 feet long, 175 feet wide, and 175 feet deep, with close to 80% of what was taken from the pit being sellable asbestos or asbestic.¹⁹⁴ The Jeffrey Mine became renowned for its production levels at a time when asbestos mining was the most profitable industry in Quebec and l’Estrie provided 80% of the world’s supply.¹⁹⁵

The rectangular shape of the mine was seen as the most efficient way to facilitate the extraction of asbestos because it exposed a variety of zones and allowed multiple crews to extract the fibre at the same time.¹⁹⁶ It also indicated that the land at Asbestos would be devoted to mining: no other use was as profitable. Obalski confirmed this when he excitedly wrote, “[p]ratiquement on peut dire que la quantité en vue est illimitée, et

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa on Imperialism and Bi-Culturalism, 1900-1918* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1970), p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Henri Bourassa, *Great Britain and Canada: Topics of the Day* (Montreal: C.O. Beauchemin & Fils, 1902), p. 47.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf: The Social Programs of the Nationalists of Quebec, 1900-1914*, 2nd ed., Cahiers d’histoire (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1972), p. 41.

¹⁹² “Asbestos Mines,” *The Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 13 September 1901, p. 1.

¹⁹³ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1902-1903,” (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1903), p. 29S.

¹⁹⁴ Cirkel, *Asbestos*, p. 23 and p. 102.

¹⁹⁵ Obalski, *Province de Québec*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁶ Cirkel, *Asbestos*, p. 32.

avec le matériel existant, la facilité et le prix limité de la main d'œuvre ainsi que les facilités d'expédition, il n'y a guère de concurrence à redouter, et un bon avenir est réservé à cette industrie."¹⁹⁷ The deposits at Asbestos appeared limitless, which was good news to outside interests and indicated to the townspeople that work would be available in Asbestos for generations to come.

The growth of the Jeffrey Mine was balanced by the growth of the village of Asbestos, and as the mine expanded at the start of the 20th century, the community did as well. In 1903 and 1904, curé Antoine Lebel successfully lobbied to have wooden sidewalks constructed along the Danville Road from the train station to the church.¹⁹⁸ Sidewalks were suitable for a community of families, and their presence in Asbestos was a sign of a stabilizing local cultural identity, fostered by buoyant markets. By 1905, with employees at the Jeffrey Mine working an average of 10 hours a day all year long,¹⁹⁹ and the Quebec government putting advertisements in mining magazines promoting the industry,²⁰⁰ the village of Asbestos constructed an impressive 35,000 feet of wooden sidewalks along a number of new and expanding roads.²⁰¹

The community grew rapidly and reaped the benefits of the leading role the mineral was taking in industrial markets, rising in value by 25% in 1905 alone, and bringing in \$2,162,528.²⁰² As Canada became increasingly industrialized, many resource industries boomed, but what made the growth of the asbestos industry especially remarkable was that only a fraction of the mineral's uses and applications had been discovered at this time, and market demand and prices would only continue to rise. By 1908, the Shawinigan Water & Power Co. had installed electricity along the limits of the village, the first telephone lines were being connected, 185 family homes had been constructed, and the town council had made a commitment to make the "Village d'Asbestos un centre prospere qui deviendra la Ville d'Asbestos et aussi, a ciel ouvert, la plus grande mine d'amianté au monde."²⁰³ A strong element of the local cultural identity

¹⁹⁷ Obalski, *Province de Québec*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁸ *L'Asbestos*, 11 February 1949, p. 1, and 18 February 1949, p. 1.

¹⁹⁹ Obalski, *Province de Québec*, p. 67.

²⁰⁰ *The Canadian Mining Review*, vol. 23 (30 June 1904), p. iii.

²⁰¹ *L'Asbestos*, 25 February 1949, p. 1.

²⁰² *The Canadian Mining Review* (1907), p. 496.

²⁰³ *L'Asbestos*, 4 March 1949, p. 1, 11 March 1949, p. 1, and 18 March 1949, p. 1.

was the global ambition of the people of Asbestos, fuelled by the economic prosperity of the community's land.

Throughout the beginning of the 20th century, the Canadian Geological Survey continued to investigate the land surrounding Asbestos in order to more fully understand the reasons behind its remarkable wealth. The industry had reached a turning point, becoming more sophisticated, professional, and profitable, and land management in Asbestos was unique in the region, focusing on only one mine, compared to the five to six separate mines operating in Thetford at this time. The CGS reported in 1909 that “[a]side from the abandoned pits incidental to early prospecting, the only closed works are those of ill-judged enterprise that probably ought never to have been begun.”²⁰⁴ After the asbestos revolution created by Feodor Boas, the Jeffrey Mine was no longer one of the “ill-judged” ventures scarring the landscape of l’Etrie, and by 1909 the CGS noted that it was, “cut into a series of benches, generally about 8 to 15 feet high, which afford a number of faces from which the rock can be quarried at the same time...[with] some underground work...carried on by night.”²⁰⁵ The land continued to be reshaped according to new knowledge and ideas on the Jeffrey Mine deposits were formed. This had a direct effect on those who worked in the pit each day. Not only were these workers responsible for creating these benches around the mine, this new structure required a greater amount of men to work at different areas and at different levels all at the same time. The mine was rapidly becoming a giant “factory without a roof” and its workers were vital tools in the industrialization of the land. These changes helped bring the industry \$2,500,000 a year by combining new extraction technology, this newly structured pit, and vast mineral deposits.²⁰⁶ The leading newspaper in l’Etrie, the *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, noted this industrial progress and reported in 1909 that asbestos was “king” in the region, with gold and silver following behind, and that the mineral from the Jeffrey Mine was the best in the land.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1909,” (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1909), p. 191.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 192.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 191.

²⁰⁷ *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 27 May 1909, p. 1.



The Jeffrey Mine and the town of Asbestos, Quebec, 1909²⁰⁸

Impressive revenue and reputation contributed to changes in government policy at the beginning of the 20th century. Previously, Quebec had made money off its natural resources by selling the rights to them to private companies, but this changed by 1910, the year Henri Bourassa founded his nationalist newspaper, *Le Devoir*, and rallied against non-French Canadian ownership of Quebec's natural resource industries.²⁰⁹ Bourassa and his followers formed a powerful group and the province slowly began to lease rather than sell rights to the land. The government's change in policy came too late to capitalize fully on the Jeffrey Mine and it missed out on a share of the £500,000 profit the British Asbestos and Asbestic Co. gained for the H.W. Johns-Manville Company in 1910.²¹⁰ Bourassa believed that the development of resource industries in Quebec was the key to national and economic power, which were the "weapons of this century."²¹¹ In the case of asbestos, Quebec had surrendered its "weapons" to the United States: by 1907, the industry was largely owned by Americans.

It was not only the government that failed to receive a share of this money, however, and while the citizens of Asbestos were excited about the success of the Jeffrey Mine and the sense of permanence and importance it gave the community, they were also aware that their wages did not rise with company profits. This was a common experience for industrial workers at the time and led to 142 strikes throughout the province between

²⁰⁸ "Village at Pit Edge, Asbestos 1909," ETRC Photo Collection, ETRC.

²⁰⁹ Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf*, p. 35.

²¹⁰ Fritz Cirkel, *Chrysotile-Asbestos: Its Occurrence, Exploitation, Milling, and Uses*, vol. 2 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910), p. 184.

²¹¹ Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf*, p. 35.

1901 and 1905, mostly in Quebec's textile and railway industries.²¹² Companies were able to keep wages low because replacement workers were available in abundance if employees began to lobby for more money. This was especially true for asbestos, the most profitable mining industry in Quebec by 1908,²¹³ because it required only unskilled labour and offered positions picking, breaking, and bagging asbestos to any man, woman, or child who would not complain. Asbestos was not a transient mining town, however, and if Jeffrey Mine workers were replaced, the community would suffer.

During this first industrial revolution in Quebec, the sharp cultural divide between the ruling Anglophone elite and the Francophone working-class majority accentuated labour issues in the province. This conflict was illustrated in 1912 when 36 workers at Asbestos joined 600 other miners on strike the province to gain a higher salary and meet the rising standards of living in an industrial Quebec. On average, the miners in Quebec made between \$1.50-\$1.75 a week in 1912, wages having increased from \$1.00 from 1883-1900 and \$1.25-\$1.50 between 1900 and 1905,²¹⁴ but workers at the Jeffrey Mine only earned between \$1.10 and \$1.60 each week.²¹⁵ This was the standard unskilled labour wage in Quebec, but did not adequately reflect the annual revenue gained from the asbestos industry, which was \$3,800,000 by 1913.²¹⁶ It also did not match the rising cost of living in l'Estrie, and the industry struggled to reconcile profits, fair wages, and competition coming from the development of Russian and South African deposits.

The 36 employees who went on strike at the Jeffrey Mine worked in four groups of nine, each working a shift in the pit and the mill. With the introduction of new technology to the mining process, the Asbestos and Asbestic Co. attempted to reduce their workforce to 32, with eight men in each group.²¹⁷ The workers at the Jeffrey Mine were successful in preventing the employee reduction through a short and peaceful strike²¹⁸ and they demonstrated that while technically unskilled, they would not be replaced by machines. This first strike set a pattern for labour disputes to come in Asbestos—including the 1949 strike—and shows that the community had developed a

²¹² Yvan Lamonde, *Histoire Sociale des Idées au Québec, 1896-1929*, vol. 2 (Montreal: Éditions Fides, 2004), p. 78.

²¹³ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 15 June 1909, p. 362.

²¹⁴ Vallières, p. 129.

²¹⁵ *Sherbrooke La Tribune*, 3 September 1912, p. 7.

²¹⁶ *Annuaire Statistique de Québec* (E.E. Cinq-Mars, Imprimeur de Le Majesté le Roi, 1914), p. 278.

²¹⁷ *Sherbrooke La Tribune*, 3 September 1912, p. 7.

²¹⁸ The strike did not last more than a week and there were no reports of vandalism or animosity against the Asbestos and Asbestic Co. See: *Sherbrooke La Tribune*, 3 September 1912, p. 7.

cultural identity based on reliable work at the Jeffrey Mine. As soon as machines threatened the workforce, strikes would occur.

Despite being linked to miners throughout the province, the 1912 strike at Asbestos was intensely local, and the workers did not rely on help from other strikers, unions, government agencies, or company heads. Historian of Quebec Michael D. Behiels writes that the workers union was “perceived as an institution central to the modernization and democratization of Quebec society,”²¹⁹ but this was not the case in Asbestos. With the number of its employees growing from 750 in 1897 to 2,909 in 1913,²²⁰ it would seem as though the asbestos industry would be ready for a union, it took decades for a union to take root in Asbestos because workers were used to relying on themselves in industrial disputes and they feared unions would make the industry unstable.²²¹ This anti-union attitude was strong throughout the province, but especially so in the asbestos industry, which was internationally known for having rich mineral deposits that contributed 82% of the global supply, and a docile working class.²²² The Quebec working class was not yet ready for unions, but Jeffrey Mine workers were becoming more confident in their ability to influence how operations at the pit were run.

The workers in Asbestos eventually received their first pay raise of the 20th century because of war, not the 1912 strike. The mineral was already used widely throughout the building supply industry, but this was paltry compared to the demand for asbestos that was generated by the First World War. This had a significant effect on the development of the Jeffrey Mine, the people who worked it, and the community’s strengthening cultural identity. By 1914, the industry’s prosperity was bringing major changes to the lives of the citizens of Asbestos as the road leading to Danville was paved and the first cement sidewalks were poured, both signs of stability and modernity. The town also set aside a new space for a larger cemetery, moving 431 coffins from the original site to the new one in order to prepare for the future.²²³ Not only was this an indication that the community was growing, but also that it was growing alongside the Jeffrey Mine, which had forced the establishment of the new cemetery by expanding onto

²¹⁹ Michael D. Behiels, “Introduction,” in Michael D. Behiels, ed., *Quebec Since 1800*, p. 212.

²²⁰ *Annuaire Statistique de Québec*, p. 286.

²²¹ Vallières, p. 129.

²²² *Annuaire Statistique de Québec*, p. 286.

²²³ *L’Asbestos*, 29 April 1949, p. 1.

the land where the original graveyard was located. Moving the cemetery was not a pleasant task, but it was one the community was willing to do if it meant giving their local industry room to grow. This began a local tradition in Asbestos of sacrificing land to the mine for the good of the community. In the process, Asbestos became a “moving community,” similar to northern iron mining towns in Sweden, such as Malmberget and Kiruna.

As the war in Europe continued and the demand for asbestos grew, changes to the land intensified. In 1914 and 1916, the CGS sent a detachment of surveyors to l’Estrie with assignments “best calculated to help the war effort: investigating and reporting on problems of mine development, and discovering deposits of economically or strategically important minerals.”²²⁴ While Shipton Township was known for the Jeffrey Mine deposits, surveyors examined it once again to see if there was anything else that could be put to use for the war effort, but “[a]ll valuable timber has been removed long since and, as several fires have swept the district within the last twenty years, no new stand has taken its place... The future of the district is bound up with the mining industry.”²²⁵ The land surrounding Asbestos had undergone drastic change as its industrialization brought in waves of new inhabitants who were only focused on what riches could be discovered beneath the surface soil. While logging or agricultural pursuits could not compete with the profits of the Jeffrey Mine, the destruction of these resources eliminated the potential diversification of the local economy if and when the asbestos industry collapsed. The threat of collapse was far from the minds of the people of Asbestos as the Jeffrey Mine became of prime importance during the war. While many French Canadians chose not to join the army, their wartime contribution in the form of industrial production, especially with asbestos, was invaluable. At the outbreak of the war, the *Canadian Mining Journal* acknowledged the importance of the mineral when it reported, “[t]he marked increase in disastrous fires is directing more attention every day to the need of fireproof building materials that can be relied upon.”²²⁶ The demand for asbestos wood, shingles, cement, and wall plaster sharply increased, and Jeffrey Mine workers would help meet it.

²²⁴ Zaslow, p. 315.

²²⁵ “Geological Survey of Canada: Report for the Year 1916,” (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1916), p. 231.

²²⁶ *The Canadian Mining Journal* (1 November 1914), p. 712.

The demand for asbestos increased so considerably—to 133,339 tonnes by 1916—due to new uses,²²⁷ that the Jeffrey Mine needed new technology to expand and extract the mineral quickly. W.G. Clarke, engineer at the Jeffrey Mine during this period, described the long process of how the pit was expanded and the mineral extracted at Asbestos:

Horses hauled dumpcarts which were loaded by hand, to the dump. Sometimes the drivers, mostly young boys... would back the cart too close to the edge of the dump and when the latch was released and the load did not slide out easily, everything went, load of earth, dumpcart, and the poor old horse. In most cases that was the end of the horse. The harness was stripped off and the horse shot and buried by succeeding loads of earth.²²⁸

While horses were often used in industry, they were not quick or strong enough to meet the rising demand when they were alive, and were a considerable disturbance to production when they died. Furthermore, the industry was suffering from a severe lack of manpower, which slowed production for the booming market.²²⁹ As profits continued to rise during the war, action was quickly taken to modernize the Jeffrey Mine.

In 1914, the Asbestos and Asbestic Co. installed twenty-one derricks around the open pit. These were tall mast-like structures with wires to create a pulley-like system that lifted 4x6 foot train carriage boxes full of men and mineral out of the mine.²³⁰ While the derricks cut back on the use of horses, it was not until steam shovels were introduced at the Jeffrey Mine in 1916, three years after many of the other mines in l'Estrie, that horses were completely eliminated.²³¹ Two years following this change, the derricks themselves became obsolete due to the combination of steam shovels and a railway line running from the bottom of the pit to the Grand Trunk at Danville.²³² The land and the people who worked it were becoming increasingly industrialized, which the people of Asbestos were fine with as long as the workforce continued to grow. The 1912 strike demonstrated the willingness of Jeffrey Mine workers to protest any threats an increased reliance on machines posed. The fact that they did not strike during this period of transformation indicates that their connection to the land through labour was maintained.

²²⁷ This was worth \$5,182,905. See: *The Canadian Mining Journal* (15 March 1917), p. 121.

²²⁸ WC Clarke Fonds, Eastern Townships Research Centre, photo C14.

²²⁹ *The Canadian Mining Journal* (1 November 1914), p. 712.

²³⁰ Lampron, et al, p. 49.

²³¹ Armstrong, "The Quebec Asbestos Industry," p. 204.

²³² WG Clark Fonds, Eastern Townships Research Centre.

With wartime technological advancements, the Jeffrey Mine attained a degree of modernity, efficiency, and success that its initial owners could hardly have imagined in 1879. By 1918 the *Canadian Mining Journal* reported, “[n]ow the architect, builder, steam-fitter and electrician recognize asbestos as a splendid material for resisting weather, fire, acids and other agencies of destruction, and they use it for very many purposes. The variety of uses is fast increasing and scarcely a month passes without some new application being found...Now it is a necessary article of commerce.”²³³ These improvements, combined with an international market that would only grow when the First World War ended, led to the H.W. Johns-Manville Co. completely taking over operations at Asbestos. Since 1892, this had been an umbrella company for all of the asbestos manufacturing firms operating in the United States and it connected the Jeffrey Mine to an immense industrial network that it would feed in the years following the war. This would drastically change the community and industry of Asbestos, affecting the politics of both land and people. If Feodor Boas created an asbestos revolution in the 1890s, the H.W. Johns-Manville Co. began an American revolution at the Jeffrey Mine, far more technologically advanced, economically connected, and managerially cutthroat than anything Quebec had experienced before. While this would not be the last time Asbestos would be redefined, the American control over land and people was the most formative for the developing local cultural identity, and continues to influence how the town and the Jeffrey Mine function today, long after the company’s tenure there. The ways in which the international aspirations, ideology, and reach of the H.W. Johns-Manville Co. radically changed the land, the people, and the community of Asbestos will be examined in the next three chapters.

²³³ *The Canadian Mining Journal* (1 March 1918), p. 90.

Chapter 2: Land With a Future, Not a Past: Bodies of Land, 1918-1949

In June 2010, the town of Asbestos was featured on the Australian comedy show, *The Gruen Transfer*. The program's host challenged two advertising executives to create a new ad campaign for the community. Upon hearing the challenge, the audience immediately began to laugh, continuing as the executives talked about how difficult it was to put a positive spin on a town called Asbestos. One of the two contestants admitted that he could not get past the name, so instead created a television commercial promoting Asbestos by highlighting other communities around the world with off-putting names, such as Accident, Maryland and Boring, Oregon. The tag line for the commercial was, "Don't let our name put you off. Asbestos: Bad Name, Great Destination."²³⁴ The other ad executive attempted to use the community's name to its advantage and made a commercial called "Speed Date a Town." Competing with cities like New York and Rome, represented by suave men in expensive suits, the humble Asbestos man, dressed in a beige windbreaker, finds no dating success until the narrator says, "Great relationships are built on truth, and the truth is, we don't have a very attractive name. So spend some time online with us first, and you'll see what makes people like you fall in love with a town like us."²³⁵ The commercial ends with the Asbestos man meeting his perfect match: a woman wearing a gas mask.

For the sake of comedy, neither commercial mentioned the Jeffrey Mine or the community's connection to it, established over generations of working the land and raising families around it. The connection is what keeps the local community in Asbestos, despite the current collapse of their industry, but it is also what keeps tourists and new residents away. While the commercials were meant to inspire laughter, they also reveal an important dilemma facing the people of Asbestos today: in order to create new interest in the community, they have to somehow forsake the Jeffrey Mine, so important to the local cultural identity and economy. The reluctance of the community to do so reveals that the people of Asbestos continue to see the land as part of their past, present, and future.

When the Johns-Manville Co. took full control of the Jeffrey Mine in 1918, it radically transformed the land and how the community was connected to it. This chapter

²³⁴ "How to Sell Asbestos, Canada," *The Gruen Transfer*, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/gruentransfer/>, accessed 16 June 2010. For access to the commercial in Canada, please see, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klpxelbki0I>.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

focuses on how the land was used, understood, and changed in Asbestos between 1918 and 1949, and how these changes were negotiated within the community. By working the Jeffrey Mine and living in such close proximity to it, the people of Asbestos developed a complex connection to the mineral and the mine. Their shared experiences with the prosperity the Jeffrey Mine gave them during this period influenced the local cultural identity and gave the community a global confidence and ambition because of the international reach of the industry. This understanding complements and contributes to how community members viewed their health and demonstrated their collective strength before 1949. The different factions of Asbestos negotiated comfortable patterns and roles that will stand in stark contrast to how the land was treated and viewed after the 1949 strike.

Between 1918 and 1949, JM and the people of Asbestos negotiated a balance between liveable space and workable space, with the Jeffrey Mine dividing and defining the two. The community was built on top of a massive asbestos deposit, but the mine that JM took over in 1918 exposed only a small fraction of the land's wealth. Over the next 30 years, Asbestos would be shaped by how politics and people were set aside to accommodate the increasing cultural and economic importance of the land. JM was fundamental to this process. While Thetford became successful through a series of smaller pits owned by different companies, JM believed that what Asbestos needed for success was one giant mine. Based in New York City, company officials embraced a "bigger is better" philosophy. The exponential growth of the Jeffrey Mine had a tremendous effect on the land and on the community, and it loomed large in the local identity. Because of the economic importance of the land and the excitement that came from being such vital players in the booming industry, the few local objections to this growth went unheeded and the people of Asbestos developed a tradition of sacrificing the community to the Jeffrey Mine.

Small Sacrifices, 1918-1923

With his discovery of asbestic at the end of the 19th century, Feodor Boas revolutionized how the Jeffrey Mine's asbestos deposit would be used and understood. Market forces limited the success of the inventions and new extraction techniques Boas brought to Asbestos, but the First World War radically changed this situation as global

demand for the fireproof mineral rapidly increased. Although European markets were closed to imports during the conflict, the growing war industry in the United States more than made up for the loss.²³⁶ Prices rose because of the demand for the mineral and American manufacturing companies took a special interest in Quebec's asbestos industry. JM focused on the Jeffrey Mine, which was worked night and day following the installation of floodlights around the pit after the outbreak of war.²³⁷ This American interest in the land would change how the people of Asbestos viewed the mine and themselves within an international trade network.

From its foundation, JM was primarily an asbestos manufacturing company, and while it eventually owned a few other mines in Canada and the United States, the Jeffrey Mine remained its main source for the raw mineral, and the company heavily relied on it to supply its factories, processing plants, and customers with asbestos. This was an ideal situation for the Quebec government, which under the premiership of Lomer Gouin, actively sought to put the province's natural resources into the hands of American businessmen in order to secure Quebec's future industrial success. Gouin believed that French Canadians would learn from these experts and gradually gain control of the industries that flowed from the land.²³⁸ The United States was seen as a good place from which to learn because it was becoming an economic and industrial powerhouse without any reliance on the British Empire, and this appealed greatly to French Canadians.

Asbestos was attractive to JM because it was a single-resource town in which every member of the community was in some way connected to the industry and this gave the company a great deal of power. As the Jeffrey Mine became more successful, the population of Asbestos grew around the pit, with a town square, a hotel, a church, and small businesses appearing on the roads that led from it. The lives of the townspeople were lived according to the rhythms of the pit, with everyone coming to a halt each day at noon and 5:30pm when blasting in the Jeffrey Mine marked the turnover of each shift.²³⁹ In 1918 when JM increased the number of employees, the hours the pit was worked, and

²³⁶ Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécoise des Origines aux Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), p. 100.

²³⁷ W.G. Clarke. W.G. Clarke Fonds, *Eastern Townships Research Centre*.

²³⁸ Bernard L. Vigod, *Quebec before Duplessis: The Political Career of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), p. 32.

²³⁹ W.G. Clarke. W.G. Clarke Fonds, *Eastern Townships Research Centre*.

the amount of asbestos extracted. Everything and everyone in the community was focused on the mine.

JM's purchase of the Jeffrey Mine was a sign of prosperity and permanence to the people of Asbestos: under the company's guidance, the community appeared to be economically secure. One of the first lessons the townspeople learned from the American company, however, was that the permanence that came with prosperity was unlike what they expected. In May 1918, Asbestos town council established a committee to determine the location of more sidewalks,²⁴⁰ but JM had other plans for the roads in Asbestos. Only a few weeks after the committee was established, the company requested that instead of sidewalks, they be allowed to run a railway line across rue St-Georges, one of the principle streets of the town.²⁴¹ In the opinion of the company, "permanence" meant that all land in Asbestos should be devoted to the success of the Jeffrey Mine, not the comfort of the community.

Town council granted permission for the railway, but reserved the right to change the rail line in two years if it hindered the community. In the two trial years that followed, however, council and most townspeople subscribed to JM's way of looking at the land and the town. Sidewalks and other community infrastructure were established over the coming years, but the success of Asbestos was quickly and firmly linked to the success of JM, and town council would root many of its decisions in what was in the best interest of the company, not necessarily the local population. The railway acted as an extension of the industrialized Jeffrey Mine into the community, and shipments of the mineral were constantly taken via train across the main streets of town. The introduction of the railway inspired JM officials to ask council if they could close the main roads surrounding the Jeffrey Mine for 10 minutes several times each day to allow for the mineral to be safely unloaded from the pit in large trucks and transported out of town.²⁴² Because it was proposed for the sake of safety, council approved this request, and an era of harmonious company-community relations began, with JM gaining more and more control over the land surrounding the Jeffrey Mine, blurring the boundaries between liveable space and workable space.

²⁴⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 May 1918, p. 141.

²⁴¹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 23 May 1918, p. 143.

²⁴² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 June 1918, p. 146.

A rail line and temporary road closures were changes to the land that the people of Asbestos could adjust to quickly. They were also signs that JM was willing to invest in the community, even if in ways not immediately understood. The American company had spread its influence throughout Asbestos and the community was indebted to it. JM officials knew they had invested well when they purchased the Jeffrey Mine, and they needed the freedom to do whatever they saw fit in the town to maximize their profits.

The province provided 80% of the world's supply of asbestos by the end of the war,²⁴³ but Americans were in full control of the industry on both a local and global scale. Despite this, the *Canadian Mining Journal* wrote that “the future of asbestos is only beginning, [and] the variety of its possible uses is immense, [so] that Canada, occupying such a dominating position in the asbestos market, may very well look forward not only to a greater production of the raw material, but to multiplication of the industries concerned with the manufacture and marketing of asbestos in finished form.”²⁴⁴ The asbestos industry was Canada's key to modernization and international economic success. The fact that American and British companies owned all the asbestos mines in country while local workers remained in subservient positions was not seen as a hindrance to the advancement of the Canadian economy even though it replicated the colonial systems of years past.

The town of Asbestos prospered following the First World War because of increased market demand, proving at the time that the American ownership of the mine improved the local economy and the global reach of the industry. The reconstruction of European cities destroyed during the war, such as Louvain and Douaumont, counted for a percentage of this rise in demand, but it was the American automobile industry, which required asbestos brake linings, that ensured the Jeffrey Mine would continue to grow in importance. The rapid rise in the use of electricity, a “close ally” of asbestos,²⁴⁵ throughout North America and Europe, combined with new laws making wooden shingles illegal because of the fires caused by the still new lighting and heating technology,²⁴⁶ also suggested to contemporaries that the mineral had “undoubtedly

²⁴³ A. Leonard Summers, *Asbestos and the Asbestos Industry: The World's Most Wonderful Mineral and Other Fireproof Materials* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1920), p. 8.

²⁴⁴ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 24 December 1919, p. 966.

²⁴⁵ Summers, pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁶ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 28 January 1921, p. 62.

unlimited scope and possibilities for future development.”²⁴⁷ These industrial advances were especially favourable to the people of Asbestos because of the large quantities of asbestic required for these products. The *Canadian Mining Journal* explained in 1920 that “[w]hile high-grade asbestos is much sought after, probably the most encouraging feature of the business at this time is the extension of uses for short fibre material and material that formerly was regarded as waste and unsaleable,” and that “[w]ith depth the contents of asbestos in the rock seem to increase rather than diminish.”²⁴⁸ The land and labour of Asbestos was in great demand internationally, and the community took pride in meeting it.

The Jeffrey Mine’s mineral was ideal for these new products and the people of Asbestos saw this as a sign of future prosperity. In 1921 a new school for 215 children was built out of wood and asbestos to accommodate the needs of the growing community, as well as to keep young boys from working the mine until they were teenagers.²⁴⁹ JM was also building at this time, and in June 1921 it announced that it was constructing a manufacturing plant in Asbestos within the coming months.²⁵⁰ To the great excitement of the community that already had 700 to 1,200 people working for the company, the factory would require at least 100 new employees, and was a tangible sign that JM believed the Jeffrey Mine would continue to be prosperous and it offered more members of the community, including women, the opportunity to know the mineral through the work they did.

The community was proud they possessed one of the largest asbestos mines in the world out of their land now the first manufacturing plant for the mineral in Canada. In 1920, approximately \$12,000,000 worth of raw asbestos was exported to manufacturing plants in the United States and Britain, but the addition of the plant in Asbestos would increase this number at least seven times over.²⁵¹ The plant was to be the most modern factory in the country and was a tangible sign that JM was taking the community down the right path. The new plant was built in Asbestos at the beginning of what Quebec mining historian Marc Vallières calls the province’s “revolution technologique,” which

²⁴⁷ Summers, p. 2.

²⁴⁸ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 31 December 1920, p. 1079 and 7 January 1920, p. 4.

²⁴⁹ Frère Fabien, *Au Fil des Années: Historique de l'École St-Aimé, 1918-1968* (Sherbrooke: Éditions Paulines, 1968), p. 20.

²⁵⁰ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 10 June 1921, p. 457.

²⁵¹ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 22 July 1921, p. 576.

lasted until 1950.²⁵² In just a few years of having JM run the Jeffrey Mine, the land in Asbestos had become a place of modern technology and progress. In no way did it resemble the land the Abenaki had relied on in the region, nor did it match the ordered, agrarian township system the British Crown introduced in the 18th and 19th century. This was now land made unsuitable for anything but the asbestos industry and a French Canadian majority worked it.

Being at the forefront of Quebec's industrial and technological revolution, townspeople began to believe that the land was where the province would find its success and Asbestos had a central role in the process. The Jeffrey Mine was reported to be one of the best examples of this technological revolution, because the pit had been turned into something resembling a machine "laid out in wide benches, [with] the rock being loaded into cars of standard gauge by steam-shovels and hauled on trains to the mill by steam locomotives on a maximum grade of three percent."²⁵³ JM used the most technologically advanced drills and shovels available. The benched method of asbestos mining was especially efficient because it allowed for extraction on many different levels at once. In order to prevent landslides, however, the pit had to expand in width as well as in depth, which had repercussions for the community built alongside it. The new manufacturing plant at the Jeffrey Mine was completed in 1923 and consisted of two buildings, each 150 by 1000 feet.²⁵⁴ The company also increased its use of machinery in the pit, which the mines at Thetford had not yet done; men who had once loaded chunks of broken rock into carting boxes at the bottom of the pit were replaced by steam shovels, and given new roles in the pit.²⁵⁵ These developments meant that both production and profits increased in Asbestos, but also radically changed the land and the townspeople's association with it.

By 1922, the increase of automobiles made the roads in Asbestos congested and the bridge leading to Danville was consistently blocked due to shipments from the Jeffrey Mine.²⁵⁶ This situation worsened with the manufacturing plant's increased production. JM attempted to solve the problem by extending rue Bourbeau across company property to be

²⁵² Vallières, p. 165.

²⁵³ "Modernization of the Asbestos Mines," *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 5 August 1921, p. 618.

²⁵⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 14 March 1923, p. 407.

²⁵⁵ Norman A. Fisher, "The Quebec Asbestos Industry," *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 17 August 1923, p. 649.

²⁵⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 5 April 1922, p. 353.

a transport route for trucks.²⁵⁷ While this seemed to be a solution, only months after the town constructed new cement sidewalks, JM “moved” the main road of the community. The Asbestos-Danville road was a core part of the town. It not only ran alongside the Jeffrey Mine, but also was where the first residents chose to settle because of its proximity to the pit. The benched method of fibre extraction, however, meant the Jeffrey Mine was becoming wider and the townspeople were getting in the way of progress. After appealing to council, JM’s proposal to relocate part of the Asbestos-Danville road from its original location was approved. Council justified this decision when it stated,

la dite rue Asbestos étant présentement située trop près des puits ouverts de la mine d’amiante, où des explosions des mines et les opérations à vapeur, l’électricité et autres machines à pouvoir est requis, qu’offre un danger appréciable au trafic passant dans cette rue comme elle est située precautement, et reconnaissant en même temps, le fait officiel de poursuivre les opérations minières, étant si essentiel à la vie et l’intérêt de la communauté locale, il est de plus résolu.²⁵⁸

The success of the community depended on the success of the Jeffrey Mine and council made it clear that if came to a choice between using the land in Asbestos for community infrastructure or for industrial advancement, the industry would always win. A new road was to be built by the company 66 feet away from the edge of JM property, which the community, used to the risks of living so close to the mine, believed to be a safe distance.

This new road kept the name of the one appropriated by JM and a tradition began in the community where a sense of stability was maintained through place names, even though the land was constantly in flux. Moving the road because of rising production levels at the Jeffrey Mine was an indication of prosperity for the community, but it was also a great disruption to the townspeople, many of whom had to move their homes or businesses. With town council minutes listing only eight people in Asbestos who protested this move—all of them local businessmen not affiliated with the company²⁵⁹—it appears that the majority of the community had subscribed to JM’s philosophy. The mine was of principal importance and all other possible uses of land had to be secondary.

²⁵⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 7 March 1923, p. 404.

²⁵⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 13 November 1923, p. 447.

²⁵⁹ Réjean Lampron, Marc Cantin, and Élise Grimard, *Asbestos: Filons d’Histoire, 1899-1999* (Asbestos: Centenaire de la ville d’Asbestos, 1999), p. 117.

Groundbreaking Success, 1924-1938

The industry suffered from post-war over-production in the early 1920s.²⁶⁰ The asbestos market was opened once more to Russian and South African fibre, which had been restricted due to wartime trade restrictions, and the resulting price wars that came from this competition forced many Quebec mines to shut down. Despite these problems, JM continued to invest heavily in the Jeffrey Mine. While the mine was temporarily closed because of overproduction in January 1924, the *Canadian Mining Journal* reported that “[o]ne can gain an idea of the magnitude of the mining operations of this company when one learns that eight big steam shovels are used in the amphitheatre-like open-cast workings; that to cope with the mine output, a new crushing plant had to be built, which will take care of 500 tons of rock per hour; and that a new mill...is now ready to receive the crushed rock.”²⁶¹ Company officials believed that the “bigger is better” Jeffrey Mine required bigger and better technologies. JM was established in the late 19th century when New York City was undergoing an era that “viewed largeness itself as progress,” and American businessmen saw consolidated monopolies as the fastest and surest route to international success.²⁶² This philosophy was applied to many resource industries in the United States, including iron and steel, and JM saw the Canadian Jeffrey Mine as the key to global success and dominance of the asbestos industry. In order to achieve this goal, the land was increasingly industrialized in Asbestos, as were the people who worked it, changing jobs in the pit to accommodate new technologies.

The Jeffrey Mine continued to bring an incredible amount of wealth to JM. In the mid-1920s, the growing automobile industry consumed more than 50% of all manufactured asbestos products for over a dozen uses.²⁶³ To maximize sales, JM, already a world-leader in building materials, won contracts from the automobile, railroad, and oil industries. While the Jeffrey Mine was not JM’s only asbestos property, it was by far its largest and most profitable, allowing the company to expand its product line and marketing. One result was that JM extended its presence in the town of Asbestos. Each

²⁶⁰ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 17 August 1923, p. 650.

²⁶¹ “The Canadian Johns-Manville Co. Ltd. Work on a Large Scale,” *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 4 January 1924, p. 30.

²⁶² Thomas Kessner, *Capital City: New York City and the Men Behind America’s Rise to Economic Dominance, 1860-1900* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p. 318. See also, Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁶³ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 18 April 1924, p. 374.

winter, company equipment plowed the roads of the community²⁶⁴ and when the majority of the streets were renamed in 1926, rue Asbestos and part of rue Nicolet were rechristened “rue Manville,” which JM immediately began enlarging.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, in 1926 JM effectively lobbied council for the introduction of bilingual street signs in the community;²⁶⁶ while the majority of Asbestos was Francophone, company officials were Anglophone and they had an influence in local affairs that was larger than their minority status. The linguistic divide in Asbestos mirrored and blended with the town’s class divisions, and the Anglophone minority held great power within the community because of its managerial role at the Jeffrey Mine. When relations between the managing class and working class were good, relations between the English and French residents of the community were also good. When they were strained, however, linguistic tensions rose in Asbestos, as will be seen in later chapters.

With record profits being recorded for the industry and Asbestos’ population growing to 3,602 by 1926,²⁶⁷ local class relations were good and the linguistic needs of JM and its officials were easily met in the prosperous 1920s. In March 1927, town council wrote to the Quebec government requesting permission to extend the boundaries of Asbestos by 17,588 square feet for the future prosperity of the community.²⁶⁸ The request was granted and the town soon covered 800 acres.²⁶⁹ This marked the first major step towards the complete manipulation of the land surrounding Asbestos and the people who lived on it. Following a request by council to extend the lease on the supply of electricity the company provided the town, JM asked for a portion of this new land so that it could extend company roads and operations.²⁷⁰

The request was for 55 acres and JM explained that the community was in the way of the Jeffrey Mine’s necessary expansion. The global price of asbestos was increasing and with Canada providing 85% of the fibre worldwide²⁷¹ this was the perfect opportunity for the company to increase its land holdings in Asbestos. In order to combat any negative feelings towards this expansion, which would require many citizens to move further away

²⁶⁴ W.G. Clarke Fonds, Eastern Townships Research Centre.

²⁶⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 10 May 1926, p. 79.

²⁶⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 4 March 1926, p. 68-69.

²⁶⁷ *L’Asbestos*. 22 July 1949, p. 1.

²⁶⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 7 March 1927, p. 113.

²⁶⁹ *L’Asbestos*. 27 July 1949, p. 1.

²⁷⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 27 April 1927, p. 137.

²⁷¹ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 25 November 1927, p. 934.

from the mine as it grew into existing neighbourhoods, JM announced that it would construct four new roads with houses for its employees with families, equipped with such modern conveniences as running water, electricity, and streetlights.²⁷² Single male employees were housed in the Hotel Iroquois at the edge of the Jeffrey Mine where they had their meals provided and rooms cleaned. JM also paid to have all the remaining roads in the town covered with gravel. Asbestos was becoming indebted to the company and used to the perks that came with progress.

The 1928 expansion was the first time the Jeffrey Mine, in the words of the townspeople, “commence à grignoter le village.”²⁷³ For community members to describe the pit as being something that “ate” away at the town gives the Jeffrey Mine agency and personality in the history of Asbestos, but the local population did not necessarily view this “eating” in a negative light, as the mine was what mattered, and if it needed to grow to increase profits, the town would sacrifice. Pit expansion changed not only the land, but also the way townspeople related to the Jeffrey Mine. For the first time since the mine was opened, it had a barbed wire fence around it to prevent children from playing in the pit when it was not being worked, clearly distinguishing land for work and land for play.²⁷⁴ Many residents were upset over the destruction of the original section of the community, but the late 1920s were an exciting time in Asbestos and the expansion was a sign of greater things to come. In 1928, l’Estrie was internationally known as “the most important asbestos producing territory in the world. The asbestos mined there is the standard for the whole industry...[and] with it all other asbestos is compared.”²⁷⁵ The majority of the citizens of Asbestos accepted that land with this reputation could not be exploited enough and the international reach of Jeffrey Mine labour strongly influenced the local cultural identity.

The global price for asbestos dropped sharply with the onslaught of the Great Depression. While JM controlled almost half of all the asbestos mined in Canada in the early 1930s,²⁷⁶ it drastically reduced its workforce at the Jeffrey Mine and operated only

²⁷² Lampron, et al, p. 140.

²⁷³ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 70.

²⁷⁴ W.G. Clarke Fonds, Eastern Townships Research Centre.

²⁷⁵ *Asbestos: Its Sources, Extraction, Preparation, Manufacture, and Uses in Industry and Engineering* (Berlin: Becker and Haag, 1928), p. 17.

²⁷⁶ Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 21.

one shift per day because of the economic crisis.²⁷⁷ JM was so affected by the Depression because it was inextricably tied to the collapsed automobile and construction industries. The company's foresight to combine mining and manufacturing under one umbrella could not help the situation. The land at Asbestos suddenly lost its value and the community was brought to a standstill.

Townpeople had been willing to sacrifice their land and homes to the progress of the Jeffrey Mine in 1928, but the Great Depression and the severe reduction in employment did little to convince them they had made the right decision. For JM, however, the expansion had not been a mistake and despite global overproduction, increased output of Russian fibre, and new geological surveys beginning in Quebec to find other valuable minerals,²⁷⁸ the company pushed ahead on its agreed-upon plans for expansion. The 55-acre enlargement of the Jeffrey Mine completely destroyed what locals referred to as the "nerve centre" of the community, including Le Carré, the store opened in 1890 by the first mayor of Asbestos, Henri Roux.²⁷⁹ In return for this loss, the town received from JM an equal amount of land to construct a new commercial centre. The merchants along the original commercial strip of the town protested the expansion more in 1930 than they did in 1928, despite the fact that council had already given the company permission to move ahead. Sacrificing the land to the Jeffrey Mine seemed necessary when it was first proposed at the height of the industry's success, but appeared less so during the Depression when JM did not employ a full workforce.

In the opinion of town council, however, the expansion would generate work for the community and sustain JM, which "apporte la presque totalité des revenus d'Asbestos."²⁸⁰ Local physician Dr. Elzéar Émard made an official protest against the destruction of Le Carré in 1930, and stated that "les dit membres du conseil n'étaient pas libres d'agir dans l'intérêt exclusif de la municipalité, ils étaient liés à la dite compagnie minière et la résolution a été passée par eux dans le but d'être agréables à la dite compagnie, sans songer aux droits des contribuables."²⁸¹ Although council demanded a

²⁷⁷ Elizabeth W. Gillies, "The Asbestos Industry Since 1929 with Special Reference to Canada" (McGill University, 1941), p. 40.

²⁷⁸ Morris Zaslow, *Reading the Rocks: The Story of the Geological Survey of Canada, 1842-1972* (Ottawa: Macmillan, in association with the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and Information Canada, 1975), p. 349.

²⁷⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 42.

²⁸⁰ *L'Asbestos*, 26 August 1949, p. 1.

²⁸¹ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 70.

retraction of Énard's statement, the accusation was apt. While the community wanted to encourage JM's success, the company was not in control of town business, and distance between the two was necessary. In order to avoid any more accusations of partiality the mayor appealed to the provincial government for a final decision on the expansion.

In 1931 the Quebec government sided with JM and the first Bill of Expropriation for Asbestos was put into effect. Locals were forced to sell their land to the company because the success of the community relied on the success of the Jeffrey Mine. Since the community depended on the mine for existence and JM was in charge of that mine, the company was essentially in charge of Asbestos, and the law of expropriation solidified this. It was clear to the townspeople that their emotional attachment to community land, seen in their protests of the expropriation, did not matter. Under the rule of JM, the town did not have a history preserved in buildings or roads, but rather a future to ensure by unrestricted changes to the land.

Meanwhile, the population of Asbestos continued to grow with the mine. The community experienced the sharpest increase in population of any other town in Richmond County, reaching 4,396 in 1931.²⁸² Even through the economic downturn town council continued to put its faith in the company, and often asked JM officials for advice and the use of their engineers when new roads were being constructed.²⁸³ Despite this faith, JM was forced to close the Jeffrey Mine completely between May 1932 and April 1933 because of the continued collapse of the automobile industry.²⁸⁴ Many local merchants and homeowners directly affected by the expansion of the Jeffrey Mine also had their property severely damaged in the process of moving roads and buildings, and had to appeal directly to JM for compensation. The industrial freeze in Asbestos challenged the local cultural identity that had developed alongside the tremendous international demand for the mineral found in the Jeffrey Mine.

Throughout the Depression, JM planned for the future, even though the Jeffrey Mine was closed. It developed new markets for magnesia pipe and boiler insulation to compensate for the decreased demand in the auto industry; this quickly became the

²⁸² *Le Citoyen*, p. 108.

²⁸³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 11 January 1932, p. 429 and 1 June 1932, p. 470.

²⁸⁴ Gillies, pp. 47-48.

company's top selling product.²⁸⁵ Partly due to this innovation, and partly because of a sudden revitalization in the automobile sector, by the end of 1933 the asbestos industry experienced a 29% increase in production and 71% increase in monetary value over the previous year, and the Jeffrey Mine opened once again.²⁸⁶ The effects of this were immediate. Town council purchased additional acreage to prepare for community growth and to tap into a new water source because the current one had become too contaminated.²⁸⁷ While production levels at the mine did not reach pre-Depression heights until after the Second World War, by 1935 employees were working an average of 58 hours each week, compared to the 70 hours six years earlier,²⁸⁸ and there was every indication that the industry, and the land that fed it, was making a strong recovery.

With production having increased by 19.2% in 1935, town council decided that it would generate more growth in the community by extending and paving rue St-Aimé by 1,400 feet and rue St-Rock by 2,300 feet, each connecting to what was to be the new commercial centre of Asbestos.²⁸⁹ While these expansions damaged some homes along the roads, they were another sign of permanence and prosperity. Canadian production continued to rise in 1936, increasing 43% in quantity and 41% in value from the previous year,²⁹⁰ and by 1937, the village of Asbestos officially became a city because of its rising population. These developments, both local and global because of the international reach of the industry, were rooted in the value of the land: without it, and without JM's Depression-era management, the community could have collapsed. JM's manufacturing plants at Asbestos and Montreal could handle only 5% of the fibre being extracted from the Jeffrey Mine,²⁹¹ and the rest of the raw mineral went to the several hundred factories the company ran in the United States, the world's leading exporter of finished asbestos products.²⁹² The land at Asbestos was supplying more fibre than the local population could manage and JM officials saw nothing wrong with this situation: Asbestos was

²⁸⁵ McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 26.

²⁸⁶ Oliver Bowles and B.H. Stoddard, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook 1934*, Kiessling, O.E., ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), p. 1014.

²⁸⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 14 November 1934, p. 298.

²⁸⁸ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1934, p. 67.

²⁸⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 20 June 1935, p. 301.

²⁹⁰ Oliver Bowles, M.A. Cornthwaite, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, 1937, Herbert H. Hughes, ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), p. 1368.

²⁹¹ Vallières, p. 195.

²⁹² Bowles and Cornthwaite, 1937, p. 1363.

connected to the company's vast American network and as the Jeffrey Mine became larger, the extent of the land's global reach would also grow.

With the world economy pulling out of depression, Canada's asbestos production increased from 301,287 tonnes worth \$9,958,183 in 1937 to 389,688 tonnes worth \$14,072,000 in 1938.²⁹³ The Jeffrey Mine had become the largest pit in l'Estrie, a significant achievement for the land and the people of Asbestos. While JM increasingly industrialized the mine, the men and women who worked in the pit and the manufacturing plant maintained a close, physical connection to the land. In the bilingual *Johns-Manville News Pictorial* distributed to its local employees each month from 1938 to 1949, the company highlighted this connection by focusing on the work of Achille Boudreau and Joe Letarte in the first issue. Boudreau was photographed sitting in the pit wearing his denim jacket as he "cobbed" the long asbestos fibre out of large pieces of rock by breaking it along the fibrous seams with a hammer. Latarte, also a cobber, was pictured climbing out of the pit with a bucket of rock in one hand and a burlap bag full of hand-picked fibre slung over his shoulder as though he was an asbestos Santa.²⁹⁴ Machines could not completely distance the workers and the natural world.

The physical connection between the people of Asbestos and the land did not end in the pit. The entire community was intimately acquainted with the Jeffrey Mine simply through working and living in such close proximity to it, hearing, seeing, and breathing in the sound and dust of progress, and this connection will be seen again and again in the following chapters. As the industry recovered from the Depression many asbestos mines in the region found it difficult to meet the increased demand because there was no physical space to expand operations.²⁹⁵ This was not the case in Asbestos, where industry trumped community when it came to issues of land-use, and in 1938 JM appealed to town council with a proposal to expand the Jeffrey Mine once again.

Industrial Revolution Meets Natural Phenomenon, 1938-1949

The years following the Depression taught the people of Asbestos that if they put their faith in the land and JM, they would prosper, and town council approved the

²⁹³ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1938, p. 65.

²⁹⁴ *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, December 1938, p. 4.

²⁹⁵ Vallières, p. 194.

company's request for 14 undeveloped lots in 1938 without hesitation.²⁹⁶ The expansion did not directly affect the homes and businesses of the town and was not as controversial as the first major enlargement. It was clear that the pit had reached its physical limits, as it resembled a steep inverted cone with limited access to fibre at the bottom,²⁹⁷ and workers could not dig deeper without expanding wider first, due to the threat of disastrous landslides. For the structural stability of the land and the financial stability of the town, the Jeffrey Mine had to become wider.

The expansion was viewed as another example of progress after the economic trials of the early 1930s, and in order to compensate for lost land, council purchased 7 unused lots from Joseph Isabelle in January 1939.²⁹⁸ The town needed more liveable land to accommodate a growing workforce and a shrinking community space caused by the expanding pit. The following spring, council purchased 14 additional undeveloped lots belonging to Eugenie Bolduc.²⁹⁹ The town was learning to balance mine and community land use. These purchases were well planned, as 1939 saw great development in the land of the community, and the Jeffrey Mine was declared to be the largest asbestos mine in the world.³⁰⁰ By making the industrialization of the land a priority, the community



Mining and haulage arrangement of levels and approaches at the Jeffrey Mine, 1939³⁰¹

²⁹⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 30 September 1938, p. 158.

²⁹⁷ W. Gillies Ross, "Encroachment of the Jeffrey Mine on the Town of Asbestos, Quebec," *Geographic Review*, v. 57, n. 4 (1967), p. 529.

²⁹⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 3 January 1939, p. 182.

²⁹⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 3 April 1939, p. 210.

³⁰⁰ RC Rowe, "Mining and Milling Operations of the Canadian Johns-Manville Company Ltd. at Asbestos, PQ," *The Canadian Mining Journal*, April 1939, p. 185.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

attained global recognition. Creating the world's largest asbestos mine was a great achievement for the people of Asbestos, and further added an international element to their local cultural identity.

The local identity in Asbestos was rooted in a land that was constantly changing. The original hill on which Jeffrey and Webb found their first asbestos deposits had almost disappeared by 1939, but the pit remained about 750 feet above sea level and was 510 feet deep and 300 feet wide with spiralling benches 35 feet high and at least 75 feet wide to accommodate the trucks and trains emerging from the bottom.³⁰² JM believed that the pit could be deepened between 100 and 150 feet more, which meant that for a while at least, the townspeople would not have to sacrifice any more land to the Jeffrey Mine. According to the *Canadian Mining Journal*, the land in Asbestos told a tale of progress:

The first impression gathered from a tour of these workings is one of size. Here is an operation that handles great quantities of material, and uses mammoth machines in the process. [Here] is the largest power shovel in Canada; along its levels run standard locomotives hauling trains of cars, some of which are 30 yard capacity. Yet as one stands on the high side of the pit looking down, these great machines look like toys in that immensity of space. It is a big job worked in a big way because some 3,000,000 tons of rock and stripping are handled from the pit in a year.³⁰³

The Jeffrey Mine had become a natural and a technological phenomenon, and the increased use of large machinery took the land in Asbestos to a new level of industrialization. Derricks mounted around the mine now held the drills that made the blasting holes in five separate working areas of the pit to ensure precision and cut back on staff. When JM officials came up with this cost-saving idea, drill manufacturers told them that replacing men with machines was impossible,³⁰⁴ so the company invented a way to do it and further revolutionize how the land and technology collided in the Jeffrey Mine.

Locomotives now carried steel, drill bits, explosives, and other supplies around the pit and three four-yard electric shovels worked in tandem with one eight-yard shovel to load the fibre into empty train cars heading back up to the surface. Because of the influx of technology, it might appear as though asbestos extraction was a relatively people-less endeavour, but this was not the case. Groups of men operated these machines

³⁰² Ibid, p. 190.

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 194.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 194.

and packed explosives into the mechanically drilled holes before taking cover. Shifts operated 24 hours a day and groups of men appeared ant-like in the pit under the 1000-watt floodlights that shone on the Jeffrey Mine all night. Employees were also required to continuously move the pumps that extracted the estimated 500,000 gallons of surface and underground water that filled the pit each day, as well as to pick through the rubble after blasting to remove any pieces of wood, blasting wire, or other foreign objects that would decrease the value of the mineral packaged at the mill. The connection between the people of Asbestos and the mine was changing with the increased industrialization of the land, but it remained a strong pillar in the local cultural identity.

Two-thirds of JM employees in Asbestos were Francophone, while company officials were exclusively Anglophone. In addition to the employees who worked directly in the Jeffrey Mine, 250 others (including 25 women) were employed at the factory by 1939, processing approximately twelve train cars of milled asbestos each day.³⁰⁵ While socially, culturally, and linguistically different from company heads, by extracting the majority of the company's supply of asbestos, this workforce was a major factor in JM controlling a significant portion of the market for the mineral termed "indispensable to modern life" by the American government in 1939.³⁰⁶ The market for the fibre increased exponentially after the outbreak of the Second World War and a thirty-year boom period began. By 1941, JM sales had increased by 50% because of wartime industry³⁰⁷ and the temporary elimination of Russian fibre from competition. The closing of European markets during the war did not severely affect the company or its operations at Asbestos because its foundations were in Canada and the United States, both countries that continued to manufacture and feed the machines of war with the fireproof mineral. In fact, the United States wartime industrial boom more than compensated for the loss of European sales³⁰⁸ and workers at the Jeffrey Mine often had trouble keeping up with demand.

³⁰⁵ "Manufacturing Operations of Canadian Johns-Manville Co. Ltd. at Asbestos, PQ," *The Canadian Mining Journal*, April 1939, p. 205.

³⁰⁶ Oliver Bowles and K.G. Warner, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, Herbert Hughes, ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 1309.

³⁰⁷ McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 28.

³⁰⁸ Oliver Bowles and K.G. Warner, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, E.W. Pehrson and H.D. Keiser, eds. (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1941), p. 1323.

It was an exciting era for Asbestos with new technologies and products being developed with Jeffrey Mine fibre every day. This included asbestos cement, which saw asbestic added to cement to reinforce its strength, and led many contemporaries to believe that the “Asbestos Age” was just beginning.³⁰⁹ Asbestos cement was particularly popular in America’s construction industry and the Jeffrey Mine’s short asbestic fibre was ideal for this product. At the end of 1941, JM approached town council to purchase part of rue St-Aimé and rue St-Georges for mine expansion. Although this bordered a central area of the town, council granted the request in the spring of 1942: at this time of great local prosperity the company could do no wrong and would not be second-guessed.³¹⁰ In return, the town would receive \$5,000 for just under 500 feet of road. While the lack of protest indicates that the majority of the community agreed mine expansion was a positive development, on the same day permission was given to JM, homeowner Joseph A. Lambert requested that he be allowed to move his house away from rue St-Amié at his own expense. Not everyone was thrilled by living in close proximity to the noise and dust that was produced by the Jeffrey Mine 24 hours a day, and between June 1942 and February 1943, four other residents requested permission to move their homes away from the growing pit.³¹¹ These moves demonstrate a quiet acceptance of how land was managed in Asbestos. Rather than attempt to prevent mine expansion, residents simply moved out of the way.

As had become custom whenever the Jeffrey Mine “ate” part of Asbestos, there was a rollback effect in which the town moved homes and purchased new land located at the edges of the community. JM officials typically lived on a knoll far away from the Jeffrey Mine, owning cars that took them from their homes to the pit each day. The workers, on the other hand, walked to the Jeffrey Mine and for financial reasons, many rented affordable housing from JM that was located close to the edges of the pit. The families in these homes were moved when the company decided to expand the mine at JM’s expense, but residents who owned their houses also chose to continue living close to the mine despite its constant growth. These homes were placed on logs and pulled by

³⁰⁹ Gillies, p. 8.

³¹⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 6 May 1942, p. 495.

³¹¹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 22 June 1942, p. 3 and 5, and 8 February 1943, p. 36.

horses from one location to another each time the Jeffrey Mine grew. In June 1942, town council annexed almost 3,000 feet of unused farmland in order to expand the



Moving homes in Asbestos, Quebec, circa 1940³¹²

liveable limits of Asbestos.³¹³ This expansion was important not only in providing new land to those displaced by the growing Jeffrey Mine, but also for new residents who had moved to the community to work for JM. The mine provided an excellent source of wartime employment, operating three shifts working 24 hours each day, seven days a week and still not meeting market demands.³¹⁴ The wartime reduction in male employees also allowed for an influx of women in JM operations and by 1943, 25% of the workers at the manufacturing plant were female,³¹⁵ which offered a new way of life to a significant portion of the population.

In 1943, the Jeffrey Mine covered 115 acres of surface land, and 6,000 tons of rock and mineral were extracted daily.³¹⁶ Despite these impressive figures, JM was not able to expand the mine quickly enough as the demand for the mineral increased with the American entrance into the war in 1941. The Jeffrey Mine was already so close to the residential portion of Asbestos that sewage from homes close to it began pouring into the pit, contaminating the fibre.³¹⁷ Until the company was operating with a full workforce and with the proper amount of time to expand, a new way of looking at the land had to be developed. Reports began to emerge stating that the shortage of asbestos fibre was the

³¹² Lampron, et al, p. 399.

³¹³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 22 June 1942, p. 5.

³¹⁴ Oliver Bowles and A.C. Petron, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, F.M. Shore, ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 1436.

³¹⁵ McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 28.

³¹⁶ T.A. Rickard, "The Mining of Asbestos," *The Canadian Mining Journal*, June 1943, p. 364.

³¹⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 16 June 1943, p. 50 and 7 July 1943, p. 52.

result of the opencast method used for extracting the mineral.³¹⁸ In response to this, the president of the Canadian Johns-Manville (CJM) branch, G.K. Foster, approached town council at the beginning of 1944 and informed them of the company's new wartime plan: they were going underground.

Although underground mining was not typically used for asbestos extraction it allowed JM to expand operations and increase production quickly, while not infringing on the property of the townspeople because shafts required far less land than an open pit. Underground operations also hid the drastic changes to the land that opencast mining put on display. The first two shafts were built on the south end of rue Bourbeau and were 10x10 feet wide, about 750 feet deep, and each had a conveyor belt 25 feet high leading out of the ground towards the mills in order to prevent rocks from flying into surrounding neighbourhoods.³¹⁹ Town council approved the building of these shafts and in return, JM donated a portion of company land in order to extend Boulevard St-Luc. JM also built a new Hotel Iroquois beside the shafts on rue Bourbeau in order to house 200 single male workers who would be needed to help meet the rising global demand for the fibre.³²⁰ Although Canadian asbestos production rose by more than 100,000 tonnes during the Second World War, there was little fear amongst industry insiders that the market would collapse during peacetime because of the desirability of the mineral for everyday use.³²¹ The new British invention of asbestos sheeting was able to withstand extremely high temperature and pressure and suitable for fighter jets and commercial airlines, was an example of this market transferability.³²² In the transition from wartime to peacetime markets, JM invested more money into the land at Asbestos to make sure levels of production would increase.

Following the Second World War, employment at the Jeffrey Mine rose with returning soldiers, and the development of shaft mining and mill expansion increased JM profits by 50%.³²³ While opencast mining maximized fibre extraction on the largest scale

³¹⁸ Oliver Bowles and F.M. Barsigian, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, E.W. Pehrson and C.E. Needham, eds. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 1431.

³¹⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 9 August 1944, p. 8.

³²⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 7 June 1944, p. 81.

³²¹ Oliver Bowles and Dorothy I. Marsh, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, E.W. Pehrson and C.E. Needham, eds. (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1944), p. 1478.

³²² *The Canadian Mining Journal*, October 1945, p. 940.

³²³ G.W. Josephson and Dorothy I. Marsh, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook*, E.W. Pehrson and Allen F. Matthews, eds. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 150.

possible, it was also expensive and time-consuming. Underground mining required less space and manpower, and protected the fibre from being tainted by the elements and thus ensured the highest quality of asbestos taken from the mine. Rather than aggravate the local population through further width expansion, JM opted for the extraction method that was the least expensive and least invasive for the community. The company's decision to change the way land in the Jeffrey Mine was used suggests that there was a growing frustration in Asbestos due to the constant expansion of the pit and expropriation of town land. Underground mining, combined with opencast methods, was a way JM could increase production while maintaining good company-community relations in Asbestos by minimizing changes to town infrastructure and land.

One group JM could not appease, however, was the local merchants in the community. There was constant tension between the company and the smaller businessmen of Asbestos. The majority of townspeople were employees at the Jeffrey Mine and they usually sided with the company on land issues, but the independent proprietors were a vocal minority against JM expansion. The original commercial centre of Asbestos had been destroyed when the mine "ate" Le Carré, but local merchants attempted to create a new centre on rue Bourbeau years before JM began underground shaft mining along it. In November 1946, the company requested permission from council to close a large section of rue Bourbeau and rue St-Georges to accommodate this new use of the land. While JM offered to extend Boulevard St-Luc in return for this closure and to "fournir toute l'aide nécessaire et à défendre les intérêts de la Ville d'Asbestos," the merchants along rue Bourbeau were not satisfied.³²⁴ At the same meeting of council, La Ligue des Propriétaires d'Asbestos Inc. presented a statement that read, "Nous soussignés, propriétaires affectés si jamais la rue Bourbeau venait à être bloquée dans la direction de St-Georges-de-Windsor, désirons vous prier d'utiliser toutes les mesures légales afin d'empêcher ce blocus qui causerait une grosse dépréciation à nos propriétés."³²⁵ This was the first sign of real local conflict over land use in Asbestos and it reveals how difficult community relations could be in a single-resource and single-company town. Loss of property value and loss of business were main concerns of the merchants when it came to the industrialization of rue Bourbeau, but JM's land management provided the

³²⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 November 1946, p. 199.

³²⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 November 1946, p. 199.

community with stability and profits. Council chose to end the meeting without making a decision in order to avoid choosing which segment of the population had the greatest right to the land.

Although JM promised to pay for any damages that might occur during the closure of rue Bourbeau, local merchants continued to protest the sale, firmly believing that townspeople did not want to shop next to large mining shafts and conveyor belts connected to the noisy mill. While they were concerned for their property, their commercial futures as independent businessmen in a single-industry town were even more important to them. By January 1947 Mayor Albert Goudreau had had enough of the debate over rue Bourbeau and demanded council make a firm decision on the subject with the interest of the community's economic future in mind.³²⁶

In response to the mayor's frustration, council approved JM's request to close the road, "à partir du point marqué par une borne au fer sur le côté est de la rue Bourbeau, la dite borne marquant les coins des lots 5-90 et 5-211, et sur une longueur s'étendant jusqu'à la ligne de jonction de la rue Bourbeau avec le chemin conduisant à St-Georges-de-Windsor."³²⁷ Although JM would pay for any property damage, the displeasure of the local merchants was noted in the minutes and Goudreau instructed them to address their complaints through arbitration discussions with the company directly. It was clear that JM had the primary right to both land and business in Asbestos, especially as the demand for the fibre rose once again due to newly opened European markets following the Second World War.

With post-war reconstruction demand for asbestos products rising to over \$25,000,000 a year³²⁸ and JM operations in the town growing underneath rue Bourbeau, Asbestos once again needed to acquire more land. Between September 1947 and January 1949 the town underwent a period of immense physical growth, purchasing land from the County of Shipton, local property owners, and JM, which was in possession of several lots of land that did not contain profitable amounts of asbestos. This began with the purchase of seven lots from the county for \$700 in September, and was followed with additional purchases that month of private and company land in order to extend

³²⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 15 January 1947, p. 213.

³²⁷ "Règlement No. 240," *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1947, p. 241.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Boulevard St-Luc, rue Bourbeau, rue St-Georges, Boulevard Olivier, and rue Roi.³²⁹ Council justified such large purchases, including 20,766.52 feet at the end of rue Bourbeau, by stating that the town needed new and existing roads to accommodate the growing community.³³⁰

The post-war market for asbestos did not abate and in 1947 the industry in Quebec exported 10,785,189 tonnes of fibre with a value of \$438,356,805.³³¹ By combining open pit mining with a new “block-caving” system that was just being introduced, extraction levels at the Jeffrey Mine far surpassed those of its regional competitors, including mines in Thetford and East Broughton. Block-caving is a form of underground mining particularly suited to land that already has a working opencast pit. The benches that spiralled up the Jeffrey Mine and allowed for locomotives and trucks to bring fibre to the surface were hollowed and mined from the inside out. These blocks were 10x20 feet at the beginning and were worked to about 10x35 feet, each being 200 feet from each other to prevent the walls from caving in. Men operated giant double-drum mechanical slushers that scraped the rock out of the caves and brought it to the surface, loading the ore into train cars to be taken to the factory.³³² JM was a leader in extraction technology and the Jeffrey Mine was often used to test new techniques that would maximize profits. Block-caving further industrialized the land without visible signs from above and changed the structure of the Jeffrey Mine, weakening the benches on which trains and trucks brought men and mineral to the surface.

Block-caving was an extremely efficient way to extract fibre, especially because by 1948 the mine had grown to be 3,200 feet long and 2,800 feet wide, reaching the absolute limits of JM property. The new method allowed the company to continue operations without purchasing more land from the town, so it was a politically as well as an economically efficient method that allowed for the immense extraction of between 19,000 and 22,760 tonnes of rock every 24 hours.³³³ This shift towards more underground extraction once again suggests the unwillingness of JM to expropriate more town land on which to expand the Jeffrey Mine, possibly due to a growing tension in company-

³²⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 8 September 1947, p. 256-258.

³³⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1947, p. 276, and *L'Asbestos*, 22 August 1947, p. 1.

³³¹ H.R. Rice, “The Asbestos Industry in Quebec,” *The Canadian Mining Journal*, October 1948, p. 148.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

community relations. The entire Jeffrey Mine was run on electricity and coal-fuelled steam power, with even the blasting caps being electronically controlled from a tower on the edge of the pit, and these technologically-advanced, incredibly noisy and dusty methods were what helped JM extract so much fibre in so little time. While townspeople grew accustomed to constant noise and dust coming from the Jeffrey Mine, workers did not appreciate being replaced by these new machines. This level of production and dedication to the industrialization of the land was why Asbestos town council continued purchasing land for expansion throughout 1948 to accommodate the population that was rising alongside production levels.

While the mineral had long been nicknamed “white gold” by those in the industry, by 1948 asbestos was actually worth as much as gold to Quebec, with the two minerals each bringing \$430 million to the province since 1876.³³⁴ But the land in Asbestos still had to support the people that worked it, and town council could not purchase acreage quickly enough to meet the demand of the growing population. Moving several kilometres away from the Jeffrey Mine onto surrounding farmland to avoid the continuous expansion of the pit was never proposed or discussed by town council or the local newspaper, which illustrates the close connection the local population had and wanted to maintain with the mine³³⁵. In March and April 1948 the town purchased 16,605 feet of land between rue St-Georges and rue Bourbeau from JM and annexed 8 other lots from the County of Shipton in preparation for major expansion.³³⁶ These purchases were fairly straightforward, but when it came to buying land from local property owners, the town began to have difficulty. Although council stated that “il est devenu nécessaire et même impérieux, à la suite du développement considérable de la ville et en vue d’aide au progrès,”³³⁷ three citizens refused to sell their land. The community was becoming less willing to sacrifice itself to the Jeffrey Mine, suggesting that the local cultural identity was changing, and townspeople were taking greater control of the way land was managed and used in Asbestos. While this was problematic, council had learned much from JM,

³³⁴ P.B. Bourret, “Non-Metallic Mineral Deposits of the Province of Quebec,” *The Canadian Mining Journal*, October 1948, p. 162.

³³⁵ This assertion is based on a thorough analysis of the Procès-verbal in Asbestos from 1899 to 1985, and the local newspaper from 1943, when it was established, to 1985.

³³⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, March 1948, p. 280 and 26 April 1948, p. 282.

³³⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 7 July 1948, p. 16 and March 1948, p. 280.

and stated that if these owners continued to refuse the sale, the town would begin legal action against them in order to expropriate the property.

The Jeffrey Mine had become fully industrialized during the first half of the 20th century and extensions of this industrialization were seen throughout the community. Railway lines, new roads, new neighbourhoods, workers being replaced by machines that caused more noise and dust coming from the pit, and town council's willingness to rule in favour of JM when it came to local land-use issues, were all signs of the widespread industrialization of the land and community. In order to remain competitive in the global asbestos industry, the local population had to sacrifice town infrastructure to accommodate the Jeffrey Mine's need for more mineral-rich land. The results of this sacrifice were often positive and made the community proud of their industrial accomplishments, as seen when the mine became the largest of its kind in the world after it expanded into the original section of town.

The people of Asbestos enjoyed the economic gains the Jeffrey Mine brought them, but while everyone appeared to be focused on the success of the community as a whole, competing ideologies began to clash over how the land should be used and by whom. The people of Asbestos did not like workers being replaced by machines, and began to grow wary of the close ties town council had with JM. They were also becoming frustrated with the constant moving of houses and shifting of community centres in order to accommodate the needs of the company. JM attempted to appease this frustration by beginning underground operations that were less invasive to the community, but this did not fully address the problem of how decisions concerning land were made in Asbestos. The labour of Jeffrey Mine workers is what made the pit the largest asbestos mine in the world by 1939, and it also strongly connected the townspeople to the land, giving them an ambition for success that convinced them sacrificing community space was often worth the economic success and international renown they gained in doing so.

The contribution Jeffrey Mine workers made to the asbestos industry also gave the community a confidence that was rooted in a connection to the natural world and was expressed in the local cultural identity, which led townspeople to believe they had a right to decide how their land was to be used. Machines replacing workers at the Jeffrey Mine would shake their confidence, however, as did town council ruling in favour of JM

whenever an issue of land use arose. In January 1949 council purchased 55,125 square feet of land to accommodate the growing population,³³⁸ but these plans were soon put on hold when Jeffrey Mine workers went on strike to ensure their connection to the land in the community—and the international industry it fed—was maintained despite the rapid industrialization of the pit. The labour dispute would combine issues of land-use, human health, and community, to drastically change the way the natural world was used and understood in Asbestos.

³³⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 24 January 1949, p. 35.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Risk: Human Bodies, 1918-1949

In 1995, Dr. Gerrit W.H. Schepers published a report on the time he spent at JM's secret laboratory in Saranac, New York. Interning there as a post-doctoral student in 1949, Schepers discovered the autopsied lungs of at least nine Jeffrey Mine employees that JM attorney Yvan Sabourin smuggled to the lab between 1944 and 1946. A study of these lungs was deemed necessary because "workers had begun to agitate for compensation [for their asbestos-related diseases, and]...such a large number of cases in such a small and well-defined group of industrial employees suggested a significant problem."³³⁹ JM doctors at Asbestos were only supposed to deal with "active employees," and the lungs Sabourin delivered came from retirees. Not only were these retirees secretly autopsied in Asbestos, their lungs were also illegally brought across international borders, dissected, placed on nameless slides, studied, and filed away. Schepers was prevented by JM from publishing on his discovery for decades.

While the people of Asbestos did not know of these autopsies or of any diseases the doctors at Saranac found in the lungs, they were aware of the state of their own bodies and were constantly negotiating the health risks of living next to the world's largest chrysotile asbestos mine. Some risks, like those to the miners themselves, were acceptable, others, like those to the women or children of the community, were not. Furthermore, while the people of Asbestos knew they were getting sick, before 1949 they were not fully aware of the types of disease the mineral was capable of inflicting, nor did it occur to them that JM was using their community as a giant research laboratory, with workers and their families acting as test mice.

Today, the cemetery in Asbestos is a place difficult for an outsider to find. While homes, businesses, and churches are located on the easternmost part of the community, the Cimetière de St-Aimé d'Asbestos is found to the extreme west. What divides the two is also what unites them, giving reason for both: the Jeffrey Mine. Without the mine, the living side of Asbestos has little reason to exist, having no other industry to sustain it. Right next to the cemetery is the mill, historically the dustiest place to work. Located beside the mill and behind the rows of tombstones, a large crucifix, and a statue of Jesus with the inscription "Je ne meurs pas. J'entre dans la vie" looms the steep rise of the

³³⁹ Gerrit W.H. Schepers, "Chronology of Asbestos Cancer Discoveries: Experimental Studies of the Saranac Laboratory," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, v. 27 (1995), p. 600.

Jeffrey Mine, built up with waste that resembles the knoll where the deposit was originally found in 1879. The pit is the heart of the community, bringing it both life and death, and this is ingrained into the local cultural identity of Asbestos.

Over the past fifty to sixty years, asbestos has gone from being perceived as “one of Nature’s most marvellous productions,”³⁴⁰ because of its remarkable fireproof abilities, to being something that produced a “deadly dust” that slowly and painfully killed thousands,³⁴¹ roughly separated by a period of public ignorance and public outrage. The people of Asbestos’ close relationship with the mineral and the industry meant they have also celebrated and suffered through these two extremes. But the centrality of the Jeffrey Mine to their lives changed their understanding of risk and death, and a unique cultural identity was developed through bodily interaction with the mineral.

This chapter will examine the medical history of the people of Asbestos from 1918, when JM began to operate the Jeffrey Mine, to 1949, when the workers were encouraged to come out against the health risks associated with the mineral and went on strike partly to force JM to alleviate these risks. This is when the health of the workers first became an international issue. The chapter will rely on sources never before used in studies of the people of Asbestos, or of global asbestos-related disease, such as confidential medical reports funded and hidden by JM.

This period is one of innocence and discovery in Asbestos. While JM suppressed medical discoveries proving the mineral was dangerous, the townspeople nevertheless knew their own bodies and knew something was wrong. They coughed up dust after only short periods of work and generations slowly suffocated to death because of the long-term bodily effects of the industry. This chapter will show how the townspeople deemed their knowledge as secondary in favour of a trust in medical professionals, company officials, and the land, which complemented their understanding of their own bodies and needs, and the desire to maintain the success of the community and industry. Sacrifice became a fundamental element in the local cultural identity during this period, but Jeffrey Mine workers were not martyrs. Instead, they were agents, weighing their risks and needs, and

³⁴⁰ Robert H. Jones, *Asbestos and Asbestic: Their Properties, Occurrence, and Use* (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1897), p. 307.

³⁴¹ See, for example, Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Industrial Disease in Twentieth Century America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

acting as they saw fit. This chapter will advance our understanding of how and why the community upheld risk and sacrifice as part of the local cultural identity between 1918 and 1949.

Discovery and Denial, 1918 to 1930

When JM arrived in Asbestos in 1918, it brought its own medical professionals with it and established a clinic for employees. Not only were these doctors Anglophone, they often reported the health conditions of Jeffrey Mine employees to the company rather than to the patients themselves. JM doctors were a perk in resource communities at this time and as mining historian Larry Lankton notes, they allowed paternalistic companies to control workers from “cradle to grave.”³⁴² While there were independent doctors in Asbestos, the lives of JM employees were oriented towards the Jeffrey Mine and they had mandatory, free yearly check-ups at the company clinic. Few had the money, or felt the need, to seek an independent medical opinion. JM had a vested interest in the bodies of the people of Asbestos, and their doctors were fundamental to the preservation of a calm, healthy workforce. The medical professionals in Asbestos were insular, segregated, and did what the company told them to do. JM had doctors stationed in some of the company’s processing towns, such as Manville, New Jersey, but workers at the Jeffrey Mine were their major concern because it was JM’s main source for the mineral.³⁴³ Nowhere else were JM workers exposed to such a pure raw form of the mineral, and medical professionals funded by the company could monitor the progression of disease in Asbestos as though they were in an experimental laboratory, not a community. As long as JM doctors reported that Jeffrey Mine employees were healthy, the mineral, the industry, and the town, would be safe.

In 1924, JM opened Canada’s first mineral processing factory in Asbestos, which increased profits, provided employment opportunities for women and children, and created more mineral dust than the community had ever experienced before. This coincided with the first reported asbestos-related death in international medical literature, when Dr. W.E. Cooke reported in the *British Medical Journal* that Nellie Kershaw, who worked in a factory processing asbestos near Manchester, England, had died because of

³⁴² Larry Lankton, *Cradle to Grave: Life, Work, and Death at the Lake Superior Copper Mines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 195.

³⁴³ This statement is based on a thorough examination of JM correspondence between company doctors and management throughout the corporation from 1898 to 1985. See, “Asbestos Chronology” and “Draft 7,” ACRF.

her exposure to the mineral. Cooke explained that asbestos caused a fatal respiratory disease,³⁴⁴ but the community was unaware of this discovery, and looked forward to the prosperity the new factory would bring. Healthcare was changing in Quebec, however, and JM officials, who knew of Kershaw's death, had to adapt. An increased focus on tuberculosis due to its wartime occurrence had initiated an aggressive health education program on respiratory disease. The government of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau then acted on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour and made it mandatory for companies to carry insurance against compensation claims.³⁴⁵

Because of this new law, JM partnered with the Sun Life Assurance Co. to keep itself protected from any compensation claims. But this was not a simple business arrangement. Sun Life medical director Dr. G.W. Wright wrote to his colleague, Dr. Knight, in 1926 on how both companies could protect themselves by funding the establishment of a Department of Industrial Hygiene at McGill University in Montreal. Wright wrote that Sun Life and JM could provide “guidance in regard to matters affecting community or individual health—such as, aid in preparation of publicity, occasional research matters...field investigations...or industrial hazards...[T]he usefulness of the University could be made apparent in relation to group insurance much more readily than in any other way.”³⁴⁶ The department was established and ensured that the health issues of JM employees in Asbestos would be addressed differently than elsewhere in the province, free from the administrative hand the Catholic Church traditionally wielded in such affairs. Asbestos was a single-industry and single-company town, and employees trusted JM with their health the same way they trusted the company with the town's land.

In 1927, W.E. Cooke continued his studies on British factory workers and coined the term “asbestosis” to describe the hardening effect the mineral had on human lungs, resulting in death by suffocation.³⁴⁷ Two years following Cooke's new diagnosis, JM received its first claim for compensation from textile factory workers in New Jersey

³⁴⁴ W.E. Cooke, “Fibrosis of the Lungs Due to the Inhalation of Asbestos Dust,” *British Medical Journal* (1924), p. 487.

³⁴⁵ Bernard L. Vigod, *Quebec Before Duplessis: The Political Career of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), p. 134.

³⁴⁶ Dr. George Wright to Dr. Knight, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, ACRF, 19 January 1925, p. 1.

³⁴⁷ W.E. Cooke, “Pulmonary Asbestosis,” *British Medical Journal* (1927), p. 1024.

suffering from asbestosis.³⁴⁸ The company was now on alert: the industry was becoming increasingly lucrative, but JM would be ruined if workers began to die because of it.

In 1929, Metropolitan Life Assurance, which had taken over JM's insurance policy from Sun Life, urged Frank G. Pedley, one of the only doctors in Canada publishing on asbestos-related disease, to approach McGill and "enter into an agreement...to secure for the Company certain services and information relating to the health of industrial workers."³⁴⁹ Pedley understood what such a relationship would mean, and he wrote, "[s]uch a plan involves a definite quid pro quo, payments specifically conditioned upon a commensurate return."³⁵⁰ Even though the Canadian Medical Association acknowledged that the mineral was a possible danger, JM officials knew that Pedley was the Canadian authority on asbestos-related disease and to have him on their side was a coup.³⁵¹

At the beginning of the Great Depression the death rate in Quebec was, much like its medical care, divided along linguistic lines, and Francophones had a higher death rate in the province than Anglophones.³⁵² This was partly because of a general lack of medical care given to French Canadians who could not afford it, but it was also because they were more engaged in industrial activity, and so experienced the health problems, poverty, and poor nutrition that tended to accompany it. This was a population that worked hard and suffered for it, but because of JM, the situation at Asbestos was different, and medical care was a definite perk of working at the Jeffrey Mine.

With the establishment of McGill's new Department of Industrial Hygiene, partially funded by JM, Pedley was hired by the university and in 1930 was invited to work with company doctor R.H. Stevenson to assess the health status of Jeffrey Mine employees. In his short report published in the *Canadian Medical Journal*, Pedley summarized, "[a]sbestos is a mineral of interest to Canadian physicians...If work with asbestos presented a hazard to the worker it would be reasonable to suppose that cases of disease would be reported from time to time, but so far as can be determined no cases of

³⁴⁸ "Asbestos Chronology," 1929, ACRF, p. 4.

³⁴⁹ Dr. Frank G. Pedley, 1929. "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 3.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁵¹ "Pollution of the Air," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1930), p. 554. This information is based on a review of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* from 1911 to 1983.

³⁵² Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, Robert Chodos, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1983), p. 23.

specific disease have been reported among asbestos workers in the Province of Quebec.”³⁵³ While factory workers in America suffered from asbestos-related disease, the heart of the industry, the Jeffrey Mine, did not seem to be causing it.

This was what Pedley was allowed to publish from his study of workers at both Asbestos and Thetford, but it completely misrepresented his findings, and Pedley expressed frustration at how much JM and Metropolitan Life edited out of his report.³⁵⁴ Pedley’s lengthy, detailed, unpublished report offers a valuable first look at how the industry affected the bodies of the people of Asbestos. It has not been studied in great depth because scholars either did not know of its existence or of its significance when considering what and when JM knew about asbestos-related disease, and how many medical professionals willingly censored their findings.

From the beginning, Pedley’s comparison between Jeffrey Mine and Thetford workers was misleading. Every JM employee had to pass a physical exam before they began working at the Jeffrey Mine. Thetford did not have this restriction.³⁵⁵ This meant that any medical problem that a JM employee was diagnosed with occurred during their time at the mine, which was important for compensation claims and for injuries such as hernias, from which 4 men at Asbestos suffered in 1930.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, while Pedley studied 141 men at Asbestos and only 54 at Thetford, the majority of those at the Jeffrey Mine had worked in the industry for less than 9 years. This was in sharp contrast to Thetford, where the average employee had worked more than 15 years. In addition to this, the bulk of Jeffrey Mine workers were between 15 and 40 years of age, while at Thetford, where the industry had experienced much more stable market fluctuations than Asbestos, the majority of employees were over 40 and there was no dusty factory to deal with.³⁵⁷ This is vital information when placed within the context of asbestos-related disease, which typically took at least ten years of industrial exposure to be diagnosed by doctors in the 1930s.³⁵⁸

³⁵³ Frank G. Pedley, “Asbestosis,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1930), p. 253.

³⁵⁴ David Egilman and Candace M. Hom, “Corruption of the Medical Literature: A Second Visit,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 34 (1998), p. 402.

³⁵⁵ Frank G. Pedley, “Report of the Physical Examination and X-Ray Examination of Asbestos Workers in Asbestos and Thetford Mines, Quebec,” (Unpublished. Montreal: McGill/Metropolitan Life, 1930), ACRF, p. 9.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵⁸ Frank G. Pedley, “Review of E.R.A. Merewether, ‘Occurrence of Pulmonary Fibrosis and Other Pulmonary Affections in Asbestos Workers,’” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1930), p. 873.

While Pedley acknowledged that these differences would show an increased rate of disability and disease in Thetford,³⁵⁹ he did not amend his examination methods to compensate for the differences between them and those employed at the Jeffrey Mine. This was especially significant when it came to the diseases asbestos was being linked to in Britain at the time. Pedley found no occurrences of “asbestos corns” on Jeffrey Mine employees, but admitted that he was uncertain of what these small, “pin head sized elevations of the skin, somewhat like minute warts,” caused by fibres being implanted like slivers, actually looked like.³⁶⁰ Twenty-seven men in Asbestos had infected tonsils, but Pedley failed to connect this to the dusty conditions in which they worked. Pedley was not an expert in the field of asbestos-related disease, but the fact that he was the only medical professional focusing on it in Canada suggested he was.

Pedley’s lack of expertise became increasingly apparent when he focused on the lungs of the men at Asbestos. He did not examine any of the workers personally, but instead relied on already-diagnosed x-rays given to him by the company doctor. Of the 101 x-rays he examined, Pedley found only 4 cases of “definite” asbestosis but immediately discounted them because of his “doubtful diagnosis.”³⁶¹ Pedley was able to justify his cursory examination of the x-rays because he believed “[n]one of the cases of asbestosis appeared to suffer from disabling symptoms. Perhaps the most common symptom was shortness of breath, but less than half the cases complained of this,” and “very few of the men were coughing.”³⁶² The workers were not complaining of disease, so there was no cause for alarm, but Pedley’s reasoning overlooks the fact that historically, miners have rarely complained about their poor health,³⁶³ and this certainly was the case in Asbestos. Furthermore, the technology Pedley used to test for asbestosis was rudimentary. Pedley augmented x-rays that were difficult to read with a test to measure chest expansion, using nothing but a tape measure and a sheet covering the employee’s torso. This test was soon given up because of its inaccuracy. Continuity in the examinations was not considered of prime importance.

³⁵⁹ Pedley, “Report on the Physical Examination,” p. 13.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁶² Ibid, pp. 15-16.

³⁶³ See, for example, Karen Buckley, *Death, Danger, and Disaster in the Crowsnest Pass Mines, 1902-1928* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Digging Our Own Graves: Coal Miners and the Struggle Over Black Lung Disease* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

In addition to the difficulty in establishing a firm diagnosis of asbestosis, Pedley wrote that, “[c]onversation with physicians and mine managers in the asbestos regions indicated that no hazard to health was suspected in connection with work in the asbestos mining and milling industry.”³⁶⁴ While he was the only medical professional in the country publishing on asbestos, Pedley trusted the expertise of company doctors enough not to refute them, and wrote that “it is the general impression both among miners and physicians that asbestos dust is not particularly harmful....From the public health standpoint...it seems hardly likely that asbestosis will become of importance either from the standpoint of morbidity or mortality.”³⁶⁵ According to Pedley, asbestosis was not a terribly painful affliction despite the British medical reports that suggested different, and furthermore, it was contained to the working class and did not present a risk to the general public. Pedley’s conclusions had profound effects on how health was viewed by workers, company doctors, and JM in the coming years, and remain part of the local cultural identity in Asbestos today. Medical historian Charles E. Rosenberg writes that disease is both biologically and socially constructed and “does not exist until we have agreed that it does, by perceiving, naming and responding to it.”³⁶⁶ In the professional opinion of Pedley, the workers, and JM, asbestos-related disease did not exist.

“the less said about asbestos, the better off we are,” 1930-1940

While Pedley’s report on the workers in Asbestos and Thetford Mines was not published in its entirety, it did give JM cause for concern. While many men at the Jeffrey Mine did not have severe cases of asbestosis in 1930, the fact that almost half those studied in Thetford did³⁶⁷ was a sign that it was only a matter of time before the same occurred in Asbestos. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, however, the mineral gained a global reputation for being synonymous with safety. It was used to line electrified oxygen bottles in airplanes, and as an additive to hospital and broadcasting stations ceiling tiles because it made them soundproof.³⁶⁸ With these uses came increased profits and reluctance on the part of JM to admit asbestos was dangerous.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

³⁶⁵ Pedley, “Asbestosis,” p. 253.

³⁶⁶ Charles E. Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 305.

³⁶⁷ 24 out of 54 men tested at Thetford had asbestosis. Pedley, “Report of the Physical Examination,” p. 10.

³⁶⁸ “Science Supplement,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1927, p. 93, and Harvey Agnew, “The Reduction of Noise in Hospitals,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1930, p. 417.

In a 1931 letter from Metropolitan Life to JM attorneys, a Dr. McConnell wrote that Pedley's unpublished report, "like the report on the American plants, will be given no publicity by us except with the consent of the firms concerned."³⁶⁹ Although Pedley did not think the workers at Asbestos were suffering from any severe health issues, both the insurance company and JM were aware of the potential financial loss that would come from compensation claims if his full report was released. This awareness, combined with the results of a secret JM study at New York's Saranac Laboratory that found asbestos dust caused asbestosis in mice after just sixty days of exposure,³⁷⁰ led the company to go on the offensive: the medical knowledge its doctors discovered would be kept secret while the evidence of others would be denied. No doctor outside of JM control examined Jeffrey Mine employees for decades. Because medical care by company doctors was provided as part of their contract, and because workers trusted JM, they did not seek second, independent opinions. This does not mean the workers were free of asbestos-related disease, but rather that it was underreported and unacknowledged by both the company and the workers.

After Pedley submitted his full report to JM, the company began a campaign against the conclusions made by British medical professionals about the health effects of the mineral. Because the asbestos-related deaths of British factory workers could not be ignored, JM claimed that it was South African blue asbestos that was dangerous, not Canadian,³⁷¹ and Jeffrey Mine asbestos was completely safe. British doctors immediately refuted this claim, stating that 80% of the asbestos used in England came from Canada.³⁷² Although this discredited the company's claim that Quebec asbestos was safe, JM maintained this argument for decades. The company was so committed to the false idea that Canadian asbestos was safe that it permeated the local cultural identity and convinced the community the mineral, and their land, was safe, which is an idea that many townspeople uphold today.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ Dr. McConnell, Metropolitan Life, to JM Attorneys, 9 July 1931, "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 129.

³⁷⁰ Frank G. Pedley, "Review of Studies in Experimental Pneumonokoniosis, VI. Inhalation of Asbestos Dust: Its Effect Upon Primary Tuberculosis Infection," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1931), p. 883.

³⁷¹ David Egilman, Corey Fehnel, and Susanna Rankin Bohme, "Exposing the 'Myth' of ABC: 'Anything But Chrysotile:' A Critique of the Canadian Asbestos Mining Industry and McGill University Chrysotile Studies," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 44 (2003).

³⁷² J.B. Sparks, "Pulmonary Asbestosis," *Radiology*, vol. 17 (1931), p. 1249.

³⁷³ See, for example, Frederic Tomesco, "Asbestos, Quebec, Seeks a Healthier Name Not Linked to Cancer," *Bloomberg.com* (14 July 2006).

While JM was not acknowledging publicly that asbestos caused severe health effects, internally the company was in a panic over the potential lawsuits that could be launched against it. In a letter from one JM vice president to another, E.M. Voorhees wrote S.A. Williams that “[e]ver since dust suits have been brought against us at Manville [New Jersey] we have considered, first, the possibility of installing the most modern and improved dust collecting systems.”³⁷⁴ Asbestos-related disease in the 1930s appeared to be contained to the factories that processed the mineral, so in mining and as an additive to consumer goods and industrial products it seemed relatively safe. This was good news for JM because if the disease could be contained to factories, it could be managed.

The disease-prevention plan was carried out in Asbestos, but not to the extent it could have been. In a letter to S.A. Williams, Jeffrey Mine Vice President C.H. Shoemaker wrote, “since September 1931, no new dust collection equipment has been installed in the factory, chiefly because the equipment there meets ‘all practical requirements’ [and] [i]nspection by the medical officers of the Quebec Board of Health ‘indicates a clear ticket.’”³⁷⁵ Shoemaker believed that the dust control measures already in place eliminated 80% of the dust in the factory and mill even though it was difficult to persuade workers to comply with the new requirements: “[they] do not find respirators practicable. The dust in the mills is evidently less irritating and is more fibrous than in [other] locations, resulting in less need for a respirator and more trouble with the filter clogging when a respirator is used.”³⁷⁶ Shoemaker’s sentiments reflected those of Pedley two years earlier: even though there was so much dust in the air at the Jeffrey Mine that it clogged respirator filters, the workers did not complain, so there was not a problem. The fact that the fibres clogged respirator filters should have been an indication to employees and JM officials that more safety precautions were necessary, not fewer, but the company did not make the use of protective devices at the Jeffrey Mine mandatory until 1975. Respirator technology was constantly improving, and JM would increasingly stress the importance of their use to employees in order to prevent litigation due to asbestos-related disease. Clogged filters remained a problem because of the amount of dust in the mills at

³⁷⁴ E.M. Voorhees, Johns-Manville Co., to S.A. Williams, VP Johns-Manville Co., 28 July 1931. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 6.

³⁷⁵ C.H. Shoemaker, VP, CJM Co. Asbestos, to S.A. Williams, VP, JM, 24 December 1932. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 9.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the Jeffrey Mine, however, and workers again and again chose not to wear respirators or lobby for better dust control measures. The lack of action of Jeffrey Mine workers reveals an acceptance of dust and an acceptance of risk in Asbestos, and illustrates an occupational culture that greatly influenced local identity. Workers did not complain of ill health and they chose not to take precautionary measures to prevent disease, even when JM acknowledged the risk by providing respirators.

As health measures were carried out and contested in Asbestos, more work was done to discover what exactly the mineral did to the human body. Members of the British medical community wrote much of the literature emerging on asbestos-related disease at this time³⁷⁷ because they had witnessed the deaths of British factory workers and were convinced that the mineral was not safe. In 1933, British doctor E.R.A. Merewether stated, “[i]f only the slightest exposure to the dust results untimely in death, then the scope of the necessary preventive measures is summed up in one word—prohibition—for, practically speaking, it is impossible to prevent such exposure.”³⁷⁸ Coinciding with this was an article by Pedley, no longer under the censorship of JM, that claimed asbestosis worked twice as fast as, and with symptoms more severe than, silicosis, a similar industrial disease.³⁷⁹ Prohibition would ruin JM, as would statements about the severity of asbestos-related disease. The company had to go on the offensive in order to save itself.

Aside from company doctors stationed in communities like Asbestos, JM had a whole band of medical professionals under its control in Saranac, New York, who were used to combat negative health reports on the mineral. Writing to Saranac Laboratory head Dr. A.J. Lanza, company doctor Leroy Gardner stated, “the fat seems to be in the fire,” because of leaked medical reports on JM factory workers in New Jersey that resulted in compensation claims.³⁸⁰ If successful, these claims had the potential to result in others and a growing awareness of the negative effects of asbestos. New health and safety measures were put in place at the factory in Manville, N.J., and Vice President Vandiver Brown wrote his brother, President Lewis H. Brown, that during the rest of

³⁷⁷ This is based on an examination of every asbestos-related article found in the medical journals the *Lancet* (from its inception in 1823 onward), the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (from 1883 onward), and the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (from 1911 onward), until 1984.

³⁷⁸ E.R.A. Merewether and C.W. Price, “A Memorandum on Asbestosis,” *Tubercle*, vol. 15 (1933), p. 80.

³⁷⁹ Frank G. Pedley, “Review of ‘Pulmonary Asbestosis: Its Clinical, Radiological and Pathological Features, and Associated Risk of Tuberculosis Infection,’” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1933), p. 488.

³⁸⁰ Leroy Gardner to A.J. Lanza, Saranac Laboratory, 14 April 1933. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 79.

1933, they must “bring other operations, especially Waukegan, Alexandria, Lompoc, and Asbestos to Manville efficiency.”³⁸¹ These places were of prime importance to the company, but the safety measures in these locations were not as strict as they could and should have been. The Jeffrey Mine was in definite need of improvement, but the people of Asbestos were more secluded than those who worked at JM’s American plants because of language barriers and a lack of concern for industrial disease within the Canadian medical community. This seclusion allowed the company a degree of freedom and patience when it came to dust control measures.

While factories were slowly brought up to health standards, Saranac Laboratory doctors worked to dispel the idea that asbestos was a dangerous mineral. In an address to the Home Office Life Underwriters Association in November 1933, Dr. A.J. Lanza claimed, “I am going to make this a little bit dramatic. So far as we could ascertain, there is no dust hazard or asbestos hazard in connection with the actual mining or quarrying operations...in the open pit and quarry work there was no apparent pulmonary hazard.”³⁸² While this did not address factory work, it was a small victory for the company and for the town of Asbestos, where mining operations were crucial to economic survival. The following year, Lanza met with Metropolitan Life officials to discuss the elimination of dust in factories and stressed that knowledge of asbestos-related disease was still too rudimentary to say for sure that the mineral posed a serious health risk.³⁸³ JM was fortunate to have Lanza in its employ and the company knew it.

The connection between asbestosis and silicosis was something many doctors and legislatures were exploring in the 1930s. Silicosis was a recognized, compensatable industrial disease in the United States and Canada,³⁸⁴ but asbestosis was not, although the diseases were similar. Silicosis was a recognized industrial disease because the hard rock mining industry was older than the asbestos industry, which resulted in increased occurrences and a stronger labour movement that could successfully lobby governments. Diseases are both physical and political, and Vandiver Brown called on Lanza to write a

³⁸¹ Vandiver Brown, JM VP, to Lewis H. Brown, JM President, 10 May 1933. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 11.

³⁸² A.J. Lanza, Proceedings of the Home Office Underwriters Association, November 1933. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 10.

³⁸³ Minutes of a meeting between Johns-Manville Co., Raybestos-Manhattan Co., and Metropolitan Life, 29 December 1933. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 13.

³⁸⁴ “Silicosis,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1934) p. 304.

report to be submitted to various government and union organizations denying the similarities between asbestosis and silicosis, but stressed,

no one in our organization is suggesting for a moment that you alter by one jot or title any scientific facts or inevitable conclusions revealed or justified by your preliminary survey. All we ask is that all of the favorable aspects of the survey be included and that none of the unfavorable be unintentionally pictured in darker tones than the circumstances justify. I feel confident we can depend upon you...to give us this 'break.'³⁸⁵

Brown did not ask Lanza to alter his medical report, but implied that the company was after a positive account of asbestos and its effects on the human body. While JM continued to raise health and safety standards in its operations with new dust control technology,³⁸⁶ Lanza released his report on the risk of asbestosis among American factory workers and Canadian miners and millers. The report concluded that asbestosis was milder than silicosis and caused only a "little," occasionally fatal disability.³⁸⁷

This gave JM the proof it needed to defend itself against compensation claims that, although only a few dozen at this time, were steadily rising in the United States and the company could play the injured party to "the shyster lawyer[s] and the quack doctor[s]"³⁸⁸ who were launching lawsuits against JM. Vandiver Brown was especially skilled at this, and continuously stated that the claims brought against the company were "not bona fide and...we are victims of the racket."³⁸⁹ However, JM official Sumner Simpson cautioned Brown against this and warned, "the less said about asbestos, the better off we are."³⁹⁰ Simpson's statement shows just how much JM knew about asbestos-related disease at this time and how much they were committed to covering it up.

Simpson urged caution because in the middle of the 1930s, as unions in both America and l'Estrie were becoming more common and knowledgeable about asbestos-related disease,³⁹¹ the company had no definite idea of what the mineral could do to the human body. As a result JM asked Saranac's Dr. Leroy Gardner to study the effects of

³⁸⁵ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, to AJ Lanza, Saranac Laboratory, 21 December 1934. "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 24.

³⁸⁶ Weidlein to Hitchins, JM, 21 January 1935. "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 134.

³⁸⁷ AJ Lanza, 1935 Report. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 15.

³⁸⁸ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, internal memo, 15 January 1935. "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 6.

³⁸⁹ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, internal memo, 14 February 1935. "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 16.

³⁹⁰ Sumner Simpson, JM, to Vandiver Brown, VP JM, 1 October 1935. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 18.

³⁹¹ The Fédération nationale des employés de l'industrie minière was established in 1936 to educate asbestos workers in l'Estrie on the health effects of the mineral. See: Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécoise des Origines au Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), pp. 215-216.

asbestos dust on mice so they could track the evolution of disease.³⁹² Gardner was paid for the study on the condition that JM had the right to “determine whether, to what extent and in what manner [his conclusions] shall be made public.”³⁹³ JM officials were worried about the possible outcomes of the study and the potential effects, which Simpson made clear when he wrote, “[t]he reports may be so favorable to us that they would cause us no trouble, but they might be just the opposite; which could be very embarrassing.”³⁹⁴ Throughout this period JM was concerned solely with its public image and financial success. The pain and suffering of its employees, including those in Asbestos, was not a problem on which the company focused.

Gardner agreed to the conditions the company set for his study. Meanwhile, JM’s doctor in Asbestos became a spokesman for the industry. Dr. R.H. Stevenson had helped Pedley in his 1930 examination of Jeffrey Mine employees, but it was not until 1938, when Quebec officially recognized asbestosis as a compensatable industrial disease due to pressure from the Fédération nationale des employés de l’industrie minière,³⁹⁵ that JM asked him to take a more public role. In his 23 May 1938 address to Quebec’s asbestos producers, Stevenson defended the health record of the Canadian industry, and insisted that it was only South African asbestos that caused disease because of its high silica content, absent in the Jeffrey Mine. Stevenson believed that asbestosis was “a rare case among asbestos workers” in North America, and stated that this “has been experimentally proved by...Dr. L.U. Gardner of [the] Trudeau Laboratory at Saranac. There is very little clinical evidence of Asbestosis, and certainly not enough to even venture a diagnosis.”³⁹⁶ Stevenson was referring to both Gardner’s past and current research on asbestos, which JM assumed would be favourable.

Stevenson relied on his own experience in Asbestos to show that the mineral did no harm. He said that he had been studying asbestosis there for ten years, and “We have been highly pleased to note the extreme rarity of asbestosis among our men....As is to be expected the cases discovered showing early Asbestosis were men who had worked a

³⁹² JM Memo of Agreement between the Company and Dr. Leroy Gardner, Saranac, 20 November 1936. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 88.

³⁹³ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, to Dr. L. Gardner, Saranac Laboratory, 20 November 1936. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 89.

³⁹⁴ Sumner Simpson, JM, to Schluter, 10 November 1936. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 82.

³⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam, and Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons de l’est* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1998), p. 563.

³⁹⁶ R.H. Stevenson, CJM Asbestos, “Talk by Dr. Stevenson to Quebec Asbestos Producers,” 23 May 1938, Turner & Newall Archives, p. 1.

long time in the company service.”³⁹⁷ To Stevenson asbestosis was not a deadly respiratory disease, but rather a part of getting old in the industry, like wrinkles or a bad back. Those who suffered from it at the Jeffrey Mine were mostly men who worked in the mill, which convinced Stevenson “that it is a good idea to transfer men away from the mill after ten to twelve years of service to other departments. You will see...that our position is very far from serious as far as actual damage to the men is concerned.”³⁹⁸ The idea of rotating mill workers every ten years or so illustrates just how little medical professionals understood the severity or pathology of asbestos-related disease at this time. It also demonstrates just how little doctors understood the suffering associated with diseases like asbestosis, which began with shortness of breath, but resulted in a slow and painful death due to suffocation. For Stevenson to say the men with asbestosis at the Jeffrey Mine were not “damaged” was grossly misleading, and his direct interaction with the workers influenced the way they understood what was happening to their bodies. According to Stevenson, the good health of Asbestos men, at least during their first decade on the job, proved that the mineral, and the industry, was safe.

Despite Stevenson’s convictions, many of Quebec’s asbestos producers still had doubts. C.S. Bell, lawyer for the British asbestos manufacturing company Turner & Newall, which owned a mine in Thetford, forwarded a transcript of the speech to his employers and stated that while Stevenson “appears to consider that Rhodesian asbestos is more liable to promote Asbestosis than Canadian, by reason of the higher proportion of SiO₂...as far as I can trace from the published analyses the Silica content of Canadian and Rhodesian fibre is almost identical, i.e. about 40%.”³⁹⁹ Experience dealing with health problems in British factories trumped Stevenson’s convictions, but Turner & Newall officials did not publicly refute his claims because it would damage the industry. The unwillingness of company officials to challenge Stevenson’s claim that Canadian asbestos was safe allowed many in the medical community to deem the doctor in Asbestos an expert on the subject and his theory on the relative safety of the Canadian mineral has had long lasting effects.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 1.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 1.

³⁹⁹ C.S. Bell, Esq., to Sir Samuel Turner, President, Turner & Newall, 4 July 1938, Turner & Newall Archives, p. 1.

Although Stevenson did not believe asbestosis was a significant problem, the situation at Asbestos was worrisome. In 1938 the dust collection equipment in the mill was only 50% effective and resulted in mineral dust hovering like clouds over the community, being in general an “almost intolerable nuisance,” with complaints rising from both the town council and individuals.⁴⁰⁰ JM officials reported that “so heavy at times was the concentration of this dust in the mill area that it began to be regarded as a safety hazard, and the familiar grey colour in town and country-side constituted a very definite public nuisance.”⁴⁰¹ Townspeople accepted high levels of dust at the Jeffrey Mine, but not in the streets of the community because of effects on aesthetics and visibility, not a great fear of what the dust was doing to their lungs. Townspeople did not realize that dust-related disease was becoming a community-wide issue, not one contained to the mine or mill. To solve the dust problem, JM spent \$135,000 and five months to construct a new Cottrell Precipitation Plant designed to eliminate dust both in the factory and outside it. When the project was completed dust produced in the mill was reduced to just 20% of the previous levels. This sounded impressive, but still meant that ten tonnes of dust was released into the air of Asbestos each day.⁴⁰² Dust was a fact of life in the community in the first half of the 20th century, and while it was a nuisance, it was not feared.

Canadian JM President H.K. Sherry received letters from Asbestos town council thanking him for the improvements made in reducing the amount of fibre hovering over the community, and for his commitment to beautifying the town.⁴⁰³ There was a level of dust hovering over Asbestos that the community accepted, partly because they believed JM was taking care of them. This belief was linked to the installation of new technologically advanced equipment, such as state of the art x-ray machines, at the CJM Hospital in Asbestos, designed to “take hazards out of industry.”⁴⁰⁴ The hospital was for the entire community and JM officials stated that “Government authorities have expressed interest in the discovery that workers here show remarkable freedom from dust

⁴⁰⁰ JM Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 18 April 1938. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 21.

⁴⁰¹ JM Internal Memo, September 1938. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 22.

⁴⁰² JM Internal Memo, September 1938. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 22.

⁴⁰³ “Asbestos Chronology,” 1939, ACRF, p. 23.

⁴⁰⁴ “Hospital Equipment and Accident Prevention at Asbestos, Que. Take Hazards Out of Industry,” “Asbestos Chronology,” 1939, ACRF, p. 22.

diseases.”⁴⁰⁵ The people of Asbestos appeared to be the healthiest, most monitored resource community in the province, and the presence of doctors and new medical tests convinced workers yet again that the mineral would not seriously harm them. With this positive image surrounding the company and the community, JM once again asked Dr. Stevenson for a public assessment of his patients.

Whereas Stevenson’s 1938 address was designed to convince industry leaders that Quebec asbestos was safe, he used little evidence from his own experiences working with Jeffrey Mine employees. In his 1940 report, by contrast, Stevenson provided a detailed account of the health of his patients. He began by once again stating that asbestosis was a misunderstood disease and “the victim of a great many reports.”⁴⁰⁶ Stevenson continued to assert that asbestosis was not serious, and even if it was, “in this country [it] is not the serious hazard to labor that it was a few years ago believed to be.”⁴⁰⁷ The aim of this report was for Stevenson to ease the growing concern over asbestosis by providing an expert opinion on the recognition of it in theory and in practice.

Although the symptoms and significance of asbestosis was debated in the international medical community, Stevenson compiled a list of nine generally agreed-upon indications of the disease:

1. Dyspnoea [painful breathlessness], the most common, but cannot be noticed except following violent exercise, such as stepping up out a chair 25 times in 30 seconds; 2. Cough; 3. Cyanosis (late) [unoxygenated blood, poor circulation, blue colouration of the skin]; 4. Clubbed finger nails (late); 5. Spitting of blood; 6. Loss of weight and emaciation; 7. Anorexia. When a man cannot eat it is time to stop work; 8. Poor chest expansion; 9. Substernal pain.⁴⁰⁸

These symptoms show how superficial knowledge on asbestos-related disease was in 1940 and the extent to which Stevenson could acknowledge, but not address, the pain that some of the workers at the Jeffrey Mine experienced. While not all of these symptoms occurred at once, and many could be signs of other diseases such as tuberculosis, or simply of poor physical fitness, this list demonstrated JM’s willingness to push employees to their bodily limits, a lack of compassion within the medical profession, and

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁶ R.H. Stevenson, “Asbestosis,” 1940, Turner & Newall Archives, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

a desire to serve the industry, not the sick. These symptoms also help advance our understanding of what some people in Asbestos experienced. Townspeople did not need a doctor to tell them that turning blue and coughing up blood meant that they were sick, and it did not take medical training to connect these often painful symptoms to the jobs these men performed at the Jeffrey Mine. That the people of Asbestos possessed this knowledge and chose not to wear respirators while at work or to lobby for better health measures at the mine shows their willingness to accept bodily risk if it meant a steady job and a prosperous community. The acceptance of risk was entrenched in the local cultural identity at this time, and influenced the actions of the townspeople in the years to come.

Stevenson's report changed focus halfway through when he wrote on the health of 507 employees who had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for over ten years, the minimum amount of time believed to be required before asbestosis occurred. Of this cohort, Stevenson found 17 with early asbestosis, 5 with moderate asbestosis, and none with advanced asbestosis.⁴⁰⁹ While 22 incidents of asbestosis out of 507 men appeared relatively small compared to occurrences of silicosis in hard rock mining communities and suggested it was not a serious or widespread industrial disease, this was not good enough for Stevenson. He reported that these "figures are arrived at by taking results of Stereoscope examinations only. When these cases are studied from a case history and physical examination standpoint, our percentage of those suffering from Asbestosis is exactly zero. If we used all of our employees in making these figures, the percentages would be about three times smaller."⁴¹⁰ These conclusions suggested that asbestosis was not a problem at the Jeffrey Mine and medical experts outside the community that stated the mineral was dangerous were wrong. Stevenson's lack of trust in medical equipment like the Stereoscope to properly assess disease illustrates his unwillingness to believe asbestosis was a problem in the community. By disregarding his own medical evidence, he denied the harmful health effects of the mineral and greatly influenced the opinions of the suffering workers he treated.

While Stevenson gave a detailed review of the symptoms of asbestosis, he also highlighted some of the customs of the community. Like all JM towns, Asbestos had a Quarter Century Club to which every employee belonged once they had worked twenty-

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

five years for the company. Stevenson wrote that “a good percentage of these oldsters are still doing as hard manual labor as they ever did, and with no more sign of fatigue than any other men of similar age.”⁴¹¹ Whether these men were working so late in life due to a dedication to the company or a need to support a family is unclear because the goal was to portray them as tough, healthy, and happy members of the club. Stevenson also mentioned the JM employees who had died since 1929: “I have investigated the cause of death in all these cases, and not one of them have died of a lung affection [*sic*]...Of those living, there is not one that displays the classical signs of Asbestosis.”⁴¹² Once again, Stevenson’s conclusions were misleading. He did not perform any autopsies on the dead workers of Asbestos, the exterior physical indicators he relied upon for diagnosis were similar to a number of other diseases, and as a JM spokesperson, he had a vested interest in denying any occurrence of serious health problems in Asbestos.

At the beginning of his report, Stevenson attributed the confusion over asbestosis to the lack of human bodies to study,⁴¹³ but he ignored the fact that he was the doctor in a community that was built around the asbestos industry and had bodies available. Although he admitted that autopsies were the one conclusive way to determine if an employee suffered from asbestosis, Stevenson reported, “we have never had reason to have autopsies on our men, owing to the absence of symptoms [*sic*] suggesting Asbestosis.”⁴¹⁴ This statement showed unwillingness on the part of Stevenson to fully investigate the diseases asbestos caused in favour of skimming the surface of signs and symptoms without questioning them. No mention was made as to whether families in Asbestos requested autopsies or if autopsies were seen as a violation of the body, but if asbestosis had been discovered in the lungs of dead Jeffrey Mine employees and families were told, JM would have been inundated with compensation claims. The people of Asbestos knew many of them were becoming painfully ill after working at the Jeffrey Mine but Stevenson’s assurances that they were healthy, or that their illnesses were caused by other factors, he was able to convince community members that the bodily knowledge they possessed through their own suffering was wrong. Because of Stevenson’s cursory methods of diagnosis it is likely that more than 22 Jeffrey Mine

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 5.

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 1.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

workers had asbestosis in 1940,⁴¹⁵ but no health-related protests or complaints were launched and JM employees did not lobby for a safer work environment, internalizing bodily risks as part of the local cultural identity.

Many asbestos industry heads read Stevenson's 1938 report. Officials at the British manufacturing firm Turner & Newall were unconvinced. Showing a lack of respect for his medical authority, company man F. Bussy wrote to Turner & Newall that "Dr. Stevenson has obviously had but little experience of post mortem examinations and we shall therefore have to be guided more by men who have the opportunity of many such examinations. I cannot but feel that with their experience of known cases if our Medical Board were to examine the 507 men mentioned there would be more cases to report."⁴¹⁶ Stevenson did not hold much authority within the global medical community because he was a company-funded doctor who did not perform the most basic examinations or autopsies to trace the progression of disease, which contrasted with the practices of British doctors who were particularly concerned with industrial diseases like asbestosis and devoted entire studies to autopsy results. He was more effective closer to home, however, and after his report was submitted to the Quebec government, asbestosis was removed from its list of compensatable industrial diseases; even the workers association accepted the decision.⁴¹⁷ Because of his authoritative role when it came to the health of the workers at Asbestos, Stevenson was kept on retainer by JM after he retired in 1945, "due to the number of asbestosis cases that will come up for consideration in the next few years,"⁴¹⁸ and he was elected mayor of the neighbouring community of Danville soon after. While the company publicly denied the ill health effects of the mineral, it was only a matter of time until the realities of asbestos-related disease became public knowledge.

"A situation is developing with the miners in Quebec," 1940-1949

Stevenson's 1940 report emerged as the medical scene in Quebec was becoming increasingly divided. English Canada's medical association turned its attention towards industrial diseases, mostly in Ontario factories, because of their increased occurrence in

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴¹⁶ F. Bussy, Turner & Newall Co., to W.W.F. Shepherd, Turner & Newall Co., 25 May 1940, Turner & Newall Archives, p. 1.

⁴¹⁷ Morris Greenberg, "A Report on the Health of Asbestos, Quebec Miners 1940," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 48 (2005), pp. 235-236.

⁴¹⁸ A.R. Fisher, JM, to J.P. Woodard, Attorney, JM, 29 June 1945. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 37.

workers employed in the growing industry of war.⁴¹⁹ L'Association des Médecins de Langue Française du Canada did the same, but separately, and focused on asbestos. While neither of these organizations had direct access to Jeffrey Mine workers because JM did not allow outside medical professionals access to employee files, it became increasingly difficult to hide the severity of asbestos-related disease. Doctors at l'Université Laval in Quebec City were beginning to investigate the bodies of employees at Thetford, where company restrictions were less severe.

The medical reports on asbestos-related disease emerging from Laval in the 1940s were strong where Stevenson was weak: autopsies. These reports spoke of how quickly and painfully Thetford asbestos workers died once they arrived at the hospital complaining of difficulty breathing, and they included autopsy photos of diseased lungs.⁴²⁰ The Laval doctors provided proof of disease Stevenson had not searched out and reveal just how much the French Canadian medical community knew of asbestos-related disease at this time. In the first report on asbestos in *Laval médical*, doctors wrote, "l'amiantose est une affection dont le chapitre pathologique nous paraît encore incomplet. Nous espérons que certaines conditions favorables d'observation et de collaboration médicales nous permettront d'apporter une contribution intéressante à l'étude de cette maladie professionnelle."⁴²¹ Laval medical professionals were able to independently publish all of their findings and suspected those associated with JM were not.

The doctors at Laval demonstrated this freedom when two patients suffering from asbestosis in their care died of lung cancer.⁴²² While two cases were not enough to make a firm connection, "il nous paraît logique de la croire, comme d'autres l'ont cru pour la silicose, que l'amiantose peut être une cause prédisposant du cancer pulmonaire."⁴²³ This was radically different from the type of reports JM doctors released, but it coincided with what Leroy Gardner was finding at Saranac. During his study on the effects of asbestos dust on mice, Gardner accidentally found that the mineral caused lung and organ cancer

⁴¹⁹ H.E. MacDermot, *History of the Canadian Medical Association*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Murray Printing & Gravure, 1958), pp. 138-139.

⁴²⁰ R. Desmeules, L. Rousseau, M. Giroux, and A. Sirois, "Amiantose et Cancers Pulmonaires," *Laval Médical: Bulletin de la société médicale des hôpitaux universitaires Québec*, vol. 6, no. 3 (March 1941), pp. 99-105.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

81.8% of the time.⁴²⁴ Cancer was not something JM had thought to ask him to investigate, and in a letter to Vandiver Brown, Gardner wrote that the

question of cancer susceptibility now seems more significant than I had previously imagined. I believe I can obtain support for repeating it from the cancer research group. As it will take 2 or 3 years to complete such a study, I believe that it better be omitted from the present report....The evidence is suggestive but not conclusive that asbestosis may precipitate the development of cancer in susceptible individuals.⁴²⁵

If these results were released, repercussions for JM and the economy of Asbestos would be catastrophic, and cancer was not something the townspeople had considered when they accepted the bodily risks of the industry. Just as the company was making record profits because of the necessity of the fibre to the war effort,⁴²⁶ the fact that asbestos caused cancer had the potential to destroy the industry. Gardner's findings were never released and JM claimed that there was no proof the mineral caused cancer. After Gardner's death, Lanza thoroughly edited the report and published it as an effort to prove the relative harmlessness of the mineral. The effects of asbestos on the mice in Gardner's lab were ignored, as were the effects of the mineral on the workers at the Jeffrey Mine.

Whereas JM had the authority over the release of studies at the Saranac Laboratory, they had no control over the medical professionals at Laval. Francophone doctors in Quebec were somewhat isolated from the rest of the North American medical community because of linguistic boundaries,⁴²⁷ but were well aware of the studies on asbestos-related disease written in English. In 1943 Laval's Dr. Louis Rousseau believed that asbestos was unique in the way it affected the human body: "[p]armi les maladies professionnelles causées par les divers types de poussières... donnant des maladies pulmonaires...il en est une qui mérite une place spéciale, tant par son étiologie, sa forme histo-pathologique, que par son apparition relativement récente, comme syndrome pulmonaire encore à l'étude."⁴²⁸ The mineral fascinated these doctors because of their proximity to the asbestos-producing region and due to its unusual pathology, not because

⁴²⁴ Leroy Gardner, Saranac Laboratory, to Hektoen, JM, 15 March 1943. "Doc. 7," p. 31, and Dr. Leroy Gardner, "Draft Report," "Doc. 7," ACRF, p. 29.

⁴²⁵ Dr. Leroy Gardner, Saranac Laboratory, to Vandiver Brown, VP JM, 24 February 1943. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 30.

⁴²⁶ "Industries de Guerre," 7A 021 03-05-001B-01; 1960-01-040\183 e24 E8, Library and Archives Canada.

⁴²⁷ MacDermot, p. 29.

⁴²⁸ Louis Rousseau, "Amiantose Pulmonaire," *Laval médical* (1943), p. 239.

they had a financial interest in the results of their studies like those at Saranac. Rousseau believed that these edited studies prevented proper legislation in Quebec and wrote,

l'ouvrier lui-même n'est pas empressé de se prêter à l'étude de cette maladie et, s'il désire des modifications de la loi actuelle en sa faveur, il ne fera aucune revendication qui l'exposerait à un licenciement. Cette opposition des compagnies, favorisée par la méfiance des ouvriers qui ne se sentent pas protégés par une législation favorable est, dans notre opinion, le principal obstacle à l'étude de l'amiantose pure.⁴²⁹

Rousseau believed that workers did not have the power to lobby for improved health standards in the Quebec asbestos industry and that they mistrusted the companies that owned the mines, but in the community of Asbestos, this was not the case. Workers at the Jeffrey Mine experienced the painful symptoms of asbestos-related disease, but though they went on strike six times, they never once chose to strike for improved working conditions before 1949. After seeing what the mineral could do to the human body, Rousseau could not understand how the people of Asbestos interpreted bodily risk as part of their local cultural identity.

In a step towards improved occupational health legislation, in 1944 Liberal Premier Adélar Godbout attempted to enact a new Labour Code in the province that would help facilitate compensation claims and unemployment insurance. However, that same year he was replaced by Union nationale leader Maurice Duplessis, who had no intention of updating the province's labour laws, especially if they infringed on corporate rights.⁴³⁰ As far as Duplessis was concerned, companies needed the freedom to act in ways they felt were best for business without worrying about government intervention. Disease legislation was stalled.

The growing number of medical reports on asbestos-related disease in *Laval medical*,⁴³¹ combined with Gardner's accidental discovery of the mineral causing high rates of cancer in mice, meant that JM needed to know if the same was happening to its workers in Asbestos and those in the numerous and dusty manufacturing plants that relied on the Jeffrey Mine's mineral throughout the world. In May 1944, Gardner wrote to

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 238.

⁴³⁰ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard, *Quebec Since 1930*, Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmais, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1991), p. 30 and p. 108.

⁴³¹ This is based on a thorough study of every issue of *Laval medical* printed, which shows a marked increase in the amount of publications on asbestos-related disease during the mid-1940s.

Stevenson asking to visit Asbestos to review the x-ray films of his patients because the population's occurrence of asbestosis was so disproportionately low compared to JM factories in America.⁴³² Although Gardner was given permission for the visit, CJM President H.K. Sherry made it clear to Stevenson that “[o]ur main interest should be in any favorable findings” that resulted from Gardner’s examination of the films.⁴³³ JM did not need another negative health report.

Fortunately for the company, Gardner confirmed Stevenson’s findings. After examining between 200 and 300 x-rays with a New York State Department of Health official, Gardner found only two possible cases of “questionable first degree asbestosis.”⁴³⁴ This indicated to Gardner that Stevenson’s claims about the safety of the Quebec mineral were accurate and that factory workers were dying because the fibre was mixed with South African asbestos in the United States.⁴³⁵ Gardner failed to question why he was only given a selection of old films chosen by Stevenson to study. The two cases of questionable asbestosis may have been from many years prior and could have turned into lung cancer or premature death by 1944, but Gardner did not follow up on them. The workers at the Jeffrey Mine were not disease-free, but Stevenson’s selective method for choosing films for Gardner to study made it appear as though they were.

Soon after Gardner’s 1944 visit, JM and its workers signed a new collective agreement. The union demanded that a “dust clause” be included in the contract that stated, “the Company will take necessary steps to eliminate as much as possible the dust in its operations.”⁴³⁶ The workers were not as content about the effects of asbestos dust on their bodies as Stevenson was, and this was the first time they expressed their concerns through the union. CJM official G.K. Foster insisted that the dust clause was to be accepted only if absolutely necessary and only if rephrased to read: “the Company recognizes the desirability of progressive improvement in the alleviation of any nuisance arising from the existence of dust in its operations, and will continue to pursue its policy of adopting such measures as it may from time to time deem to be practical, having in

⁴³² Leroy Gardner, Saranac Laboratory, to R.H. Stevenson, CJM Asbestos, 19 May 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 33.

⁴³³ H.K. Sherry, President CJM, memo, 24 May 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 33.

⁴³⁴ Leroy Gardner, Saranac Laboratory, to Vandiver Brown, VP JM, 15 July 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 33.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴³⁶ G.K. Foster, CJM, memo to A.R. Fisher, CJM, 9 August 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 34.

view the accomplishment of that objective.”⁴³⁷ Altering the statement resulted in vague allusions to dust control rather than an actual dust clause. JM’s ability to alter the clause demonstrates that although the workers were concerned with the presence of dust, they were not so worried that they would fight for the firmer version of the clause, again showing their willingness to accept the risks associated with working at the Jeffrey Mine.

As the dust clause in the new contract was being negotiated in 1944, JM funded a report on a forgotten segment of the Jeffrey Mine workforce: women. While company doctors acknowledged that most cases of asbestosis were limited to those who worked in the mill,⁴³⁸ they never mentioned the women who made up 25% of the workforce during the war.⁴³⁹ In August 1944, JM official Joan Ross examined the female workers at the Jeffrey Mine and noted that the Textile Department had the worst dust problem and the highest absentee rate in the entire factory, so it should have been studied in the past.⁴⁴⁰ The reasons Ross gave as to why female employees at Asbestos were absent so often were “dust and bad ventilation, fatigue, and higher absentee rate among women in general.”⁴⁴¹ Ross also noted that the “situation has become a topic of conversation throughout the entire community and is a serious detriment to the reputation of the company.”⁴⁴² The local population’s understanding of risk was that it was something contained to male Jeffrey Mine employees. Women were still to be protected from the adverse effects of industrializing the land.

Gendered perceptions of who was allowed to be exposed to industrial risk and disease were common in the 19th and early 20th century, especially in the textile factories of Montreal and New England, but JM officials and doctors had previously ignored the health of female employees in the asbestos industry, partly because mining was perceived to be male-dominated and this overshadowed the women who worked in the industry. Stevenson felt it was acceptable to move a sick male employee from the mill to another part of JM operations. Women, on the other hand, could not be sacrificed to the industrial

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴³⁸ Pedley, “Report of the Physical Examination,” p. 14, and A.J. Lanza, Saranac Laboratory, “Underwriting Aspects—Dust Hazard,” 1940. “Doc. 7,” ACRF, p. 11.

⁴³⁹ Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28.

⁴⁴⁰ Joan Ross, “Survey of Female Employees in Canadian Textile Department,” 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 34.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

machine and asbestos dust could not be allowed to harm wives and daughters, which was why townspeople complained. Later that year the province recommended that improvements be made to control dust at the mill,⁴⁴³ but these suggestions were not mandatory because of the Duplessis government's unwillingness to infringe on the rights of companies operating in Quebec. The care of female employees at the Jeffrey Mine had to be negotiated between the workers and JM, and the company would not admit to any hazard.

Although the Duplessis government was not worried about asbestos dust, the doctors at Laval made it a primary concern. In 1946, Dr. Louis Rousseau once again expressed his frustration over the lack of commitment to researching asbestos-related disease: "si la silicose peut être étudiée dans tous les pays, il n'en est pas de même de l'amiantose. Comme la région... produit environ 75% de l'amiante mondiale, l'on comprendre facilement qu'une étude clinique approfondie n'a pu être faite par des médecins ne vivant pas dans l'entourage immédiat de ces ouvriers exposés à ces poussières particulières."⁴⁴⁴ Rousseau believed asbestosis was a unique disease that required further study because of its severity. He wrote, "[u]ne solution satisfaisante à ce problème industriel ne m'apparaît pas devoir être obtenue, tant qu'une commission d'étude, indépendante de la politique et des compagnies intéressées, n'aura pas la liberté de les ouvriers avant leur admission dans cette industrie et de faire des contrôles fréquents de leur état pulmonaire par la suite."⁴⁴⁵

Rousseau referred not only to Stevenson's work, but also to Leroy Gardner's unreleased report, which had been greatly anticipated by the medical community. Gardner, the "famed director of the Saranac Laboratory,"⁴⁴⁶ died in 1946 without completing his study of the effects of asbestos dust but JM released an edited portion of his unfinished report that stated the mineral was relatively benign, which Rousseau found impossible to believe.⁴⁴⁷ In 1947, Vandiver Brown went even further with Gardner's

⁴⁴³ 27 October 1944. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 35.

⁴⁴⁴ Louis Rousseau, "Quelque considérations sur l'amiantose," *Laval médical* (1946), p. 57.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁶ *Time Magazine*, 4 November 1946. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,777256,00.html>. Accessed 11 February 2008.

⁴⁴⁷ Rousseau, "Quelque considérations," p. 58.

study and requested that any reference to cancer be deleted,⁴⁴⁸ and wrote to company attorney J.P. Woodard that the discovery of cancer “looks like dynamite.”⁴⁴⁹

Because the threat of cancer had the potential to counter JM’s claim that Quebec asbestos was safe, the company went on the offensive to overpower reports emerging from Laval with findings of their own, believing there was “a need to complete Gardner’s report before French Canadian researchers elect to write something themselves.”⁴⁵⁰ While the doctors at Laval were convinced that asbestos dust raised death rates in the mining towns of l’Estrie, workers at the Jeffrey Mine were not included in their studies and they found no traces of cancer during their autopsies of Thetford employees.⁴⁵¹ It appeared that the results of Gardner’s study had been successfully contained, but to be sure it stayed this way, JM installed a new doctor at Asbestos after Stevenson retired.

Dr. Kenneth Smith had worked for JM prior to being relocated to Asbestos and knew what was expected of him, although he was not always comfortable with this role. One of the first actions he took in 1947 was to remove mill employee Alexandre Bourassa to a “non-dusty operation.”⁴⁵² Although Bourassa was only 35 years old and did not appear sick, he had worked in the mill for 20 years and “[s]hould he continue to work in the dust much longer, I feel that we might have another case with a typical x-ray film and typical physical findings of asbestosis.”⁴⁵³ Smith was a different kind of doctor than Stevenson. He took the risks of Jeffrey Mine asbestos much more seriously than his predecessor, and often became conflicted with his role in putting workers at risk. It is not clear what an employee was told or not told when they were transferred from one part of the Jeffrey Mine’s operations to another after visiting the doctor, or if they worried about what the move might mean. What is clear, however, is that Smith believed the people at Asbestos were at a much greater risk of disease than they had previously been told.

Despite this, Smith helped calm JM’s fears over what might be discovered by Laval medical professionals studying Thetford workers. Although they worked for different companies, he befriended Dr. Paul Cartier at Thetford and scheduled monthly

⁴⁴⁸ Vandiver Brown memo, 1947, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁹ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, to J.P. Woodard, JM, 21, March 1947. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁰ A.R. Fisher, JM, to J.P. Woodard, JM, 22 July 1947. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 41.

⁴⁵¹ “Tuberculose et Amiantose,” *Laval médical* (1947), p. 1090.

⁴⁵² Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to H.F. Janson, Department Supervisor, Mill, CJM Asbestos, 21 January 1947.

“Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 39.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

meetings with him to ensure a “uniformity of procedure and results in the two clinics.”⁴⁵⁴ Smith was able to convince Cartier to keep Thetford health records from outsiders and between 1947 and 1949 doctors at Laval had no subjects on which to study the health effects of asbestos. Their studies were stalled.⁴⁵⁵ The two doctors became friends and after the medical records at Thetford were closed, Cartier became Smith’s ally and confidant. Smith felt free to express his frustration to Cartier over not having the freedom to study only one aspect of asbestos-related disease. Instead, Smith had to address every medical ailment in Asbestos and complained to Cartier, “I cannot do as good a job as you are doing, but that is what J-M wants.”⁴⁵⁶ Despite his complaints Smith was in a position of power at the Jeffrey Mine and JM did ask him to focus on only one thing there: preventing knowledge and evidence of asbestos-related disease from spreading.

In March 1948, this duty became clear when JM allowed two independent doctors from New York to visit Asbestos and assess a series of employee x-rays. Although the selection of x-rays was supposed to be done by the Quebec Compensation Board to ensure a fair report, Smith managed to bypass the restrictions and supply the visiting doctors with slides taken of employees he had already deemed healthy: “we never have let anyone know that this company (JM) had anything to do with the scheme; we are merely co-operating with...the Board to the best of our ability...Even the head of the union here thinks that...all I did was...help.”⁴⁵⁷ This deliberate deception of medical boards, local union heads, and Jeffrey Mine workers was never uncovered.

It was particularly important to JM that Smith hide the effects of asbestos dust on its employees at this time because the Congress of Asbestos Miners, a workers group based in East Broughton, Quebec met each year to lobby for asbestosis awareness and prevention.⁴⁵⁸ The general public was still ignorant of the adverse health effects of the mineral, but the workers were becoming increasingly aware of the threats. Vandiver Brown believed that a “situation is developing with the miners in Quebec that urgently requires that a report based on Dr. Gardner’s experiments be made available as a counter agent to opinions being expressed and conclusions arrived at by Quebec physicians and

⁴⁵⁴ Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to Ivan Sabourin, JM, 13 March 1947. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁵ This is information gained from an analysis of the content in *Laval medical* between 1947 and 1949.

⁴⁵⁶ Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to Paul Cartier, Thetford, 11 September 1947. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 41.

⁴⁵⁷ Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to Paul Cartier, Thetford, 6 July 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 43.

⁴⁵⁸ “Asbestos Chronology,” 1948, ACRF, p. 44.

officials upon the basis of surmise, social ideology, and inadequate information. Time therefore is of the essence.”⁴⁵⁹ Brown wanted a severely edited version of Gardner’s report with every mention of cancer—in mice or men—removed.⁴⁶⁰

At the end of 1948, when another contract was being negotiated between JM and the union at Asbestos, the company opened a new hospital supplied with the most advanced x-ray technology.⁴⁶¹ Government officials, company heads, and union leaders celebrated the new CJM Hôpital et Clinic, but Kenneth Smith was not happy. Having asked the company to do something about the dust problem in the mill,⁴⁶² Smith advised, “if any dust is raised, I believe that the men should wear respirators.”⁴⁶³ While he was willing to hide x-ray results from employees and the public, Smith was not content to see Jeffrey Mine workers continuously exposed to a severe health hazard. Employees were each issued two respirators to use, but they again refused to wear them because they were uncomfortable. Even though their knowledge of asbestos-related disease was growing, Jeffrey Mine workers continued to accept the risks associated with the mineral and their labour. Company officials believed the health issue was better addressed by new technologies designed to eliminate rather than screen dust.⁴⁶⁴ The continued rejection of respirators by employees even while they were advocating for better dust control in the factory suggested that they felt the same way.

Smith was caught in the middle. It upset him that JM employees refused to protect themselves, and he warned the company that his work had the potential to damage the industry. And yet he wrote CJM President G.K. Foster that he did not want to increase the number of autopsies performed on Jeffrey Mine employees who had passed away to learn more about asbestosis, because he was sure this would automatically lead to successful

⁴⁵⁹ Vandiver Brown, VP JM, to Ernest Muehleck (Keasby & Mattison) and Rohrbach, Raybestos-Manhattan, 22 October 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 47.

⁴⁶⁰ Vandiver Brown, JM VP to Kelley, American Brake Block, 12 November 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” p. 46, and A.J. Lanza, Saranac Laboratory, to Vorwald, JM, 14 December 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 34.

⁴⁶¹ *L’Asbestos*, 26 November 1948, p. 1.

⁴⁶² Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, memo, 22 December 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 48.

⁴⁶³ Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to J.E. Morrison, CJM Asbestos, 1 December 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 47.

⁴⁶⁴ H. Jackson, CJM Asbestos, to J.E. Morrison, CJM Asbestos, 6 December 1948. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 47-48.

compensation claims.⁴⁶⁵ Smith was committed to protecting JM even though he worried for the health of his patients.

Smith's dedication became crucial to the company at the beginning of 1949 when a report from Burton LeDoux, an American investigative journalist of French origin, brought the Quebec asbestos industry into a period of crisis. LeDoux published his exposé on asbestos-related disease, *L'amiantose à East Broughton: un village de trois mille âmes étouffé dans la poussière*, in pamphlet form and in Montreal's *Le Devoir* in January 1949, at the very moment that contract negotiations between JM and the workers at the Jeffrey Mine had reached a deadlock. Because his report was published in a newspaper, not a medical journal, it reached a much wider audience than anything that had come before and the bodily knowledge of the people of Asbestos was suddenly confirmed. Although LeDoux focused his analysis on the asbestos-mining community of East Broughton, about 120km from Asbestos, the first section of the report was a more general account of the industry and the diseases the mineral gave to the workers of Quebec.

LeDoux wrote that a much more sophisticated understanding of asbestos-related disease in the workers of l'Estrie was needed because demand for the mineral continued to increase and Quebec had a monopoly on its supply. LeDoux stated that asbestos companies in Quebec made millions of dollars while their workers died of terrible diseases. He claimed that "[l]'argent a aussi ses camps de concentration,"⁴⁶⁶ and that these were in the asbestos mining towns of l'Estrie: "l'exploitation des dépôts d'amiante a surtout apporté à ce peuple des misères imméritées, de graves maladies qui auraient pu être évitées, et des morts prématurées. Aujourd'hui, 30,000 personnes à peu près habitent la région québécoise de l'amiante. Un quart d'entre elles environ sont exposées à contracter une maladie mortelle, l'amiantose."⁴⁶⁷ Equating communities like Asbestos to concentration camps following the horror of the Second World War was shocking and effective, especially because the "administration autoritaire" of JM was well known.⁴⁶⁸

Another of LeDoux's goals was to educate asbestos workers on what the mineral was doing to their bodies, which is why he wrote the pamphlet in French and in an

⁴⁶⁵ Kenneth Smith, CJM Asbestos, to G.K. Foster, President, CJM Asbestos, 6 December 1948. "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 47.

⁴⁶⁶ Burton LeDoux, *L'Amiantose à East Broughton: Un Village de Trois Mille Âmes Étouffé dans la Poussière* (1949), p. 55.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Vallières, p. 216.

accessible style. He claimed it only took two to three years for asbestosis to develop in the lungs of workers both young and old, and that every part of the industry, not just the mill, created dust that was too small for the eye to see. Anyone who “respire cette poussière durant un certain temps est condamné à la mort.”⁴⁶⁹ While LeDoux was not a medical professional, he was convincing and he put names to the symptoms generations of people in Asbestos suffered from.

LeDoux devoted several pages to explaining, in a way everyone could understand, what asbestosis was and how it affected the human body:

Cela ressemble à l'araignée qui tisse sa toile. La poussière d'amiante, une fois qu'elle a pénétré en grande quantité dans les poumons, agit comme si elle était sous la direction d'une araignée; elle se dépose par endroits où elle forme de longs filaments de tissus fibreux vaguement reliés entre eux en un dessin mal défini et irrégulier.⁴⁷⁰

Comparing the disease to a spider spinning a web tighter and tighter around the lungs was easy to comprehend and terrifying. LeDoux wanted to get a reaction, to shake workers out of their acceptance of risk so they would fight for their lives, and he was successful in this pursuit, partly because he did not hide any of the frightening effects of asbestosis:

à mesure que la poussière envahit les poumons des lignes de destruction de plus en plus nombreuses s'y forment. Conséquemment, le malade devient de moins en moins capable d'aspirer assez d'oxygène pour répondre aux besoins de son corps...très lentement et à travers les pires angoisses, ses poumons sont progressivement détruits. Il finit par mourir étouffé.⁴⁷¹

The graphic language LeDoux used in describing the type of death he believed was awaiting the asbestos workers of Quebec countered the assurances company doctors had given over the years to patients who knew they were not physically well, and who saw their friends and family members slowly suffocating to death.

Company doctors were able to pacify employees in the past, LeDoux wrote, because of the basic human desire to deny death as being imminent and inevitable. Another reason was that asbestosis develops slowly in the body, so the victim develops other ailments such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, and heart disease.⁴⁷² This explained why cases of asbestosis had not been reported in the past even though it was such a rampant

⁴⁶⁹ LeDoux, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, p. 5.

⁴⁷² Ibid, p. 5.

disease. LeDoux also argued that the relative absence of asbestosis diagnoses was due to companies and their doctors lying to workers. He provided a list of symptoms so employees could self-diagnose without relying on the suspect motives of medical professionals. These included irritation of the nose, throat, and the upper respiratory tubes, shortness of breath, a wet or dry cough, loss of weight and appetite, physical weakness, and chest pain.⁴⁷³ LeDoux also explained that when these symptoms became noticeable, it was already too late to stop the progression of disease.

Despite the morbid tone of his report, LeDoux attempted to end on a positive note, writing in all capital letters: “L’ AMIANTOSE EST INCURABLE, MAIS ON PEUT LA PREVENIR.”⁴⁷⁴ This statement placed responsibility not in the hands of the companies or doctors, but the workers themselves. If equating asbestosis to a deadly spider spinning a web inside them until they suffocated to death did not scare employees into action, if the idea that just breathing near any of the Jeffrey Mine’s operations would condemn them to death did not outrage them, and if the thought that companies had been lying about the state of their health did not inspire workers to organize against them, it was their own fault if they became fatally sick. The local newspaper in Asbestos urged townspeople to read LeDoux’s piece and the union distributed copies of it.⁴⁷⁵ The community understood the report’s implications and it had a direct effect on the local cultural identity, so used to accepting the risks of the industry. Already confident because of their role in the global reach the Jeffrey Mine had through trade networks, the workers at the Jeffrey Mine believed it was time they took ownership of their bodies, and at the start of 1949, they went on strike to do just that.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

⁴⁷⁵ *L’Asbestos*, January 1949, and LeDoux, p. 58-60.

Chapter 4: Essential Characteristics: The Body Politic, 1918-1949

In the past twenty years the population of Asbestos has declined about fifty percent, and in 2006 the community was named one of ten towns in Quebec that would disappear within a decade.⁴⁷⁶ This is what happens when a single-industry town suffers a collapse. In 2006, the mayor of Asbestos, Jean-Philippe Bachand, attempted to change the name of the community to Trois Lacs or Phoenix, in order to attract new industry because he believed that “Asbestos as a name doesn’t sell.”⁴⁷⁷ The majority of townspeople disagreed with Bachand and the name remains, while the mayor does not. Town councillor Serge Boislard, whose father died of asbestos-related disease, explained that changing the name would only “tell the world that we are ashamed of our product...[and it would] be one more nail in our coffin.”⁴⁷⁸ Asbestos is part of the community’s identity; the town by any other name would still be home to the largest chrysotile asbestos mine in the world, which will not disappear.

As much as the mineral can be derided throughout the world and as much as the townspeople of Asbestos can accept that it makes people—themselves in particular—sick, the Jeffrey Mine remains fundamental to their identity. Over two kilometres wide and deeper than the Eiffel Tower is high, the pit is where the town’s cultural identity takes root, connecting the land and the people. By exploring how the people of Asbestos oriented their lives, politics, economy, and faith around the Jeffrey Mine, this chapter will track the development of the local body politic to more fully understand how the community negotiated a longstanding, strong cultural identity by interacting with the pit between 1918 and 1949. Identities and duties were formed alongside the mine as it grew and changed the community. How this tradition took root in Asbestos contextualizes this tradition and gives foundation to how the community envisions itself today.

Getting Acquainted, 1918-1923

In *Working People*, historian Desmond Morton writes that the “essential characteristic of a worker was dependence. A worker is a *hired* person,”⁴⁷⁹ but this was not the essential characteristic of those who worked the Jeffrey Mine. As soon as JM took

⁴⁷⁶ Frederic Tomesco, “Asbestos, Quebec, Seeks a Healthier Name Not Linked to Cancer,” *Bloomberg.com* (14 July 2006). <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601082&refer=canada&sid=acD5eSZMS.rc>. Accessed 30 March 2008.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Desmond Morton, *Working People*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1990), p. 2.

ownership of the mine in 1918, the people of Asbestos went on strike to prove they too had power and that the company would be dependent on them.⁴⁸⁰ Although the miners at Thetford unionized in 1915,⁴⁸¹ those at Asbestos acted independently and did not need a union to give them bargaining strength following the war, when industry was booming and there was a severe shortage of manpower to meet the rising global demand for asbestos. Companies were suddenly dependent on the workers,⁴⁸² and JM was in need of more employees.⁴⁸³ The fifty men who went on strike were the dynamite handlers inside the Jeffrey Mine and made \$3.15 each day, but believed that in the post-war economy they should be making 35 cents more. The 1918 strike was peaceful and the company met the demands of the workers. Through the dispute the workers showed JM that they had authority in the community and were fundamental to the success of the Jeffrey Mine. The company could own the mine, but it could not own the workers.

The asbestos industry following the First World War was extremely profitable and all signs pointed to it becoming even more so. Industry leaders declared the men who chose to work at the Jeffrey Mine rather than enlisting in the army to be heroes, and likened them to the soldiers who had performed so well in the war.⁴⁸⁴ This sentiment affected the development of a cultural identity in Asbestos and gave JM's employees the confidence that was seen in 1918 and will be seen again and again in this chapter, leading up to the 1949 strike.

JM went to Asbestos not because it believed Jeffrey Mine workers were heroes, but because it was a good business decision and the Quebec government actively recruited British and American investment in the natural resource industries of the province.⁴⁸⁵ Company officials knew that Asbestos was a single-industry and single-company town, and JM immediately began a system of paternalistic company-community relations that made the town indebted to JM. Even though the workers did not believe they were dependent on the company, the town would be.

⁴⁸⁰ "Une Grève se Déclare dans les Mines de la Manville Asbestos Co.," *La Tribune*, 29 May 1918, p. 1.

⁴⁸¹ Jacques Rouillard, *Les Syndicats Nationaux Au Québec De 1900 À 1930*, vol. 24, *Les Cahiers D'histoire De L'université Laval* (Québec: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1979). P. 187.

⁴⁸² Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), p. 196.

⁴⁸³ "Une Grève se Déclare," p. 1.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Canadian Mining Journal*. 5 February 1919, p. 66.

⁴⁸⁵ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*. Robert Chodos, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1983), p. 306.

On 4 June 1919, town council passed Règlement 81, allowing JM to pay for the installation and maintenance of electricity at the mine and in the community. The town would buy electricity the company bought from the Shawinigan Water and Power Co., taking the amount this would cost out of what JM owed in property taxes.⁴⁸⁶ Mayor Victor Dubois was the first in the community to have his house equipped with JM's electricity. With this agreement, the town of Asbestos paid the company a percentage of the cost it took to run the electricity and a percentage of the profits gained from it until 1929.⁴⁸⁷ JM also received a reduction in the amount the company had to pay to improve the roads they used to ship asbestos out of the community. While the workers of Asbestos greeted JM with a strike, town council sought a close working relationship with the company, making deals and sacrificing the value of the land. In addition to the electricity agreement, town council allowed JM Vice President and Treasurer J.P. Pearson and JM Vice President C.H. Shoemaker to be voting members of the relatively small council.⁴⁸⁸ This solidified the close relationship between council and the company.

It was important for town council and JM to become allies because of the growing worker unrest throughout Quebec and Canada in 1919. During this year there were at least 68 strikes in Montreal⁴⁸⁹ and 210 throughout Canada, which was a steep increase in the number of labour conflicts the country had seen before.⁴⁹⁰ The Winnipeg General Strike of that year lasted over a month and brought worry to companies all across the country. Furthermore, the Communist Party of Quebec was formed on May Day 1919 in Montreal.⁴⁹¹ JM needed allies in Asbestos if it was to maintain control over its workforce at the Jeffrey Mine, and town council fit this need well before 1949.

The workers at the Jeffrey Mine made it clear to both JM and town council that they were a force to be reckoned with in the community with their 1918 strike, and again in October 1919, when they chose to form their first union. Although the majority of unionized workers in Quebec, much like the rest of Canada, belonged to American unions, the miners at Asbestos chose an alternative option: l'Union ouvrière Catholique

⁴⁸⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 4 June 1919, p. 189-197.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 189.

⁴⁸⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 23 July 1919, p. 200.

⁴⁸⁹ Geoffrey Ewen, "The International Unions and the Workers' Revolt in Quebec, 1914-1925," (Toronto: York University, 1998), p. 127.

⁴⁹⁰ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement, A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lorimer, 1996), p. 53.

⁴⁹¹ Ewen, p. 257.

du Québec. Sherbrooke's *LaTribune* reported that Jeffrey Mine employees joined the union because there was strength in numbers and it could improve wages and working conditions.⁴⁹² The miners in Asbestos differed from the communists in Montreal and the radicals in Winnipeg: a Catholic union, headed by priests, meant that they had God on their side in labour disputes. L'Union ouvrière Catholique du Québec was making advances in the province due to post-war economic success and the aversion those outside Montreal felt towards the radicalism of the international unions seen with the strike in Winnipeg.⁴⁹³ Having the miners of Asbestos join was a coup for the union because by 1919 the mineral was making significant contributions to Quebec's economy.⁴⁹⁴ The industry was of great importance to the province and its workers were valuable to unions.

The Catholic union did not allow those of other faiths to join, but this was not a major issue in Asbestos at this time, when only 15% of the town's population was not French Catholic, and most of those were JM officials and their families. This was in sharp contrast to other areas in l'Estrie, including Shipton Township as a whole, which was 38% Anglophone, and Sherbrooke, the major city in the region, which was 29% Anglophone.⁴⁹⁵ The community of Asbestos was divided along linguistic and class lines, with the Francophone population making up the bulk of the workers and the smaller Anglophone faction running JM. This put an extra communication barrier between the workers and the company, which was solidified when JM refused to recognize the union for decades after its establishment.⁴⁹⁶ JM did not want outside union officials changing the dynamics of the community.

The workers tolerated this because they were united with JM in their commitment to the asbestos industry. By the end of 1920, the major cities of Europe were rebuilding after the First World War and asbestos was crucial to this reconstruction. For Asbestos, this meant that operations at the Jeffrey Mine would grow despite the new tariff imposed by the United States on all manufactured asbestos goods. The tariff meant that Quebec, which supplied 89% of the world's asbestos in 1921, would not profit fully from

⁴⁹² "Formation d'une Union Ouvrière à Asbestos," *La Tribune*, 15 October 1919, p. 1.

⁴⁹³ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, p. 409.

⁴⁹⁴ Theo. C. Denis, "The Mining Industry in the Province of Quebec in 1919," *The Canadian Mining Journal* (4 January 1920), p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam, and Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons de l'Est, Les Régions du Québec* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'université Laval, 1998), p. 276 and p. 490.

⁴⁹⁶ Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécois des Origines au Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), p. 215.

exporting manufactured products to the United States, one of the largest markets for the fibre. In response, Quebec imposed its own 5% tax on asbestos exports.⁴⁹⁷ JM was undeterred by the U.S. tariff and the Quebec tax, and in June 1921 announced that it would open a manufacturing plant in Asbestos.

While building the plant was good for the town, international demand began to decline after the post-war boom flooded the market with the mineral. Wages and shifts were reduced throughout the mining communities of Quebec, a quarter of unionized workers in the province were out of work,⁴⁹⁸ and the *Canadian Mining Journal's* hopes that “a brilliant page of History is about to be unrolled in this Dominion,” brought about by industrial development, seemed to deflate.⁴⁹⁹

Despite the economic downturn, the Catholic union movement in Quebec had by 1921 grown to six times its size in 1914, and was united under the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC).⁵⁰⁰ By 1922 the CTCC represented 96 unions and 26,000 workers, and both the Church and the provincial government approved of the organization.⁵⁰¹ This gave the CTCC strength, but its leaders were not interested in using it. At its inception the CTCC was a conservative body committed to French Canadian and Pan-Canadian nationalism through a celebration of both founding nations, a distancing from the British Empire, and an adherence to the social doctrine of the Church.⁵⁰² The CTCC operated with a spirit of cooperation between workers and employers and on the belief that labour issues were moral issues.⁵⁰³ While it was optimistic that both sides in a labour dispute would do what was morally right as dictated by the Church, the idea was based on the *Rerum Novarum*, an encyclical released by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 that encouraged the formation of doctrine-abiding unions.⁵⁰⁴ It relied on the belief that workers would accept their lower position on the class scale because the meek would inherit the earth. The existence, and indeed the strength of the CTCC, the largest labour organization in Canada based on cultural and religious values, indicates how deeply the

⁴⁹⁷ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 5 August 1921, p. 619.

⁴⁹⁸ Morton, p. 126.

⁴⁹⁹ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 28 January 1921, p. 63.

⁵⁰⁰ Jacques Rouillard, *Le Syndicalisme Québécois: Deux Siècles d'Histoire* (Montreal: Boréal, 2004), p. 40.

⁵⁰¹ Morton, p. 131

⁵⁰² Jacques Rouillard, *Les Syndicats Nationaux au Québec de 1900 à 1930* (Québec: Les Cahiers d'histoire de l'université Laval, 1979), pp. 223, 225, and 227.

⁵⁰³ Simon Lapointe, *L'influence de la Gauche Catholique Française sur l'idéologie de la CTCC-CSN de 1948-1964* (Montreal: La Collection RCHTQ, 1996), p. 24.

⁵⁰⁴ Rouillard, *Le Syndicalisme Québécois*, p. 49.

Catholic Church permeated the lives of the Québécois in the 1920s.⁵⁰⁵ Because of its exclusive membership requirements, the CTCC tended to pit French Canadian workers against foreign, Anglophone, and Protestant officials operating companies in Quebec.

But during the economic crisis of 1921, employment was more important to Jeffrey Mine workers than unions were, especially after their wages were cut and they knew others would take their place if given the chance. Jeffrey Mine workers chose not to fight for union recognition. Industrial relations in Quebec's asbestos industry had changed since 1918, and when Thetford workers went on strike in 1921, new employees replaced the miners who attempted to hold out for a raise.⁵⁰⁶ Despite the economic situation, geologist John A. Dresser continued to believe that "[w]hen one speaks of mining in Quebec he is supposed to refer to asbestos, unless he specifies otherwise."⁵⁰⁷ The asbestos industry would survive.

While the workers at Asbestos were prepared to sacrifice wages and unions at this difficult time, the miners at Thetford believed the industry's importance meant that they were important and at the end of April 1923 they went on strike again. While short, the strike illustrated how militant the 500 workers at Thetford were when it came to their economic value. Thetford had an older workforce than the Jeffrey Mine because of its immediate success in the 19th century, and the stability of the community, combined with five or six mines and companies in the town, created a local identity that differed from the more moderate one found in Asbestos at this time. They demanded higher wages and that the Assistant Manager of the Asbestos Corporation, Colonel MacNutt, be removed from his post.⁵⁰⁸ The strike was not sanctioned by any union and quickly turned violent when the workers raided a local hardware store for guns and dynamite and threatened to blow up part of the town if their demands were not met.⁵⁰⁹ The strike was broken soon after and the workers returned to the mines without any changes in management or wages. They went on strike again in the middle of May, but were once again unsuccessful.⁵¹⁰ The

⁵⁰⁵ Heron, pp. 53-4.

⁵⁰⁶ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 26 August 1921, p. 685.

⁵⁰⁷ John A. Dresser, "Mining in Quebec," *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 17 August 1923, p. 645.

⁵⁰⁸ Letter from the Deputy Minister of Labour to "Sir," "Strike 22, April 1923," Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁹ *The Ottawa Journal*, 27 April 1923, "Strike 22, April 1923," Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC.

⁵¹⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, 21 May 1923, "Strike 22, April 1923," Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC.

workers who acted outside the doctrine of the Catholic unions were more radical than those who acted in accordance with the CTCC.

Growing Pains, 1923-1937

As Thetford miners were striking at the beginning of the 1920s, workers at the Jeffrey Mine were content not disrupting the order of industry or community. This allowed JM to construct its new manufacturing plant, hire more employees, and make a new partnership with the Phillip Carey Manufacturing Co., another U.S.-based company that manufactured asbestos-based products. In 1924, the two companies bought a factory in Lennoxville, a small university community just outside Sherbrooke, in order to produce asbestos paper with fibre extracted from the Jeffrey Mine.⁵¹¹

Aware that partnerships like this would help bring Asbestos out of its economic downturn, town council further solidified its relationship with JM. Echoing the doctrine of the CTCC, council agreed that “il est de l’intérêt de ce conseil de marcher en coopération avec la dite compagnie minière en autant que justice soit rendue aux deux parties concernées en ce qui concerne toute transaction qui sera faite entre les deux parties.”⁵¹² There seemed to be only two factions in Asbestos—the company and everyone else—and council wanted relations to be harmonious. Jeffrey Mine employees were willing to make sacrifices for the good of the industry, but this did not mean that they were in full cooperation with JM or council. The workers knew that the industry was rebounding from an economic downturn by 1927⁵¹³ and the town was growing alongside JM operations. The J.P. Morgan Co. aided this rebound when it bought over half the company’s shares and financially supported JM’s industrial ambitions.⁵¹⁴

JM then constructed a Canadian headquarters in Montreal in 1927 and town council extended their electricity contract for 10 more years. The new contract explained that JM would receive “annuellement en taxes municipales, sur toutes ses propriétés industrielles, terrains minières, moulins, manufactures, un montant d’argent égal à 45% per cent des recettes totales provenant des taxes municipales.”⁵¹⁵ Council sacrificed a

⁵¹¹ Kesteman, et al, p. 541.

⁵¹² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 5 February 1925, p. 6.

⁵¹³ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, p. 513.

⁵¹⁴ Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and Its Fights for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 22.

⁵¹⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 11 August 1927, p. 151.

significant portion of its tax revenue to maintain good relations: the company paid just over \$500 in taxes in 1927, much less than it owed as the largest landholder in town.⁵¹⁶

Despite the good relationship being nurtured between town council and JM, the community was wary of the changes it was experiencing so quickly due to the growing industry. In particular, the local population was suspicious of newcomers that arrived in Asbestos because of the growing demand for labour at the Jeffrey Mine. Council moved to charge residents who had lived in Asbestos for less than a year extra municipal taxes and defined them in Règlement 163 as “strangers.”⁵¹⁷ This meant that council was able to compensate somewhat for the reduced taxes paid by JM. It also showed how adverse to outsiders the community had become. This aversion grew to be a strong part of the local cultural identity in Asbestos.

By the end of the 1920s, the Quebec asbestos industry was extracting 300,000 tonnes of the fibrous mineral each year, a sharp rise from the 30,000 tonnes it produced at the end of the 19th century.⁵¹⁸ The seven asbestos producers around Thetford united under the Asbestos Corporation in an act of “patriotic self-preservation” to control wages and prices,⁵¹⁹ but much like William H. Jeffrey and the Asbestos Club, JM officials chose not to join the organization. Although it had to abide by U.S. anti-trust laws, JM instead joined an international cartel that would be an asbestos “League of Nations,” with Phillip Carey, Britain’s Turner & Newall, and Austria’s Eternit.⁵²⁰ The Asbestos Corporation had power in Quebec, but because of this global alliance, JM had international influence and was quickly informed of the latest mining technologies and new markets, which further added to the success of the Jeffrey Mine. This influence permeated the local cultural identity, but was soon put on hold with the onslaught of the Great Depression.

While the community had suffered hard economic times in the past, most recently in 1921, the early 1930s were devastating, as they were to the entire nation. French Canadian organizations formed throughout Quebec and demanded the government and economists fix the situation.⁵²¹ These organizations, such as L’Action française and Les

⁵¹⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 31 December 1928, p. 229.

⁵¹⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 2 June 1927, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹⁸ Linteau, et al, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929*, p. 321.

⁵¹⁹ Alexander Gray, “Asbestos Industry Readjusted,” *Canadian Mining Journal*, 9 April 1926, p. 402.

⁵²⁰ McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 25.

⁵²¹ *Le Rouge et le Blue: Une Anthologie de la Pensée Politique au Québec de la Conquête à la Révolution Tranquille*, Yvan Lamonde and Claude Corbo, eds. (Montreal: Les Presses de l’université de Montreal, 1999), p. 383.

Canadiens français, believed that if people from the province rather than international firms had managed Quebec's industries, the economy would not be suffering. Les Jeunes-Canada, a youth-based organization headed by future *Le Devoir* editor André Laurendeau, agreed, and in 1933 articulated it with the phrase, "maîtres chez nous."⁵²² The sentiment behind this phrase was in accordance with Asbestos town council passing a regulation that made those who had lived in the community for less than a year pay an extra "newcomers tax," as well as its refusal to allow Jewish families to live or work in the community because they were not Christian and many were believed to be communist radicals.⁵²³

Despite the good relationship fostered between the company and town council, even JM was not exempt from the changes the Depression brought to the community. With an increasing number of citizens unable to afford electricity, the town's contract with JM was suspended and the company was required to pay the full tax on its land. To go from paying just over \$500 in taxes in 1927 to \$16,689.86 in 1932⁵²⁴ was a financial blow to the company already suffering from the global economic downturn, and officials cited it as one of the reasons they were forced to close the Jeffrey Mine from May 1932 to April 1933.⁵²⁵

The closing of the Jeffrey Mine made life difficult for the community. Many residents had few savings and a great deal of humility was needed when they turned to town council for aid. Municipalities throughout Canada became responsible for supporting their citizens during the Depression⁵²⁶ and Asbestos was no exception. At the end of 1933 council applied to the provincially managed Secours-Direct for \$800 to help feed 30 local families and clothe and shelter 41 more.⁵²⁷ That 71 families were in need of aid even after JM resumed operations demonstrates the extent to which a year's worth of lost wages affected the people of Asbestos. Requests for provincial money continued

⁵²² Ibid, p. 381.

⁵²³ "A Good Dose of Racism," *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 73.

⁵²⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 25 January 1932, p. 435.

⁵²⁵ Elizabeth W. Gillies, "The Asbestos Industry Since 1929 with Special Reference to Canada," (Montreal: McGill University, 1941), pp. 44-45.

⁵²⁶ Susan Mann, *The Dream of a Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), p. 236.

⁵²⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 December 1933, p. 146.

throughout the Depression, with the town asking for \$950 on 9 May 1934 and \$900 more one week later.⁵²⁸

The process of distributing aid was entirely open: anyone who asked for financial help from the town was listed in the minutes, their apparent need was discussed and voted on by council, and if they received aid, the amount was made public.⁵²⁹ A single person in Asbestos during the Depression who would have made over \$3.00 a day in the 1920s received \$1.25 in aid each week and a married couple would get \$1.60 per week.⁵³⁰ The rate of aid increased according to the number of children a couple had. If they had one child they would get \$2.00, two children would grant them \$2.20, and the amount would increase all the way up to fourteen children, which would grant the family \$7.20 in aid each week.⁵³¹ This was not a great amount of money for any family in Asbestos that had experienced the wages of an industrial boom only a few years earlier.

JM paid its full amount of municipal tax throughout the Depression, making it the largest contributor to municipal revenue by supplying 70% of the town's income.⁵³² While it hired many townspeople back after the closure, the company could not afford a full workforce and operated shortened shifts with Sundays off.⁵³³ The lack of productivity of the Jeffrey Mine frightened the people of Asbestos and in July 1934 the town voted to try to get other industries to come to the community. The town argued that, "nous avons une seule industrie dont tout le monde ne peut y travailler pour différentes raisons...[et] il est de l'intérêt de tous les propriétaires, s'il y avait d'autres industries, pouvant employer jeunes filles, jeunes hommes et hommes âgés, ne pouvait travailler à la mine."⁵³⁴ This was the first of many times the town expressed its concern over being completely reliant on one industry, but despite this resolution, and those still to come, no other major industry ever came to Asbestos.

As council and JM developed their relationship with each other, Jeffrey Mine workers were also changing. Although the Catholic union movement attempted to recruit

⁵²⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 9 May 1934, p. 187, and 16 May 1934, p. 190.

⁵²⁹ See, *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 14 November 1934, p. 235 and 26 October 1936, p. 440.

⁵³⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 21 February 1934, p. 168.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 7 March 1934, p. 171.

⁵³³ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 74.

⁵³⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 16 July 1934, p. 211.

more members in the early 1930s,⁵³⁵ the economic climate prevented much progress, especially in Asbestos, where people were more concerned about the future of the industry than wages. Understanding the aversion to unions at this time, Taschereau's provincial government passed a law in 1934 that was in accordance with the CTCC's doctrine of cooperation and dictated that the government would enforce agreements established between workers and employers, whether a union was involved or not.⁵³⁶ Although it did not help membership, the law illustrated the CTCC's continued belief that all parties involved in labour issues should be willing to compromise.

Despite Taschereau's willingness to reform labour laws, the Liberal hold on Quebec was slipping and the CTCC began to change its policies in response to a conservative movement sweeping the province in the middle of the Depression. Maurice Duplessis, leader of the Union nationale, was elected Premier of Quebec in 1936, just as Taschereau's successor, Adélard Godbout, attempted to put an unemployment insurance program in place.⁵³⁷ Duplessis was ultra-conservative and immediately put an end to any program that distributed provincial money to the unemployed. He believed Quebec was, and should remain, a primarily agricultural province and was prepared to intervene in order to support this ideal.⁵³⁸ Duplessis was a sharp turn away from the longstanding policies of the Liberals, which had held office since 1897. The Duplessis government turned its back on suffering industrial communities like Asbestos.

The Depression and the aid distributed during it, combined with Duplessis' new policies, helped illustrate the benefits of collectives to those in industrial towns. Slowly, left-wing idealists began to infiltrate the Catholic union movement and leaders lobbied workers in the industries of the greatest importance to the province.⁵³⁹ The union in Asbestos, still ignored by JM, suddenly became energized under the activist leadership of Sherbrooke's abbé Aubert in 1936.

The workers had allowed JM to disregard their union because of the industry's instability. Furthermore, the company built and owned the houses many of them lived in,

⁵³⁵ Bernard L. Vigod, *Quebec before Duplessis: The Political Career of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), p. 132.

⁵³⁶ Morton, p. 158.

⁵³⁷ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard. *Quebec Since 1930*, Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmais, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1991), p. 108.

⁵³⁸ Richard Jones, *Duplessis and the Union Nationale Administration*, Terry Cook, ed., vol. 35, Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1983), p. 5.

⁵³⁹ Vallières, p. 215.

supplied medical care to the town, and was the main source of revenue and employment in the community: the workers had become dependent on JM. While Jeffrey Mine employees did not want to enter into an antagonistic relationship with the company, the Depression and its subsequent relief in 1937, combined with the recent urging of the Catholic union movement, convinced the workers to do as they had done when JM first came to Asbestos and go on strike to regain some control over operations at the Jeffrey Mine. The workers demanded a wage increase of 33% and recognition of their Catholic union.⁵⁴⁰ These demands were given to the company two weeks before the strike with the promise from JM's Shoemaker that they would have a response by 22 January. When no response was given, the workers in the manufacturing plant walked out and were soon followed by the men in the Jeffrey Mine.⁵⁴¹ In total, 1,100 men and 50 women went on strike for eight days.⁵⁴²

The *Toronto Clarion* called this "one of the most important strikes in the province" in recent memory because of the financial value of the asbestos industry,⁵⁴³ but the dispute had an even greater significance in the minds of the strikers: their labour was pulling JM out of the Depression and their role in the company's success had to be acknowledged. Despite the economic significance the industry had in the province, the workers believed this was a local issue and they wanted it to stay that way. This belief was articulated when they refused Duplessis' demand that negotiations take place in Quebec City under government supervision.⁵⁴⁴

The workers picketed the gates to the mine in such great numbers that JM staff could not enter the buildings.⁵⁴⁵ The workers did not own the mine, but their picketing showed the belief that their labour gave them some authority over how the Jeffrey Mine was run. When P.P. Bartleman, the official in charge of JM's employment office, rode his horse around the striking workers on the morning of the 26th, the picketing crowd forced

⁵⁴⁰ Strike Report, 27 March 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC.

⁵⁴¹ *The Montreal Gazette*, 25 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 34.

⁵⁴² H.K. Sherry, Strike Report, 2 February 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 8.

⁵⁴³ *The Toronto Clarion*, 27 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 29.

⁵⁴⁴ *The Montreal Gazette*, 26 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 31.

⁵⁴⁵ *The Ottawa Morning Citizen*, 26 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 30.

him back home. Later that afternoon, Bartleman once again rode around the strikers on his horse, this time pointing his revolver at the crowd and “displaying a spirit of bravado.”⁵⁴⁶ He was quickly disarmed and taken to the mayor’s office where a committee that included three JM heads publicly judged his conduct. The committee found Bartleman guilty and banished him from Asbestos. He was put on a train bound for Cornwall, Ontario that night.⁵⁴⁷

This was not an example of mob rule, but rather an upholding of certain values the entire town held dear. Bartleman had worked in Asbestos for almost a decade⁵⁴⁸ and for an impromptu court made up of JM officials and a portion of the striking employees to order him out of town was a sign of the strength of the workers and the company’s commitment to a cooperative spirit within the community. This stood in stark contrast to the failed attempts of the Thetford miners in 1923 to have their assistant manager fired. Two days following Bartleman’s banishment, C.H. Shoemaker returned to Asbestos to participate in strike negotiations. After a day of not coming to any resolution on increased wages, a group of 500 striking workers entered the Hotel Iroquois where negotiations were taking place, grabbed Shoemaker, and led him to city hall where they ordered him to leave Asbestos.⁵⁴⁹ He left town the next morning.

Although the *Sherbrooke Record* claimed, “the vice-president was severely beaten up by a crowd of hoodlums,” several other newspapers reported that neither official was harmed and Mayor Philippe Roy denied that any violence occurred.⁵⁵⁰ A reason for the *Record*’s conservative take on the events in Asbestos was that Sherbrooke was becoming increasingly powerful within the region and the province, as a local bourgeoisie rose with the increased industrial development along the river system. These new bourgeois elite were not sympathetic to an unruly working class, especially when it negatively impacted industry. H.K. Sherry took over Shoemaker’s job and a settlement was soon reached. The employees received the wage increase they had asked for, as well as recognition of their

⁵⁴⁶ *The Montreal Gazette*, 27 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 28.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁵⁴⁸ *The Toronto Clarion*, 28 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 26.

⁵⁴⁹ *The Toronto Telegram*, 29 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 23.

⁵⁵⁰ *The Winnipeg Manitoba Commonwealth*, 19 February 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 4.

union. President of JM, Lewis H. Brown, wrote to union head Olive Cyr, “we depend upon you and your organization to keep the peace and maintain order and preserve property at Asbestos and with the understanding that our employees will return to work as rapidly as arrangements can be made by our local manager.”⁵⁵¹ Brown also published his letter in the major newspapers that covered the labour dispute. The strike was over, the workers had succeeded in getting rid of two upper level officials, and JM entered into its first collective agreement with its Canadian employees and their union.⁵⁵² The people of Asbestos had yet to experience an unsuccessful strike, and these victories contributed to the confidence they felt and helped further develop the local cultural identity. While claims to mob rule in Shoemaker’s removal were made, the company’s willingness to cooperate with the workers, as well as its unwillingness to hold those who accosted Shoemaker accountable, demonstrates JM’s understanding of the need to share its authority with the workers in Asbestos.

Newspaper reports detailing the workers’ success in redefining industrial relations in Asbestos spread throughout the country. On 24 March 1937, the Duplessis government enacted la loi du cadenas, also known as the “Loi protégeant la province contre la propagande communiste,” which forbade groups of people meeting to discuss or publish pro-communist ideas and actions.⁵⁵³ This law heavily restricted union operations and actions because the government saw labour organizations as communist entities committed to overthrowing capitalism. Labour relations were changing in the province almost as fast as they were in Asbestos.

The Tug of War, 1938-1949

The post-strike environment in Asbestos was a cautious one, with attempts made on both sides to improve the relationship between the company and the workers. In February 1938, CJM Director A.O. Dufresne wrote,

We have received a letter...informing us of complaints made by French-speaking workmen of their inability to get employment in the mines because they could not make themselves understood by the employment agents...who spoke only English. The suggestion is made that the mine

⁵⁵¹ Lewis H. Brown, JM President, to Olive Cry, President of the National Catholic Syndicat, Asbestos, PQ, 29 January 1937. *The Toronto Telegram*, 29 January 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 9.

⁵⁵² *The Quebec Chronicle Telegram*, 24 March 1937. Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 330, Reel T-2713, LAC, p. 2.

⁵⁵³ *Le Rouge et le Bleu*, p. 427.

companies make it a requisite in the choice of their employment agents that they speak sufficiently well French and English.⁵⁵⁴

Although it did not mention him by name, this letter indicates that one of the problems the workers had with P.P. Bartleman, aside from his antics during the strike, was that he was in charge of the employment office at the Jeffrey Mine yet did not speak French, the only language the majority of employees spoke. The communication problems that arose from this situation were frustrating on both sides and this change of policy was an attempt by JM to build a better relationship with its workers. The company also wrote to the province asking if any of “our local boys” would be eligible for a government-sponsored program that helped French Canadians qualify for executive positions by getting university degrees in Mining Engineering.⁵⁵⁵

Attempts to improve company-worker relations addressed one of the key points of conflict between the two groups: JM management was exclusively Anglophone while almost all Jeffrey Mine employees were Francophone and had no opportunity to rise within the company ranks. The company hoped that this difference, and the animosity that arose because of it, would be minimized by these changes. On 20 September 1938, JM president Lewis H. Brown stated in the company’s Creed of Management, “business in this country has never been what it could be and never what it yet will be,” and by bringing Francophones into the upper ranks of the company, JM would attempt to change the almost-exclusively Anglophone business landscape of Quebec.⁵⁵⁶ Despite this goal, there is no evidence of JM actually instituting any such changes in Asbestos.

JM did attempt to bridge the Anglophone-Francophone divide in Asbestos with the 1938 introduction of the bilingual *Johns-Manville Photo*, a monthly newspaper that featured photographs of employees and their families at work and in the home. The first issue explained that while newspapers from outside the community were helpful, “there are always a lot of things going on in the Canadian Johns-Manville organization which are of particular interest to the people here...which are not carried by the daily

⁵⁵⁴ A.O. Dufresne, CJM Director, to “Gentlemen,” 14 February 1938. BANQ, P182 3A 017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁵⁵⁵ C.M. McGaw, CJM Department of Industrial Relations, to the Department of Labour, Quebec, 26 February 1938. BANQ, P182 3A 017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁵⁵⁶ Lewis H. Brown, “La Grève d’Asbestos: Rapport sur le fond de la Question et sur la Position de Canadian Johns-Manville Company, Ltd.” (Canadian Johns-Manville Company, Ltd., 1949), p. 16.

newspapers because they are not of general interest outside this community.”⁵⁵⁷ The company was not only a contributing member of Asbestos; it was a friendly one as well. JM used the newspaper to boost its image and encourage subtle changes in the behaviour of its employees. When company officials noticed that some of its workers were wasting material in the mining and milling process, they explained the problem as a household issue via the *Johns-Manville Photo*:

If your wife...were to burn the meat and spill half the potatoes on the floor, you probably would charge it up to bad luck...But, if this continued to happen every few days and you had to spend a lot more money for supplies just to make sure that there would be enough...then you'd try to do something to cut down on the waste...Of course, you could “Fire” your wife. But good wives are hard to find these days and, besides if you did that, there wouldn't be ANYTHING to eat.⁵⁵⁸

The company went on to explain that the same was true for wasting material at the Jeffrey Mine, which cost the company—the head of the household—a significant amount of money that could have been spent on higher wages.⁵⁵⁹

By comparing the operations at the Jeffrey Mine to how the average Asbestos household was run, JM wanted to foster an image of the company being one large family. In 1940, JM hosted the first “open house” at the Jeffrey Mine, where townspeople could see “how their husbands, fathers, brothers and sisters turned out the products which have made the name Johns-Manville world famous.”⁵⁶⁰ The absence of mothers from this list is significant. While married women in Asbestos did work at the Jeffrey Mine's Textile Department, this was discouraged because of the belief that a married woman's place was in the home raising children. The Jeffrey Mine was often celebrated as the location where young “Asbestos Beauties” would find husbands, but they were expected to stop working once they did.⁵⁶¹ The reality of this quickly changed with the labour demands of the Second World War.

Although the outbreak of the Second World War once again closed European markets to asbestos imports, the demand for the mineral rose exponentially because of the North American market. The government of Canada contracted JM to equip the Canadian

⁵⁵⁷ *Johns-Manville Photo*, December 1938, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁸ *Johns-Manville Photo*, June 1939, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ *Johns-Manville Photo*, October 1940, p. 2.

⁵⁶¹ This is based on an examination of every *Johns-Manville Photo* newspaper issued in Asbestos.

Army with fireproof material. In 1940, this included over \$50,000 for firefighting equipment, building supplies, and asbestos fabric to make fireproof uniforms.⁵⁶² The United States Army and Navy Munitions Board also had asbestos on its “critical minerals” list and was prepared to protect its Canadian suppliers via invasion if enemy powers took control of the mines.⁵⁶³ Canada was rapidly becoming a fully industrialized nation and the asbestos industry was a major part of this change. The people of Asbestos were not aware that the United States planned to invade their community if the Germans seized control of the Jeffrey Mine, but they were overtaken by a sense of importance because the mineral was so vital to the war effort. During the First World War, industry leaders deemed Jeffrey Mine workers “heroes,” and the community was excited to take on this role once again, especially because most of the eligible men in Asbestos chose not to enlist in the Canadian Forces.⁵⁶⁴

The mass industrialization and urbanization that took place in Quebec during the Second World War worried the Catholic clergy, who feared that social problems like class conflict and communist ideals would come with the shift.⁵⁶⁵ This concern was partly because the Church’s hold on the union movement in Quebec was slipping, as more secular labour leaders emerged. Union membership grew across Canada during the war and by 1943 one in three unionists was on strike. In Quebec, where the wartime economy was booming, there were 135 strikes in 1942 alone.⁵⁶⁶ While this was worrisome to the clergy and their union representatives, there was no unrest in Asbestos. The most socialist activity that occurred was when a group of local citizens founded the “Chez Nous Ideal” in 1942. The aim of the group was to have community members, not JM, construct houses for townspeople so that home ownership would increase and workers would not be dependent on the company for rented accommodation.⁵⁶⁷ Although JM attempted to strengthen its relationship with employees after the 1937 strike, the Chez Nous Ideal indicated that the people of Asbestos did not fully trust the company as a landlord and wanted to own their property, and adhered to the “maître chez nous” philosophy

⁵⁶² “For Release: Director of Public Information,” 26 April 1940, p. 2, 16 August 1940, p. 3, 27 September 1940, p. 4. BANQ, “Industries de Guerre,” E8 7A 021 03-05-001B-01; 1960-01-040\183 e24.

⁵⁶³ Oliver Bowles and K.G. Warner, “Asbestos,” *Minerals Yearbook*, Herbert Hughes, ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 1310.

⁵⁶⁴ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 97.

⁵⁶⁵ Ewen, p. 281.

⁵⁶⁶ Rouillard, *Le Syndicalisme Québécois*, p. 130.

⁵⁶⁷ Kesteman, et al, p. 675.

encouraged by a burgeoning group of nationalists. By applying this provincial “chez nous” movement—committed to getting French Canadians in charge of the economic destiny of the province—to their local situation, this group began to subtly change how the community functioned. The workers did not have to be dependent on the American company that owned the mine; they could rely on themselves.

Although the clergy, JM, and the Quebec government feared that strikes and “chez nous” housing organizations meant that the people were becoming increasingly radical, conservatism still reigned in Asbestos. In 1938 the community once again voted to continue the prohibition of alcohol within town boundaries.⁵⁶⁸ The workers, who were affectionately described by JM as an “industrial army,”⁵⁶⁹ successfully lobbied to cancel shifts on Sundays, a major coup considering the rising demand for the mineral during the war.⁵⁷⁰ Furthermore, the local newspaper preached the importance of women staying at home with their children rather than working in the “industry of war” because it believed mothers working industrial jobs led to a sharp rise in juvenile crime throughout the province.⁵⁷¹ This maintenance of conservative values was not limited to Asbestos, and in 1944 Duplessis and his Union nationale government were elected once again. Asbestos voted in favour of the conservative leader, and the shift back to Duplessis’ conservative policies worried leaders of the province’s labour movement, because his government was fervently anti-union and attracted foreign investors by advertising Quebec’s docile working class.⁵⁷² In 1944, Duplessis enacted the Labour Relations Act, which gave the government the power to recognize or discredit unions and to supervise collective bargaining procedures.

Union sympathizers believed the Labour Relations Act was a result of the government’s denial of how much the province was changing during the Second World War. Journalist and politician Gérard Pelletier wrote, “[a]près la guerre, au moment où la révolution industrielle s’était accélérée ici à un rythme effarant précisément à cause de la guerre, [Duplessis] tenait dur comme fer à l’agriculturisme, il était l’ennemi juré d’un

⁵⁶⁸ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 102.

⁵⁶⁹ *Johns-Manville Photo*, September 1944, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁰ *L’Asbestos*, 7 April 1943, p. 1.

⁵⁷¹ *L’Asbestos*, 17 February 1943, p. 3.

⁵⁷² Linteau, et al, *Quebec Since 1930*, p. 222.

syndicalisme libre, ouvert et militant.”⁵⁷³ Despite the vast wealth the industrialization of land brought the province, Duplessis continued to believe Quebec should be an agricultural province. In response to Duplessis’s labour policies and the changes it had experienced during the war, the CTCC elected social activist Gérard Picard as the organization’s new president. This coincided with the gradual abandonment of the union’s policy of cooperation with employers, focusing instead on economic democracy.⁵⁷⁴ No longer concerned with the good faith of companies, the post-war CTCC became focused on how industry was run in the province.

The war transformed Quebec industrial society and how workers organized, and further encouraged Jeffrey Mine workers. In the June 1942 issue of the *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, an editorial cartoon explained that the “four ways to hang Hitler” were to avoid accidents, smash sabotage, eliminate waste and increase production.⁵⁷⁵ By doing



Editorial cartoon distributed to Jeffrey Mine workers, June 1942.⁵⁷⁶

these things during the war, JM led Jeffrey Mine workers to believe they were partly responsible for defeating Hitler. Heroes once again, the workers began to assert their confidence and began a trend of short labour disputes in Asbestos that would last for years. This was first seen even before the end of the war on 22 March 1945 when the men who had been hired to sink the shaft mines beside rue Bourbeau went on strike.⁵⁷⁷ Eighteen of the 34 shaft sinkers struck, but they were subcontracted workers and were not represented by the union. They demanded higher wages and more reasonable expectations

⁵⁷³ Gérard Pelletier, “Témoignages.” Alain-G. Gagnon and Michel Sarra-Bournet, eds., *Duplessis: Entre la Grande Noirceur et la Société Libérale* (Montreal: Éditions Québec Amérique, 1997), p. 23.

⁵⁷⁴ Lapointe, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁷⁵ *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, June 1942, p. 7.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁵⁷⁷ Strike Report, 27 March 1945. “Strike 53, March 1945,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 440, Reel T-4072, LAC, p. 1.

for production, claiming that the footage expected of them each day was “almost impossible to reach.”⁵⁷⁸ Jeffrey Mine workers believed they had a right to influence production levels because of their primary role in the process, but JM disagreed and the demands were refused. Only two of the striking shaft sinkers returned to the job, with local men replacing the other 16, “as fast as they [could] be located.”⁵⁷⁹

While this strike was unsuccessful, more labour disputes erupted, although never again without a union. These strikes create the context for the lengthy strike at the start of 1949 that changed so much in the community. They also advance our understanding of the increasingly militant cultural identity in Asbestos that drastically changed in the years following the 1949 strike. Going over the major issues of these earlier strikes establishes a foundation of working class agitation and the willingness of JM to accommodate the demands of their employees to ensure the smooth functioning of operations at the Jeffrey Mine and in the community.

In November 1945, 300 men and 60 women, all union members working the midnight to 8am shift at the manufacturing plant, went on a short wildcat strike.⁵⁸⁰ In this case, the conflict was not between employees and JM, but rather between unionized and non-unionized workers. Union members complained that non-unionized employees reaped the benefits won from their labour disputes without paying into the union or standing alongside their fellow workers. Non-unionized Jeffrey Mine employees felt unionized workers slowed production by going on strike with outrageous demands. This was a problem solved in Ontario in 1945 with Justice Ivan Rand’s ruling on a strike at Ford. The resulting Rand Formula declared that all employees had to pay union dues, although they would not be forced to join the union.⁵⁸¹ This formula was initially enacted only in Ontario, but its adoption was one of the major demands made by the striking Jeffrey Mine workers in 1949.

⁵⁷⁸ R.L. Bruneau, Manager, Unemployment Insurance Commission, to Mr. MacLean, Director of Industrial Relations, Department of Labour, Ottawa, 22 March 1945. Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁷⁹ Strike Report, 27 March 1945, Ibid, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁰ C.M. McGaw, CJM, Strike Report, 28 November 1945. “Strike 197, November 1945,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 443, Reel T-4076, LAC, p. 1-2.

⁵⁸¹ Morton, p. 186.

The November 1945 dispute was followed by a 4 hour strike on 14 January 1946 that involved 150 Jeffrey Mine railway employees.⁵⁸² Reminiscent of the 1937 strike, the men objected to the way they were treated by a JM foreman currently up for promotion. They claimed that he was prone to “swearing when giving orders to his men, being unnecessarily rough at work, expecting too much to be done, [and was] unqualified for the job.”⁵⁸³ The foreman was refused promotion when the accusations were investigated by JM and found to be true.⁵⁸⁴ During the 1949 strike, JM would accuse union officials of wanting to have a say in company promotions and operations, but the strikes in 1937 and 1946 clearly demonstrate that this was something the workers had a history of demanding and receiving from JM.

Generally, the union was wary of pushing JM too far in this period. When 36 diggers working inside the Jeffrey Mine went on a wildcat strike in May 1946 that prevented 175 pit employees from working because they depended on the striking men, the union ordered them back to work.⁵⁸⁵ The dispute only lasted one hour and the wage increase employees were demanding was refused because JM and the union agreed they were “making actually enough money.”⁵⁸⁶ Having the strike stymied by their own union was a blow to Jeffrey Mine workers and demonstrated that even with the social activist Picard as the new president, the CTCC was still less militant than other unions in the province and the workers they represented. As a result, their membership dropped to 24.2% of Quebec’s union members, down from 37% in 1936⁵⁸⁷ when the economy was not doing half as well as it was following the Second World War. This was frustrating for the workers of Asbestos, who knew that the mineral they mined and processed was in great international demand, and should be giving them lobbying power, especially as JM’s annual report for 1948 acknowledged, “there is almost no field of human endeavour

⁵⁸² Strike Report, 26 January 1946. “Strike 3, January 1946,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 444, Reel T-4076, LAC, p. 3.

⁵⁸³ R.L. Bruneau, Manager, “Summary,” 16 January 1946. Ibid, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁴ C.M. McGaw, JM Industrial Relations Manager to Allen Pechles, Director, Research and Statistics Branch, Department of Labour, 21 January 1946. Ibid, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁵ R.L. Bruneau, “Report on Industrial Dispute,” 3 May 1946. “Strike 71, May 1946,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 445, Reel T-4077, LAC, p. 5.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Jones, *Duplessis and the Union Nationale Administration*, p. 12.

in which, at some stage or another, some JM product does not play a part.”⁵⁸⁸ Workers were growing convinced that the company depended on them, not the other way around.

With the asbestos industry thriving, it seemed to workers that it was an ideal time to negotiate with JM. By the end of 1947, the workers at Asbestos and Thetford successfully lobbied their respective companies to establish uniform contract and negotiation procedures throughout the entire Quebec asbestos industry.⁵⁸⁹ Despite this agreement, 2,650 workers at Thetford acted independently from those in Asbestos and went on strike in January 1948 in order to gain union security, a raise in wages, and the adoption of the Rand Formula.⁵⁹⁰ The strike lasted almost three days and workers returned to the pits without a resolution.

As Jeffrey Mine workers and JM grew more confident, tension in company-community relations rose. In April 1948 JM officials from New York visited the town to discuss improving public relations through a weekly company radio show, better circulation of information pamphlets, and closer ties with the local newspaper.⁵⁹¹ The company wanted to avoid a major confrontation with its workers, but following the visit, Quebec Minister of Labour, Antonio Barrette, wrote to the Commission des relations ouvrières and the provincial arbitrator that there was “a problem brewing” in Asbestos.⁵⁹² Seventy-two Jeffrey Mine employees were upset with JM for introducing new shovels in the pit that required fewer men to work them.⁵⁹³ This was a major issue that was directly connected to the increasing industrialization of the Jeffrey Mine, which the workers did not support.

Highlighting signs of growing worker frustration, the local newspaper reported that there had been incidents of sabotage at the Jeffrey Mine, with foreign objects being placed in the raw asbestos that broke processing machines and damaged JM’s reputation when tainted bags of the mineral were sold.⁵⁹⁴ The company responded that these

⁵⁸⁸ “Johns Manville Annual Report, 1948,” seen in McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 30.

⁵⁸⁹ Vallières, p. 215.

⁵⁹⁰ Report on Strike, 20 January 1948. “Strike 1, January 1948,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, Vol. 461, Reel T-4092, LAC, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹¹ *L’Asbestos*, 16 April 1948, p. 1.

⁵⁹² Gérard Tremblay, Quebec Deputy Minister of Labour, to Paul E. Bernier, Secretary, Commission de Relations ouvrières, 21 April 1948, and Gérard Tremblay, Quebec Deputy Minister of Labour, to Cyprien Miron, Director, Service de conciliation et d’arbitrage, 21 April 1948, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

⁵⁹³ Georges J. Lépine, Government of Quebec, “Rapport Préliminaire d’Intervention,” Arbitration Form, 29 April 1948, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

⁵⁹⁴ *L’Asbestos*, 23 April 1948, p. 1.

incidents constituted negligence, not malicious sabotage, but townspeople were shocked that workers had been accused.⁵⁹⁵ Relations between JM and its employees were crumbling. From January to April 1948, there were 92 suggestions for workplace reform made by Jeffrey Mine workers, more than the entire number given in 1947.⁵⁹⁶ Despite letters sent to JM by Barrette asking that there be no worker reductions at the Jeffrey Mine, the company refused and employees became even more agitated.

The company wanted to reduce three people from every shift at the manufacturing plant and two people from every shovel working in the Jeffrey Mine. The new shovels reduced the need for employees in the pit by 40%,⁵⁹⁷ and this was attractive to JM because the machines would increase extraction levels and profits while decreasing the company's reliance on an increasingly disgruntled and demanding workforce. The reduction would not be severe, but the provincial arbitration board reported that there was a "serious threat of strike" if it were to happen.⁵⁹⁸ The warning went unheeded by JM and the company held its ground at the arbitration table. Officials were aware that the union wanted fixed salaries included in the new collective agreement that would ensure a steady wage if new technologies that made employees redundant were introduced.⁵⁹⁹ This goal became even more important when JM announced that the Wool Rock Department at the factory would be closed in July and moved to Toronto where furnace products could be manufactured at a reduced cost.⁶⁰⁰ Workers were angry and their response to these changes suggests that they believed that JM had a responsibility to employ the people of Asbestos and not replace them with machines or cheaper labour in other provinces. Local union leader Armand Larivée wrote to the community's MNA Albert Goudreau that if the company did not agree to fixed wages for its employees and no reduction in staff, the workers would lose faith in JM and would remember the trouble the company has caused when the next collective agreement was being negotiated.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁵ *L'Asbestos*, 30 April 1948, p. 1.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Léopold Rogers, Government of Quebec, "Rapport Final d'Intervention," Arbitration Report, 21 May 1948, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

⁵⁹⁸ Cyrien Miron, Director, Service de conciliation et d'arbitrage, to Gérard Tremblay, Quebec Deputy Minister of Labour, 10 May 1948, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *L'Asbestos*, 14 May 1948. Department capitalized in official documents.

⁶⁰¹ Armand Larivée, SNA President, to Albert Goudreau, MLA, 19 June 1948, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

As tension rose in Asbestos, a provincial election took place. In January 1948, Duplessis unveiled a new flag for Quebec and this, combined with his repeated speeches on provincial autonomy and promises to protect French Canadians from “outsiders,” won his Union nationale government another record majority.⁶⁰² The people of Asbestos again supported the Duplessis government, and Mayor Adélar Godbout ran as the Union nationale representative for the county of Richmond and won.⁶⁰³

The townspeople’s support of the Union nationale was shaken, however, with the introduction of the draft provincial labour code Bill 5 in November 1948. This bill was supposed to bring recommendations and suggestions from employers and employees to the provincial government, but the CTCC rejected it completely, not trusting that Duplessis would acknowledge the concerns of workers.⁶⁰⁴ This was a sharp departure from the spirit of cooperation preached by the Catholic unions before the Second World War and showed just how much the organization, and the people it represented, had changed. Because of the CTCC’s public and hostile rejection of Bill 5, it was withdrawn from the Quebec legislature, making it appear as though the government had retreated under union pressure.⁶⁰⁵

The defeat of Bill 5 was a significant victory for the union movement in Quebec. In January 1949, when CTCC President Gérard Picard arrived in Asbestos with newly appointed Secretary Jean Marchand, the community greeted them with a parade as though they were war heroes returning from the front. Picard and Marchand gave the local union its own flag and every worker at the Jeffrey Mine and their families were required to attend a meeting with them on 14 January in the basement of l’Église St-Aimé.⁶⁰⁶ CTCC officials went to Asbestos to negotiate a new collective agreement with JM that, in the wake of the introduction of the new shovels in the pit and the closing of the Wool Rock Department, would include salary and job security.⁶⁰⁷

Of JM’s 2,083 employees at the Jeffrey Mine, 1,733 would be directly affected by the negotiations; this number excluded only those who had worked for the company for

⁶⁰² *L’Asbestos*, 30 July 1948, p. 2.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁴ Antonio Barrette, *Memoirs*, Marc Sormont, trans. (Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1966), p. 100.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶⁰⁶ *L’Asbestos*, 14 January 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

less than 16 years, employees under 16 years old, and office staff.⁶⁰⁸ While a percentage of JM's workforce came from outside Asbestos, the majority of employees came directly from the community itself, and as the main source of employment for the town, the majority of the local population was directly invested in Jeffrey Mine operations. Despite the faith the workers had in Picard and Marchand, negotiations broke down after only two weeks of meeting with JM officials.⁶⁰⁹ At the start of February 1949, the community was uncertain over what would happen next during the standoff between the fundamental factions of the community: the working class Francophone majority, the town council now allied with the Union nationale, and the elite Anglophone minority running the Jeffrey Mine. As the strike of 1949 began, the local cultural identity in Asbestos was challenged by internal and external forces and it would be radically changed during the five months of the dispute. The community of Asbestos would never be the same.

⁶⁰⁸ "Renseignements qui doivent accompagner une requête pour intervention conciliatrice en vertu des dispositions de l'article 13 de la loi des relations ouvrières de la province," Intervention Paper, 31 January 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

⁶⁰⁹ G.K. Foster, CJM, to Antonio Barrette, Quebec Minister of Labour, 31 January 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

Chapter 5: Bodies Collide, The Strike of 1949

Just before midnight on 13 February 1949, Jeffrey Mine workers met in l'église St-Aimé and, against the advice of their union leaders, voted to strike. A few days later, every other asbestos mining community in l'Estrie except East Broughton followed.⁶¹⁰ Because they did not wait for an arbitration board to be established, this violated Quebec's Loi des Relations ouvrières and the strike was illegal,⁶¹¹ but this did not concern the workers. The 1949 strike was not the first time the workers had challenged JM, and they had a history of short, successful strikes. The workers hoped that after the dispute was resolved, Asbestos would be fundamentally changed, but they had no idea how much this would be true.

Although the 1949 strike had provincial, national, and international repercussions, the strike was a profoundly local affair, with land, people, and the community all being radically redefined. The 1949 strike was primarily a battle over bodies and an articulation of the local cultural identity. The workers went on strike to reform their collective agreement with JM, but their demands can be placed on three main pillars: how land was used in Asbestos, how issues of occupational health were addressed, and how community decisions and dynamics were negotiated among the working class, town council, and JM. Operations at the Jeffrey Mine were frozen for five months as workers demanded to have a say over how the company industrialized the land. After Bruno LeDoux's exposé on asbestosis, JM employees no longer trusted the company and refused to return to work until the health hazards the mineral posed were properly addressed and toxic dust was eliminated. Furthermore, the strike revealed a broader struggle in Asbestos, and Quebec, over who would dictate the development of communities and industry in the province: the French Canadian working class majority or the Anglophone managing elite. The striking workers and JM fought over who had the authority to dictate how people and place were understood in the community, and their battle focused on the Jeffrey Mine, which had brought them "un progrès aussi rapide et si constant."⁶¹² Using a combination of local and company accounts, such as the town's newspaper and JM correspondence, which have

⁶¹⁰ Cyprien Miron, Quebec Workers Relations Commission, to Gérard Trembley, Deputy Minister of Labour, Quebec, 14 February 1949, BANQ, P182 3 A017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁶¹¹ Antonio Barrette, Quebec Minister of Labour, to Jean Marchand, Secretary of the CTCC and Rodolphe Hamel, President of the SNA, no date, BANQ, P182 3 A017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁶¹² *L'Asbestos*, 7 January 1949, p. 1.

never been used before, this chapter will offer a renewed analysis of the dispute, dispelling myths of revolution and victimization, and focusing on the community directly involved in the conflict. The people of Asbestos knew the strike had implications beyond the limits of the town,⁶¹³ but it was their own, local concerns that shaped their actions and reactions during the strike.

“Cette grève ne durera pas 48 heures,” February to March 1949

February 1949 began unexceptionally. Town council appealed to the province for a grant to attract new industry and annexed more land on which to build new houses.⁶¹⁴ JM paid over \$8,000 in municipal taxes and Dr. Kenneth Smith wrote a report on the need for better dust control measures at the mill.⁶¹⁵ JM also announced to its employees that 1948 was “BIG NEWS!” as the company prospered from a postwar boom that led to record profits.⁶¹⁶ The people of Asbestos were partly responsible for these profits, as the Jeffrey Mine provided JM with the vast majority of the company’s supply of mineral. One hundred and thirty one of these local workers had been employed by JM for over 25 years, longer than many of the company’s officials, which gave them a unique understanding of how the Jeffrey Mine had been run in the past, and how it could be run in the future. Goods were purchased, bills were paid, but a sense of uneasiness reigned: the workers had been without a contract for over a month, and they had recently read Burton LeDoux’s exposé on how asbestos dust affected the human body.

It was amid this atmosphere that union members met in the basement of l’église St-Aimé at 11pm on 13 February. Despite CTCC Secretary Jean Marchand’s request that they wait for contract negotiations to address their concerns, workers overwhelmingly voted to strike. The local role they had played in bringing global economic success to the community via international trade networks gave the workers confidence in their own abilities to achieve contract reform without being dependent on their union. JM officials knew something was wrong when the Jeffrey Mine went silent at midnight as the evening

⁶¹³ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 114. In an article on the strike in this issue of the local paper, it is acknowledged that because of the importance of the industry to Quebec’s economy and because of the number of key national and provincial political figures who became involved in the dispute.

⁶¹⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 2 February 1949, p. 38 and *L’Asbestos*, 11 February 1949, p. 4.

⁶¹⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 2 February 1949, p. 37 and “Asbestos Chronology,” 3 February 1949, ACRF, p. 46.

⁶¹⁶ *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, January 1949, p. 6-7.

shift ended.⁶¹⁷ This silence would have been noticed throughout the community, too, which was used to sleeping with the noise of production. The 2,100 striking workers set up headquarters at city hall after local police chief Albert Bell willingly gave them the keys.⁶¹⁸

The strike eventually involved 5,000 workers throughout l’Estrie, but newspaper accounts of the dispute made it clear that those at Asbestos were the ones to watch because of the size of JM, its workforce, and the Jeffrey Mine, “l’une des plus importantes mines d’amiante du monde.”⁶¹⁹ Because the workers at Asbestos were the first to strike, they also dictated the terms on which the conflict would end. Their major demands were a raise of 15 cents to bring wages to \$1.00 an hour, plus 5 cents more for night shifts (which would cost JM an additional \$120,000 each year), job security so machines would not replace workers, better dust control to prevent asbestosis, more time off, and union input in promotions. The workers also wanted the adoption of the Rand Formula, requiring 3% of the wages of all employees, even nonunionized ones, to be paid as union dues.⁶²⁰ These were all types of demands the workers had made in previous strikes, but had yet to achieve.

JM in response refused to accept the Rand Formula, to allow unions to have a say in promotions,⁶²¹ or to admit to a health problem at the Jeffrey Mine, but the workers believed they could force the company into submission because by being on strike, workers stopped the flow of asbestos to the company’s 20 manufacturing plants across North America and forced the 300 non-unionized employees at the Jeffrey Mine to stop work because of a lack of raw mineral.⁶²² At the start of the strike, the company was dependent on them.

Chief Bell reported that the workers were acting calmly and quietly. When not picketing at the gates to the Jeffrey Mine, strikers held meetings in which only union members were allowed except for one reporter, Gérard Pelletier, who worked for *Le Devoir*. Pelletier was friends with CTCC Secretary Jean Marchand and when he was sent to Asbestos at the start of the conflict, Marchand told him, “[s]i tu as ta brosse à dents, ca

⁶¹⁷ *La Tribune*, 15 February 1949, p. 5.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶²⁰ *Le Devoir*, 15 February 1949, p. 1, and *La Tribune*, 14 February 1949, p. 1 and 15 February 1949, p. 5.

⁶²¹ C.W. Hite, JM New York Office, to Yvan Sabourin, lawyer, CJM Asbestos, 7 February 1949, QAMA.

⁶²² *The Globe and Mail*, 15 February 1949, p. 7.

suffit. Tu n'as même pas besoin d'un pyjama; cette grève ne durera pas 48 heures.”⁶²³ Pelletier remained in Asbestos for five months. Although he was the only member of the press who stayed in the community for the duration of the conflict and the only reporter whom workers allowed into their homes, Pelletier's reports have never been studied in depth. This is possibly because his criticism of Duplessis and his later career as a federal Liberal cabinet minister led scholars to interpret his reports as simply yet another young intellectual attack on the government's conservative hold of the province,⁶²⁴ when they actually offer valuable insight into the thoughts and experiences of those on strike.

Pelletier spent months getting to know the people involved in the strike and how they interpreted and coped with the changes it brought to their community. The regional newspaper, Sherbrooke's *La Tribune*, supported JM and promoted the belief that the workers were bitterly divided over whether to stay on strike or not, and had enough money and health benefits already.⁶²⁵ On the other side of the spectrum, according to Pelletier, *Le Devoir* “not only took the side of the striking workers, but conducted a systematic campaign on their behalf throughout the course of the conflict.”⁶²⁶ Pelletier's experiences in Asbestos and those of other reporters who were allowed temporary access reveal the townspeople to be strongly conservative and religious, not the left-wing, secular idealists Trudeau's 1956 collection on the conflict implied.⁶²⁷ At least once a day strikers celebrated mass at St-Aimé and when outsiders arrived with alcohol to raise the spirits of the workers they were chased out of the dry community.⁶²⁸ Showing just how non-confrontational the conflict was, picketers even let some JM employees pass the gates to the Jeffrey Mine so they could pump out the groundwater filling the pit, ensuring equipment would not be damaged.⁶²⁹

Despite the initially peaceful nature of the dispute, on 18 February, just after the local paper published a message from JM stating that the demands of the workers were unreasonable,⁶³⁰ 200 strikers broke through the gates at the Jeffrey Mine and forced the

⁶²³ Gérard Pelletier, *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 114.

⁶²⁴ See, for example, Conrad Black, *Duplessis* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), p. 521.

⁶²⁵ *La Tribune*, 15 February 1949, p. 5.

⁶²⁶ Gérard Pelletier, “The Strike and the Press,” in *The Asbestos Strike*, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, ed. (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1970), p. 243.

⁶²⁷ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, “Epilogue,” in *The Asbestos Strike*.

⁶²⁸ *La Tribune*, 15 February 1949, p. 5.

⁶²⁹ *L'Asbestos*, 18 February 1949, p. 1.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

factory manager and two female office staff members off JM property, while taking their pay cheques from the week before.⁶³¹ The company wrote frantic telegrams to Quebec Minister of Labour Antonio Barrette and Premier Maurice Duplessis requesting the assistance of the Sûreté provinciale.⁶³² JM officials described the community as being in a state of anarchy and “[w]hen the municipal council is silent can we not count at least on the immediate assistance of the police force of this province.... We have been here more than a half century operating and maintain that our record and our rights call for a measure of protection.... If you ignore further request we feel that any consequence from violence will be your responsibility.”⁶³³ The fact that town council was not intervening in the strike at this time shows that the community did not believe the labour dispute would be long enough to significantly impact local affairs. The longest Jeffrey Mine workers had been on strike in the past was eight days, and this was only day four. Neither Chief Bell nor town council were alarmed by the situation, although four more officers were hired to bring the local police force to 11 men. Bell himself went into the Jeffrey Mine to make sure the pumps were running.⁶³⁴ The workers and the local police were neighbours and even played cards together at the beginning of the strike; there was little evidence of anarchy.⁶³⁵

After strikers forcibly entered company property, JM sued the union for \$500,000 worth of damages, and filed an injunction to prevent picketing outside the Jeffrey Mine. At 2am on 20 February, at the request of JM and on Duplessis’ orders, 60 provincial policemen arrived in Asbestos. The presence of the provincial police was unnecessarily heavy-handed based on the patterns established over the past decade of labour conflicts in Asbestos, and immediately changed the character of the strike. Company-community, upper class-working class, Anglophone-Francophone relations had radically shifted away from the established spirit of negotiation and would never be the same again. While JM and Duplessis may have believed this was a necessary force in order to control the workers, the people of Asbestos saw it as an invasion of their community and an insult to

⁶³¹ *La Tribune*, 19 February 1949, p. 1.

⁶³² Canadian Johns-Manville Co., to Antonio Barrette and Maurice Duplessis, 18 February 1949, BANQ, P182 3 A017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁶³³ CJM to Antonio Barrette and Maurice Duplessis, 18 February 1949, BANQ, P182 3 A017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-013\3.

⁶³⁴ *La Tribune*, 21 February 1949, p. 1, and *Le Devoir*, 21 February 1949, p. 2.

⁶³⁵ *Le Devoir*, 23 February 1949, p. 1.

striking workers. Bell reacted to the provincial police in Asbestos by telling *La Tribune* that “S’ils viennent, c’est alors que cela va aller mal...Les grévistes sont paisibles et ils n’ont fait aucun dommage à la propriété,”⁶³⁶ and Pelletier reported that the arrival of the police was “considérée à Asbestos comme un geste de méfiance que rien ne justifie.”⁶³⁷ The company and the government deeming the strike illegal and sending provincial police to the town suggested that striking workers were criminals, an idea offensive to the local population, so proud of the labour they had done to make the Jeffrey Mine so successful. Once the provincial police had arrived, seven young strikers followed one of their patrol cars through the streets and were apprehended after one said, “[n]ous sommes des grévistes et nous voulons savoir ce que vous faites.”⁶³⁸ This again expressed the confidence of the workers, bold enough to demand information from the provincial police, but following several hours of interrogation—which ended in the strikers crying and apologizing—they were released with their confidence shaken.

While council attempted to remain neutral, it had to address the new police presence, especially because the policemen were each paid \$50 a week by JM⁶³⁹ and brought alcohol into Asbestos to drink between patrols. The minutes of the 21 February council meeting show how badly the force was received. Council believed there were now 150 officers in the community who had arrived in a state of inebriation, and, “un certain nombre se sont même rendu coupables d’actes indécents dans les rues de la ville et aussi d’avoir été des causes de désordre dans les places publiques...dans certains cas les polices provinciales ont usé de violence...[et] ces actes ont été accomplis sans avertissement et dans le but évident de provoquer des troubles.”⁶⁴⁰ The presence of the provincial police immediately changed town dynamics and the way the community related to JM. Understanding the threat the police posed to community-company relations, council voted unanimously to request the immediate removal of the force. The entire country was suddenly acquainted with the “indecent acts” of Quebec’s provincial police through the press.⁶⁴¹ Mayor Albert Goudreau, a member of the Union nationale

⁶³⁶ *La Tribune*, 21 February 1949, p. 1.

⁶³⁷ *Le Devoir*, 21 February 1949, p. 2.

⁶³⁸ *La Tribune*, 23 February 1949, p. 3.

⁶³⁹ *Le Devoir*, 22 March 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 21 February 1949, p. 38.

⁶⁴¹ See, for example, “Police Drunk, Indecent, Caused First Disorders, Asbestos Council Says,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 February 1949, p. 11, and *The Toronto Star*, 21 February 1949, p. 11 and 14.

government, brought the resolution to Duplessis himself in hopes that the premier would recall the force.

In response to council's resolution, the director of the Sûreté provinciale, Hilaire Beaugard, issued a statement saying that there were only 60 provincial police in Asbestos and while some had beer with their dinner, none had time to become drunk.⁶⁴² Pelletier contradicted this, saying that many provincial policemen were seen bringing supplies of beer into Asbestos from Danville and Richmond to store it at their new barracks, JM's Hotel Iroquois,⁶⁴³ which was where single male Jeffrey Mine workers usually lived. Duplessis denied town council's request and the police remained.

The continued presence of the provincial police changed the character of the strike and the town. They escorted office staff through the gates of the Jeffrey Mine and patrolled the streets, telling anyone who was outside at night to return home. At a union meeting at St-Aimé on 22 February, strikers expressed their outrage but renewed their commitment to a non-violent strike. This inspired parish priest and union head curé Louis-Philippe Camirand to poke fun at reports that said the people of Asbestos were uncivilized, stating he was "très heureux de vivre avec de tels sauvages," much to the delight of the crowd.⁶⁴⁴ Camirand's support convinced workers that their strike was morally just, and encouraged them to remain committed to achieving their demands.

JM reacted to the arrival of the police in a different manner. The company wrote in the local paper that council's resolution against the police ignored the real violence of the dispute, which included an illegal strike and the invasion of JM property.⁶⁴⁵ Local opinion did not agree with the company, and Pelletier's description of JM as being "la plus coriace des companies,"⁶⁴⁶ was deemed apt at the beginning of March when rumours began to spread of JM looking for replacement employees from outside Asbestos.⁶⁴⁷

No replacement workers were seen at this time to confirm the rumour, which JM denied, but the company warned that a long strike would have wide-ranging effects far beyond the community and region.⁶⁴⁸ The company also sent strikers weekly letters

⁶⁴² *The Globe and Mail*, 23 February 1949, p. 10.

⁶⁴³ *Le Devoir*, 23 February 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁵ *L'Asbestos*, 25 February 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁶ *Le Devoir*, 25 February 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁷ *La Tribune*, 1 March 1949, p. 5.

⁶⁴⁸ *L'Asbestos*, 4 March 1949, p. 1.

urging them to return to work so negotiations could begin. The letter of 28 February claimed that the union was concealing facts from strikers, and focused on the illegality of the conflict and the claim that Jeffrey Mine equipment had been damaged because of it.⁶⁴⁹ To bypass the union in this manner and appeal directly to the workers' sense of law, order and duty was an attempt by JM to weaken the connection between strikers and their union, and to work within the closed framework of Asbestos without relying on outsiders. The company's attempt to convince strikers not to rely on their union demonstrated JM's mistaken belief that its employees were not as militant as their outside union leaders. This was certainly not the case, as demonstrated by the workers' vote to strike without the consent of the CTCC. It also showed that the company underestimated the intelligence of the community: if the workers should not rely on outside union aid, why was it okay for JM to call in the provincial police? Summing up the collective response to the company letter, Pelletier wrote, "les résultats sont nuls."⁶⁵⁰

As the strike continued, and the injunction against picketing at the Jeffrey Mine was extended to April, Mayor Goudreau began to express his fears for the future of Asbestos:

le commerce commence à souffrir de cette grève et partant, toute notre ville, car il ne faut pas oublier que la "Johns-Manville" est à peu près la seule industrie d'Asbestos et qu'elle emploie 2,100 ouvriers. L'activité municipale est aussi paralysée; la ville a suspendu des travaux en cours et elle a remis à une date ultérieure et indéterminée la mise à exécution de nombreux projets dont l'urgence était pourtant incontestable.⁶⁵¹

The strike had already deeply affected the town. Council could not proceed with its plans for development and, with 2,100 citizens not receiving wages, commercial businesses began to struggle for lack of customers.

Asbestos was caught in a state of uncertainty as rumours of a lengthy strike plagued the community. It was clear that this was not going to be another short and simple strike. In order to ease these worries, Marchand and local union head Roldolphe Hamel held a meeting on 6 March solely for the wives of the men on strike. This was highly unusual for a labour dispute in Canada at this time, but the CTCC wanted to make

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

⁶⁵⁰ *Le Devoir*, 3 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁵¹ *La Tribune*, 4 March 1949, p. 3.

sure that workers had the support of their families, many of whom were worried about the length of the strike.⁶⁵² Pelletier was the only member of the press allowed to attend the meeting and the only one to report on it. He wrote that the hall at St-Aimé was full of “jeunes femmes, de vieilles mamans, quelques enfants pour lesquels on n’avait pas trouvé de gardiennes (ou de gardien, puisque la plupart des papas étaient restés pour une fois à prendre soin de la maison).”⁶⁵³ The role reversal of wives and mothers at a union meeting while the striking men of Asbestos remained at home shows how much the conflict, and the issues it raised, had affected the entire community. The women listened to union representatives speak about the goals of the strike for two hours and then had the chance to ask questions, which they did with enthusiasm, revealing their prime concerns. Their questions addressed worries over the union having its certification revoked by the government, concerns about the illegality of the strike, fears of what asbestos did to human health, and how their families were to be supported without any wages.⁶⁵⁴ The inclusion of health-related questions reveals just how much LeDoux’s exposé on asbestosis had permeated the community.

After their questions were answered the women left the hall and strikers, both male and female, entered, “plus graves, moins légers, après ces trois semaines de grève.”⁶⁵⁵ Pelletier reported that morale remained high, however, especially as the meeting turned into a rally for Marchand, whom JM had named the “biggest obstacle” to a resolution and who had been banned from negotiations by the Quebec government.⁶⁵⁶ The meeting provides insight into how deeply families were involved in the dispute. Having a “wives meeting” showed that the union understood its members and the questions they asked indicate that women were not passive bystanders in the strike.

JM attempted to follow this example of inclusivity when it sent a second letter to its employees, which again stressed the illegality of the strike and stated, “[n]e tenant pas compte de ce qui peut avoir été écrit avant ou pendant la grève, vous devriez comprendre de plus en plus que votre échelle de salaire et vos conditions de travail sont parmi les

⁶⁵² *Le Devoir*, 7 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁶ *Le Devoir*, 8 March 1949, p. 1.

meilleures au Canada?”⁶⁵⁷ The letter suggested that strikers should return to the Jeffrey Mine, proud of what they had already accomplished in past negotiations. JM again failed to understand that what the workers were proud of was the international role they played in the industry, extracting fibre that went around the world, helping armies achieve peace, keeping people safe from fire, and making the company an incredible amount of money. These accomplishments gave strikers the confidence to insist their salaries and working conditions, although among the best in Canada, still were not good enough for them. They operated on a different scale and wanted more. This feeling was seen in the workers’ response to the ballot JM included with the letter, asking, “Désirez-vous, oui ou non, reprendre le travail?”⁶⁵⁸ Each employee was to return the ballot to JM offices, but Pelletier claimed that none of the striking men he talked to intended to do so. A lack of trust in the company, disbelief that the vote had any validity, and fear of betraying the union by being seen entering JM offices were all reasons for this reluctance.

The company also published a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper reinforcing its belief that strikers wanted to return to work, adding that each employee lost \$7.90 in wages every day and Asbestos lost \$90,000 each week because of it.⁶⁵⁹ This was a significant amount of money and speaks not only to the severity of the situation, but also the resolve of those on strike. The newspaper ad was an attempt by JM to bring the community around to its way of thinking, showing how the company understood the labour dispute affected the entire town while still failing to appreciate how the community’s cultural identity gave the workers support and the confidence to strike.

The loss of wages and JM’s continued focus on the strike’s illegality did not convince the people of Asbestos to push for an end to the conflict. Instead, it angered the community, and townspeople expressed their anger by accusing the editor of the local paper of being against strikers because of how often he published the opinions of JM.⁶⁶⁰ Although the editor claimed union heads ignored his requests for information, the accusation demonstrates that the letters and ads from the company were changing the dynamics of the entire community.

⁶⁵⁷ *L’Asbestos*, 11 March 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁵⁸ *Le Devoir*, 14 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁹ *L’Asbestos*, 7 March 1949, p. 6. Before the strike, Jeffrey Mine workers earned 85 cents an hour and typically worked eight hour shifts each day.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1.

JM's attempts to win the opinion of the public were counteracted by the fact that it was lodging the provincial police on company property. The police narrowly defined "order" in Asbestos and at the slightest offence, such as driving without a license, citizens were immediately sent to a Sherbrooke jail.⁶⁶¹ This created a deep divide between JM and the community, with townspeople believing they were being treated as criminals by an outside police force funded and housed by the company. Town council attempted to mediate this issue, as well as the strike, when it met with JM on 11 March to determine the company's terms for negotiations to begin and for the police to leave, then reported these demands to strikers.⁶⁶² Although the company stopped emphasizing the illegality of the strike, workers continued to distrust JM officials, and these talks had little effect.

Tension finally erupted in the community just after 11pm on 14 March, when twenty feet of railway line running between the Jeffrey Mine and the Grand Trunk station at Danville was blown up.⁶⁶³ The attack was a response to rumours of outside strikebreakers being brought in to work the Jeffrey Mine. Blowing up the tracks was a dramatic articulation of the local cultural identity: even though JM owned the mine and a small percentage of the company's workforce came from the surrounding area, the Jeffrey Mine belonged to the people of Asbestos, through their labour, their sacrifices, and their history. The mine, and its valuable fibre, became hostages in Asbestos. The strike had been peaceful up to this point, but as soon as the local connection to the Jeffrey Mine was threatened, strikers reacted with force.

With the rising tension in the community came a tightening of the definition of "local." The night following the explosion on the train tracks, a group of strikers attacked a non-unionized worker, Paul Beauchemin, outside city hall. Beauchemin had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for only three months and was not on strike. The thought that this relative newcomer continued to earn wages and helped keep the mill running angered strikers, and he was beaten until the provincial police arrived and took him to the JM hospital.⁶⁶⁴ This stood in stark contrast to when striker Edmond Delorme broke his leg attacking a company truck the evening after the Beauchemin attack. Delorme was taken

⁶⁶¹ *Le Devoir*, 11 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁶² *Le Devoir*, 12 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁶³ *La Tribune*, 15 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁴ *L'Asbestos*, 18 March 1949, p. 1.

to a hospital in Sherbrooke, not the local one run by JM,⁶⁶⁵ reminding workers how dependent they were on the company's health facilities in the community. A local Jeffrey Mine employee who did not strike or belong to the union was now someone who did not abide by the cultural identity of the town: in the new Asbestos that the labour dispute was creating, people like Beauchemin were betraying the community, and their "local" status was questioned. Although tension between unionized and nonunionized employees was not new, Asbestos was changing and neighbours, buildings, and streets were taking on new characteristics.

The union excused this violence as being a reaction to provocations of the provincial police and encouraged by JM so that workers would lose the support of the public.⁶⁶⁶ The union's claim was more self-serving than likely. The constant threat of strikebreakers led union heads to request that town council refuse to allow "scabs" into the community.⁶⁶⁷ Despite the history of labour disputes in Asbestos, strikebreakers had never been used at the Jeffrey Mine before, and the request expressed the genuine fear strikers had of outside workers threatening their place at the mine and their role in the international markets it fed. To have outsiders filling these jobs would drastically affect the local cultural identity and company-community dynamics. Council did not have the power to restrict who JM could hire, but the violence showed that the workers were prepared to protect their connection with the Jeffrey Mine any way they could.

"Notre grève est juste et morale," March to April 1949

JM responded to the violence by placing advertisements in the local newspaper's 18 March edition, attacking CTCC officials for lying about the issues of the strike. The ads accused the union—not the strikers—of breaking the law, in another attempt to put a wedge between the workers and the CTCC, and to suggest that JM understood the anger felt by those on strike when told that the dispute was illegal.⁶⁶⁸ The ads stressed that the company would protect the rights of its employees with whom JM had worked in harmony for over 12 years, conveniently forgetting the 6 other strikes that had occurred in Asbestos over that time period. JM claimed that the ballots it sent out the week before showed that 97% of strikers wanted to return to work, but as Pelletier pointed out, "[I]a

⁶⁶⁵ *La Tribune*, 17 March 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁸ *L'Asbestos*, 18 March 1949, pp. 5-6.

statistique fantastique de la compagnie a fourni aux ouvriers une des meilleures rigolades depuis le début de la grève.”⁶⁶⁹ The people of Asbestos did not believe the company’s claims, and workers had begun to laugh at JM’s efforts to bring the community over to its way of thinking. The company had no chance of gaining the support of workers until it addressed issues of land, health, and community. Even JM doctor Kenneth Smith believed JM could not ignore these issues and wrote to company officials to try to convince them to stop their denial of the negative health claims and concerns being voiced by workers.⁶⁷⁰ Doing this would have been an official acknowledgement of the threat asbestos posed to human health, an acknowledgement the company could not afford to make.

Although attempts to swing the opinion of strikers and other community members in favour of JM were constant, the increased presence of provincial policemen since the train tracks were dynamited prevented progress. The arrival of a truckload of provisions donated by the people of Sherbrooke on 18 March boosted the spirits of those on strike and made them even more determined to continue the dispute. An estimated \$1,500 worth of food filled the truck and strikers greeted it with cheers and gratitude.⁶⁷¹ The company could not starve them back to work, and strikers’ worries over how to support their families were eased.

Although the donated food boosted community spirit, Asbestos remained bitterly divided along linguistic, class, and religious lines, and this divide reached the town’s churches. The largely-Catholic provincial police heard mass and took communion at JM’s Hotel Iroquois, so they were fully removed from the townspeople when not on patrol. The majority of JM officials were protestant, but which of the two Catholic Churches in Asbestos a citizen chose to attend during the conflict revealed who sided with the company and who sympathized with the workers. Local union official curé Louis-Phillippe Camirand gave mass each day at St-Aimé and publicly defended the workers. By contrast, curé Alphonse Deslandes at St-Isaac-Joques spoke against the strike as being bad for the families of Asbestos, of whom 50 to 60 would be unable to pay rent by the

⁶⁶⁹ *Le Devoir*, 19 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁰ Kenneth Smith to G.K. Foster, CJM President, 19 March 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 50.

⁶⁷¹ *Le Devoir*, 19 March 1949, p. 3.

end of March.⁶⁷² In response to Deslandes' opinion, people stopped donating during mass and several citizens expressed their desire to "casser le gueule au curé."⁶⁷³ The threat to kick a priest's teeth in showed just how deeply the striking workers had internalized the conflict, making their cause more important than respecting a church official. The differences between Camirand and Deslandes indicates how divided the opinion of the Catholic Church was when it came to labour issues at the time, but Camirand's support was enough to convince the workers that the strike was morally justified.

Tension was especially high in Asbestos because JM had begun employing strikebreakers to process what fibre remained. Anyone who threatened one of these strikebreakers was arrested. On the night of 22 March, over 30 policemen arrived at Roger Beauchemin's⁶⁷⁴ home on rue Albert to arrest Émilien Richer. The charge was intimidation against a strikebreaker and when Beauchemin refused to allow the police into his home, they stormed in and dragged him, Roland Paradis, Rosario Bernier, Richer, and his screaming, pregnant wife out into the street.⁶⁷⁵ The group was then sent to a Sherbrooke jail.

This was not how order was usually preserved in Asbestos and the community was outraged. A local policeman commented that "[j]'aurais pas cru qu'on trouvait des hommes pour des ouvrages sales comme celui-là," and Pelletier reported that "[n]on seulement les grévistes, mais aussi bien toute la population d'Asbestos est dégoûtée de ces procédés."⁶⁷⁶ The entire community was disgusted by the "dirty work" of the provincial police and this disgust extended to JM. Community-company relations in Asbestos were rapidly deteriorating. Curé Camirand spoke out against the actions of the police and told *La Presse* that "si j'étais mineur, je serais moi-même en grève et dans les circonstances, j'aurais la conscience parfaitement tranquille. D'ailleurs, sans être mineur, je suis avec eux jusqu'au bout et ils le savent."⁶⁷⁷ Camirand's support continued to encourage the strikers and helped them maintain the belief that their actions were just.

⁶⁷² *La Tribune*, 21 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁴ It is unclear whether Roger Beauchemin was related to Paul Beauchemin, the non-unionized worker mentioned above, who had been beaten. In a community as small as Asbestos, it is likely that they were related in some way.

⁶⁷⁵ *Le Devoir*, 22 March 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁶ *Le Devoir*, 23 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

The company responded to the situation by sending yet another letter to its employees on 24 March and printing it in the local newspaper for the entire community to read. This letter was different from the others in how it presented the dispute: it stated that the strike was not going well, that negotiations had not taken place since early February, that the company was not going to give in to demands, and that it would not fire strikebreakers when the dispute was over.⁶⁷⁸ Tired with not getting a positive response by projecting a friendly image, JM officials took on a more unforgiving nature to frighten employees back to work. Although the post-strike situation the company presented was terrifying, JM again underestimated the militancy and the confidence of its employees, which had developed over years of industrial contribution and success.

The length of the strike had already far exceeded predictions and people were becoming alarmed. Two more truckloads of food from Sherbrooke and Montreal arriving in Asbestos on 24 March helped alleviate some of these worries, however, as did the financial donations from union members in Shawinigan and the local comité de secours paying the grocery accounts of the striking workers.⁶⁷⁹ This was the committee established during the Great Depression and the strike had made it necessary once again. The loss of wages and the truckloads of food from outside the community meant that local merchants suffered greatly during the strike, and this group tried to take matters into their own hands. These citizens believed the strike was lasting so long because of a lack of an intermediary, which they thought they could be. They attempted to meet with JM and union heads, but were unsuccessful.⁶⁸⁰

On 27 March the striking workers held a parade in Asbestos in honour of two more truckloads of food arriving from Montreal. Although the provincial police walked through the streets singing songs of their own during the parade, there was no reaction from the strikers and the attempt to provoke trouble failed.⁶⁸¹ The lack of violence inspired the editor of the local paper to report that calm had settled on Asbestos and that an end to the strike would come soon,⁶⁸² but tension remained between those on strike and non-unionized JM employees who did not join them. On 29 March, Gérard “Tiny”

⁶⁷⁸ *L'Asbestos*, 1 April 1949, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁹ *La Tribune*, 25 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁰ *La Tribune*, 26 March 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁶⁸² *L'Asbestos*, 1 April 1949, p. 4.

Newcombe was assaulted outside a company-owned club in Danville by a group of strikers, one of which was Jean-Noël Hamel, son of local union leader Rodolphe Hamel. Newcombe was taken to JM's hospital in Asbestos and Hamel was arrested.⁶⁸³ This attack was revenge against Newcombe because he had allegedly beaten a striker outside a club in Richmond the night before. Animosity reigned on both sides of the dispute and Rodolphe Hamel accused JM of planting spies in the town, further showing just how much the community was changing during the strike.⁶⁸⁴

While this suspicion inspired some townspeople to stay indoors, those on strike used the idea of spies to send a message of defiance to the company and the provincial government that had sent the police to the community. When three more trucks of food arrived in Asbestos from St-Hyacinthe on 3 April, strikers carried signs in the welcome parade that depicted those whom they considered were the key antagonists of the dispute: CJM President G.K. Foster, CJM lawyer Yvan Sabourin, and Minister of Labour Antonio Barrette. Signs bore the slogans "Ils ne l'auront pas, notre syndicat," "Pas de contrat, pas de travail," "Notre grève est juste et morale," as well as the mocking, "Vive la police provinciale," and "Qui a fait sauter les rails?"⁶⁸⁵ The workers also handed out fliers to the crowd depicting the eight wives of Tommy Manville, the "multimillionaire d'amiante," whose seventh marriage had lasted less than 8 hours.⁶⁸⁶ The emphasis the strikers placed on the morality of their cause shows just how important faith was to the local cultural identity in Asbestos. The idea that the strike was morally just was an attack on the illegality of the conflict and shows that the strikers chose to adhere to the laws of the Catholic Church rather than the provincial government.

The humour that strikers displayed on their signs also reveals an important characteristic of the community and shows that even when a significant portion of the population could not afford to feed their families, a local camaraderie remained. This spirit was also seen when strikers produced a board game resembling Snakes and Ladders that dealt with the major issues of the labour dispute. At the top of the ladders were positive things like a growing union membership or a happy family because of affair

⁶⁸³ *La Tribune*, 31 March 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁴ *La Tribune*, 2 April 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁵ *Le Devoir*, 4 April 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁶ *Le Devoir*, 5 April 1949, p. 2.

wage. At the bottom, were the negative aspects of the industry: company heads paying for tropical vacations with the money workers earned them, and deaths due to asbestosis.⁶⁸⁷



“L’amiante-jeu,” dealing with the issues of the 1949 strike⁶⁸⁸

Proceeds from the sale of the board game went directly to the union. The people of Asbestos found humour and camaraderie in delivering powerful messages about which group involved in the dispute was morally just. This was especially important at the start of April, when 17 people from Asbestos were brought before a magistrate in Sherbrooke and found guilty of intimidation and resisting arrest.⁶⁸⁹ In the opinion of those who supported the strikers, these citizens were innocent and it was JM and the provincial government who were breaking moral laws.

Regardless of who was in the right, Asbestos town council had to ensure the community would survive the conflict. JM paid over \$8,000 in municipal taxes in April, but because of the social assistance the town was providing for the workers and their families—\$24,729.34 in March alone—Asbestos was falling into debt.⁶⁹⁰ Each week council paid for 2,000 to 2,500 bottles of milk and 4,000 loaves of bread in addition to the 200 sacks of potatoes already handed out during the strike so far.⁶⁹¹ While this was helpful, the families in Asbestos often included more than 10 children, and were capable of consuming “half a peck of potatoes at one meal and ten loaves of bread a day.”⁶⁹² The fact that council continued to annex land from Shipton Township to accommodate the

⁶⁸⁷ “L’amiante-jeu,” at the Société d’Histoire d’Asbestos. The Société does not have numbers cataloguing its collection.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ *La Tribune*, 5 April 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁹⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 6 April 1949, p. 44-47.

⁶⁹¹ *La Tribune*, 8 April 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁹² “Asbestos: Where We Live and Work,” *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, October 1959, p. 11.

growing community further added to the financial burden. Even though the strikers did not want to admit it, the community was dependent on JM.

The financial troubles of Asbestos were severe despite the continued donations of food from Quebec communities. By 8 April, the 2,100 employees on strike had passed their seventh week without a paycheque. Despite the \$100,000 in aid donated by the CTCC, Mayor Goudreau stated that “the loss in wages in Asbestos alone [was] about \$800,000...The town has been hard-hit by this...[and] there is a danger of some merchants going bankrupt.”⁶⁹³ The entire community was in full crisis mode and this shook the local cultural identity, so confident and proud.

For its part, JM was just beginning to feel the effects of the strike on its profits. *La Tribune* reported that many of the company’s American processing plants had “fermer leurs portes ou soit congédier un grand nombre d’employés. À Manville, N-J...[I]es chefs ouvriers de l’endroit prévoient que l’usine fermera complètement ses portes si la grève dure un tant soit peu.”⁶⁹⁴ The article also indicated that the American auto industry was suffering because of the lack of supply coming from the Jeffrey Mine and prices for asbestos were higher than they were during the Second World War because of the shortage, which explained why the company’s profits were only beginning to suffer. The local labour at the Jeffrey Mine was connected to a vast international trade network that was weakening because of the strike. The damage the conflict was causing demonstrated just how central to the global asbestos industry the people of Asbestos were, and this knowledge convinced JM that it had to compromise with its workers.

Because of the threat to profits, JM recruited more strikebreakers to process the raw fibre remaining in the mills at the Jeffrey Mine. Officials also stated that they would be willing to give its workers a 10 cent raise, rather than 15 cents, and 4 paid holidays. Although the strikers were suffering, the offer was refused, showing that the financial crisis the strike inflicted on the community and the humility required to accept food donations had not shaken the striking workers too fundamentally. If anything, JM’s sudden willingness to compromise gave the strikers more confidence and made the more dedicated to their goals. This dedication was seen when one worker responded to the increased presence of strikebreakers by telling Pelletier that maybe “ils réussissent à faire

⁶⁹³ *The Globe and Mail*, 12 April 1949, p. 10.

⁶⁹⁴ *La Tribune*, 11 April 1949, p. 1.

un peu de poussière.”⁶⁹⁵ JM had yet to mention the health issues raised by the workers during the conflict in its letters and newspaper ads, but the threat of asbestosis remained a major concern and the strike would not end until issues of dust and risk were addressed. The threat of strikebreakers was not yet great enough to seriously worry employees on strike and JM’s offer was a sign that the company was weakening.

Aside from lost profits, occupational health may also have been a reason behind the company’s sudden willingness to compromise. In a letter from JM lawyer J.P. Woodard to CJM president G.K. Foster on 15 April, Woodard detailed Leroy Gardiner’s study, which showed that even a small exposure to asbestos dust caused serious lung damage. Woodard encouraged Foster to investigate the levels of dust at the Jeffrey Mine to see how dangerous working conditions were.⁶⁹⁶ If the mineral affected workers the same way it affected Gardiner’s mice, the company would be inundated with compensation claims and bad publicity that could seriously damage the industry. Even though this had not yet happened, it did not mean that asbestos-related disease was not progressing in Jeffrey Mine workers and their new heightened awareness of the symptoms associated with asbestosis, combined with the recent media coverage of the community, put the company at risk. The issue of dust raised by the strikers was connected to a much larger health problem within the asbestos industry and JM needed to determine how to address the issue of dust without damaging the safe image of the mineral. Gardiner’s study would not be publicized, but the longer that employees were on strike and publicizing the effects of “un peu de poussière,” in *Le Devoir*, the more likely it was for additional studies to be done that would not be subject to JM privacy agreements, such as those produced by doctors at Laval. Even though the mineral was not being mined, bags of fibre were still being processed throughout North America and the lungs of asbestos workers would surely show signs of damage. The strike needed to end before this issue was made even more public.

After the workers rejected JM’s offer, the editor of the local newspaper felt it was necessary to intervene in the strike. In an editorial published on 15 April, J. Osias Poirier wrote that Asbestos was one of the most important communities in the region, poised to become even greater. He believed the key to this was not relying on a single-industry for

⁶⁹⁵ *Le Devoir*, 14 April 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁹⁶ J.P. Woodard, JM lawyer, to G.K. Foster, President, CJM, 15 April 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 47.

success, but warned that no new industry would come to the community if it gained a reputation for having unruly workers.⁶⁹⁷ He urged the strikers to accept the compromises made by JM for the future success of the entire town.

Poirier's argument had little impact, even though he was correct in emphasizing the necessity of bringing new industry to the community. What he failed to consider, however, was that Asbestos had become such an important community in l'Estrie because of the Jeffrey Mine, and no new industry could possibly compete. Furthermore, workers were not interested in the different types of jobs new industries could offer; they showed this in their dedication to their employment at the Jeffrey Mine despite the fact that they knew the mineral was negatively affecting their health. That strikers remained committed to the toxic industry immediately following LeDoux's warnings illustrates the strength of the connection between people and land in the community, built over generations of work at the Jeffrey Mine. This connection was also demonstrated in the frustration strikers felt towards the people in Asbestos who threatened their ties to the mine by continuing to work for JM. With the police presence in the community reduced, on the night of 17 April strikers threw rocks through the windows of the homes of nine nonunionized Jeffrey Mine workers, allegedly hitting Adélar Fortin and the head of Ernest Dionne's sleeping baby.⁶⁹⁸ As seen earlier when Paul Beauchemin was attacked, this violence indicated that the community was rapidly changing and neighbours were becoming enemies.

More provincial policemen arrived in Asbestos to enforce order against, as director of the Sûreté provinciale Hilaire Beauregard saw it, "le terreur qui régné"—which Pelletier believed was a gross exaggeration.⁶⁹⁹ The following day the strikers sent a telegram to provincial Minister of Labour Antonio Barrette demanding his resignation because he had termed the strike illegal and said the community was in a state of anarchy that went against the doctrine of the Church. The telegram stated that the "mineurs d'Asbestos considèrent que vous agissez comme ministre du Capital," not Minister of Labour.⁷⁰⁰ This telegram shows that strikers were not afraid to challenge the provincial government when their motives or morals were questioned, especially when confronted

⁶⁹⁷ *L'Asbestos*, 15 April 1949, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁸ *La Tribune*, 18 April 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁹⁹ *Le Devoir*, 18 April 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁰ *La Tribune*, 19 April 1949, p. 1.

by the increased number of police patrolling their streets. The confidence of the local population remained three months into the strike.

In response to this violence, JM went on the offensive once again. To combat the growing press coverage of the workers' concern over asbestosis, on 20 April the company had Dr. Kenneth Smith issue a statement to the press that claimed the population of Asbestos was a healthy one. He, not Burton LeDoux or *Le Devoir*, was the expert on the bodies of those who worked at the Jeffrey Mine, and he stated that only two cases of asbestosis had been found in the community in the past 50 years.⁷⁰¹ He claimed that studies showed that the air quality in Asbestos was similar to any other industrial city in Canada. He also falsely stated that each JM employee was given yearly x-rays that were available for anyone to see, when, in fact, annual exams were running years behind and nobody outside the company was allowed to see the workers' medical files. Smith's statement contradicted everything he had confidentially reported to JM and it showed the degree to which he was involved in covering up the health risks of the mineral.

JM also informed its striking employees that they and their families would be removed from their company-owned homes. Because rent was taken directly out of wages, the company had not been paid since the strike began,⁷⁰² and JM wanted the houses for the strikebreakers it had hired from outside the community. G.K. Foster wrote to Barrette that the company needed to house its employees where,

we have been operating for more than half a century and which has been experiencing in recent years an acute housing shortage. More than three hundred employees are now lawfully at work...[and] we have felt duty bound to inform the occupants of our dwellings that they must consider resumption of work and understand that we must sooner or later make room for actually working employees so that we respect the objective for which these houses have been built.⁷⁰³

Foster's letter portrayed JM as a victim to a negligent working class, which was the only way the company could not appear to be a villain forcing families out of their homes. Evictions would cause problems in Asbestos, where the population was concerned over providing food for local families. Now they had to worry about housing them, too.

⁷⁰¹ Kenneth Smith, statement to the press, 20 April 1949, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 47.

⁷⁰² *The Globe and Mail*, 21 April 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁰³ G.K. Foster, CJM President, to Antonio Barrette, Quebec Minister of Labour, 21 April 1949, BANQ, P182 3 A017 03-01-003B-01; 2000-10-0133.

The workers took this especially badly. Not only were their houses and families threatened, the fact that it was inspired by the need to accommodate strikebreakers from outside the community filled them with anger and worry. Responding to this threat, “une gréviste d’Asbestos” wrote to Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent asking him why he was not intervening in the crisis of the strike and wondering if he cared more for the lies of Duplessis than the plight of the workers who shaped the economy of Quebec and perhaps even Canada.⁷⁰⁴ This letter shows how vital the workers rightly believed they were to the success of the industry and its economic impact on the province and the country. It also shows how much the strikers distrusted Duplessis, who was in full support of JM and the company’s decision to evict workers. Local union official curé Camirand,⁷⁰⁵ who represented one side of the Catholic Church’s divided opinion on the conflict, declared that the company and its “scabs” would have to trample over his body to evict the striking workers,⁷⁰⁶ and Marchand stated that “la Canadian J-Manville n’exécutera pas sa menace parce que les Canadiens français se sont pas prêts ç’accepter l’esclavage surtout d’une compagnie qui explicite l’une de nos meilleures richesses naturelles.”⁷⁰⁷ The French Canadian majority in Asbestos was no longer going to be slaves to a foreign company which exploited them and their land. Camirand assured them they had God on their side and Marchand encouraged them to think of the asbestos found in the Jeffrey Mine as theirs, which strengthened the local cultural identity, based on the connection between the workers and the land.

That evening a group of strikers went to the neighbouring community of Stoke, where several strikebreakers lived. Once there, they cut the community’s telephone wires and assaulted strikebreaker Gaston Malenfant. The men then invaded the homes of other strikebreakers, “pour faire le désordre, battre les occupants et casser des vitres.”⁷⁰⁸ The 2,100 workers on strike in Asbestos would not allow the threat of homelessness to defeat them, and made it known that outsiders were not welcome in their community.

⁷⁰⁴ “Une gréviste d’Asbestos” to Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent, 22 April 1949. LAC, MG 26-L, vol. 56, file I-25-3-A, 1949, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰⁵ Because of the CTCC’s religious affiliation, local priests were part of each chapter’s administration.

⁷⁰⁶ *Le Devoir*, 22 April 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁷ *La Tribune*, 22 April 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁰⁸ *La Tribune*, 21 April 1949, p. 3.

“Such Explosive Possibilities,” April to May 1949

The following day the striking population of Asbestos threw insults and rocks at strikebreakers on their way into the community.⁷⁰⁹ JM was pressured by Barrette to hold off evictions, but the severity of the local situation was increasing. To counteract this, JM President Lewis H. Brown published a report on the strike to stockholders in every major newspaper in Canada and the United States, revealing his belief that the main issue of the conflict was union control over the Jeffrey Mine. Blaming the CTCC rather than the workers, Brown wrote that the “crux of the strike is the insistence by the union leaders that they secure for themselves certain controls over managerial policy. It is the revolutionary doctrine that the right of owners hitherto unchallenged to select management to operate the property must be subjected to the veto power of union leadership.”⁷¹⁰ Since the 1937 strike, when workers succeeded in getting both P.P. Bartleman and C.H. Shoemaker removed from their positions with JM and banished from the community, Jeffrey Mine employees had shown their desire to have a say in how promotions were granted. JM had also to some degree acquiesced by dismissing Bartleman and Shoemaker and establishing programs that would help local Francophone workers attain managerial positions at the Jeffrey Mine. The workers had yet to see any real advancement on this front and Brown’s suggestion that the CTCC, not the strikers, was responsible for the demand, angered the people of Asbestos. It was unusual for workers to have a say in company promotions, but that did not make it any less deserved in the opinion of the strikers.

While Brown’s report rallied the support of stockholders, it did little to appease the population of Asbestos, frustrated by how the presence of strikebreakers and provincial police was affecting their community. Strikers continued their attacks on the houses of non-unionized JM employees and they also threw rocks through the windows of Mayor Goudreau’s house on 24 April.⁷¹¹ Goudreau had let strikers down by allowing the police to remain and Jeffrey Mine mills to be run, as well as by being a member of the Union nationale government, supporting the anti-union views of Duplessis. Lines of

⁷⁰⁹ *Le Devoir*, 22 April 1949, p. 3.

⁷¹⁰ *The Globe and Mail*, 23 April 1949, p. 7.

⁷¹¹ *La Tribune*, 25 April 1949, p. 1.

loyalty were being drawn and in the opinion of the workers, those on strike, not Goudreau, represented Asbestos.

In response to the attack on Goudreau's house, at the 26 April meeting of council, "il est résolu comme suit: 1: ...le couvre-feu aura lieu à 1 heure de matin pour se terminer à 5 heures; 2: Que la salle municipale de l'Hotel-de-Ville à l'avenir soit fermée à minuit et trente du matin."⁷¹² Council unanimously passed the imposition of a curfew in Asbestos and restricted the use of city hall at night. Anyone found on the streets of the community between 1am and 5am would be arrested, and workers moved strike headquarters to the basement of St-Aimé after being locked out of city hall. Council hoped that this would prevent further violence from happening in the town, but it did little to alleviate the growing frustration of the striking workers and their families.

Following the resolution, over 500 wives of strikers went to St-Aimé to pray the rosary. Although this was hardly a radical act, provincial policemen apprehended many of the women on their way out of the church and took them to the Hotel Iroquois where they were interrogated about curé Camirand.⁷¹³ The women refused to give any information—if there was indeed any to give—and were released, but this was a sign that JM believed Camirand was a radical who negatively influenced workers with socialist thoughts. It also showed how the entire community was now involved in the dispute—not even praying women were exempt from suspicion.

The townspeople were incensed when they heard that police had harassed the women. Local union leaders went to council to demand that the provincial police be controlled, that the curfew be lifted, and that the union be allowed to pay for any damages the striking workers caused.⁷¹⁴ The council agreed to consider this at its next meeting, but in response to the union's request that it forbid any outsider from entering the town to work at the Jeffrey Mine, council replied that it "ne croit pas qu'il possède les pouvoirs nécessaires pour passer un règlement empêchant les gens de l'extérieur de venir travailler à Asbestos."⁷¹⁵ Council's reluctance to act on behalf of the union led the strikers to believe they would have to take control of the town by force.

⁷¹² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 26 April 1949, p. 50.

⁷¹³ *Le Devoir*, 29 April 1949, p. 3.

⁷¹⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 29 April 1949, p. 51.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 51.

May began and the strike entered its 13th week. Production numbers for February were released and showed that, although half the month had been strike-free, the month showed only half of the asbestos production of the previous year, falling from 48,873 tonnes to 26,148 tonnes.⁷¹⁶ To combat how its stockholders would react to these numbers JM used an article in the *Johns-Manville News Pictorial* to calm worries by stating that 750 Asbestos employees had returned to work. Conscious that the magazine was sent to its employees throughout Canada and the United States, the article also stated that if the strike continued, “a number of plants...will be forced to shut down [and]...as many as 100,000 employees will be thrown out of jobs, resulting in suffering and hardships not only to themselves but also to their families numbering perhaps 400,000 more human beings.”⁷¹⁷ Highlighting the wider effects of the strike and the potential victims beyond the boundaries of the town took focus away from Asbestos and the local struggles occurring there. The article also emphasized how important the community was to the global success of the industry: while strikers did not want 400,000 people to suffer, the international reach of their labour gave them bargaining strength.

Although JM was skilled at rallying outside support for its side in the dispute, the strikers in Asbestos had their allies outside the town as well. Archbishop of Montreal Joseph Charbonneau instructed every Catholic Church in the city to raise monetary donations for the victims of the strike throughout May, and Archbishop of Quebec City Maurice Roy followed suit. These efforts showed that Camirand was not the only Church official supporting the strikers, and in addition to money, the archbishops provided valuable moral encouragement. Charbonneau asked the people of Montreal to think of the mothers of Asbestos, “qui se demandent ce qu’elles donneront demain comme nourriture à leurs enfants,” and stated that “[q]uand on conspire à écraser l’ouvrier, l’Église a le devoir d’intervenir.”⁷¹⁸ Making the strike a community issue, rather than simply an industrial dispute was effective, but while this meant that money would be sent to the families of Asbestos, the community needed more to stop the sharp increase in anxiety the town felt after JM announced that the 700 strikebreakers working at the Jeffrey Mine

⁷¹⁶ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, May 1949, p. 148.

⁷¹⁷ *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, May 1949, p. 3.

⁷¹⁸ *La Patrie*, 2 May 1949, p. 1.

would not only keep their jobs when the conflict was over, but also threaten the seniority of strikers when it came to promotions.⁷¹⁹

The local population was enraged by the idea that strikebreakers would remain at the Jeffrey Mine after the labour dispute was over. Anticipating violence, town council resolved that it would “demande instamment à la Canadian Johns-Manville Co. Ltd. d’engager ses anciens employés de préférence à toute personne venant de l’extérieur, ceci afin que la situation économique d’Asbestos soit affectée le moins possible.”⁷²⁰ It did not have the power to prevent strikebreakers from entering the town, but council could try to reason with JM in a way angry workers could not. The retention of strikebreakers at the Jeffrey Mine was a major problem because it suggested that 700 of the 2,100 strikers would not have jobs when the dispute was over because new employees would have taken their place. The single-industry town could not support that great a number of unemployed people.

Council’s request was as close as it had ever come to dictating how JM should run the Jeffrey Mine, but it also showed the tradition of cooperation and negotiation that had been established in the community. This was not good enough for those directly affected by the strike, however, as they struggled to feed their families. Pelletier wrote that the workers wondered if they could replace JM management as easily as the company seemed to be able to replace them, but despite this humour, the presence of the strikebreakers, “met en rage les ouvriers réguliers fidèles à la grève et qui voient leurs emplois confiés à des inconnus.”⁷²¹ Frantic with worry over losing their jobs and homes to outsiders, the workers on strike were compelled to assert their authority in Asbestos.

At 5am on the rainy morning of 5 May, about 800 of the Asbestos strikers began to barricade the roads leading into the community. Loading pickup trucks and station wagons with lumber and other heavy materials, and parking them across the width of the roads, all the entrances to Asbestos and the Jeffrey Mine were blocked by 7am when the strikers were joined by some fellow union members from Thetford.⁷²² Their goal was to prevent any outside strikebreakers from entering the town and any locals from entering JM property. Asbestos was closed. Positioned at the entrance to the mill just before 8am,

⁷¹⁹ *Le Devoir*, 2 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷²⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 2 May 1949, p. 53.

⁷²¹ *Le Devoir*, 4 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷²² *La Tribune*, 5 May 1949, p. 1.

Pelletier saw 30 provincial policemen armed with machine guns, revolvers, and grenade launchers approach a large group of men picketing outside the Jeffrey Mine in defiance of the injunction placed against them. The community had become a battleground, but before any violence happened, “[p]lusieurs centaines de femmes, défilant en bon ordre, arrivèrent d’une rue adjacente en récitant le chapelet. Lentement, sans le moindre signe de nervosité, elles passèrent devant les barrières et l’arsenal de la police.”⁷²³

The image of a large group of women reciting the rosary in the rain between picketing strikers and heavily armed provincial police is haunting. It conveys the Catholicism of the people of Asbestos and the determination of women to be a part of the conflict. It also shows the belief amongst those on strike that although they were breaking the laws of Quebec, they were justified by the laws of God. Five minutes after the women proceeded down the road to pray with other groups of strikers, the police launched tear-gas bombs into the picketing crowd, allegedly hitting Rodolphe Hamel’s 12 year old son Jacques in the face.⁷²⁴ The gas was effective in clearing the gates to the Jeffrey Mine, but did little to disperse the gathering crowds at the road barriers, where any strikebreaker who ventured too close was beaten, and three cars were turned over and lit on fire. Danville soon filled with those who were unable to enter Asbestos.⁷²⁵ The community remained closed and firmly under the control of those on strike. JM and strikebreakers had threatened the local cultural identity, so rooted to employment at the Jeffrey Mine, for too long. It was time to retaliate.

The barricades were maintained for the entire day and the group of praying women continued to walk the streets of Asbestos, bringing food to those guarding the town as other strikers smashed the windows at the homes of local strikebreakers.⁷²⁶ Although no JM official was harmed, provincial policemen were. Targeting them as invaders of their community, the strikers attacked and disarmed any policeman who came close to the barricades, overturned a patrol car and broke the arm of Lieutenant Émile Contant as his vehicle drove away from the “wet, determined” strikers.⁷²⁷ CTCC Secretary Jean Marchand was not present on 5 May and the union did not sanction the

⁷²³ *Le Devoir*, 5 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3, and *The Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷²⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

barricades or the violence: this was something, much like the call to strike, that came directly from the people of Asbestos.

The policemen who did not retreat in the face of the barricades were taken by the strikers and forced to march through the streets of Asbestos with their hands up until they arrived in the basement of St-Aimé. Police later reported to the *Globe and Mail* that eight of them were led to the platform where they were booed and ridiculed by a crowd of 400 strikers. According to Detective Quevillon, “[t]hey called us everything you can say...All had clubs. The women especially screamed and kept yelling ‘Beat them, beat them.’” Detective Therrien claimed that he was kicked in the stomach several times and that “[y]ou couldn’t talk to them. They just don’t understand anything.”⁷²⁸ Curé Camirand was present, but told the policemen that the matter was between them and the striking workers, not him. The willingness of Camirand to witness these actions without reproach, combined with the noted enthusiasm of the women of Asbestos to inflict violence on the policemen, demonstrates how deeply the strikers and those who supported their cause resented them in the community. It also shows how violent the people of Asbestos had become through the duration of the strike. They were not innocent victims of an oppressive corporation and the strikers, their families, and their priest believed that these actions were sometimes necessary in the pursuit of victory.

After these confrontations Pelletier reported that “[t]out le monde est sur la rue et rares les citoyens qui ont eu le temps de se raser. La tension nerveuse, grande au début de la matinée, diminue d’heure en heure.”⁷²⁹ Press helicopters circled overhead and 32 press envoys waited for more drama beyond the barricades, further adding to the war zone atmosphere that had settled on the community. Although few members of the press were allowed into Asbestos that day, those that were already there were not allowed out. Pelletier was a friend of the strikers, able to move throughout the community; he had no intention of leaving. *Financial Post* reporter Ron Williams, however, was terrified and tried to leave town. While he got past one barricade, he was forced back by the second after he was pulled from the car and told, “too bad and I’m sorry, but if we know you,

⁷²⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷²⁹ *Le Devoir*, 5 May 1949, p. 1.

fine; otherwise you stay.”⁷³⁰ Phoning the *Globe and Mail*, Williams described the community as a beleaguered citadel under a reign of terror and said that he was being guarded by provincial police, armed with shotguns... There is a mass meeting going on in the basement of St. Aimé Church and everyone in the room is fearful that when it breaks up, violence will break out. As I speak, church bells are ringing. This is the first time in two months they have been heard... I can see strikers patrolling the streets... The streets, apart from the strikers’ cars, are deserted... I’ve never been in a situation before which has such explosive possibilities.⁷³¹

Williams was terrified of what the striking workers would do next and his description of Asbestos illustrates just how drastically the community had changed during the labour dispute. Church bells were now signs of danger and citizens on the street were assumed to be violent aggressors. Nevertheless, when the church bells stopped around 2:30am, the meeting at St. Aimé dispersed and the strikers “vanished into thin air.”⁷³²

The strikers had been “maîtres de la situation”⁷³³ throughout the day and intended to continue the barricades until Camirand warned them against it after mass, saying, “[a]llez-vous en chez vous et restez là jusqu’à nouvel ordre. Il est inutile d’offrir une résistance physique devant une force policière armée. Allez-vous coucher maintenant parce que vous avez fais une grosse journée d’ouvrage et vous méritez du repos.”⁷³⁴ As militant as the priest’s support for local workers was, he did not want them to be involved in a violent confrontation with the provincial police who were surely on their way to the community. Camirand was wise to warn them. Hilaire Beauregard had requested more policemen from Sherbrooke and Montreal: “[n]ous avons atteint la limite de la patience. Nous nous sommes retenus depuis quelque temps mais à la suite de ce qui se produit aujourd’hui, nous répondrons à la violence par la violence.”⁷³⁵ Beauregard’s open admission that the provincial police would be bringing violence to Asbestos because they had lost patience with the strikers foreshadowed what was to come. The workers listened to Camirand and while leaving, one told a reporter, “[t]here will be no fight *tonight*.”⁷³⁶

⁷³⁰ Pelletier, “The Strike and the Press,” p. 264.

⁷³¹ Ibid, p. 264.

⁷³² Ibid, p. 264.

⁷³³ *Le Devoir*, 6 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷³⁴ *La Tribune*, 6 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷³⁵ *La Tribune*, 5 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷³⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1949, p. 1, emphasis theirs.

The barricades were abandoned and the Thetford strikers who had come to Asbestos to help barricade the community slept in the basement of St-Aimé, while local strikers went home. They were not surrendering, but rather regrouping to see what would come during the next day of battle. They were unprepared. By 3am a contingent of 291 provincial police broke through the barriers to Asbestos and after seeing only a few journalists wandering the streets,⁷³⁷ decided to reinstate their definition of order in Asbestos by taking back sections of the town. Their first target was St-Aimé.

Arriving at the church at 4am when the men—almost 40 in number—were just waking up, the police stormed into the basement led by Detective Daniel Nadeau, who had been injured by picketers the day before. Bursting into the church, Nadeau was struck with a wooden club.⁷³⁸ Heavily outnumbered, the strikers ran towards the stairs to the chapel where they felt they would be safe. Thetford worker Laurent Bernatchez was hit from behind on the stairs by an officer and punched until he lost consciousness. The press photographed him as he was led from the church asking if he could go to the hospital, but he was taken to the Hotel Iroquois instead.⁷³⁹ Maurice Kirouac, also a Thetford worker at the church, was beaten on the way to the Hotel Iroquois because he told police, “Duplessis, il est fort; il vient chercher le monde dans les églises.”⁷⁴⁰ Kirouac’s mention of Duplessis reveals the political consciousness of the strikers and how much they believed the premier was aligned with JM, against the plight of the workers.

The church, so important to the citizens of Asbestos, had been violently invaded. Pelletier reported that while in the church, “la police a saisi 15 haches dont plusieurs étaient tachées de sang ainsi qu’un bon nombre de bâtons également entachés de sang.”⁷⁴¹ Violence and blood in their church was shocking to the people of Asbestos, but more was to come. After the police had rounded up 40 men, Justice of the Peace Hertel O’Bready read the Riot Act on the front steps of St-Aimé, forbidding anyone to gather in groups of more than two. O’Bready added to the small crowd before him, “[r]etournez à vos occupations régulières. Ceux qui n’obéiront pas sont passibles d’emprisonnement à

⁷³⁷ *Le Devoir*, 6 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷³⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷³⁹ “Testimony of Laurent Bernatchez,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité de la Police Provinciale à Asbestos, Re: Grève de l’amiante* (Sherbrooke: District judiciaire d’Arthabaska, 1949), p. 22.

⁷⁴⁰ “Testimony of Maurice Kirouac,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 16.

⁷⁴¹ *Le Devoir*, 6 May 1949, p. 3.

vic.”⁷⁴² What occurred at the church was described by the *Globe and Mail* as “an action without parallel in Canadian history.”⁷⁴³ If reporters were horrified by the actions of the provincial police from a national perspective, the people of Asbestos were even more so because it happened in their place of worship. Outsiders had invaded the community and church, and the people of Asbestos were now prisoners in their own homes.

Before townspeople had time to react, provincial policemen escorted strikebreakers into the community and through the gates of the Jeffrey Mine. They then raided the homes of strikers and the local businesses where they gathered, arresting 125 citizens and taking them to the Hotel Iroquois. Pelletier described the scene of Asbestos following the raids: “[l]es trottoirs d’Asbestos sont aussi déserts, ce matin, qu’ils étaient encombrés dans la matinée d’hier. Mais dans la rue, le va-et-vient des voitures de la police provinciale a remplacé ce-lui des piqueteurs.”⁷⁴⁴ The war zone atmosphere in Asbestos had continued, but this time, outside invaders were in control. The local paper took this eerie calm to mean that the strike was over and everything would soon return to normal.⁷⁴⁵ This was not the case.

The provincial police’s treatment of strikers after they were arrested that morning was later revealed to be ordered by JM officials who were present at the Hotel Iroquois, and court records taken when these men sued the police for brutality give an account of what they experienced. These records have not been used in previous studies of the strike, because of their inherent bias and because the experience of the workers has been of less interest to scholars than that of the notable public figures involved in the conflict. Although testimonies may have been exaggerated, they convey how the strikers felt they were treated under the supervision of JM officials. The company later claimed that the violence of 5 May was the fault of Thetford miners, but these accounts prove that the barricades and violence came from the local population, an important distinction that shows the militancy and agency of the strikers in Asbestos.⁷⁴⁶

After the Riot Act was read the morning of 6 May, police raided Rodolphe Lassond’s restaurant for local strikers. Among others, they took Joseph Beaudoin, Bruno

⁷⁴² *La Tribune*, 6 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁴³ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁴ *Le Devoir*, 6 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁴⁵ *L’Asbestos*, 6 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3.

Champagne, and Alfred Blanchette, all JM employees on strike who were taken to the Hotel Iroquois for questioning before they were sent to jail in Sherbrooke or Montreal. Beaudoin was taken to a bathroom in the hotel where he would later claim two provincial policemen beat him until he lost consciousness. When he revived, his eyes were swollen shut and he could not hear out of his right ear, but the policemen allegedly continued to berate him, saying, “que j’étais un maudit lâche, que j’étais en grève depuis trois mois et que j’étais trop lâche pour travailler mais qu’avec eux autres.”⁷⁴⁷ Beaudoin claimed that he was not even present at the barricades and that he was 55 years old and had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for 27 years. This distinction now meant nothing to company officials or the provincial police under their control and Beaudoin was sent to Montreal along with many others, where he was questioned for the rest of the night.

The strikers believed that what had happened in the basement of the Hotel Iroquois was indicative of how JM attempted to reassert its authority in Asbestos. They believed this because the company paid the salaries of the policemen sent to the community and, even if officials did not call for physical harm themselves, CJM President G.K. Foster and others supervised many of these interrogations without intervening when violence began.⁷⁴⁸ The workers interpreted the lack of company intervention to stop the violence as approval, and Foster’s presence reveals just how connected the JM was to the police and to Duplessis. Bruno Champagne claimed to have had an experience similar to Beaudoin’s after he was taken from the restaurant. He stated that he also was beaten at the Hotel Iroquois, with policemen focusing their efforts on his face and ears while saying, “[p]arle, ou bien tu vas mourir.”⁷⁴⁹ Champagne expressed his offence at the language the policemen used, especially religious curses and assaults on the priest at St-Aimé, such as, “[v]otre Christ de Curé Camirand, ses hosties s’il les avait icitte, on lui ferait ravalier.”⁷⁵⁰ This language was especially offensive to the religious strikers and an attack on Camirand was an attack on their faith, their union, and the idea that the strike was moral.

The police appeared to take pleasure in assaulting the strikers, but not all of the people under JM control agreed with what was happening. After Alfred Blanchette was

⁷⁴⁷ “Testimony of Joseph Beaudoin,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 12.

⁷⁴⁸ “Testimony of Jean-Paul Houle,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 15.

⁷⁴⁹ “Testimony of Bruno Champagne,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 17.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

allegedly beaten by police in a second floor washroom until his dentures no longer fit his mouth, he was taken to Dr. Kenneth Smith, who secretly fed him two eggs, tomato juice, and baloney.⁷⁵¹ Smith's actions reveal how conflicted he was in his role with JM at Asbestos. He actively downplayed the risks associated with the mineral, but was deeply concerned with the wellbeing of community members. Although Blanchette admitted to being at the barricades, he was told at 9pm that, "[o]n va te lâcher sur ta parole d'honneur de ne pas te montrer la face à Asbestos d'ici la fin de la grève; sans ça ma job est en jeu. Tu n'iras pas à la messe dimanche."⁷⁵² Blanchette's banishment from Asbestos and from Camirand's mass revealed how important the community and the priest were in maintaining the spirit of the strikers.

While the police did not arrest Camirand, they did take reporter Jacqueline Sirois to the hotel after she was seen talking to the priest in his car.⁷⁵³ To the provincial police, Camirand was a dangerous influence in the community, but they could not accuse him publicly. Both Willie Champagne and Gérard Chamberland of Thetford claimed that police insulted the priest while they beat them, with Chamberland testifying, "[i]ls nous feront mettre à genoux on disant: 'Le curé Camirand les fait mettre à genoux, nous autres aussi on va les faire mettre à genoux.'"⁷⁵⁴ Part of the reason Camirand was ridiculed and mentioned so often while the workers were allegedly being beaten was that he had allowed them to meet in his church and encouraged them to remain strong during the labour dispute. The strikers emphasized this in their testimonies against the police because it supported the idea that they were morally justified: the priest supported the workers while company-paid provincial police defied the laws of the church by treating Camirand with such disrespect. In 1949 Catholic Quebec, this was a serious offense with the power to sway public opinion in favour of the workers.

Striker Jean-Paul Houle's account of what happened to him at the hotel reinforces this idea. Detective Émile Contant, who had his arm broken the day before, singled Houle out of the crowd, allegedly saying that someone had to pay for hurting him. He told another detective in English that Houle should have special attention placed on him. Houle claimed that before he was beaten until he lost consciousness, a policeman told

⁷⁵¹ "Testimony of Alfred Blanchette," *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 1.

⁷⁵² *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷⁵³ *Le Devoir*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷⁵⁴ "Testimony of Gérard Chamberland, *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 7.

him, “[v]ot’ C.... de grève on va la casser! Vot’ curé en tant que curé il est bon, mais en tant que Camirand il est écoeurant.”⁷⁵⁵ The police spoke in English both because they believed the working class in Asbestos could not understand it, and because the JM officials who were present were unilingual Anglophone. Although he did not recognize Foster, Houle was allegedly told that “[c]e gars là c’est Monsieur Foster, le gérant général de la Compagnie. Il t’a vu. Tu vas retourner travailler et il va te donner des chances... Quand tu auras du temps, sors et cherche nous des tuyaux. Si tu entends parler des gars qui ont battu les polices, viens à l’hôtel et dis-moi ça.”⁷⁵⁶ The direct inclusion of Foster in Houle’s violent interrogation proved to strikers the involvement of JM officials in the brutal actions of the police. The alleged attempt to use Foster’s presence to bribe Houle into betraying his fellow strikers also suggests that JM continued to underestimate how loyal Jeffrey Mine workers were to each other, not the company.

Houle was released and told that if anyone asked about his battered body, he was to use the ridiculous excuse that it was nothing but a sunburn, even though it was only early May and the sun did not cause bruising. The release of local strikers suggests that JM was reluctant to arrest them because it would go against the company’s public statement that the violence was the action of Thetford workers, not the people of Asbestos. Furthermore, Foster’s direct supervision indicates that he wanted workers to fear what JM could do while continuing to portray the strike as being an attack on, “la loi, l’ordre, et l’édifice social tout entier,”⁷⁵⁷ notwithstanding the physical proof of the beatings.

Although the majority of local strikers taken by the police on 6 May were released that night on various conditions, Émile Grimard and Jean-Noël Hamel were sent to a Sherbrooke jail. Their experiences being interrogated by the police were similar to the others, which *Time* and *Life Magazine* photographer Mike Rougler said made him “sick to watch.”⁷⁵⁸ Although Rougler was present in the main holding area at Hotel Iroquois, it is unclear as to why JM or the police allowed him to be, and no photographs were ever released of the events that occurred that night. The police took particular joy in beating

⁷⁵⁵ “Testimony of Jean-Paul Houle,” *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 14. “C....” was a way to write “Christ” in this context in the minutes.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁷⁵⁷ *La Tribune*, 7 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

Hamel, who had already been charged with intimidation and whose involvement in the violence would discredit his father, Rodolphe Hamel, the local union leader. Hamel was taken to JM's hospital rather than the hotel, and once there, Hamel was allegedly told by his interrogator, "je viens de Montréal. Ça fait deux que je tue et si tu ne parles pas tu vas être le troisième."⁷⁵⁹ The animosity that had grown between the strikers and the policemen being paid by JM had reached terrifying levels.

Both Hamel and Grimard were beaten severely, and required stitches on their limbs, torsos, and heads. Kenneth Smith took x-rays of both of their heads to make sure their skulls had not been fractured, gave them food, and according to Grimard, confidentially told them, "qu'il était 100% avec nous autres et qu'il désapprouvait ce qui se faisait là."⁷⁶⁰ While we cannot be sure Smith actually told Grimard this, his efforts to convince JM to reduce the amount of dust at the Jeffrey Mine suggests that he did sympathize, at least somewhat, with the workers. Smith then offered the injured strikers beds in the infirmary while he guarded the door as they slept before being transported to Sherbrooke. Because of this alleged support, Smith was the only JM employee not on strike that emerged from the conflict with a positive reputation in the community. Of course, the town did not know the extent to which Smith had helped JM cover up the damage the mineral was doing to their bodies.

The families and friends of the men taken by police the morning of 6 May had no idea what was happening to them at the Hotel Iroquois. *The Globe and Mail* described Asbestos that afternoon as being a deserted city with blood-spattered streets⁷⁶¹ and Pelletier reported that "[u]n grand nombre d'épouses d'Asbestos sont extrêmement inquiètes... Certaines de ces femmes n'ont pas eu de nouvelles de leurs maris depuis qu'ils ont quitté le foyer le 6 au matin."⁷⁶² Uncertainty reigned in the once so confident community and Camirand spent the day going from home to home comforting families and becoming, "a pillar round which the strikers and their friends have rallied."⁷⁶³ No one knew how the police used his name to justify their violence. In total, 150 men were sent

⁷⁵⁹ "Testimony of Jean-Noel Hamel," *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁰ "Testimony of Emile Grimard," *Declarations sur la Brutalité*, p. 11.

⁷⁶¹ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁶² *Le Devoir*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

⁷⁶³ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1949, p. 2.

from Asbestos to Sherbrooke and 53 of them were sent onto a Montreal jail because there was not enough room.

“Malaise et l’Amertume,” May to June 1949

The events of 5 and 6 May changed the community of Asbestos in ways that the first few months of the strike had not. *La Tribune* reported that “malaise et l’amertume règnent dans la ville...où la grève interminable a irrité les caractères et les nerfs,”⁷⁶⁴ which stood in stark contrast with the jovial spirit the strikers showed months before. The town was on edge and because of JM’s connection to the provincial police and the violent interrogations of local workers, the people of Asbestos turned against the company in a way that showed that the strike was not just a labour dispute: it was personal.

The personal element of the strike was reinforced when the imprisoned men were released from the Hotel Iroquois and the Sherbrooke jail. These men were husbands, fathers, and friends, and they remained in their homes for days to hide their injuries, as instructed by the police, but the community still saw their swollen faces, and *La Presse* reported that “[I]es mesures de rigueur ont naturellement soulevé à la fois l’ire et le dégoût, non seulement des grévistes, qui devaient en être les premières victimes, mais tout aussi bien des autres citoyens qui rageaient littéralement à la vue des contingents de policiers arrêtant à vue tous ceux qui leur semblaient un peu suspects.”⁷⁶⁵ The image of JM in Asbestos had been damaged throughout the strike, but it worsened as townspeople became aware of the violence Foster sanctioned at the Hotel Iroquois. Since 1918, the company had been an important influence on the local cultural identity, often making the community proud because of global economic success, but after these events company-community relations were no longer so harmonious.

JM continued to blame radical union leaders and Thetford miners for putting up the barricades to Asbestos,⁷⁶⁶ and G.K. Foster, who had seen local workers admit to their involvement at the Hotel Iroquois, refused to admit it and stated that the “radicaux qui dirigent cette grève refusent ainsi de fait à des ouvriers le droit de travailler et de faire

⁷⁶⁴ *La Tribune*, 7 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁵ *La Presse*, 7 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁶ Thetford workers were a convenient group for JM to blame the violence on because they were not connected to the community in the same way Jeffrey Mine workers were. They were not friends or neighbours, and it was easier to blame strangers for the violence than it was to blame locals. Furthermore, it made sense from a PR perspective for JM’s workers not to be so violently against company policy and decisions. Thetford workers were present during the violence, but they did not initiate the barricades.

vivre leur famille. Dans leur lutte pour le pouvoir ces meneurs de désordre restent froids aux misères qu'ils infligent à nos employés, à notre ville et au public."⁷⁶⁷ By referring to local strikers as "our employees" and to Asbestos as "our town," Foster attempted to create the image that company-community relations had not been damaged by the strike or police violence, but this was certainly not the case. JM workers began the strike on 13 February, they had clear goals they wanted to achieve with the conflict, and they fought against the presence of the provincial police and strikebreakers on 5 May. They did these things of their own accord, often against the wishes and advice of their union leaders and Foster's attempt to take these actions away from local strikers illustrated how much JM had failed to understand its workforce and the militant, confident cultural identity of the community surrounding the Jeffrey Mine.

On Sunday, 8 May, 350 provincial policemen watched the people of Asbestos go to mass at St-Aimé, which was a significant presence in the community of 6,000. After mass had finished, the crowd did not react when they were told the Riot Act had been lifted and they were now free to meet as they pleased.⁷⁶⁸ Camirand became a spokesman for the people of Asbestos, and told the press that locals were appalled by the "profane acts" committed by the police in their church, which was now "battle-scarred as well as hallowed ground."⁷⁶⁹ He also reported that the police had raided and eaten the donated food organized by Archbishops Charbonneau and Roy, which turned the opinion of the community even more against them. Rodolphe Hamel had not seen his son Jean-Noël since he was taken from his home and did not know that he was in a Montreal jail with almost 60 others awaiting charges. These men were unable to see their lawyer, Jean Drapeau, who sent letters of protest to Duplessis on their behalf.⁷⁷⁰ A sense of the unknown settled on Asbestos.

The members of the press allowed into the community once the barricades had come down believed they knew what was to come. On Monday, 9 May at 8am, in the words of Pelletier,

un grand nombre de journalistes ont guetté à toutes les entrées de l'usine, de la mine et des moulins, pour suivre le mouvement des ouvriers qui

⁷⁶⁷ *Le Devoir*, 7 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 9 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1. Jean Drapeau would later become Mayor of Montreal.

rentraient au travail. Après toute la violence et les menaces de ces derniers jours, plusieurs s'attendaient à voir des centaines de mineurs reprendre leurs emplois. Mais ceux-là ont été déçus. Il ne s'est rien passé ce matin à Asbestos qui ressemble même de loin, à une rentrée en masse. Sans doute quelques ouvriers qui avaient tenu bon jusqu'ici ont-ils cédé aux terribles pressions de ces derniers jours.⁷⁷¹

The violence had not broken the strike, nor the spirit of the workers, and Pelletier wrote that reporters from Ontario and the United States “à Asbestos depuis les troubles de jeudi n'en croient pas leurs yeux” when the strikers did not return to work at the Jeffrey Mine that morning.⁷⁷² He knew the character of the people of Asbestos better than these newcomers and was not at all surprised when Hamel stated that the workers were prepared to remain on strike for at least five more months.⁷⁷³ To ensure this would be possible, Hamel placed an ad in *Le Devoir* asking Montrealers to “adopt” a family in Asbestos by donating \$5 each week for every married couple in the community and \$1 more for each child they had.⁷⁷⁴ While it is unclear if the people of Montreal chose to adopt Asbestos families, Hamel's confidence was remarkable following the violence that had occurred just days earlier and the suffering of the community after 4 months of strike.

The 28 local men jailed in Sherbrooke were released on 9 May after the union paid their \$800 fines. That night, the strikers met in the basement of St-Aimé to discuss the brutality of the provincial police. Local union head Armand Larivée opened the meeting with humour when he said, “le ‘panier à salade’ si actif qu'il ait été en fin de semaine, n'avait quand même pas tout ramassé et qu'il restait quelques grévistes.”⁷⁷⁵ Larivée's tone lightened the atmosphere as he highlighted the dedication of the strikers, and after both he and Marchand spoke, Camirand told the crowd that their commitment to the strike was upholding the social doctrine of the church and that “[i]l a souligné surtout que les grands responsables des récents troubles, ce sont ceux qui importent à Asbestos des ouvriers étrangers pour voler leurs emplois aux ouvriers en grève.”⁷⁷⁶ That the Asbestos workers continued to believe they were doing God's work by striking is

⁷⁷¹ *Le Devoir*, 9 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁷² *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷⁷³ *La Tribune*, 10 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁷⁴ *Le Devoir*, 10 May 1949, p. 10.

⁷⁷⁵ *Le Devoir*, 10 May 1949, p. 1. The vehicles that transported the strikers to Sherbrooke and Montreal were called “panier à salade,” which is the French equivalent of the term “paddy wagon.”

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

significant, as is the blame Camirand placed on strikebreakers from outside the community. Both of these ideas removed any blame that could be placed on the strikers without denying that they began the labour dispute and reacted violently on 5 May.

To combat this attitude, JM president Lewis H. Brown distributed a pamphlet on the strike to employees as well as the press because, “[i]t is our hope that every leader of every group in the Province of Quebec will read this report and from it obtain a clear understanding of the revolution that has been attempted by the leaders of the Asbestos Syndicate.”⁷⁷⁷ This pamphlet has not been studied in examinations of the strike due to an apparent lack of interest in the local dynamics of Asbestos, but it is an important piece of evidence in assessing community-company relations during the strike. Brown correctly assessed the main issues of the conflict except that he gave agency to the CTCC, not Jeffrey Mine workers. Brown wrote that the demands to have a say in how land was used, how health issues were managed, and how promotions were awarded were what the union wanted, not the workers. He also stated that this was not a conflict over health or wages, but rather ownership. Quoting Pope Pius XI, Brown stated that “in the application of natural resources to human use the law of nature demands that right order should be observed. This order consists of this; that each thing have its proper owner.”⁷⁷⁸ JM owned the Jeffrey Mine and had the right to dictate how it was run, but the striking workers were the majority in this situation, and the company was dependent on them. This, as well as their history of sacrificing community land to pit expansion, gave them the “revolutionary” belief that they had the authority to decide how the Jeffrey Mine was developed. Brown did not understand this reasoning. He believed that the people of Asbestos should be grateful to JM. The company had spent over a million dollars on dust-control equipment in the mills and another million on hospitals and recreation centres in the community.⁷⁷⁹ The townspeople were appreciative, but Brown could not understand that they could want more: that was just not how single-industry working class communities were run.

Brown blamed the violence entirely on a group of outsiders who terrorized the police and the people of Asbestos, especially the wives and children of JM officials,

⁷⁷⁷ Lewis H. Brown, “La Grève d’Asbestos: Rapport sur le fond de la question et sur la position de Canadian Johns-Manville Company, Ltd.,” (Canadian Johns-Manville Company, Ltd, 1949), p. 15.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

although no reports of officials or their families being targeted exist. Brown also subtly attacked Camirand when he wrote, “[w]e are appreciative of many years of help from the late Father Castonguay, Asbestos parish priest for nearly half a century, with whom we cooperated in trying to improve the home and community life of the town of Asbestos.”⁷⁸⁰ Camirand now ran Castonguay’s parish and this statement shows JM’s conviction that the priest was agitating his congregation into rebelling against the established order of the community.

Brown’s reasoning was ineffective in turning the opinion of Asbestos in the company’s favour. The provincial policemen in the town were reduced to 50 on the day the pamphlet was released and while this brought the population “un soupir de soulagement,”⁷⁸¹ the knowledge that Foster and other officials had been present at the Hotel Iroquois while workers were being beaten weighed heavy on their minds. Pelletier explained that “jamais l’appui des gens aux grévistes n’a été plus complet que depuis la fin de semaine...[la violence] a ouvert les yeux à nombre de personnes qui n’avaient jamais manifesté clairement leur sympathie pour les ouvriers. Des professionnels et des marchands, qui avaient gardé jusqu’ici une prudente réserve se prononcent désormais en faveur des mineurs.”⁷⁸² Even friends of JM officials, he wrote, had become disgusted with the company. The general sympathy the public had towards the workers, combined with disgust felt towards the company for sanctioning the violence of the police, ensured that community dynamics in Asbestos had radically changed.

For once, the local paper supported Pelletier’s assessment of the town. While it still did not completely side with the strikers, *L’Asbestos* acknowledged the atmosphere of despair that had taken over the community. In its 13 May edition the headline read, “Désolation règne à Asbestos,” and stated that the first half of 1949 had brought a degree of suffering the town had never experienced before.⁷⁸³ There was no chance of alleviating this sadness, in the paper’s opinion, because aside from the majority of the population not receiving wages for 13 weeks, JM announced it would have to cut back on its workers due to global economic conditions. This was a serious threat to the community, which

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 2.

⁷⁸¹ *Le Devoir*, 11 May 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁸² Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁸³ *L’Asbestos*, 13 May 1949, p. 1.

based its entire economy on the success of the industry,⁷⁸⁴ but the article concluded on a positive note, suggesting that the violence had ended the strike, an opinion held by many in Asbestos even though the workers had not yet returned to the Jeffrey Mine.

CTCC officials did not believe the workers were giving up hope and demanded a federal inquest into the role JM played in the violence of 6 May, which had been committed in “les chambres de tortures” owned by the company and, in the opinion of the union, scarred some workers for life.⁷⁸⁵ These claims were based on the testimonies of the arrested strikers, whose allegations against the police were believed by those who had seen their bruised faces. Jean-Noël Hamel, Gérard Chamberland, Alfred Blanchette, and Jean-Paul Houle sued JM for \$25,000 each because they were “savagely beaten” on company property and they had the bruises to prove it.⁷⁸⁶ Adding to JM’s worries over a public lawsuit damaging company finances and reputation was a confidential report given to W.H. Soutar, CJM Assistant Mine Manager, which stated that cancer rates were rising in both Thetford and Asbestos, with 22 workers at the Jeffrey Mine having died of it between 1943 and 1947.⁷⁸⁷ The company could deal with a few lawsuits launched by men who had been arrested, but if workers and the general public found out the mineral caused cancer, JM would be ruined. This concern was heightened in the middle of June when British doctor E.R.A. Merewether suggested a link between asbestos and cancer in an address he gave to the Canadian Medical Association.⁷⁸⁸ Why Merewether did not spread this information to the asbestos mining communities in Quebec is unclear, but JM officials were fortunate he did not and they knew the company needed to resolve the strike in order to get the attention of the press off the industry before the threat of cancer was exposed.

Unaware of the connection between the mineral and cancer, the people of Asbestos continued the pattern of life that had been in place since mid-February. On 26 May, 800 books sent by Ligue ouvrière catholique arrived in Asbestos along with eight tonnes of food donated by the streetcar workers of Montreal.⁷⁸⁹ Although it was a rainy

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁵ *La Tribune*, 16 May 1949, p. 1 and 31 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁶ *L’Asbestos*, 27 May 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁷ Paul Parrott, demographer, to W.H. Soutar, CJM Assistant Mine Manager, 24 May 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 51.

⁷⁸⁸ 15 June 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 47.

⁷⁸⁹ *La Tribune*, 27 May 1949, p. 3.

day, the townspeople organized a parade of cars to welcome them. The joy felt by the community was quickly lost three days later when a street dance on the highway linking Asbestos and Danville suddenly turned into a brawl between strikers and strikebreakers, demonstrating just how much tension remained in the community.⁷⁹⁰

Tension increased as strikers in the neighbouring community of St-Remi de Tingwick returned to work.⁷⁹¹ While many took this to mean that all strikers in the asbestos region of Quebec would return to their mines and mills, JM was uncertain. In its June issue of the *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, the company stated that the people who worked the Jeffrey Mine, “have lost more than \$1 1/2 million in wages as a result of the strike. An increase in wages amounting to \$5 a week would have been granted without any strike. With such an increase, it would take each employee over three years to get back what he has lost [but the] losses to the Company are much greater.”⁷⁹² The expense of the strike had been great for the company, but few strikers in Asbestos could believe JM’s suffering was greater than theirs.

The magazine also made it seem as though nothing was happening to bring an end to the strike, when in fact negotiations were constantly going on even though the workers turned down a JM offer to raise their hourly wage by 10 cents on 2 June.⁷⁹³ On 19 June the workers held a vote in St-Aimé on another proposed contract; 976 of them rejected it and only 37 supported. Pelletier explained that less than half the strikers voted because “plusieurs grévistes ont été placés ici et là par le syndicat et bon nombre d’entre eux travaillent maintenant en dehors d’Asbestos.”⁷⁹⁴ The fact that the majority of the 2,100 workers now lived or worked outside the town demonstrates just how much their lives and community had been shattered by the strike. The new faces of strikebreakers in Asbestos made this sad reality even more disturbing to the local population.

Adding to the worries of the community and the desire to leave town was JM’s announcement that it had discovered a new asbestos deposit near Munro, Ontario and was shipping equipment and \$10,000,000 in development funds from Asbestos to this

⁷⁹⁰ *The Globe and Mail*, 30 May 1949, p. 7.

⁷⁹¹ *Le Travail*, June 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁹² “Asbestos Production Limited as Strike Continues,” *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, June 1949, p. 2.

⁷⁹³ *The Globe and Mail*, 2 June 1949, p. 12.

⁷⁹⁴ *Le Devoir*, 20 June 1949, p. 1.

location.⁷⁹⁵ This was terrifying even to those who relied only indirectly on the Jeffrey Mine for their income. The entire community was connected to the mine, and even if JM's image had been damaged during the strike, the people still needed it to survive.

Town council was hopeful the conflict would soon end, but the strike and the Munro development soured relations between them and the company. No longer comfortable with relying so much on JM, council negotiated a deal with the Shawinigan Water and Power Co. to supply Asbestos with electricity.⁷⁹⁶ Although this was an indirect way to articulate the new distance between council and company, it was clear that the way the community would function after the strike ended would be much different from how it did before the conflict.

Changes to the community would also be great because of JM's demands in the negotiation room. Although JM claimed it had always treated its employees fairly,⁷⁹⁷ behind closed doors the company refused to rehire at least 20 of its striking workers who had been present at the barricades at the start of May and insisted on its right to retain over 100 strikebreakers from outside Asbestos.⁷⁹⁸ This would change both the community and the spirit of camaraderie and authority the workers had at the Jeffrey Mine. When the Thetford strikers voted to return to work on 24 June due to desperation and a slightly improved contract, the people of Asbestos knew their strike would not last much longer; they were losing valuable allies and bargaining power for contract negotiations.

Although their list of demands was long in February, by the end of June all the strikers at Asbestos wanted was for JM to promise that they would be able to return to work at the Jeffrey Mine. JM did not want to rehire employees who had been arrested and warned that global economic conditions would prevent them from hiring everyone back. The strike ended on 30 June after lasting 137 days and an arbitration board was established to negotiate the details of the new collective agreement, which was a risky yet necessary move for the workers to make after suffering for almost 5 months without any income. *Le Devoir* reported that following the vote to accept the new contract in the basement of St-Aimé at 1:30am, "les ouvriers sont sortis de la salle et ont manifesté leur joie par les rues d'Asbestos. Fanfare en tête les grévistes ont paradé. Les femmes ont

⁷⁹⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, 23 June 1949, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 22 June 1949, p. 61.

⁷⁹⁷ *L'Asbestos*, 23 June 1949, p. 4.

⁷⁹⁸ *Le Devoir*, 25 June 1949, p. 1.

rejoint le groupe pour démontrer qu’elles étaient tout aussi contentes que leurs époux de la fin de la grève.”⁷⁹⁹ The entire community was relieved and celebrated long into the early morning with a street dance in the town square. The morning of 1 July saw a continuance of celebrations, with the church bells at St-Aimé ringing between 7:30 and 8am to summon a full-capacity crowd to Camirand’s mass. Afterwards Camirand expressed his hope, “que tous, ouvriers, professionnels et dirigeants de la compagnie s’uniraient pour rétablir la prospérité de la ville d’Asbestos,”⁸⁰⁰ which was quite optimistic considering how much the community had changed since February.

The townspeople were jubilant, but this was not the resolution for which the workers had sacrificed almost five months of salary and security. JM promised to rehire all of its striking employees without discrimination and they were allowed to keep their seniority rights over the strikebreakers who would remain at the Jeffrey Mine. In addition to this, the workers received what JM offered at the start of April: a 10 cent wage increase, four paid holidays a year, and no promises on dust elimination at the Jeffrey Mine or a say in company promotions. The residual financial losses suffered by JM, the strikers, and the other businesses and people in the community would take years to overcome. The local newspaper illustrated the conflict between joy and sorrow when it announced the end of the labour dispute only in a small corner at the bottom of its front page.⁸⁰¹ While it may have seemed as though the workers were forced to end the strike for financial reasons without making major gains on the issues the conflict highlighted, Asbestos had undergone radical changes in land management, human health awareness, and community power during the 5 months of the dispute. These changes were dramatic and were revealed in the months and years that followed the strike of 1949.

⁷⁹⁹ *Le Devoir*, 1 July 1949, p. 1.

⁸⁰⁰ *Le Devoir*, 1 July 1949, p. 1.

⁸⁰¹ *L’Asbestos*, 30 June 1949, p. 1.

Chapter 6: “Une ville qui se deplace”: Bodies of Land, 1949-1983

As I stood on the observation platform overlooking the Jeffrey Mine on one of my first research trips to Asbestos, I was distracted from the pit by the sounds of children playing below me. On each side of the platform are piles of raw asbestos still embedded in rock taken from the Jeffrey Mine. Two young boys had leaned their bicycles against the chain-link fence that guards the mine and were playing in and with these piles of asbestos, throwing the rocks up into the sky and taking much delight when they came back down and exploded in clouds of dust. When I drove away from Asbestos that day, foolishly holding my breath and trying not to rub my suddenly itchy eyes, the children remained, laughing and holding pieces of the mineral up to the sun so it would sparkle and shine. These are not the first children in Asbestos who saw the mineral as a source of entertainment, and they will not be the last. To write them off as uninformed or their parents as irresponsible is to ignore the rich history of Asbestos that has been shaped by the interconnection of people and the natural world.

The town of Asbestos offers an in-depth look at Quebec’s second industrial revolution, when the entire province, not just its major cities, experienced massive technological transformation. A major reason for the 1949 strike was that the local interconnectedness of people and land had become threatened as giant electric shovels began to replace workers in the Jeffrey Mine. These shovels took away not only jobs, but also the traditional ways a significant portion of the community had interacted with the land for generations. In the years following the strike the struggle over how the land would be used continued. This chapter will examine the efforts the working class majority made to expand and maintain their connection to the land, the methods JM used to make land in Asbestos more industrialized and “efficient,” and town council’s attempts to mediate the two opposing philosophies to ensure the continued development of the community. The way land use was managed in Asbestos from 1949 to 1983 sharply contrasts the pattern of sacrifice the community had accepted in the years since JM took ownership of the Jeffrey Mine. This chapter will show that the changed attitude towards land use during this period was a direct result of how the strike altered the local cultural identity in Asbestos, inspiring townspeople to become even more independent from JM and develop a “chez nous philosophy.”

“Chez nous philosophy” refers to how the people of Asbestos became increasingly focused on their personal attachment to, and authority over, the land in the community. At the heart of this process was the townspeople’s commitment to no longer rely on JM for community development and support, inspired by the animosity that arose during the strike of 1949. They used the local Chez Nous Ideal, the cooperative home-building group formed during the Second World War, in new, more sophisticated ways to achieve this independence. Townspeople bought shares in the group and pledged material and five hours of labour towards the building of a new house for every member.⁸⁰² This was to construct homes independent of JM so that residents of the community could control their own land and prevent pit expansion into the town if they did not believe it necessary. The strike demonstrated the importance of this when JM threatened to evict those living in company houses so that strikebreakers could inhabit them. The Chez Nous Ideal became more active after the strike, and dealt not only with housing, but also with how the land of the entire community, including the Jeffrey Mine, was understood and used. Although they had enjoyed the perks of living in a company town, such as health care and electricity, the 1949 strike made the people of Asbestos more fully aware of how vulnerable this made them and they needed to protect themselves.

The chez nous philosophy is similar to the “Maîtres chez nous” campaign slogan of the Quebec Liberal Party that defeated the Union nationale in 1960. That phrase, coined by André Laurendeau long before Liberal Minister of the Environment René Lévesque adopted it, expressed a new type of Québécois reform nationalism.⁸⁰³ In order to control their own destiny, French Canadians had to control their natural resources. Following the end of the strike in July 1949, Asbestos was turned into a historical event, people and place forgotten. Pierre Trudeau’s 1956 interpretation of the strike’s importance to Quebec ensured the dispute, not the community, would be remembered in historical texts on the province, the country, and the working class movement.⁸⁰⁴ This does Asbestos a disservice. The strike of 1949 was a profoundly local crisis that was first

⁸⁰² *Entre Nous* (Montreal: The Canadian Johns-Manville Co.), February 1951, p. 8.

⁸⁰³ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, and François Ricard. *Quebec Since 1930*, Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmais, trans. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1991), p. 499.

⁸⁰⁴ See for example, Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec’s Quiet Revolution: Liberalism Versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985), Susan Mann, *The Dream of a Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), and Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

and foremost about the increased industrialization of the land and its effects on human health. As the land in Asbestos became increasingly industrialized between 1949 and 1983, we can see how fervently townspeople understood this idea and how determined they were to gain control over the mine and the land surrounding it by rejecting the traditional patterns of community life that had been negotiated since JM bought the Jeffrey Mine in 1918. In the process, they distanced themselves from JM and redefined how their local cultural identity was rooted in their interaction with the land through labour still present in Asbestos today.

Struggle for Ownership, 1949-1959

The people of Asbestos knew that land held great value in the community because of its rich mineral deposits and a booming industry, and everyone wanted a piece of it. As much land as possible was purchased by townspeople, JM, and town council after the 1949 strike, and because of the ever-expanding nature of the Jeffrey Mine, the land and the people who owned it continuously changed as the pit grew and local understandings of land use changed. Although the strike damaged the finances of the workers and the town as a whole, it had been good for the industry, which was suddenly confronted with a shortage of approximately a quarter million tonnes of asbestos because no fibre was extracted during the conflict.⁸⁰⁵ Although JM's image was tarnished by the labour dispute, the global asbestos demand and price rose dramatically and production rapidly increased at the Jeffrey Mine, benefiting the company. Although the community had suffered during the strike, the land remained valuable and in high demand.

The land in Asbestos was valuable before the strike, but it became even more so afterward and issues of use quickly arose. Town council anticipated the effects of the boom market by annexing over 7,000 cubic metres of land from Shipton Township in August 1949 and prepared for the town's population to grow along with the Jeffrey Mine.⁸⁰⁶ Council purchased land from Shipton and individual property owners throughout 1949 so that the roads and boundaries of Asbestos could be expanded, while pulling away from JM and the close working relationship they had shared prior to the strike.

⁸⁰⁵ G.W. Josephson and F.M. Barsigian, "Asbestos," *Minerals Yearbook 1949*, Allen F. Matthews, ed. (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1951), p. 139, and *The Canadian Mining Journal*, August 1949, p. 54.

⁸⁰⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 3 August 1949, pp. 67-68.

When the company asked council to repair the sewers close to the Jeffrey Mine in September 1949, JM was told that the issue would have to be put to a community referendum.⁸⁰⁷ This response was in sharp contrast to town dynamics before the strike, when council agreed to almost everything JM requested. It also differed with how council reacted to a request made by the members of the Chez Nous Ideal in March 1950, which asked for land at a reduced price to build 20 family homes and 1,000 feet of new road and sewers.⁸⁰⁸ In June 1950 council purchased 99.27 acres for the Chez Nous Ideal.⁸⁰⁹ Community funds were no longer going to go towards the company and decisions on land use in Asbestos would be made by the townspeople. Accommodating the needs of the working class majority over those of the company in charge of the industry that was so vital to the community showed just how much Asbestos had changed since the strike of 1949. The people were taking control of the land.

Besides purchasing more land in 1950, council refused to pave JM-owned rue Webb with the rest of the town's roads and community members demanded that the company reopen rue St-Georges near the Jeffrey Mine.⁸¹⁰ Prior to the strike, council not only allowed road closures whenever JM requested them, they also relied on the company to modernize community roads by laying gravel on them, but the local situation had changed. The townspeople were rapidly developing an independent cultural identity and the continuous industrial boom the community experienced returned some of the confidence that had been lost during the final weeks of the strike. Although Russia was emerging as a major source of asbestos, Canada continued to provide 61% of the world's supply, worth over \$64 million.⁸¹¹ While Asbestos was not the only Quebec community mining the fibre, because of how it was deposited in the land it was by far the most productive source, extracting on average three times as much as the mines at Thetford.⁸¹²

The community's confidence did not make sense to JM because it went against the basic foundations of how business worked in a capitalist society and how single-industry towns were managed. In many ways, the strike should have reminded townspeople that they completely relied on the company for the success of the

⁸⁰⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 9 September 1949, p. 73.

⁸⁰⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 20 March 1950.

⁸⁰⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 7 June 1950, p. 138.

⁸¹⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 9 August 1950, p. 154, and 4 October 1950, p. 164.

⁸¹¹ *United States Geological Survey 1950* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1951), p. 6.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, p. 346.

community, and should not resist JM's ideas for proper land use. The people of Asbestos were aware of this dependence, but their confidence was tied to the local role they played in the success of the global industry, which was something the company could not deny. Asbestos was featured in JM's monthly employee magazine in October 1950 because of its remarkable production and value. Entitled "Asbestos, PQ, Canada: Where We Live and Work," the article explained that because of this production and the usefulness of the mineral, "asbestos serves nearly every man, woman and child at least once a day in our modern civilization."⁸¹³ The land was global, modern, and internationally vital. Jeffrey Mine employees were the ones who facilitated this international reach and this role gave them a close attachment to the land they worked and the community they lived in.

Despite the connection Jeffrey Mine workers felt to the land, and their rebellion against its increased industrialization as seen in their protest of new electric shovels prior to the 1949 strike, JM introduced more machinery into its operations. In 1951 the company stopped using trains to carry loads of fibre from the bottom of the pit. Instead, it adapted the spiral benches of the Jeffrey Mine to accommodate giant 35-tonne trucks that would continuously travel from the bottom to the top of the pit, loading and unloading fibre.⁸¹⁴ These trucks would grow in size as the years went on, eventually reaching a capacity load of 200 tonnes in the 1970s. JM also altered how shifts were run at the Jeffrey Mine, explaining in February 1951 that now "one shift of miners leaves for the washroom for a shower and change to street clothes before heading home as another shift waits to enter the cage" that would take them down into the pit.⁸¹⁵ The Jeffrey Mine had indeed become a giant factory without a roof, its workers were the tiny gears that kept it running, and the land was constantly changing because of it.

While the company continued to industrialize the land and its workers, in an attempt to appease its Francophone employees, JM produced a bilingual local magazine for the people of Asbestos called *Entre Nous*, which replaced the *Johns-Manville News Pictorial* that had ceased publication in 1949. The name of the new magazine was an attempt by the company to include itself in the community's understanding of "us." In one of its earliest issues, JM furthered this sentiment when it featured the *Chez Nous*

⁸¹³ "Asbestos: Where We Live and Work," *Johns-Manville News Pictorial* (October 1950), p. 8.

⁸¹⁴ Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécois des Origines au Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), p. 348.

⁸¹⁵ *Entre Nous*, February 1951, p. 9.

Ideal, jovially calling it “typical” of the way things were done in Asbestos.⁸¹⁶ While the company did not mind its workers building their own homes, it did mind the trouble this would cause in later years when the Jeffrey Mine needed to expand onto the land where these houses were located. Home ownership meant land ownership and this changed how land was used in the community. If the people of Asbestos lived in JM housing, they were easy to move and the land could be sacrificed to the Jeffrey Mine, as it had been for decades. Private property would prove to be a problem.

The town continued to purchase more land for expansion throughout 1951 and granted the Chez Nous Ideal more acreage, providing it with sewers, roads, and electricity.⁸¹⁷ These land acquisitions became routine in Asbestos well into 1952, but JM was removed from it, having further developed its “block caving” underground system at the Jeffrey Mine that required little additional land. Each block was now 200 square feet, had crushing plants 816 feet below ground, and loading facilities 950 feet down.⁸¹⁸ Johns-Manville was a leading international asbestos company at this time and new methods and techniques introduced at the Jeffrey Mine were quickly adopted by other companies. The industrialization of the land was massive and yet subtle, occurring throughout JM property but deep enough that townspeople were not confronted by it as they were with the open pit. This subtlety also prevented the community from seeing the progress of extraction operations. Not seeing how the Jeffrey Mine was growing closer and closer to community land meant that when JM needed to expand the pit, the people of Asbestos would be unprepared.

By 1952 Canada supplied the world with 1,000,000 tonnes of asbestos each year, 70% of the global supply.⁸¹⁹ The Jeffrey Mine remained the largest chrysotile mine in the world and JM capitalized on this accomplishment by spending \$14,000,000 on a new mill. This would be the world’s largest, most modern asbestos mill, 14 storeys high and 75,000 square feet, or 3 football fields in size.⁸²⁰ These were all signs of progress in the community and again contributed pride and confidence to the local cultural identity, as the labour of Jeffrey Mine workers was responsible for this success. While it would only

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸¹⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 16 June 1951, 25 July 1951, 1 August 1951, and 5 September 1951.

⁸¹⁸ *United States Geological Survey 1952* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1953), pp. III-2.

⁸¹⁹ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1952, p. 106.

⁸²⁰ *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, July 1953, p. 3.

require 200 feet of new land for an entranceway, the mill would be built on JM property and would be an imposing presence in the community, seen from every location. By 1953 the global market price for the mineral exceeded that of gold, making the land at Asbestos even more valuable.⁸²¹ By building a new mill, the company anticipated further profits and put its idea of proper land use on display.

Although Jeffrey Mine workers were connected to the natural world in Asbestos through their labour, and other community members through their everyday lives, JM also possessed a close understanding of the land. When town council and the Chez Nous Ideal attempted to build 100 homes on newly annexed land, JM warned against it, stating that they had already considered building on the land, but it was an unstable mixture of sand and gravel and there were several large, deep holes that the company had created while determining if it had any value.⁸²² The project was suspended on this advice and JM proved itself to be an expert on land use in Asbestos. It also proved that through rapid industrialization the land in the community was becoming scarred and valueless. The fact that there were giant holes on land surrounding the town because of JM prospecting efforts advances our understanding of land use in Asbestos: the land was to be used to the advantage of industry, not community.

JM's expertise and ideas of land use were seen in both local and global ways. Locally, it allowed JM to dominate the land and the community, preventing townspeople from becoming too independent from them. Globally, JM reaped the commercial benefits of business and became known as the company in control of the Jeffrey Mine, 2,000 feet wide and 405 feet deep in 1954, extracting between 4,000 and 6,000 tonnes each day.⁸²³ While 60% of the fibre at the Jeffrey Mine was taken from underground caves, heavy investments continued to make the pit more factory-like. The giant trucks that hauled the fibre out of the Jeffrey Mine via 15 foot high spiralling benches were now 22.5 tonne diesels that made 22 trips to the surface during each of the three daily shifts, five days a week.⁸²⁴ The land facilitated its own increased industrialization. In 1954, JM developed a new form of blasting that used dynamite without wires so the Jeffrey Mine's fibre would

⁸²¹ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1953, p. 101.

⁸²² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 September 1953, p. 73.

⁸²³ L.K. Walkom, "New Shaft, Unusual New Mill: Feature Expansion at World's Largest Asbestos-Producing Property," *Canadian Mining Journal*, October 1954, p. 57.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 58.

remain pure and clear from foreign materials. These technologies replaced employees who gathered asbestos by hand at the bottom of the pit and those who picked through the rock for blasting debris. The relationship the workers had with the land was changing.

Further industrialization of the land dramatically increased Quebec's asbestos production in 1954, which had reached 914,864 tonnes worth almost \$80,000,000. These numbers led the *Canadian Mining Journal* to state that the technological advancements that allowed for the Jeffrey Mine to provide 1/3rd of the world's supply of the fibre in 1954 would "ensure asbestos mining as a principal industry in Quebec for at least another century."⁸²⁵ Wealth and stability came from the land at Asbestos and it seemed unfathomable that something could prevent this future success. Believing in the continued prosperity of land and community, everyone in town tried to capitalize on it.

There were almost 10,000 people living in Asbestos in 1955 and anticipating a further population growth because of the prosperity of the Jeffrey Mine, town council bought massive quantities of land from Shipton Township on which to expand.⁸²⁶ Council paid for this expansion in part from the \$900,000 in fees collected from construction permits, a portion of which came from JM to build 61 company houses and 78 garages.⁸²⁷ Even though the Chez Nous Ideal was working towards local home ownership, Johns-Manville continued to encourage its employees to rent more affordable housing from it, ensuring JM would have the power to move them when the Jeffrey Mine needed to be expanded. The company also built 70-foot long tunnels that ran underneath the community in order to transport the large trucks full of fibre without disrupting traffic. This was a way for JM to alter the land outside the limits of its property at the Jeffrey Mine while being considerate of community comfort.

The Chez Nous Ideal remained active in the years following the strike, and constructed 124 homes during 1956, which made it, not JM, the largest provider of housing in Asbestos.⁸²⁸ While these were signs of prosperity, the editor of the local paper was worried. Knowing the wealth of Asbestos came from the land, J. Osias Poirier questioned the longevity of these developments because of the ever-expanding nature of the Jeffrey Mine. New homes were good, but not if they would be torn down in order for

⁸²⁵ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1955, pp. 89-90.

⁸²⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 21 July 1955, p. 236.

⁸²⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 7 October 1955, p. 1

⁸²⁸ *Le Citoyen*, 11 January 1957, p. 1.

the mine to grow, and Poirier suggested that one day the pit would be so large that the people of Asbestos would have to live in Danville.⁸²⁹ Homes built by the *Chez Nous Ideal* were signs that community land was meant for the community, not the industry, but although JM had not greatly expanded the mine in many years, Poirier's concern suggests that JM's idea land use in Asbestos would overpower that of townspeople. If what the *Canadian Mining Journal* claimed was true, and the industry would boom for the next hundred years, homeowners would be constantly forced to sacrifice their land to the Jeffrey Mine until they no longer lived in Asbestos. In fact, Asbestos would cease to exist as a community.

JM was unconcerned with community disruption or dissolution as long as it continued to profit in Asbestos. Termed the "giant of the industry" because the Jeffrey Mine provided 60% of the country's exported fibre,⁸³⁰ the late 1950s were years of record-breaking profits for JM, which made more than \$100,000,000 in 1957.⁸³¹ Because of this, the company decided to close down its difficult underground operations in Asbestos and focus solely on the Jeffrey Mine. Officials saw this as a good business strategy because the open pit could be industrialized much more easily than underground mines and new technology could be applied that required less manpower. The reason the company began to mine underground in the 1940s was to minimize the expansion of the pit into the town, which had angered residents, but soaring profits and changed company-community dynamics meant that comfort was no longer a main concern for officials. JM presented plans to expand the Jeffrey Mine to town council in January 1958.⁸³²

The expansion would be gradual, but massive. One of the problems with the subtle nature of mining asbestos underground was that when open cast methods were reintroduced, extraction had to begin beyond the unseen limits of the block caves, which meant that a good portion of "buffer land" between the pit and community was actually barren and would immediately be destroyed. The company would give the town some of its own unused land further away from the pit in exchange, but another problem with this expansion was that one of the roads it would partially destroy was rue St-Aimé. This was a central road and the location of the church so important during the 1949 strike. Council

⁸²⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 26 July 1956, p. 2.

⁸³⁰ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1957, p. 107.

⁸³¹ *Le Citoyen*, 20 December 1957, p. 1.

⁸³² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 January 1958, p. 138.

agreed to the extension because JM “donne de l’emploi à un grand nombre de résidents d’Asbestos,” and the development of the mine was good for the community.⁸³³ The company appreciated this compliance, but made it clear that they were enlarging the Jeffrey Mine for the benefit of JM, not the town, by cautioning council against purchasing any more new land, stating that they had no intention of hiring more workers in the future.⁸³⁴ The church was destroyed in 1967 and the land quickly became part of the Jeffrey Mine.

The fact that the company did not intend to hire more workers during the expansion of the Jeffrey Mine was a dramatic break in the pattern previously seen in town-community relations and showed that the land in Asbestos was to be used for mining purposes, not for community development. The town would grow only if the company decided it should and technological advancements in the Jeffrey Mine gave JM the ability to increase production without increasing its workforce. To illustrate this point the company laid off 80 of its underground miners in July 1958 and 40 more in April 1959.⁸³⁵ To lay off 120 of its workers during a time of unprecedented profits and demand was a sign that JM was becoming less involved in the community in the years following the strike, as the land and the local connection to it in Asbestos rapidly changed.

The townspeople were worried. Lost jobs, annexations, and the increased use of new technology in the Jeffrey Mine challenged the connection the local population had to the land and shook their confident local cultural identity. In an attempt to regain some control over land use, townspeople voted against a proposed annexation of more land from Shipton Township in a community-wide referendum and waited to see how JM would alter the land next.⁸³⁶ The changes made by JM to the land in Asbestos were quick and dramatic. The Jeffrey Mine soon began to eat away at rue Notre Dame, which required the relocation of a number of families and businesses on both it and rue Bourbeau.⁸³⁷ The first stage of expansion would soon affect all those living on rue Laurier, Panneton, Lafrance, St-Jacques, St-Dominique, St-Aimé, Legendre, St-George,

⁸³³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 20 May 1958, p. 174.

⁸³⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 27 May 1958, p. 176.

⁸³⁵ *Le Citoyen*, 25 July 1958, p. 1 and 17 April 1959, p. 1.

⁸³⁶ *Le Citoyen*, 15 May 1959, p. 1.

⁸³⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 22 May 1959, p. 1.

and Amyot.⁸³⁸ While JM would provide the infrastructure for the roads that would have to be constructed to accommodate these displaced families, it was clear that while its local power had diminished in the years following the strike, the economic success and determination of the company ensured that JM dominated land use in Asbestos and there was nothing townspeople could do to stop it.

“Asbestos doit produire plus d’amiante,” 1960-1971

By 1960, the Quebec asbestos industry was worth more than \$100 million annually as global demand continued to increase. JM cleared 12 million cubic yards of useless overburden from the land in order to achieve the company’s goal of extracting a massive 30,000 tonnes of fibre and 12,000 tonnes of waste each day from the Jeffrey Mine.⁸³⁹ The expansion was not only in response to increased global markets for the raw mineral. JM was experimenting with adding the fibre to asphalt to increase the durability of roads, and anticipating that the new product would create another boom in the industry, the company added more shifts at the Jeffrey Mine. These developments inspired the local newspaper to declare, “Asbestos doit produire plus d’amiante,”⁸⁴⁰ and town council asked JM if it would pave the Asbestos-Danville Road with the new asphalt as the community grew to 10,709 people with the addition of new shifts at the pit.⁸⁴¹ The Quebec government also asked JM for enough asbestos asphalt to pave the roads and highways of the province.⁸⁴² The reach of the Jeffrey Mine was growing as new applications increased market demand for its mineral and made the industry in Quebec worth over \$130 million in 1961.⁸⁴³

Although they knew the mine had to expand for the continued prosperity of the community, people resented the company demolishing the town. The major problem the local population had with JM’s expansion was that it destroyed the religious and commercial centres of the community. Asbestos had already sacrificed the original core of the town, which included both a church and a commercial district, during the expansions in the 1930s, and they were reluctant to do so again. Home and business owners refused to sell their property and a standoff began between company and

⁸³⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 19 September 1959, pp. 48-49.

⁸³⁹ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1960, p. 160.

⁸⁴⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 18 March 1960, p. 1.

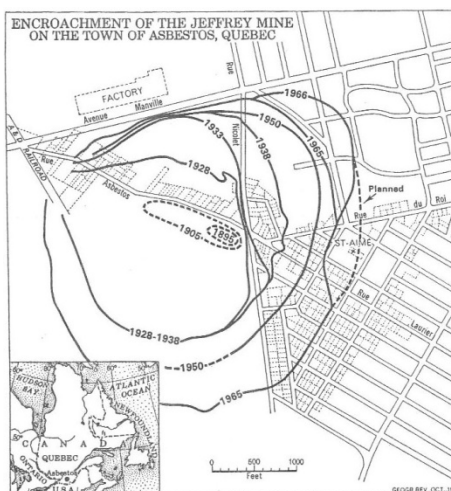
⁸⁴¹ *Le Citoyen*, 9 September 1960, p. 9 and 9 June 1961, p. 1.

⁸⁴² *Le Citoyen*, 28 July 1961, p. 1.

⁸⁴³ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1962, p. 117.

community over how land in Asbestos was to be used. The townspeople revealed their confident local identity with this standoff, as well as their belief that land use in Asbestos could be balanced much like their daily lives: between liveable and workable space. Because 1964 saw record profits for JM yet again, however, and the industry was vitally important to the province's economy, the company appealed to the Quebec government and despite his government's *Maîtres chez nous* slogan, Minister of Natural Resources René Lévesque declared that he would pass a bill of expropriation mandating the expansion of the Jeffrey Mine if the town agreed to it.⁸⁴⁴

Lévesque's decision gave some control back to the people of Asbestos, but his support of JM revealed that the government also believed the industry was more important than the community. Business owners on rue Bourbeau wanted assurances from JM that their profits would not be affected by the expansion and other citizens worried that the growth of the mine would create massive amounts of "mort-terrains." The land that was so closely connected to the people in Asbestos could not be allowed to suffer an industrial death. *Le Citoyen*, the local newspaper had a different opinion, however, and it stressed that if JM was not allowed to expand when and where it needed to, the company would leave and Asbestos would become a "ville fantôme."⁸⁴⁵ Townspeople had the choice between living on dead land or in a ghost town.



Showing the past and future expansions of the Jeffrey Mine, 1967⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁴ *Le Citoyen*, 30 January 1964, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁶ W. Gillies Ross, "Encroachment of the Jeffrey Mine on the Town of Asbestos, Quebec," *Geographic Review*, vol. 57, no. 4 (1967), p. 529.

Because their livelihoods depended on JM's continued use of the land, townspeople allowed the expansion to proceed, and the company purchased St-Aimé from the community for \$1.2 million in February 1964 to ease local resentment.⁸⁴⁷ JM also provided land for two new churches to be built, one of which would be named St-Aimé, to maintain as much continuity as possible. The local newspaper paid tribute to the church when the sale was announced and stated that Asbestos had witnessed so much destruction over the past years so that the pit could grow and the people could prosper. The loss of the church was simply another addition to the history of the community.⁸⁴⁸ Although the townspeople seemed ready to give up their religious foundation and the bad memories of provincial police invading their place of worship in 1949, the business owners on rue Bourbeau were less compliant.

The merchants of Asbestos did not want their businesses sacrificed to the Jeffrey Mine. Many believed that the town would do better if the bill failed, and the business owners of Asbestos went to Quebec City to protest it.⁸⁴⁹ Their appeals were considered, but the Quebec government knew that the land in Asbestos could only maintain its value if it was used for mineral extraction. Although the town was beginning to be seen as the "bouge au Québec"⁸⁵⁰ because of its landscape, this was a hellhole that was too important to the financial gains of the province to prevent JM from expanding the Jeffrey Mine. Bill 192 authorizing the expropriation was passed in June 1964.

JM had more authority over land use than local business owners in Asbestos did, but the government stated that the company had to wait three years before it began its expansion plan and it was to use this time to negotiate fair land sales.⁸⁵¹ While this sounded reasonable, especially after the town gave up St-Aimé, Asbestos residents who owned their homes because of the Chez Nous Ideal refused to sell their property and JM had to appeal to council to forcibly buy the land and sell it to the company.⁸⁵² Both council and the local newspaper supported JM and the editor of *Le Citoyen* urged people to think of the gains that would come from the expansion, not the losses. Asbestos was

⁸⁴⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 13 February 1964, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁸ *Le Citoyen*, 27 February 1964, p. 2.

⁸⁴⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 24 April 1964, p. 4.

⁸⁵⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 14 October 1964, p. 4.

⁸⁵¹ *Le Citoyen*, 23 June 1964, p. 1.

⁸⁵² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 4 November 1964, p. 7.

founded on a tradition of building and rebuilding to accommodate the needs of the Jeffrey Mine, and because of this, it had become “[u]ne ville qui se déplace.”⁸⁵³

Although the global demand for the mineral doubled between 1955 and 1965 and the industry was worth over \$148 million to the province, the townspeople were dissatisfied with JM treating the community as though it was of little importance compared to the Jeffrey Mine.⁸⁵⁴ Giant rocks were blasted out of the pit and into the homes of the people living in the west end of the town in April and May 1965.⁸⁵⁵ The company stated that it had invited the people living in at-risk areas to leave their homes when dynamite was being set off and it was not JM’s fault if they refused.⁸⁵⁶ This was an effective, although unintentional, way to get the people of Asbestos to sell their property to JM, but it was ineffective in making the community content with the company. It also distanced the people from the land, with the Jeffrey Mine becoming a dangerous and invasive presence in the community, rather than their main source of pride and cultural identity.

By 1967, after having 54% of town land consumed by mine expansion and 250 buildings destroyed, Asbestos was without a central district and its people had to adapt to a new sense of place and community.⁸⁵⁷ Because of technological advancements, the workforce at the mine had only grown by 200 since 1949, even though operations had increased exponentially. The town did not look upon this favourably, but JM saw cutting labour costs while increasing profits as a real indication of success. The *Canadian Mining Journal* dedicated an article in 1967 to “The Free World’s Largest Asbestos Producer,” contrasting it with Russia’s growing production because JM had turned the community into an “industrial complex” producing over 600,000 tonnes of the mineral annually.⁸⁵⁸ The article praised the technological advancements JM had introduced, and attributed the industrialization of the pit to a combination of the rising cost of labour, the increasing size of haulage equipment, and the nature of the land, which demanded greater extraction rates

⁸⁵³ “a town that is on the move” *Le Citoyen*, 19 December 1964, p. 4.

⁸⁵⁴ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1965, p. 129.

⁸⁵⁵ Antonio Hamel to Bérubé, Government of Quebec, 10 October 1979, BANQ, E78 S999, 7 A 009 03-06-004B-01; 1993-06-004\12.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁷ Ross, “Encroachment of the Jeffrey Mine on the Town of Asbestos, Quebec,” p. 534.

⁸⁵⁸ *Canadian Mining Journal*, May 1967, p. 45.

because the quality of the mineral was decreasing.⁸⁵⁹ What the *Canadian Mining Journal* failed to mention, however, was the local response to becoming an industrial complex. The people of Asbestos remained proud of their local connection to the global industry, but they also valued community and JM had drastically reorganized the town to accommodate its industrial commitment to how land and labour should be used.

Rather than consider community needs and opinions, the journal stated that the future of Asbestos depended on further industrialization of the Jeffrey Mine, and trucks that could carry 100 tonnes of fibre from the bottom of the pit were soon introduced. Despite this industrialization, and despite the danger of huge rocks blasting through the community, the people of Asbestos managed to maintain their connection to the land. This connection was illustrated during the 1967 St-Jean Baptiste Day parade in Asbestos when the community cheered for a float with a sign that read, “Amiante: Notre Patrimoine.”⁸⁶⁰ The float demonstrated that the people of Asbestos believed that the mineral, and therefore the land, was their cultural heritage. While JM looked at the land



The float made by Jeffrey Mine workers, 1967⁸⁶¹

for profit, the townspeople looked at it for pride and identity. While they did not want to sell their homes, they continuously lobbied town council to introduce more asbestos products into the infrastructure of the community, including the new city hall and new roads.⁸⁶² Furthermore, they were proud that their land was used in the construction of Montreal’s Expo ’67 buildings and was featured in the 4,000 square foot plaza sponsored by the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association at the exhibition.⁸⁶³

JM came to the community for business, but the workers at the Jeffrey Mine went there to live. When business got in the way of life, the people confidently and strongly objected, believing there could be a balance between the two. They did not do this prior to

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 49.

⁸⁶⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 186.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid, p. 186.

⁸⁶² *Le Citoyen*, 22 August 1967, p. 1.

⁸⁶³ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1968, p. 150.

the strike, however, and their new reluctance to sacrifice the community to the mine reveals a change in how they believed land should be used in Asbestos. In April 1968, the effects of the Jeffrey Mine's expansion on the community became unbearable and led to the belief that "[n]ous en avons soupé de la poussière et du bruit."⁸⁶⁴ Living in Asbestos had become like living in a soup of noise and dust that no longer resembled the community people were so attached to: the town was quickly becoming an inappropriate place for families to live as the new machinery used in the Jeffrey Mine's expansion produced more dust than had previously been seen in the community. Citizens went to council to urge them either to reroute JM's expansion plans so they would not come so close to local neighbourhoods, or establish a 1,000-foot buffer zone between the pit and the town. The new technology JM introduced to the Jeffrey Mine was louder, noisier, smokier, and more disruptive to the land than any other previous extraction method the community had experienced before and they believed that "la vie normale est intenable dans les conditions actuelles."⁸⁶⁵ For townspeople to find life in Asbestos unbearable because of the Jeffrey Mine is a remarkable change in how they related to the pit for much of their history, and has much to do with increased industrialization distancing the people from the land.

The 1,000-foot buffer zone between the Jeffrey Mine and the community was established in September 1968, while JM destroyed more roads and houses, and gave \$20,000 to town council to help with urban development.⁸⁶⁶ This buffer was reinforced in July 1969 when a 200 foot long wall was constructed between boulevard St-Luc and the Jeffrey Mine.⁸⁶⁷ The wall marked a drastic change in the relationship between the people of Asbestos and the land. Once a place without a fence and where children would play on weekends, the Jeffrey Mine had become closed off to the community at the request of the people. The visible removal of the pit was a way for townspeople to have some control over land and identity in Asbestos.

In September 1969, the Government of Quebec ruled that the people of Asbestos had to agree to the relocation of boulevard St-Luc before it became official.⁸⁶⁸ That the

⁸⁶⁴ *Le Citoyen*, 23 April 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁶⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 17 April 1968, p. 62.

⁸⁶⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 October 1968, p. 117 and 5 March 1969, p. 180.

⁸⁶⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 22 July 1969, p. 1.

⁸⁶⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 29 September 1969, p. 250.

company was not granted automatic permission to use the land as it saw fit is remarkable, especially because its management of the Jeffrey Mine was largely responsible for the industry being worth \$196.8 million in 1969 and the unobstructed expansion of the pit was supposed to raise local production levels to 100,000 tonnes of fibre a year.⁸⁶⁹ The needs of the people of Asbestos were recognized as being just as significant as those of the company and this validated the community's cultural identity, which was confident in knowing the important local role it played in the profitable global industry. Although the town extended almost all of its roads in 1970 in preparation for the Jeffrey Mine destroying parts of current neighbourhoods, because of this ruling JM turned its attention to the massive piles of pit tailings that had been part of the landscape since before the 1930s.⁸⁷⁰ Advanced technology at the Jeffrey Mine was now able to sift through the waste gathered before 1930 and extract the smaller asbestic fibres that were overlooked in the past. This mirrored the efforts Feodor Boas made after Jeffrey and Webb sold the mine and discovered the value of the land at Asbestos, which contained very little waste rock. Focusing on the tailings would also slow down expansion plans and hopefully improve company-community relations. JM needed to stop expanding the mine temporarily because the town could not keep up and there were not enough new homes for displaced citizens to move to once the company took their land.

Housing was a major issue in Asbestos at the start of the 1970s because while the town's population was not significantly growing, residents who were being forced to move because of the expanding Jeffrey Mine had nowhere to go. Both the *Chez Nous* Ideal and the company had stopped purchasing new land and building houses because the increased industrialization of the pit had capped employment numbers. When JM told the Quebec government that the 1971 housing shortage was not the company's fault, however, town council lashed out and called company officials Pontius Pilates, showing just how severely land use issues had altered community relations.⁸⁷¹ Many families lived in dangerous proximity to the Jeffrey Mine without any alternative place to go, but the company believed this was not its concern. JM was turning its back on Asbestos, as new technology made its human workforce less and less fundamental to industrial success, and

⁸⁶⁹ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1970, p. 146.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁸⁷¹ *Le Citoyen*, 22 December 1970, p. 1.

as officials began to understand that because of the negative health effects of the mineral, the future of the community—and that of the industry—was limited. Although it was still a single industry and single company town, JM began to focus solely on the land as it let go of its past responsibilities in Asbestos.

Replacing the local Chez Nous Ideal, the provincially-run Société d'Habitation du Québec united with town council in 1971 to construct 151 new houses in Asbestos that JM promised would be safe from the expanding Jeffrey Mine for at least 50 years.⁸⁷² The fact that the Chez Nous Ideal had disappeared in favour of government control is significant. While the need for new housing had diminished in previous years, when it suddenly became an issue in the 1970s, the townspeople and the province changed with the establishment of government organizations concerned with social issues and needs. The political landscape of Quebec had transformed since the Duplessis years, and as seen with the case of housing in Asbestos, so had the people. The new homes built by the Société d'Habitation du Québec would be for families displaced by the growing pit as well as those living in the petit Nicolet sector of town because the expansion cut them off from all amenities.⁸⁷³ The housing crisis showed the growing authority of the townspeople and the province in deciding how to balance land and people in Asbestos.

Change in Command, Change in Direction, 1972-1983

The new authority the townspeople had in Asbestos became more apparent as the 1970s progressed. Signs of local confidence grew and differed from the protests of the first major expropriation in the 1930s because it involved the entire community, not simply the merchants. One-third of fibre production at the Jeffrey Mine was now from pre-1930s tailings, but JM wanted to increase the amount of asbestos it extracted. Although the industry was worth over \$210 million in 1972 and the Jeffrey Mine produced 30,000 tonnes of fibre annually, well ahead of its closest competitor near Thetford producing around 12,000 tonnes, the company wanted to raise its yearly tonnage to an astonishing 700,000 by 1975.⁸⁷⁴ The desired tonnage was outrageous because it would flood the market with a mineral the western world was beginning to reject due to an increased awareness of its negative health effects. Publicity surrounding the health

⁸⁷² *Le Citoyen*, 26 January 1971, p. 1 and *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 10 February 1971.

⁸⁷³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 27 September 1971.

⁸⁷⁴ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1972, p. 139.

risks of asbestos meant that the Jeffrey Mine had a limited future, and JM extracted as much mineral as it could before the industry collapsed. Increasing production to this extent would require the Jeffrey Mine to be rapidly and exponentially expanded to the point where the town of Asbestos would be completely overtaken by the growing pit and the historical balance between liveable land and workable land would be destroyed.

The people of Asbestos refused to allow JM to follow through with its plans. By 1975, yearly extraction levels at the Jeffrey Mine had risen to only 35,000 tonnes and the townspeople continued to resist the company's development plans. The local newspaper became critical of JM and termed the pit a "mauvaise mine" while reporting on the forced evacuations of citizens from their homes, which were falling into the pit.⁸⁷⁵ This was not difficult, as the company was always forthcoming with its intentions for community land. Sections of boulevard St-Luc were soon closed for safety reasons and JM announced that 160 people had to move in order for the pit to incorporate part of the road, despite the paper asking, "Mais, pour aller où?"⁸⁷⁶ The local cultural identity in Asbestos was rooted in a fine balance between people and land, and the community would not compromise this coexistence to satisfy the ambitions of JM. All 160 people refused to move.

By this point, the community was aware it would not share in the profits increased extraction would bring the company. Due to technological advancements and a diminished global market, JM laid off 154 of its workers in 1975.⁸⁷⁷ Although townspeople rallied behind the expansion of the Jeffrey Mine in the 1930s with the hope of getting out of economic depression, JM's plans of the 1970s had a completely different feel and purpose. The industry continued to be worth millions of dollars, but as global opinion of asbestos changed with an increased awareness of the health risks associated with it, the Jeffrey Mine's importance changed as well.

The rapid expansion of the pit and the refusal of families on boulevard St-Luc to move their homes led to more accidents caused by rocks flying into the community during blasting.⁸⁷⁸ The mine itself was also being adversely affected because of its rapid development. Landslides occurred throughout 1975 that destroyed large portions of the

⁸⁷⁵ *Le Citoyen*, 28 January 1975, p. 4.

⁸⁷⁶ *Le Citoyen*, 15 April 1975, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 4 February 1975, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁸ Yves Hamel, Asbestos, to Robert Bourassa, Premier of Quebec, 9 June 1975, BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-0062.

pit's southeast spiral benches.⁸⁷⁹ In response, town council launched a claim against JM forcing the company to restrict its expansion plans to protect the community.⁸⁸⁰

The town of Asbestos had become increasingly dangerous as rocks continued to fly through neighbourhoods at all hours. In 1976, projectiles from the Jeffrey Mine crashed into one of the few remaining stores on rue Bourbeau and hit the son of the owner. Months later, a flying rock went through the roof of M. Hyppolyte's home on rue St-Barnabé and landed in his baby's empty bassinette.⁸⁸¹ The provincial government ordered JM to be more careful with blasting in the pit, but the company instead decided to invest \$77 million dollars in a new factory and new equipment that would decrease a reliance on manpower and increase production levels by enabling more blasting each day.⁸⁸² Nothing would get in JM's way, especially the community, as the company frantically extracted as much fibre as it could while the industry was still viable.

The townspeople had radically different views than JM on how the land in Asbestos should be used. The community believed that both it and the Jeffrey Mine needed to coexist in a relationship balanced between progress and stability. This balance was the identity and heritage they would defend against JM's notions of success. In 1977, council articulated this belief when it described flying rocks as "actes de vandalisme" and complained of rising "rafales de poussière" that were so thick that "la situation présente est inacceptable et intolérable pour les résidents de la Ville."⁸⁸³ The town was not against progress and even purchased more land on which to expand in June 1977, but it was becoming increasingly frustrated with the way JM treated the people of Asbestos as though they were of little importance. Thick clouds of toxic dust, flying rocks, and the constant noise of new machines had transformed the community into an industrial horror. This was not how land and people were supposed to interact in Asbestos.

As a corporation with shareholders to answer to, JM was principally concerned with getting as much fibre out of the Jeffrey Mine as quickly as possible, and the company was able to spin the damage it was doing to Asbestos and turn it into something positive. A 1977 *Canadian Mining Journal* article on the Jeffrey Mine highlighted the

⁸⁷⁹ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1976.

⁸⁸⁰ 5 June 1975, BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

⁸⁸¹ Yves Hamel, Asbestos, to Yves Bérubé, Quebec MNR, 10 October 1979, BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

⁸⁸² *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1977, p. 125.

⁸⁸³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 18 May 1977.

fact that in the next three years, JM “will have purchased 40 multifamily buildings, 93 duplexes, 49 houses and 41 commercial buildings. Another 29 houses, a hotel, company office building and some vacant lots owned by the company will also disappear.”⁸⁸⁴ The article excused these actions when it stated that “Asbestos is after all, a fairly old town and...[this is] a form of forced urban renewal that has so far been to the benefit of Asbestos, turning it into a pretty well-planned town that boasts the latest and best in community facilities.”⁸⁸⁵ The article misunderstood Asbestos. The historical pattern of Jeffrey Mine expansion and community relocation meant that new buildings and town infrastructure were constantly constructed.

These changes may have brought Asbestos new facilities, but the fact that they were forced suggests that it went against what the community wanted. The Jeffrey Mine had grown to 6,500 feet east to west, 6,000 feet north to south, and 1,000 feet deep, and its immense size was making life in the community difficult. No longer caring much for community-company relations if it got in the way of production, JM continued to industrialize the land and the people who worked it. By introducing the “hot shift change,” the company ensured the Jeffrey Mine would be constantly worked, with one shift ending only when the men starting the next shift were dropped off at the bottom of the pit by a small truck that would then deliver those done for the day to the top of the mine, avoiding the usual brief stop in production between crews.⁸⁸⁶ JM also planned to introduce “autonomous working crews” that would be stationed in “mini mines” all around the pit. These crews would only work with each other and would not have contact with other Jeffrey Mine employees, which seriously affected workplace camaraderie.

Technological and organizational changes to the land in Asbestos in the late 1970s brought JM their largest profits in company history, but also required fewer men; 60 employees were laid off in 1977.⁸⁸⁷ This pattern of increased profits and layoffs was common in industry during the second half of the 20th century, but to add to the problems arising in Asbestos, in January 1978, three large rocks were blasted into the town. One crashed into the home of Adrien Sirois on rue St-Jacques, another, weighing 23 pounds

⁸⁸⁴ Richard Fish, “Canadian Johns-Manville Beginning \$77 million Investment Program,” *Canadian Mining Journal*, November 1977, p. 8.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁸⁷ BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

broke through the exterior wall of Yvette Boucher's house on rue Notre-Dame, 1,800 feet away from the pit, and the final rock destroyed the kitchen of another citizen.⁸⁸⁸

The residents reported JM to the police and the Quebec government. In their eyes, this was not business nor resource development, it was assault and vandalism, and the people of Asbestos asked the company to establish set blasting times so they could evacuate their homes for fear of further damage or injury.⁸⁸⁹ Although not intentional, these accidents allowed the company to successfully expropriate the homes closest to the Jeffrey Mine even though the owners did not want to sell. Marie Fortin-Drouin was informed in September 1979 that her house on boulevard St-Luc was no longer safe.⁸⁹⁰ Although she got an injunction against the expropriation, Fortin-Drouin was forced to vacate her home with JM employees helping her move furniture. A week following the expropriation of Fortin-Drouin's house, a rock blasted through the roof of the Desrochers funeral home and destroyed a ceramic figure of a praying Jesus. Cars and windows along boulevard St-Luc and rue Roi were also damaged.⁸⁹¹

These accidents allowed JM to expropriate the houses and businesses located near the Jeffrey Mine and relocate boulevard St-Luc in May 1980,⁸⁹² but the people of Asbestos were becoming increasingly resentful of how the company treated their land and community. Townspeople maintained their rigid position against further expropriations and sought new ways to gain control of the land in Asbestos as council enforced restrictions on the company when it agreed to the expropriations for safety reasons. In September 1980 council agreed to the relocation of boulevard St-Luc, rue St-Dominique, and rue Laurier, but told JM that the current plans could not be altered in any way, that officials would have to negotiate with every property owner individually for the sale of the land, and that the company would have to pave the newly relocated roads at their own expense.⁸⁹³ The community was finally taking control.

⁸⁸⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 18 January 1978.

⁸⁸⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1 February 1978.

⁸⁹⁰ Gérard Piché, CJM Administrative Services to Marie Fortin-Drouin, September 1979, BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

⁸⁹¹ Desrochers to Government of Quebec, September 1979, BANQ, E78 S999, 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

⁸⁹² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 7 May 1980, p. 48.

⁸⁹³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 17 September 1980, p. 109.

Because the slow collapse of the global market for the mineral sped up during the early 1980s due to increased awareness of asbestos-related disease,⁸⁹⁴ JM was losing its authority in the town, in the province, and in the industry. The people of Asbestos showed this loss of authority when council heard from citizens concerned with how the development of the Jeffrey Mine affected their lives in January 1981. Frustrated with the constant noise and dust emerging from the pit, they asked, “[e]xiste-t-il une loi provinciale ou municipale fixant une limite entre un cratère d’exploitation et une résidence?”⁸⁹⁵ Although this appeared to be a simple request for a new buffer zone between the pit and the community, the language used is telling. It was only as the 1980s began that the people of Asbestos started to look at the Jeffrey Mine as a “crater:” something that happened to their land, not something they did to it. The people of Asbestos had always lived in close proximity to the Jeffrey Mine, but this relationship changed during the 1970s and 1980s because of new technology that decreased the interaction between workers and the pit, turning the land into something mechanical and foreign. The people wanted the reestablishment of the balance between mine expansion and town expansion that this new technology had destroyed.

JM had not lost all its power with the provincial government, however, and when council asked for a minimum buffer zone of 150 feet separating the edges of the Jeffrey Mine and the community, the Minister of Natural Resources replied that doing so was unthinkable.⁸⁹⁶ This sharply contrasted the accommodating process of establishing a 1,000-foot buffer zone in Asbestos in 1968, which had disappeared by 1981: keeping the industry afloat had become more important than maintaining the community. The economic strength of the industry was weakening, but JM continued to be a financial powerhouse in the eyes of the government and it would not restrict its development. The company continued to purchase individual plots of land along rue Noel, St-Jean-Baptiste, Chassé, St-Edmond, St-Hubert, and du Roi, and yet JM announced that it would reduce its workforce from 2,200 to 1,500 people.⁸⁹⁷ The global industry continued to collapse and the machines the company used in the Jeffrey Mine required fewer employees.

⁸⁹⁴ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1981, p. 129.

⁸⁹⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 21 January 1981, p. 171.

⁸⁹⁶ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 5 May 1981, p. 222.

⁸⁹⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 19 May 1981, p. 235 and *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1982, p. 122.

Not only did the people of Asbestos have nowhere to live because the Jeffrey Mine was expanding faster than new homes could be built, they also had nowhere to work as machines replaced them. Town council acknowledged this new reality in June 1982 when it discussed a plan for the Société d'Habitation du Québec to build 10 new houses to accommodate citizens displaced by the Jeffrey Mine. Council refused this opportunity because "suite aux mises à pied à la Johns-Manville Canada Inc., il y a eu une baisse dans la population...et l'exode de la population d'Asbestos vers d'autres villes a libéré plusieurs logements."⁸⁹⁸ People were leaving the community because the industry was collapsing and the land was turning toxic. The proud local identity was seriously threatened by the international downturn of the industry and many had given up.

Asbestos had suffered through economic collapse and depopulation in the past, when William H. Jeffrey declared bankruptcy in 1892 and JM closing the mine during the Great Depression. But the 1980s were different. Townspeople were not ignorant of the negative light in which the mineral the community was named for was now seen throughout the world; they knew the industry was suffering. Local fears were confirmed when JM filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States in August 1982. International markets had been shying away from the mineral because of the increased knowledge of its potential health risks since the early 1970s, and the industry was no longer profitable. Although the local newspaper claimed that without JM, Asbestos would collapse,⁸⁹⁹ the people of the town refused to believe this because of their faith in the land and their fears of what would become of the community if the mine failed.

Although JM's future was unstable, it continued to purchase land to expand the Jeffrey Mine. Daily extraction levels remained at 30,000 tonnes of fibre, but global prices and demand for the mineral had dropped 26% in the past year and a change in this trend did not seem possible.⁹⁰⁰ Suspecting abandonment was coming, town council demanded an immediate billing system for sales in 1983 so the people of Asbestos would not lose their land without compensation if JM left.⁹⁰¹ It was time for the community to take control of its land and its future. Insisting on immediate financial compensation was one way people did this, but the town also participated in the creation of the Municipalité

⁸⁹⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1 June 1982, p. 156.

⁸⁹⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 10 August 1982, p. 2.

⁹⁰⁰ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1983, p. 100.

⁹⁰¹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 4 January 1983, p. 246-247.

Régionale de Comté du Québec (MRC) de l'Or Blanc,⁹⁰² a new name for the region of l'Estrie of which Asbestos was a part.⁹⁰³

Renaming the town's geographical region "white gold" at the height of the global rejection of the mineral was a defiant act by the people of Asbestos and the provincial government. It shows just how willing they were to stand behind the mineral despite international opinion turning strongly against it. Townspeople balanced their memories of profitable glory days with their fears for the future. They refused to accept that the land was dangerous and became determined to continue working the Jeffrey Mine because it was their proud heritage and their hopeful future. Council approved \$45,000 to create the Musée Minéralogique in Asbestos, which featured samples of the fibre that came from the Jeffrey Mine in its raw, milled, and manufactured forms.⁹⁰⁴ Establishing the MRC d'Or Blanc and the new museum put the town into deficit, but these expenses were justified because they were to celebrate the land that was back under their control.⁹⁰⁵

Local control was made official at the end of 1983 when JM sold its property in Asbestos for \$117 million to 12 former company officials who felt that they could manage the land, the community, and the industry better than the massive corporation, even though market demand for the mineral continued to decline rapidly.⁹⁰⁶ The negative feelings townspeople had towards the Jeffrey Mine during JM's recent expansion of it disappeared when the company left the community and locals had more control over issues of land use. Profits were down, but the mine was still producing 30,000 tonnes of fibre a day and the people of Asbestos had faith in their ability to work with the land to obtain a steady future.

The community demonstrated this optimism at the end of 1983 when it declared that 1984 would be the "Année de l'Amiante." Town council justified this when it stated that it was because of "les décisions arbitraires de l'EPA concernant les produits de l'amiante...[et] les effets néfastes de cette décision; [et] l'importance que revêt ce marché de l'amiante pour le Canada, le Québec et notre région; [et] que des milliers de

⁹⁰² This name was taken from a longstanding nickname for the mineral, which was "white gold," because chrysotile asbestos was white in colour and worth just as much as, if not more than, gold.

⁹⁰³ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 17 May 1968, p. 73.

⁹⁰⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 December 1983, p. 135.

⁹⁰⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 19 December 1983.

⁹⁰⁶ G.O. Vagt, "Asbestos," *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1984, p. 143.

travailleurs vivent de cette richesse naturelle.”⁹⁰⁷ The people of Asbestos decided that it was their duty to defend the mineral and the land from the attacks the American Environmental Protection Agency had been launching against the fibre due to its harmful health effects; the townspeople felt that this negative publicity was what was causing the industry, and their community, so much damage.

The community was able to overlook the health threats and the industry’s lack of future in 1983 for the same reason it continues to do so today: a psychological and physical attachment to the land and the industry that defines it. In a federal-provincial study on Canadian mining towns in decline during the 1980s, researchers concluded that locals developed an emotional attachment to these communities and with this, “comes a sense of spirit and purpose, and commitment to a place...[M]ajor layoffs or a closure may have a more severe impact than where such spirit is lacking. Another psychological factor is the uncertainty of being dependent on one major employer, and the probable lack of alternatives for employment in the immediate vicinity.”⁹⁰⁸ The people in Asbestos dealt with the collapse of their industry in ways that showed how deeply they were attached to the mine. Although money was a factor, this was more than a simple desire for a paycheque: this was a deep sense of home and tradition rooted in the community’s cultural identity, which connected them to the Jeffrey Mine through the work they did and the lives they led. It was founded in the late 19th century when the mine was first carved out of the land, and for over a hundred years, it has permeated the cultural identity of the people who chose to live and work in Asbestos. This can further be seen in the ways the community knowingly put their bodies, and the bodies of their children, at risk, which will be examined in the next chapter.

⁹⁰⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d’Asbestos, 19 December 1983, p. 143.

⁹⁰⁸ BANQ, E78 S999 2A 026 02-05-004A-01; 1993-05-005V4, p. 6.

Chapter 7: Useful Tools: Human Bodies, 1949-1983

In April 1997, four men from Asbestos ran in the Paris marathon wearing t-shirts that read, “on peut vivre en vainqueur.” Eudore Lemay, Michel Champagne, Pierre Laliberté, and Guy Guerette ran to prove to the world that the mineral was not dangerous and should not be banned from global markets. France had come out against the fibre and their run was an attempt by the people of Asbestos to enter the political debate on the issue. Champagne stated that “[m]y house is 800 metres from the mine and I am in great shape....We want to prove to France that we live here and are not affected by disease.”⁹⁰⁹ When the men held a press conference at the Eiffel Tower, however, only four journalists showed up: three from Quebec and one from a French scientific journal.⁹¹⁰

While the men did not change international opinion on the mineral, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien applauded their efforts at the time and responded positively when busloads from Asbestos and Thetford Mines arrived in Ottawa in September 2003 to demand Parliament continue financially and publicly supporting the industry. The government agreed and has not withdrawn this support despite a provincial study released in 2004 that stated rates of mesothelioma, a particularly deadly asbestos-caused cancer, had increased in Quebec since 1982.⁹¹¹

This chapter will examine the health issues of Asbestos from the 1949 strike to when JM left the community in 1983. During this period, as in Paris in 1997, the workers at the Jeffrey Mine used their own bodies as increasingly important tools to combat overwhelming medical evidence that proved asbestos was dangerous. As long as the people of Asbestos were healthy, the mineral—and the industry—was safe. The health of the people of Asbestos has not been examined by historians, aside from brief mentions of the issue being a complaint during the 1949 strike. By using a combination of medical literature and confidential JM documents, this study will advance our understanding of why the industry remains sacred to the province even today.

In *Danger, Death and Disaster in the Crowsnest Pass Mines, 1902-1928*, historian Karen Buckley writes that miners develop a cultural identity founded on the acceptance

⁹⁰⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, 31 March 1997, p. A04.

⁹¹⁰ Michel Dolbec, “Les marathoniens de l’amiante sont ignorés,” *Le Devoir*, 5 April 1997, p. A2.

⁹¹¹ Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, “The Epidemiology of Asbestos-Related Diseases in Quebec,” (Quebec: Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, 2004), p. 53.

of risk and danger.⁹¹² This chapter will trace how this cultural identity and acceptance of risk was also present in Asbestos, growing militant in the years following the 1949 strike. JM helped begin this tradition by having company-paid medical professionals like Dr. R.H. Stevenson and Dr. Kenneth Smith falsely inform Jeffrey Mine workers that they were healthy during annual medical checkups and union-supervised contract negotiations. The company also promoted the idea that the mineral was synonymous with safety and that the community was supplying health to the world. Furthermore, JM sent the medical reports it approved for public distribution—those that showed that Jeffrey Mine workers were healthy—to both the provincial and federal governments,⁹¹³ strategically building a defence before any other party was alerted to a problem. When JM began to pull away from the health debate because of overwhelming evidence that showed asbestos was dangerous, however, Jeffrey Mine workers took over and used the methods they learned from the company to prove they were healthy.

From 1949 to 1983 there was a steady role reversal in Asbestos, with the local community taking the lead role from JM in defending the mineral's safety by using their own bodies to prove the fibre was safe, even when they knew it was not. The people of Asbestos were not ignorant of what was happening to their bodies and it was not an easy decision to sacrifice their health for their livelihood. This chapter will show how the community's acceptance of risk prior to 1949 discussed in Chapter 3, became even more ingrained into the local cultural identity of Asbestos after the strike, as the industry collapsed and the land they worked was revealed to be toxic.

“Another Storm is Brewing in Quebec,” 1949-1955

A firm understanding of what the mineral does to the human body was one of the major reasons the workers in Asbestos went on strike in February 1949. They understood Bruno LeDoux's frightening exposé on asbestosis and because of it, they knew better than to trust JM doctors, who were instructed to deny occurrences of disease in local workers. In agreeing to end the strike and return to work without any clear changes in dust elimination at the Jeffrey Mine, however, the workers showed a renewed acceptance of risk that remains in the community today. The people of Asbestos have never complained

⁹¹² Karen Buckley, *Danger, Death and Disaster in the Crowsnest Pass Mines, 1902-1928* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), p. 144.

⁹¹³ “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, 1949, p. 46.

about the negative health effects of the mineral since 1949, making risk a fundamental element of their local cultural identity.

Not being able to predict the local acceptance of risk, the company was worried about the health of its employees at the Jeffrey Mine. As the strike of 1949 ended, company Vice President Vandiver Brown was warned by officials at the Gatke Corporation, JM customers and manufacturers of asbestos-containing insulation, that “unless [asbestos producers] do something about [the health effects of asbestos] these little cases will breed like rabbits and they may grow as big as hares...”⁹¹⁴ This was particularly threatening to the company because the strike had brought international attention to the hazards associated with the mineral. Arbitration meetings continued throughout the second half of 1949 to settle the dispute and come to a resolution on the dust-elimination demands made by the workers. A contract clause dealing with the dangers of dust at the Jeffrey Mine would be disastrous for JM, which had always maintained that dust was not a problem. In order to support this position, Dr. Kenneth Smith was once again asked to study the bodies of the workers in Asbestos and prove they were healthy.

Although he had sympathized with the plight of the men on strike just months before, Smith did as he was instructed and protected JM by reporting falsified study results that showed the mineral did not harm Jeffrey Mine workers. The actual results of his study were top-secret and have never been examined in the historiography of Asbestos. Of the 708 employee x-rays he studied in 1949, Smith found that 89% of them had been in dusty areas for over 20 years and only 4 Jeffrey Mine workers had “normal” lungs. Of the remaining 704, 468 were in the early stages of asbestosis and 7 had full-blown cases.⁹¹⁵ Although JM knew its employees were getting sick, these were shockingly high numbers, especially during contract negotiations to settle a labour dispute that had focused on the issue of health. However, the union heads negotiating the terms of the new collective agreement in Asbestos would never hear of this report.

Smith justified his policy of not informing the union or employees of their illnesses, which were permanent and irreversible, when he stated, “[a]s long as the man is not disabled it is felt that he should not be told of his condition so that he can live and

⁹¹⁴ Author unknown. Gatke Corporation to Vandiver Brown, JM VP, “Doc 7,” ACRF, June 1949, p. 34.

⁹¹⁵ Kenneth Smith, “Unpublished Report: Survey of Men in Dusty Areas,” “Doc 7,” ACRF, p. 16.

work in peace and the Company can benefit by his many years of experience. Should the man be told of his condition today there is a very definite possibility that he would become mentally and physically ill, simply through the knowledge that he has asbestosis.”⁹¹⁶ Smith continued to believe that he was on the side of the workers, but his statement also reveals that he thought the symptoms of asbestosis were so subtle, the people suffering from them would not notice. Smith seriously underestimated what the people of Asbestos knew about their own bodies as he helped protect JM from a scandal that could ruin it. The Jeffrey Mine was the major source of the world’s supply of asbestos and the industry would collapse if the mineral caused its workers to become sick: the bodies of the people of Asbestos had to be viewed as healthy.

In order to ensure this, Smith suggested continuing to transfer employees to less-dusty areas of the Jeffrey Mine when their x-rays became alarming and “before there is any possibility of a claim for compensation being submitted and accepted,” although the cases were too numerous for everyone to be transferred.⁹¹⁷ The workers would not be told that they were being transferred because they were sick, but it is unlikely that they did not link sudden job changes with their decreased ability to breathe. Smith’s medical authority held weight in the community, despite his affiliation with JM, and workers accepted these relocations as part of their interaction with the Jeffrey Mine. As he ordered employee transfers, Smith urged the company to invest more money in better dust control because he had noticed significant exposure in the community down-wind of the mine and mill, showing that he understood that the entire town of Asbestos was at risk.

JM officials absorbed Smith’s report with their usual combination of worry for their financial future and confidence in their ability to contain the situation. Company attorney J.P. Woodard casually warned, “dust is causing significant lung changes in many cases, it largely being a matter of time” before serious health effects occur,⁹¹⁸ but C.M. McGaw, an official at the Jeffrey Mine, was a little more concerned. In the middle of contract negotiations he forwarded Smith’s report to JM’s head office and stated that it “shows our tremendous potential liability on exposure. Hope you can help speed approval

⁹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

⁹¹⁷ Kenneth Smith, “Industrial Hygiene—Survey of Men in Dusty Areas,” 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, p. 46.

⁹¹⁸ J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, to L.C. Bart, JM, 8 August 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, p. 49.

of the dust control appropriation.”⁹¹⁹ Although JM President Lewis H. Brown claimed during the strike that the \$1 million already spent on dust-elimination technology at the Jeffrey Mine was sufficient, Smith’s study frightened the company enough that it approved an additional \$5.5 million for better dust control. Woodard wrote to McGaw that he hoped “this will make a real improvement in your working condition situation, both within and without the plant,”⁹²⁰ which acknowledges how much dust had become a community issue because of the strike: health reforms needed to be visible both at the Jeffrey Mine and throughout the town of Asbestos.

Despite Woodard’s belief that the new funds for dust control would help ease tension in the community following the strike, JM kept both Smith’s findings and the plan for improved dust-elimination technology secret during contract negotiations. Admitting there was a dust problem would prove that the company knew the mineral adversely affected its workers, and union heads would use this to their fullest advantage. The company’s reputation had suffered during the strike and would only worsen if townspeople who did not work at the Jeffrey Mine knew they were getting sick due to clouds of dust. JM instead relied on the testimony of Dr. John Vorwald during contract negotiations, who had helped hide the stolen lungs of Asbestos workers earlier that year.

In the arbitration meetings of 1949 Vorwald downplayed the severity of asbestosis and testified, “I would like to compare lungs with our two arms, two legs and our two eyes. When one goes bad we can use the other one, and we have two lungs in case of disease.”⁹²¹ When pressed by union lawyers who suggested that this logic meant that if a man without an arm was impaired, a man with asbestosis was as well, Vorwald replied, “No, I don’t think so. He has an impairment of his lung tissue but he is not suffering from it.” Vorwald’s nonchalant attitude is especially shocking considering he had just instructed Smith to commission a confidential inquest into the link between asbestos and cancer because of the presence of it in the stolen lungs from Asbestos at Saranac.⁹²² Vorwald’s testimony helped convince the arbitration board to rule in favour of JM and

⁹¹⁹ C.M. McGaw, CJM, to C.W. Hite, JM, August 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, p. 49.

⁹²⁰ J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, to M.C. McGaw, CJM, 18 August 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, p. 52.

⁹²¹ Testimony of John Vorwald in Arbitration of the Asbestos Strike, 1949, as seen in Lloyd Tataryn, *Dying for a Living: The Politics of Industrial Death* (Toronto: Deneau and Greenberg, 1979), p. 28.

⁹²² John Vorwald, Saranac Laboratories, to Kenneth Smith, CJM, 15 October 1949, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, ACRF, p. 50.

better dust control was not made part of the new collective agreement in 1949, something the workers would never have accepted at the beginning of the strike.

Health issues took up 10 of the 57 pages of the arbitration ruling, far more than any other topic, and while JM had to publicly admit that asbestos was harmful, it was granted full control over how it dealt with this fact both within the barriers of the Jeffrey Mine and throughout the community of Asbestos.⁹²³ There was some debate over how long a worker had to be exposed to the mineral's dust before he or she began to show signs of disease, and uncertainty was expressed over how much dust was too much. Neither the company nor the union leaders were inclined to think asbestos could be mined or processed without dust, and total elimination was never a consideration, which reflected the local cultural identity in Asbestos, the community's acceptance of risk, and a widespread, longstanding societal belief that mining was dirty and no amount of reforms would change that. The willingness to live and work surrounded by dust they knew to be harmful indicates the extent to which the people of Asbestos had already decided to sacrifice their bodies in favour of a continued tradition of working at the Jeffrey Mine.

As far as asbestosis was concerned, JM medical professionals convinced the arbitration board that Smith's policy of removing workers from dusty areas when their x-rays showed signs of fibrosis was effective in stopping the progression of the disease, while also allowing the bodies of employees time to heal themselves, falsely suggesting asbestosis was not permanent. JM manipulated medical evidence to maintain the image that the Jeffrey Mine did not give the people of Asbestos an incurable disease. The company did so because if they admitted to the severity of asbestos-related disease, the industry would be seriously threatened. JM was confident that it could contain the problem in the mine and mill.

The 1949 strike was settled at the height of community concern over asbestos-related disease and the potential toxicity of their land. While townspeople attempted to return to a pre-strike way of life at the start of 1950, JM was busy preparing its defences against another health threat caused by asbestos: cancer. While "asbestosis" was a confusing term to the general public, "cancer" was something everyone understood. Although Smith had not yet seen evidence of asbestos-related cancer in Jeffrey Mine

⁹²³ *Le Devoir*, 15 December 1949, p. 1.

employees, he was worried about the increasing number of international medical reports on the topic.⁹²⁴ Whether he knew of the cancer cases discovered in the stolen lungs at Saranac is unclear. Smith re-studied all the x-rays he had on file in Asbestos and told Karl V. Lindell, the new president of CJM, that “[i]f we are to defend ourselves in the compensation courts we must have proof.”⁹²⁵ Smith also instructed Lindell to ignore Quebec’s new health regulation requiring occupational diseases to be reported because, “[w]e would not want to have this industry unjustly penalized.”⁹²⁶ JM was lucky to have resolved the strike without the full health risks of asbestos being made public, but the company needed to be prepared in case the dangers were exposed. It was necessary to deceive its workers and the government to ensure industry stability. The fact that Smith warned that JM would be “unjustly” penalized if the occupational illnesses in Asbestos were reported suggests that even though he appeared to sympathize with the workers and advocated for better dust control, Smith wanted to protect the company.

It was crucial that the employees at the Jeffrey Mine had healthy bodies. Asbestos was the main source of the world’s supply of the mineral and because very little processing occurred, JM maintained that the fibre was in its purest form there. If medical studies of workers in other locations found a link between asbestos and disease, JM stated that it was because other materials or chemicals had been added after it left the Jeffrey Mine, which meant there was a problem with the processing, not the fibre. This was a wise defence because manufacturers, especially those in Great Britain where many of the damning medical reports originated, usually mixed Canadian chrysotile with South African crocidolite asbestos, seen as a more hazardous fibre.⁹²⁷ Smith had to show that the asbestos in the Jeffrey Mine did not make people sick, and he had to use the bodies of the workers in Asbestos as proof. As long as the workers were healthy, the company and the industry would be as well.

From the private correspondence of JM officials it is clear that they were not convinced of their own argument. At the beginning of 1950, Canadian lobby groups were pushing to have lung cancer recognized as an industrial disease, and Dr. Paul Cartier at

⁹²⁴ This included new studies by E.R.A. Merewether in Great Britain. Kenneth Smith to K.V. Lindell, CJM President, 28 January 1950. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 53.

⁹²⁵ Ibid, p. 53.

⁹²⁶ Ibid, p. 53.

⁹²⁷ Kenneth Smith to John Vorwald, 8 February 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 51.

Thetford Mines confidentially reported 9 cases of lung cancer in his patients.⁹²⁸ Smith acknowledged the potential threat of cancer when he told Woodard in February 1950 that while he had not seen any evidence of the disease in Jeffrey Mine employees, this did not mean it was not there.⁹²⁹ Woodard replied that Smith should publish a report on what his x-rays showed as long as he was “sure” it would be favourable to the industry.⁹³⁰ A letter from Vorwald to Smith soon followed, urging him to quickly use the healthy bodies of Jeffrey Mine employees as a defence against damning medical reports because “another storm is brewing in Quebec, this time concerning a case of asbestosis with cancer.”⁹³¹ Vorwald did not expand on who or where this case referred to, but he did not need to: the presence of asbestos-related cancer in humans, rather than Gardner’s mice, was worrisome enough. The people of Asbestos could not be told of this new threat.

JM had narrowly escaped catastrophe over the issue of asbestosis in 1949 and wanted to avoid any suggestion that asbestos was carcinogenic. The company was not alone in this endeavour, as the Quebec government had its own interests to defend. Asbestos was one of the most profitable industries in Quebec and Premier Maurice Duplessis wanted to keep it that way. In May 1950 he eased JM’s fears with an assurance that asbestos-related disease was not something with which his government was concerned. Duplessis wrote, “[I]es companies ayant fait tout ce qui était humainement possible de faire pour éliminer la poussière, et l’amiantose étant presque inexistante dans la province de Québec, il ne convenait pas d’imposer des clauses impératives à ce sujet.”⁹³² Duplessis did not sympathize with the workers who had gone on an illegal strike for almost five months only a year before, and he left their occupational health in the trusted hands of JM.

The Quebec government was committed to the promotion of the asbestos industry and used its citizens’ health as proof that the mineral was safe. In fact, the idea that asbestos was not only safe, but helped ensure the safety of the entire population, was a common mantra during the 1950s. One of the most extreme examples of this came at the

⁹²⁸ J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, to H.H. Peterson, 3 February 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 51, and Paul Cartier to John Vorwald, 30 January 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 50.

⁹²⁹ Kenneth Smith to J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, 7 February 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 51.

⁹³⁰ J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney to Kenneth Smith, 3 March 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 62.

⁹³¹ John Vorwald to Kenneth Smith, 18 April 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 52.

⁹³² Maurice Duplessis, Premier of Quebec, “Letter of Address to the Documentation catholique de Paris,” May 1950, as seen in Esther Delisle and Pierre K. Malouf, *Le Quatuor d’Asbestos: Autour de la Grève d’Amiante* (Montreal: Les Éditions Varia, 2004), p. 11.

beginning of the decade when asbestos paste was used in heart surgeries to glue the heart and left lung together to promote new, healthy tissue and blood channels.⁹³³

JM was not comfortable relying on these assurances, however, and in July 1950 the company considered shipping raw asbestos from the Jeffrey Mine in paper rather than burlap bags to prevent dust from escaping during transport.⁹³⁴ CJM attorney Yvan Sabourin and president G.K. Foster also met with QAMA, the lobby group made up of the province's asbestos producing companies, to urge them to fund a study on the link between the mineral and cancer.⁹³⁵ JM was confident that by indirectly funding a study on the workers at the Jeffrey Mine, the company would continue to control the information discovered and released. Vandiver Brown wrote to Woodard to justify this and stated, “[w]e, of course, have never intended to suppress information obtained as a result of experiments financed by us, and on the occasions when we insisted that there be no publication without our advance ‘approval,’ we have had in mind that we might possibly wish to defer release until we could make such defensive moves as might be appropriate and available to us.”⁹³⁶ What Brown failed to mention was that if a study was particularly damning, its release date would be indefinitely deferred.

JM had established a pattern of indefinite deferment over its history in Asbestos, and it was seen again when Smith notified JM of a new test for asbestosis developed by Dr. Wright while visiting operations at the Jeffrey Mine in 1950. By measuring the oxygen absorption in the blood of JM employees, Wright was able to determine the level of pulmonary fibrosis without relying on x-rays. A degree of interpretation remained with this new test, however, and Wright had the authority to determine the “normal” level of oxygen in blood and all other doctors had to follow his standards. Smith recommended that the release of Wright’s study be deferred because it “might change our whole examination program and seriously affect the field of compensation.”⁹³⁷ Wright had found at least 8 workers with definite signs of asbestosis in their blood who Smith had previously give a clean bill of health.⁹³⁸ Before this discovery, Smith was the ultimate authority on the bodies of the workers at the Jeffrey Mine because of how he chose to

⁹³³ “Asbestos for Heart Trouble,” *Asbestos Magazine*, March 1950, p. 3.

⁹³⁴ John Vorwald to J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, 25 July 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 54.

⁹³⁵ G.K. Foster, CJM President to J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, 28 July 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 54.

⁹³⁶ Vandiver Brown, JM VP to J.P. Woodard, JM Attorney, 15 November 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 56.

⁹³⁷ Kenneth Smith to H.M. Jackson, JM, 19 December 1950, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, 57.

⁹³⁸ Wright to Kenneth Smith and Paul Cartier, 8 January 1951, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 60.

interpret shaded x-ray films, but a simple, non-interpretive blood test could destroy his reputation and result in an onslaught of compensation claims.

Not only did the company agree to delay releasing this new study, it also chose to keep Gardiner's old report on asbestos-related disease secret. Smith whole-heartedly agreed to this policy, especially after he discovered a case of asbestos-related skin cancer on Margaret Wolfe, an employee in the Jeffrey Mine's Textile Department.⁹³⁹ The presence of cancer showed how serious the threat of dust was at the mine and mill. Wolfe was not informed of her illness and in 1951, JM erased all references to asbestos and cancer from their Industrial Hygiene Meeting Minutes.⁹⁴⁰

Although these studies were suppressed, the people of Asbestos knew that they were of interest to the medical community. Job transfers and visiting doctors were not signs of a healthy workforce, but those employed at the Jeffrey Mine did not want to go on another strike over dust issues so soon after the one in 1949 destroyed their savings and failed to significantly improve conditions. They confronted the risks they suspected by continuing to work the Jeffrey Mine and by relying more on the opinion of JM doctors than their own bodily knowledge. The company had been good to Asbestos since it arrived in the community in 1918, bringing the first x-ray machines in the 1920s and funding a new hospital in 1948, even though examinations were running 3 to 4 years behind schedule because of the thoroughness with which their bodies were now studied.⁹⁴¹

JM used this trust to its fullest advantage. In 1952 Illinois ruled that all asbestos products entering the state must carry a warning label that read: "CAUTION—ASBESTOS FIBER' Inhalation of asbestos fiber over long periods may be harmful. The material should be so used as not to create dust or, if this is not possible, employees should be equipped with adequate protective devices."⁹⁴² Jeffrey Mine officials defied the ruling and refused to put the warning on their shipping bags so as not to alarm their employees or customers. What people did not know about the dangers of the asbestos industry was security for the company.

⁹³⁹ C.W. McGaw, CJM, to H.M. Jackson, 1951, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 61.

⁹⁴⁰ J.P. Woodard, C.W. McGaw, H.M. Jackson and N.S. Deeley Correspondence, 17 January 1951, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 62, and Kenneth Smith to C.W. McGaw, 11 June 1951, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 60.

⁹⁴¹ "JM Memorandum on History of JM Medical Program at Asbestos," 19 October 1951, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, pp. 61-62.

⁹⁴² 1952, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 62.

The 1952 interim report of QAMA's study on asbestos and cancer indicated that tumours were starting to develop in mice exposed to high quantities of the mineral's dust.⁹⁴³ By this time, Smith had retired and left Asbestos, although he continued to consult with JM. Dr. Anthony J. Lanza at Saranac Laboratories stepped into Smith's role as the medical authority on the health of Jeffrey Mine employees. Although he privately told the company that Canada, not England, had the first cases of asbestos-related disease fifty years ago,⁹⁴⁴ he publicly stated that the cancer and asbestosis rates being reported by E.R.A. Merewether in Britain were strikingly different from the Canadian and American experience with the mineral. In Lanza's public opinion, however, neither of these diseases were particularly problematic when only Canadian chrysotile asbestos was used.⁹⁴⁵

British medical professionals did not enjoy being told their research results were questionable and Turner & Newall's Dr. John Knox was granted permission to visit Asbestos and Thetford Mines in 1952 to see for himself. Knox found that there "has been a serious attempt to improve conditions in the mill here...but as it is made to deal with more material than originally designed for, it is practically ineffective on that account."⁹⁴⁶ Because of the large asbestos manufacturing industry in Britain, Knox was aware of the most modern methods used to prevent workers from being exposed to toxic dust, which included a limit on the amount of fibre processed each day and a sophisticated wetting and ventilation system that prevented dry particles from floating in the air. The great amount of fibre being processed in Asbestos, however, meant that JM operations there could not possibly accommodate these new methods.

The safety standards in Asbestos were appallingly low to Knox, who was unable to take a dust-count measurement because the mill was too dusty for his equipment to work. He also stated that the "[w]eaving [department] was to me really shocking...Good dust counting would have revealed a disturbing state here. There was no wetting...and no exhaust used."⁹⁴⁷ The alarming state of the area where a number of local women worked was worrisome, but not especially embarrassing for JM because the company had medical evidence to disprove Knox's comments. Since 1918, only 8% of their total workforce had

⁹⁴³ First Interim Report, 7 May 1952, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 64.

⁹⁴⁴ A.J. Lanza, 1952, "Doc 7," ACRF, p. 9.

⁹⁴⁵ A.J. Lanza, 1952, "Doc 7," ACRF, p. 12.

⁹⁴⁶ John Knox, "Visit to Thetford Mines and Asbestos," 30 September 1952, p. 2.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

ever filed claims for compensation due to occupational disease, and this was considered to be an insignificant number compared to medical reports confirming the extreme toxicity of the mineral.⁹⁴⁸ In the opinion of JM officials this meant that 92% of their employees had been unaffected by asbestos. Rather than indicating a lack of under-reporting of medical evidence, this was used as proof that the Canadian chrysotile contained within the Jeffrey Mine was relatively benign.

Statistics like this maintained the image that asbestos was not as harmful as some believed, but Knox's appraisal of operations at the Jeffrey Mine was taken seriously. Because dust levels could not be further reduced without great expense to the company, officials began to renew their efforts to get employees to wear respirators. Many did not want to wear these protective devices because they continued to clogged easily and restricted breathing. It also challenged their concept of how to work in a dangerous profession and workers rejected these artificial extensions of their bodies. Employees refused to wear respirators that were re-used from shift to shift, and when personal devices were introduced, the company found that workers had to be watched at all times to ensure they were being worn.⁹⁴⁹ The fact that Jeffrey Mine employees continued their tradition of refusing to wear respirators even after LeDoux's exposé had made them fully aware of the risk of asbestosis reveals how deeply an understanding of risk had permeated the local cultural identity. This action does not mean that workers intentionally made themselves sick, but rather that they did not, or could not, believe that their bodies would be adversely affected by the mineral. If the people of Asbestos only worked at the Jeffrey Mine because it was the largest employer in the community and it provided them with a steady paycheque, they would have worn the respirators while lobbying for even more dust control measures. Their refusal to do so advances our understanding of how community members understood the risks associated with the mineral while maintaining their local identity, rooted in their connection to the land and the steady income it provided.

The fact that workers refused safety measures to protect them from dust they knew to be dangerous only five years following the 1949 strike puzzled JM officials, who knew that the image that Jeffrey Mine employees were healthy had to be maintained. The

⁹⁴⁸ "Health of Employees at CJM," 1953, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 68.

⁹⁴⁹ I.H. Sloane to H.M. Jackson, 25 April 1954, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 74.

image of a healthy workforce was especially important in 1955 because of a report by Dr. W.C. Hueper that claimed asbestosis led directly to lung cancer and had already done so in 21 cases in the United States, 6 in Canada, 88 in Great Britain, and 12 in Germany.⁹⁵⁰ Although JM restrictions on visiting doctors ensured that none of the 6 Canadian cases were Jeffrey Mine employees, Hueper's report was dangerous. In response, the company authorized the publication of a thoroughly edited version of Smith's 1949 assessment of the health of Jeffrey Mine employees.

Whereas Smith's original report stated that only 4 had "normal" x-rays, his published work claimed that 91% of the men he studied had no signs of asbestosis.⁹⁵¹ It continued to state that of the 52 employees who showed signs of pulmonary fibrosis, none had signs of asbestosis and many of them had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for 20 to 40 years. Smith's published report only admitted to there being 7 employees who had definite asbestosis, but none of them were impaired in any way and continued to work without trouble. He concluded by stating that few employees exposed to chrysotile asbestos develop any signs of fibrosis, and those that do have asbestosis, "have been known to carry on their usual work and live fairly comfortable lives for several years."⁹⁵² Smith did not say whether the 7 men he admitted to having asbestosis had been informed of their disease or not, and if the reason they lived "fairly" comfortable lives was because he reassured them their painful symptoms were nothing to worry about.

That Smith did not publish his 1949 study without JM's approval of his altered conclusions shows how much control over medical evidence the company had. The workers at the Jeffrey Mine were relatively isolated and no doctors from outside the community or the company could examine their medical files without JM consent. While closed files may not sound unusual, within the context of the international medical community's interest in the mineral, it was, as visiting doctors were common in industry towns throughout the 20th century. The health of Jeffrey Mine employees appeared to remain—at least publicly—and this strength would become increasingly important as the

⁹⁵⁰ W.C. Hueper, "Silicosis, Asbestosis, and Cancer of the Lung," *American Journal of Clinical Pathology*, vol. 25 (December 1955), p. 1389.

⁹⁵¹ Kenneth Smith, "Pulmonary Disability in Asbestos Workers," *American Medical Association Archives of Industrial Health*, vol. 12 (1955), p. 200.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

years passed and the amount of medical evidence contradicting Smith's altered conclusions grew.

“‘ignorance is bliss’ has been expensively disproved,” 1955-1972

Smith's work was taken seriously within the Canadian medical community, which had difficulty making inroads in Quebec because of linguistic differences.⁹⁵³ His study convinced Canadian doctors that asbestosis was a rare, non-fatal disease,⁹⁵⁴ but JM remained concerned over QAMA's study on the links between asbestos and cancer led by Drs. Daniel C. Braun and T. David Truan. Because he was employed by the asbestos producers of Quebec, Braun tried to make the study's findings positive when he wrote to H.M. Jackson in 1957 that of the 99 cases of asbestosis and lung cancer studied, only 19 of them were miners, which suggested that “the possibility of an association between lung cancer and asbestosis is much more likely to exist in asbestos factories than in mining operations.”⁹⁵⁵ The Jeffrey Mine could still be perceived as safe, even if the mineral was continuously shown to be toxic. Although operations at Asbestos included a mill, the size and repute of the pit meant that the dustier mills were often overlooked.

The belief that milling was more dangerous than mining was not reassurance enough for JM, and this information was taken out of the final report, termed the “Braun-Truan Report,” before it was released. In the confidential draft submitted to JM in 1957, Braun and Truan stated that they believed incidences of asbestosis were considerably under-reported by company doctors, which directly led to an increase in asbestos-related lung cancer.⁹⁵⁶ The underreporting of asbestos-related disease certainly existed at the Jeffrey Mine, but there was no way JM would sanction the publication of this information. Braun and Truan concluded in their draft that independent medical professionals, not company-paid doctors, should evaluate all x-rays of asbestos workers,⁹⁵⁷ which suggested that company doctors were partly responsible for the increased occurrence in asbestos-related cancer because they had been instructed by their companies to not report the first signs of illness. This was a serious accusation and

⁹⁵³ H.E. MacDermot, *History of the Canadian Medical Association*, vol 2 (Toronto: Murray Printing & Gravure, 1958), p. 29.

⁹⁵⁴ J.D.M., “Asbestosis,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 73 (August 1955), p. 210.

⁹⁵⁵ D.C. Braun to H.M. Jackson, 23 August 1957, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 94.

⁹⁵⁶ Daniel C. Braun and David Truan, “Draft of QAMA: An Epidemiological Study of Lung Cancer in Asbestos Miners,” (QAMA, 1957), p. 52.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

highlighted the very real problems of medical care in Asbestos. If the company was seriously concerned about preventing occupational disease to save the industry from potential collapse and itself from certain litigation, officials would have to reform the way JM handled the issue of health at the Jeffrey Mine.

As correct as Braun and Truan were in their assessment of health in asbestos mining communities, their statements on the dangers of working in processing factories and the irresponsibility of company doctors resulting in more numerous and more severe cases of asbestos-related disease were deleted from the publish report. JM wanted to know what was happening to the bodies of Jeffrey Mine employees, but officials needed this knowledge to be kept contained and confidential. The sanitized copy of this report was released by JM in 1958 and emphasized the smoking habits, rather than dust exposure or negligent medical professionals.

The perspective Braun and Truan were allowed to take in the eventual publication became clear when they stated that the lung cancer rates of the workers they studied at the Jeffrey Mine were actually slightly below the provincial average. Braun and Truan studied 2,273 workers in Asbestos who were alive in 1950, the majority of whom were under 44 years old and smoked more than five cigarettes a day.⁹⁵⁸ Over the five years of the study, three of the 49 Asbestos workers who passed away died of lung cancer. Braun and Truan reported that of these three, “A.J.” was a 66 year old smoker who worked for 26 years in a moderately dusty environment, “N.O.” was a 65 year old smoker who spent 34 years in a mildly dust area, and “R.M.” was a 65 year old smoker who worked 37 years in the same mild section of the Jeffrey Mine as “N.O.”⁹⁵⁹ These numbers allowed them to conclude that while they found a greater chance of those with asbestosis getting cancer, “the mortality rate from lung cancer does not appear to increase with length of exposure or with degree of exposure, a fact which presents strong evidence against the carcinogenicity of asbestos. On the other hand, the study indicates that cigarette smoking is a very important factor in the incidence of cancer of the lung.”⁹⁶⁰ The study also stated that none of the 1,265 non-smokers at the Jeffrey Mine developed lung cancer. Braun and Truan’s emphasis on smoking rather than on toxic dust shows just how much JM was in

⁹⁵⁸ Daniel C. Braun and David Truan, “An Epidemiological Study of Lung Cancer in Asbestos Miners,” *American Medical Association Archives of Industrial Health*, vol. 17 (June 1958), pp. 26-29.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

control of medical literature on asbestos-related disease at this time. Jeffrey Mine employees did smoke, but lung cancer caused by cigarettes manifests differently in the body than cancer caused by asbestos, which stores tiny fibres of the mineral in tumours.

Braun and Truan would have seen the unique type of lung cancer asbestos causes, but they were hired to boost the image of the industry, not expose its risks. The tobacco industry became a convenient scapegoat for asbestos companies looking to preserve the mineral's image of being safe. Although Smith did not agree with this strategy, he believed that "[t]his publication should form the basis for future surveys and reports," and would be a great tool to refute the studies of other medical professionals who did not have such a concentrated cohort of bodies to study.⁹⁶¹ The people of Asbestos were the human equivalent of mice in a laboratory and they were constantly monitored to determine the progression of the diseases the mineral inflicted on the human body.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* accepted the Braun-Truan report for publication and editor Herbert E. Stokinger wrote, "I, myself, was particularly pleased to learn the main conclusion of the paper was against the association of lung cancer with asbestos, for I had come to a similar conclusion on obviously far less information but was afraid to say so for this reason."⁹⁶² The bodies of the workers at the Jeffrey Mine remained useful tools to ensure the legitimacy of the asbestos industry. Braun and Truan knew nothing of the post-retirement cases being secretly studied at Saranac Laboratories, which had discovered over 70 cases of unreported lung cancer in Asbestos by 1958.⁹⁶³

This information is crucial to understanding how the people of Asbestos viewed their bodies at this time. They knew they had respiratory problems because of their work at the Jeffrey Mine, and they had not forgotten LeDoux's 1949 exposé on the industry, but they did not know about the risk of cancer, and they chose to accept the threat of asbestosis. The Braun-Truan Report bought the industry time, and was effective in refuting international medical studies that proved the mineral caused cancer. Capitalizing on this, JM launched a series of print advertisements supporting the idea that asbestos was safe. One ad featured a baby sitting on a floor and saying, "What do you mean I'll catch

⁹⁶¹ Kenneth Smith to Yvan Sabourin, CJM and QAMA Attorney, 30 December 1957, QAMA, p. 2.

⁹⁶² Herbert E. Stokinger, AMA, to D.C. Braun, 1958, ACRF.

⁹⁶³ Gerrit W.H. Schepers, "Chronology of Asbestos Cancer Discoveries: Experimental Studies of the Saranac Laboratory," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 27 (1995), pp. 602-603.

cold on the floor? Our house is insulated with Johns-Manville Spintex!” The late 1950s also saw the launch of “Jim Asbestos,” a JM mascot in a lifeguard uniform that instructed consumers on how the mineral helped make everyday products safer.⁹⁶⁴ The message was clear: asbestos saved lives, it did not take them away.

These medical reports and advertisements worked to maintain the safe image of the mineral and the continued economic success of the industry: Despite this outward sense of calm, JM was having difficulties in Asbestos. In a letter to company headquarters, Jeffrey Mine official J.R.M. Hutcheson wrote, “a possible health hazard is only part of the problem. We have the ever-present, and increasingly onerous problem of public and industrial relations. This facet of the problem is serious enough, the mere suggestion of a health hazard on top of the present problem would make the necessity that much more urgent.”⁹⁶⁵ Hutcheson’s letter reveals that workers knew their bodies were getting sick and they did not believe JM was particularly concerned with their health. Company-community relations had not improved since the 1949 strike and while workers were willing to accept some risk, it was because it was part of the local cultural identity they had developed over generations of working with the Jeffrey Mine, not because of affection for the company.

By 1960, the link between asbestos and cancer was beginning to be understood by the general public⁹⁶⁶ and studies on asbestos factory workers began to show that lung cancer was only the start of what the mineral could do to the human body. For generations the literature on the health effects of asbestos centred on the respiratory system, but the 1960s brought a new challenge to JM’s assertions that the mineral was safe. In an article published in the *Lancet*’s 3 December 1960 issue, E.E. Keal provided a table listing the deaths of men and women suffering from asbestosis in British processing and manufacturing plants over a prolonged period of time. While the majority of male subjects with asbestosis died of carcinoma of the lung, the bulk of the female asbestos-related deaths were caused by carcinoma of the ovary and breast, suggesting that the interaction between asbestos and the female body was unique.⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶⁴ JM print advertisements, 1958.

⁹⁶⁵ J.R.M. Hutcheson, CJM to G.S. Smith, JMHQ, 16 October 1959, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 104.

⁹⁶⁶ Jacqueline Karnell Corn, *Response to Occupational Health Hazards: A Historical Perspective* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), p. 104.

⁹⁶⁷ E.E. Keal, “Asbestosis and Abdominal Neoplasms,” *Lancet* (December 1960), p. 1211.

Aside from the confidential study Joan Ross performed in 1944,⁹⁶⁸ none of the JM-sanctioned articles mentioned the female employees at the Jeffrey Mine who worked in the dusty Textile Department, which Braun and Truan reported to be one of the most dangerous places at the Jeffrey Mine. There was an understanding among male asbestos workers that by belonging to a masculine industry, it was acceptable that their bodies were at risk. Women were a different story altogether, and if the people of Asbestos were alerted to this report they would be horrified. A British medical journal was not something the Francophone workers at the Jeffrey Mine had access to, however, and neither the English nor the French medical communities in Canada were concerned with the link between asbestos and cancer before 1965. The mineral was only mentioned once between 1955 and 1965 in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, and that occurrence dealt again with asbestosis, not cancer. Two mentions of mesothelioma occur in 1957 and 1959, but the link between the mineral and the specific cancer it causes was not acknowledged.⁹⁶⁹ Asbestos and the Canadian public were isolated from the discovery.

JM knew this and wanted to maintain the idea that the pure asbestos taken from the Jeffrey Mine was not carcinogenic. JM President C.B. Burnett believed this could be done through more medical studies on the bodies of Jeffrey Mine workers, continuing the practice of not informing workers of their disease and treating them like mice in a lab. He explained that by simply saying, “‘no one has been hurt’ is to ignore a basic management responsibility of getting the facts upon which to make a decision. The old adage ‘ignorance is bliss’ has been expensively disproved.”⁹⁷⁰ Burnett was referring to the compensation litigation brought on by American factory workers against the company in the late 1950s. JM could not afford people knowing that Jeffrey Mine fibre was toxic, and officials needed to know the complete progression of asbestos-related disease in order to prevent it from continuing and to keep the industry alive. The following year, Dr. Kenneth Smith went further than Burnett and asked if JM was comfortable continuing “to

⁹⁶⁸ Joan Ross, “Survey of Female Employees in Canadian Textile Department,” 1944. “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 34.

⁹⁶⁹ This information is based on a thorough study of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and *Laval medical* throughout their publication history. See, J.D.M., “Asbestosis,” *CMAJ*, v. 73 (1 August 1955), p. 219, P.W. Davey and G.M. Martin, “Malignant Fibrous Mesothelioma of Peritoneum,” *CMAJ*, v. 77 (15 October 1957), p. 792, and M. Daria Haust and G.F. Kipkie, “Pleural Mesothelioma,” *CMAJ*, v. 81 (1 December 1959), p. 918.

⁹⁷⁰ C.B. Burnett, JM President to JM Managers, 19 July 1960, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 109.

impair the health of men and women [and] to shorten their lives by our actions.”⁹⁷¹ Smith was losing interest in protecting the company as his sympathy for Jeffrey Mine workers continued to grow even after he retired and left the community because he knew the severity of the diseases they were suffering from.

Smith also knew that it was only a matter of time before a full exposé on the health effects of the mineral was released with results even more dramatic than LeDoux’s 1949 pamphlet on asbestosis. Dr. Irving J. Selikoff at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York was working on just such an exposé. Selikoff published a report in 1964 on 632 American asbestos insulation workers and found that consistent exposure to asbestos led to increased rates of cancer of the lung, pleura, stomach, colon, and rectum, further suggesting that asbestos-related disease went beyond the respiratory system. It also noted that the “incidence of more than 1% of deaths from pleural mesothelioma is strikingly high for a tumor which is generally considered to be extremely rare.”⁹⁷² Mesothelioma is a fast-acting cancer of the lining of major organs, such as the lung, heart, and abdomen, and this study implied that asbestos was making it common. Selikoff also directly refuted the conclusions Braun and Truan made in 1957 when he wrote that “the smoking habits of the asbestos workers cannot account for the fact that their lung-cancer death rate was 6.8 times as high as that of white males in the general population.”⁹⁷³ With this study, Selikoff changed how asbestos and asbestos-related disease would be studied internationally in the future. Selikoff’s findings discredited JM and QAMA reports that claimed cigarettes, not asbestos, harmed workers, and his study received a lot of press because of it. Medical professionals with ties to the industry would no longer be trusted, and by extension, neither would companies.⁹⁷⁴

This was a serious threat to JM’s health propaganda, which had used the connection between cigarettes and cancer to maintain the image that the mineral was safe. The company had even used a picture of a smoking Jeffrey Mine worker on the cover of its newsletter to shareholders in 1950. Of all those connected to JM, however, Smith took Selikoff’s study the worst. Condemning Selikoff as being someone who is “ambitious and

⁹⁷¹ Kenneth Smith Presentation to JM Headquarters and General Managers, 17 October 1961, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 107.

⁹⁷² I.J. Selikoff, J. Churg, and E.C. Hammond, “Asbestos Exposure and Neoplasia,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 188, no. 1 (April 1964), p. 146.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁹⁷⁴ Paul Brodeur, *Expendable Americans* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), pp. 14-15.

unscrupulous and is out to make a name for himself at the expense of the asbestos industry,” Smith reiterated that Jeffrey Mine employees were healthy and had none of the malignancies Selikoff claimed were common. He then related how Selikoff acted when JM allowed him to visit Asbestos years before: “he told Dr. Grainger in a rather pompous manner that Grainger didn’t know anything about reading [x-ray] films and that he, Selikoff, in that short period of time had seen much more disease than he imagined existed.”⁹⁷⁵ Smith’s contradictions illustrate the difficult situation he was in. He did feel sorry that Jeffrey Mine workers were put at risk, but he did not want his medical authority questioned any more than he wanted JM’s reputation to be tainted by health-related revelations.

Selikoff’s study of American factory workers challenged Smith’s authority and suggested that the rate of disease at Asbestos was significantly higher than reported. Smith claimed that the men Selikoff studied had been exposed to chemical additives in the asbestos and pleaded with JM to make the medical records of its employees open to outside studies to prove Selikoff wrong.⁹⁷⁶ Fearful of what other medical professionals could discover, JM refused Smith’s request, knowing how dangerous it would be for someone like Selikoff to examine Jeffrey Mine workers. Despite this refusal, however, the company acknowledged that the mineral did pose some risk to human health when, in 1965, the United States mandated that shipments of asbestos had to have warning labels placed on them and JM complied. The regulation showed that Selikoff was not alone in suspecting the dangers of asbestos, but the situation in Canada was different. Although the *CMAJ* finally published an international study on the link between asbestos and cancer in 1965,⁹⁷⁷ the federal government did not regulate the industry. Because of this, company official W. Hodgson wrote to JM’s head office and stated, “[w]e have been assured by Dr. K.W. Smith that it is not necessary to use the caution label in Canada, and therefore, we obviously do not want it on any of our cartons.”⁹⁷⁸ Placing stickers over the warnings on empty cartons sent to Asbestos was discussed, but the company decided it was too risky and chose to sand off the labels before they entered Canada instead. JM did

⁹⁷⁵ Kenneth Smith to C.W. Hite, JM, 13 October 1964, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 122.

⁹⁷⁶ Asbestos Textile Institute Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1965, ACRF, p. 3.

⁹⁷⁷ “The Association of Asbestos and Malignancy,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 92 (8 May 1965), p. 1034.

⁹⁷⁸ W. Hodgson, CJM to A. Pocius, JM, 1 February 1965, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 124.

not want to risk their employees and other Canadians seeing the warnings and turning against the mineral. The company needed Jeffrey Mine workers, as well as Canadians in general, to continue believing the mineral was relatively benign in order to maintain production levels, industrial relations, and the idea that Canadian chrysotile was safe.

JM also initiated a new QAMA study of Quebec asbestos workers in 1965. The company provided over half the funds for this organization and exercised a great deal of control over its actions.⁹⁷⁹ McGill University's Dr. John Corbett McDonald was chosen to head this study. McGill had first allied itself with JM in the 1930s with the establishment of the university's Industrial Hygiene Department, so this seemed a natural partnership. JM's aim for the study was to "preserve the industry on which their business depends...[and] avoid any undesirable publicity or any precipitate action by the USA or Canadian Federal Government which might be detrimental to the industry."⁹⁸⁰ Statements like this continue to show that JM was more concerned with bad publicity affecting profits than the health of its employees. The company had dozens of confidential medical reports supporting the fact that Jeffrey Mine employees were at serious risk by working with such a dangerous mineral. Rather than fund better dust elimination equipment in Asbestos, the company chose to pay for false medical reports to use as propaganda.

JM hoped that McDonald's study would eclipse Selikoff's and assure employees, shareholders, and the general public that pure chrysotile asbestos was safe. This was especially important within Canada because of a 1965 study of 100 randomly chosen autopsies at 4 Montreal hospitals that showed the large presence of asbestos fibres in 57% of the men examined and 34% of the women.⁹⁸¹ The air in all major Canadian and American cities at this time was full of asbestos fibres because of the mineral's use in brake linings, pavement, and construction, all of which created toxic dust. That the Canadian medical community had finally become interested in the mineral was significant in itself, but the fact that airborne fibres could contaminate people not directly involved with the industry was a new discovery that could potentially ruin the company if anyone developed asbestos-related disease. The Francophone medical community in

⁹⁷⁹ Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 97.

⁹⁸⁰ John Beattie, QAMA Meeting Minutes, 15 December 1965, QAMA, p. 2.

⁹⁸¹ Lily Anjivel and W.M. Thurlbeck, "The Incidence of Asbestos Bodies in the Lungs of Random Necropsies in Montreal," *CJMA*, vol. 95 (3 December 1966), p. 1179.

Quebec also began to publish on incidences of mesothelioma in asbestos workers who had worked in the industry for over 20 years.⁹⁸² The company had to protect its interests in the province by proving that the people who worked at the Jeffrey Mine were healthy.

The need for McDonald's study increased as Selikoff continued to publish on the negative health effects of asbestos, and public opinion turned against the mineral. Although QAMA admitted in their confidential meeting minutes that there was a direct link between asbestos and cancer, and described Selikoff as "a healthy nemesis," members worried that "[w]e continue to receive an extremely bad press concerning the question of asbestos and health...the time has come for us to produce some rebuttal ourselves, either in a general way or medically substantiated to the extent possible at this time."⁹⁸³ The industry was panicking, and it looked for any evidence to prove asbestos was not as bad as it seemed. Such panic was not only due to bad press. In July 1967, dockworkers in England refused to unload shipments of the mineral unless it was packed in dust-proof containers, and in March 1968 crocokolite asbestos was banned completely in Britain.⁹⁸⁴

Adding to these difficulties was the realization that if asbestos products were not shipped with warning labels, JM could be liable for any damaging health effects the mineral caused. Worried over potential lawsuits, the company informed QAMA in 1968 that even if the rest of the industry voted against placing warning labels on their shipments, JM would. The multilingual labels would read, "This product contains asbestos. Inhalation of asbestos dust over long periods of time may be harmful. Employees exposed to dust during use in application should be equipped with adequate personal protective devices."⁹⁸⁵ Jeffrey Mine workers read these labels, but they continued to refuse to wear respirators and they did not lobby JM for better working conditions.⁹⁸⁶ The lack of fear shown by workers in 1968 sharply contrasts how they reacted in 1949 when LeDoux's report on asbestosis was released, and shows how fully they accepted the risks associated with the mineral. Risk had become such a fundamental part of the local cultural identity that by the late 1960s, it had become habit.

⁹⁸² Jean-Paul Tremblay, "Trois cas de néoplasie associés à de l'amiantose," *Laval Médicale* (April 1967), p. 370.

⁹⁸³ QAMA Meeting Minutes, 10 August 1967, QAMA, p. 44.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38, and QAMA Meeting Minutes, March 1968, QAMA, p. 3.

⁹⁸⁵ QAMA Meeting Minutes, March 1968, QAMA, p. 3.

⁹⁸⁶ Employees refused to wear respirators until JM made it mandatory in 1975. See, JM Memo, 11 August 1975, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 167.

Manufacturers all over the world objected to JM's labels and believed the warnings would cause unnecessary concern within their workforce. A tile manufacturing company in Connecticut suggested that JM distribute an information pamphlet instead of the warning labels⁹⁸⁷ and the Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee in England stated that "[I]abour might refuse to handle asbestos unless packed in an impervious bag and probably insist on metal containers or fibre board drums," if the labels were visible to those in the shipping industry.⁹⁸⁸ Complaints arrived from manufacturers in the Netherlands and Belgium, which explained that that the labels caused financial trouble and emotional trauma so JM should avoid the mistake of putting warnings on their shipments again.⁹⁸⁹ These reactions show how uniquely the people of Asbestos were internalizing the risks associated with the mineral their town was named after and that they were unafraid of. Workers in Belgium were experiencing emotional trauma, but those living next to the world's largest chrysotile asbestos mine were calm. This put JM in a difficult position. Increased lawsuits against the company made the labels necessary so they would not be responsible for any additional illnesses, but warnings angered customers. In 1972, JM removed all warning labels from its Canadian products, on the basis that they were exempt from U.S. regulations.⁹⁹⁰ With an estimated 15,000 to 30,000 Canadian jobs at risk if the industry collapsed, the company continued the "ignorance is bliss" policy even officials admitted was no longer working.

In 1968, the mills in Asbestos were finally refurbished with new dust-collecting technology. Only two years later, however, after learning that 175 of its Jeffrey Mine workers suffered from asbestosis, company officials notified JM head office that the mill was too old to fix and that "we will have to live with the conditions until our new complex is in operation. We will encourage use of the Dustfoe 77 mask despite its practical and personal comfort limitations [but] [d]isciplinary action to the point of layoff will be avoided."⁹⁹¹ JM needed to invest even more money in updating its operations in Asbestos than it did in 1968. The fact that employees continued to refuse to wear respirators did not help the situation, but once again expressed how the people of

⁹⁸⁷ W.D. Brennan, Tilo Co., to CJM, 19 November 1968, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 127.

⁹⁸⁸ Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee, London, to JM and QAMA, 23 October 1968, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 135.

⁹⁸⁹ Eternit to D. Poutiatine, JM VP Internal, 22 December 1969, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 138.

⁹⁹⁰ D. Poutiatine to G.E. Parker, 25 January 1972, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 158.

⁹⁹¹ J.R.M. Hutcheson, CJM to Swallow, JM, 27 April 1970, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 147.

Asbestos internalized the risks associated with the mineral despite being informed of the dangers it posed to their health. Yes, respirators were uncomfortable, but the workers had seen family members and friends die of asbestos-related disease and many were experiencing the painful symptoms of asbestosis and cancer. The reluctance to admit they were sick furthers our understanding of local cultural identity and risk.

“Poussière à Vendre: Rue Bourbeau,” 1971-1983

JM did a study of asbestos-related cancers in community members not directly involved in the industry in 1971. The study found that not only was there a higher occurrence of bronchial cancer in Jeffrey Mine employees compared to JM’s American factory workers, but the people living in Asbestos also had a heightened risk of developing similar diseases because of their proximity to the mine and the clouds of mineral dust that hovered over the town.⁹⁹² This threatened JM’s claim that Canadian chrysotile was relatively benign and it needed to fix the situation before the community or the press discovered it. Workers accepted risk while they were at the Jeffrey Mine, but the company was unsure if the community would mirror that acceptance.

Fortunately for JM, the occupational culture that led Jeffrey Mine workers to confront risks with their bodies had extended into the community of Asbestos. Those who did not work at the Jeffrey Mine were not ignorant of the dangers the mineral posed through press coverage of LeDoux’s exposé, the demands of the workers during the 1949 strike, and more recent warning labels that had been placed on shipments leaving the Jeffrey Mine. It was clear that dust was dangerous at the mine and in the mill. The clouds of dust that hovered over the community were just as dangerous and the local population was able to make this connection. Despite this, no mention of community concern for health appeared in the local newspaper or town council minutes during this period.⁹⁹³ By the 1970s, JM doctors were informing employees of many of their asbestos dust-related illnesses,⁹⁹⁴ including cancers, so the workers and their families were even more aware of what was happening to their bodies than they had been years before, but children continued to play in the dust that hovered over the community, writing their names in it as

⁹⁹² H.M. Jackson to Drs. G.W. Wright and T.H. Davidson, 17 March 1971, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 153.

⁹⁹³ This statement is based on an examination of every newspaper article Asbestos produced and all the town council minutes recorded during the period covered by this chapter.

⁹⁹⁴ CJM to T.H. Davidson, February 1970, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 138.

it settled on local parked cars.⁹⁹⁵ Even with this information, the workers did not strike to ensure better dust control measures were taken at the Jeffrey Mine so that they, and the broader community, would not be exposed to it. Dust and risk had become part of the local cultural identity, and as we will see when the industry collapses in the early 1980s, without this risk, the community struggled to maintain this identity.

An indication of this communal acceptance of risk was seen on 13 July 1971, when the headline of the local paper read, “Poussière à Vendre, Rue Bourbeau,” and an editorial cartoon depicted a woman crossing the road covering her face against the blowing dust while her dog exclaimed, “If I had known that she wanted to cross the desert today, I wouldn’t have gone out with her!”⁹⁹⁶ The air in Asbestos was thick with toxic dust, but while community complaints suggested that townspeople were frustrated with its presence, the spirit of the editorial cartoon was playful and accepting rather than angry and frightened: the people of Asbestos were not afraid of the dust.



Editorial cartoon illustrating the streets of Asbestos, 1971⁹⁹⁷

The company took this as a good sign. It did not want its employees or their family members to become sick, but until they discovered a way to eliminate the risk they appreciated the faith their workforce placed in the mineral. Before 1972 it had generally been accepted that the “safe” level for dust exposure in asbestos workers, known as the Threshold Limit Value (TLV), was five fibres per cubic centimetre. A survey of the dust levels in Jeffrey Mine operations at this time showed that the mills had over 100 fibres of asbestos dust per cubic centimetre,⁹⁹⁸ but the company disregarded the report because of

⁹⁹⁵ Reitze to Paul Kotkin, JM Health, Safety and Environment VP, 11 July 1978, “Asbestos Chronology,” p. 175

⁹⁹⁶ *Le Citoyen*. 13 July 1971, p. 1. Translation by author.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁹⁹⁸ JM Asbestos Fiber Division, “Dust Survey of Canadian Asbestos Dust Stations Over TLV,” 24 April 1972, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 159.

its plans to build a new factory. At the suggestion that JM reach only 2 fibres per cubic centimetres at the new plant, officials replied that this goal would be economically unfeasible and that it would lay off its employees rather than achieve it.⁹⁹⁹ Reducing the level of dust would mean reducing the amount of fibre processed, which would affect profits. Furthermore, the employees at the Jeffrey Mine were used to working with dust and even though the company failed to significantly lower dust levels, the workers did not notify the union and demand JM do so, as they had done during the 1949 strike.

The acceptance of dust was partly due to the local cultural identity in Asbestos that included a certain level of bodily risk. Because of this, Jeffrey Mine workers were the ideal cohort for the McGill study JM and QAMA had been funding since 1965, and although Dr. John C. McDonald found that there were incidences of pleural thickening in the lungs of his subjects at Asbestos, he did not believe this was caused by the mineral. He stated that high levels of dust did lead directly to the development of mesothelioma, but believed that cigarettes caused more lung damage than asbestos.¹⁰⁰⁰ McDonald also studied 428 female employees but found that while they worked in extremely dusty areas, few of them exceeded over 10 years of employment at the Jeffrey Mine, which resulted in fewer cases of disease.¹⁰⁰¹ McDonald did not mention whether he looked for cancer of the breast or ovary when he examined these women, which may have had an impact on his results.

McDonald's conclusions were well received by JM because they followed Braun and Truan's lead and blamed the tobacco industry for heightened cancer rates rather than asbestos. The fact that McDonald was employed by McGill initially suggested that his was an independent study of Quebec's asbestos workers and even Irving J. Selikoff was hesitant to attack his conclusions. While he disagreed with the results, Selikoff was only able to state that the level of dust a Canadian asbestos miner was exposed to was apparently less than that of an American insulation worker. Selikoff also accepted the idea that pure Canadian chrysotile may be less toxic than other types of asbestos, especially in its raw form.¹⁰⁰² Again favouring good publicity over the health of its

⁹⁹⁹ Asbestos Standard Reaction, "Doc 7," ACRF, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰⁰ John Corbett McDonald, McGill University, "Report," 1972, QAMA, pp. 4-9.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰² Dr. Irving J. Selikoff to Paul C. Formby, 18 December 1972, Irving J. Selikoff Papers.

employees, this was a real victory for JM and the company used McDonald's report to its fullest advantage.

In its 1973 newsletter to shareholders, JM claimed, "Much adverse, inaccurate publicity has surrounded the discussion of asbestos and human health. The mineral asbestos is unique and too valuable to do without...As with many materials, asbestos can be harmful if not used properly."¹⁰⁰³ The company relied on McDonald's study and the fact that it had spent over \$20 million on improvements since 1962 to support its claims that the way JM handled asbestos made the mineral completely safe and that dust counts in its manufacturing plants were below 5 fibres per cubic centimetre. This statement was misleading and focused solely on JM factories in the United States. It avoided any specific mention of the mill at the Jeffrey Mine, which still had not been replaced and continued to have dust counts above 100 fibres per cubic centimetres.

McDonald further aided JM's claims that the mineral was safe when he published his study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* in 1973. He stated that there was no significant occurrence of mesothelioma in asbestos workers compared to the entire province between 1960 and 1970. Although he conceded that some victims of mesothelioma were domestically exposed to asbestos through interaction with family members who worked in the industry, McDonald emphasized that this did not mean the mineral was especially deadly, nor was it the only cause of the disease.¹⁰⁰⁴ The report suggested that the asbestos industry had been victim to faulty medical reports that blamed the mineral for any disease that occurred in those who worked with it.

Following McDonald's publication, company officials hosted a QAMA meeting with other international asbestos manufacturing companies. Confidential minutes from the meeting suggest that although McDonald's report had bought the industry some time to regroup after being so thoroughly attacked in the medical community and press, officials knew this calm would not last long. One official stated that the "all important problem...is how to deal with Selikoff...Within the Industry, Johns-Manville is the only Company with sound acknowledged expertise...The battle is still continuing and Industry

¹⁰⁰³ "JM Annual Report, 1973," p. 12.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Alison D. McDonald and J.C. McDonald, "Epidemiologic surveillance of mesothelioma in Canada," *CMAJ*, vol. 109 (1 September 1973), vol. 109, p. 359.

needs help.”¹⁰⁰⁵ JM was so important to industry heads because of its control over the world’s largest and “safest” chrysotile mine and its international reach through trade and manufacturing networks.

Another advantage JM had, according to QAMA, was that “the question of asbestos & health was not as big a problem in Canada as in the USA. Besides, the audience is mostly confined to Quebec and more in the English than in the French Press. It seems that the French media have never tackle[d] too strongly the asbestos & health problem. It should be pointed out, however, that the release of the McDonald report received excellent press coverage.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Because JM’s workforce was mainly unilingual Francophone, the industry felt that there was a safe buffer between them and damning reports on the health effects of asbestos. Furthermore, aside from LeDoux’s 1949 exposé and Pelletier’s coverage of the resulting strike in Asbestos, QAMA’s observations were correct and the Francophone press in Quebec did not concern itself with health issues affecting the workers in one of the province’s most lucrative industries. Both LeDoux and Pelletier moved on to other issues and nobody took their place. English Canada did not care about it because it was in small-town Quebec, and French Canada, already lacking a critical mass sufficient to make an impact, was distracted at this time with issues of Québécois nationalism and independence, which dominated the Francophone media and medical community.¹⁰⁰⁷ For the time being, at least, the industry was safe in Quebec, and JM established a Health, Safety and Environment department in 1974 to address concerns over occupational health and to prepare defences should their fortune in the province run out.

The larger problem JM had to deal with at this time was the English media, which listened to Selikoff’s speeches and reports on the damaging effects of the asbestos industry. In 1974, CBC radio interviewed McDonald and repeatedly asked him if his study was funded by the asbestos industry. Although he stated that McGill supplied his funds, McDonald eventually admitted that QAMA had donated a significant amount of

¹⁰⁰⁵ QAMA Meeting Minutes, 24 January 1974, QAMA, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰⁷ The Francophone medical community in Quebec during the 1970s was devoted to its professional development rather than to any particular disease or issue. Most of its journal articles at this time were focused on political and developmental issues. See, for example, *La vie médicale au Canada français*, January 1972, p. 1.

research money to the university.¹⁰⁰⁸ Coinciding with this revelation, the *New York Times* ran an article condemning McDonald's study because of its links to the asbestos industry. McDonald threatened to sue the newspaper's editor for libel and claimed that while QAMA had provided funds for the study, he was acting on the request of the Canadian government, not the industry.¹⁰⁰⁹ Adding to the situation was the sudden resurgence of the Francophone medical community's interest in asbestos-related disease because of the continued international focus on the province's mines, with one report indicating that while mesothelioma occurrences were 1 in 10,000 for the general population, they were 1 in 10 for those working in the Quebec asbestos industry.¹⁰¹⁰

These numbers were alarming and JM's reliance on the Jeffrey Mine as the perfect example of health and profits was weakening. In May 1975, JM's Health, Safety and Environment Vice President Paul Kotkin sent filmmaker Walter Cooper to Asbestos to make a pro-industry documentary called "Asbestos and Health." Upon his arrival, Cooper immediately wrote back to Kotkin, "the bagging operation on the main floor was shocking. There were accumulations of dust everywhere. It took more than an hour to clean up one bagging unit of visible dust before filming. At another bag unit, I noticed an ankle-high accumulation of fiber, which was being shovelled into an open cart for disposal by a worker, who was not wearing a respirator."¹⁰¹¹ Cooper's observations echoed those of John Knox, the British doctor who had inspected operations at the Jeffrey Mine in 1952. The fact that dust levels remained high after more than 20 years demonstrates how ineffectual JM's efforts were to reduce dust in the mill, despite its awareness of the severe health risks associated with it. It also reveals the extent to which employees had grown comfortable being surrounded by dust they knew to be dangerous.

Cooper's observations in Asbestos offer a rare perspective on what it was like to work at the Jeffrey Mine in 1975 because of the lack of oral histories and diaries from now-deceased workers. He explained, "Fiber continued to spill from the bags onto the floor, where other workers tracked through it...I saw a QC man at the bagging operation open at least four bags, grab a handful of fiber, throw it into an open plate, and then break

¹⁰⁰⁸ J.C. McDonald and Gloria Menard, "Midday Magazine," CBC Radio, 7 March 1974, Irving J. Selikoff Papers (transcript).

¹⁰⁰⁹ J.C. McDonald to the Editor of the *New York Times*, 27 November 1974, Irving J. Selikoff Papers.

¹⁰¹⁰ J. Turiat and J.P. Battesti, "Le rôle de l'agression asbestosique dans la provocation du mésothéliome pleural," *La vie médicale au Canada français*, June 1974, p. 653.

¹⁰¹¹ Walter Cooper to Paul Kotkin, 29 July 1975, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 166.

it apart and swish it around. He did not wear a respirator.”¹⁰¹² The emphasis placed on employees at the Jeffrey Mine working in dusty areas of the mill without respirators is telling. Protective devices were provided by JM, but the workers continued to refuse to wear them even though they knew breathing in the dust was dangerous. Employees also showed their willingness to confront the risks of the asbestos industry by continuing to work at the Jeffrey Mine rather than organizing another strike over health issues or moving their families elsewhere and retraining for another occupation. These were options available to Jeffrey Mine employees, but the fact that conditions had not significantly changed in the mill since Knox’s 1952 visit suggests that over decades of working with dust, risk acceptance had become a permanent feature of the local cultural identity. Not understanding the historical context of this identity, Cooper was astounded at the amount of dust in the air at the Jeffrey Mine and had to stop filming three times to clean his equipment. He noted that the mill he was filming in had been closed for repairs and had just completed its weekly 2-hour cleaning session, done mostly with brooms, which did a better job of stirring up clouds of dust than eliminating them. When the filming was over, Cooper and his cameramen found that along with their clothes, bodies, and hair, their cars in the parking lot were covered with dust.¹⁰¹³

Cooper showed how the people of Asbestos lived and worked with the mineral and that dust was something that affected and covered the entire community. Soon after his visit, Health and Welfare Canada released its first study on asbestos-related disease and reported that Ontario, which had a large manufacturing industry that relied on the mineral, had 69 cases of mesothelioma between 1960 and 1970, while Quebec had at least 102. It concluded that while chrysotile was safer than other types of asbestos fibre, “[d]efinite health hazards exist in the Canadian workplace due to high levels of occupational exposures to asbestos together with inadequate health surveillance and protection.”¹⁰¹⁴ This statement shows that by 1975 at the latest, the Canadian government knew asbestos workers were at risk because of the harmful effects of the mineral, and that companies like JM were not adequately addressing the issue. The company proved Health and Welfare Canada correct when it told its shareholders in 1975 that occupational and

¹⁰¹² Ibid, p. 166.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid, p. 166.

¹⁰¹⁴ J.H. Smith, G. Schreiber, L. Eainton, and P. Bergeron, “Report of the Asbestosis Working Group: Subcommittee on Environmental Health,” (Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada, 1975), p. 10.

community exposure to asbestos dust was not a significant issue.¹⁰¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Canadian government did not insist that companies reform their approach to occupational health and safety. Despite this lack of action, and although there was little JM could do until the new mill in Asbestos was constructed, the company finally made the use of respirators mandatory if exposure was above 2 fibres per cubic centimetre.¹⁰¹⁶ The respirators designed for this type of filtration, however, were useless in environments like the Jeffrey Mine, where the concentration of dust was so high that the filters clogged immediately, making it even harder to breathe.

This was yet another sign that working conditions at the Jeffrey Mine were dangerous, but when Thetford workers went on strike in 1975 because of health concerns, the employees at Asbestos followed them but kept their dispute to wages.¹⁰¹⁷ By choosing to leave health issues out of the strike, the people of Asbestos showed their conviction that the adverse bodily effects of the mineral were not an issue for them. While they did not fully trust JM, they accepted the health risks associated with the industry and enjoyed the rewards of working jobs their fathers and grandfathers had before them. Furthermore, the people of Asbestos were aware of the growing negative publicity surrounding the mineral their community was named for and they understood that it needed to be supported if the industry—and the town—was to survive.

Although workers continued to support the Jeffrey Mine, publicity on the negative health effects of asbestos was rapidly increasing and the Environmental Protection Agency became involved as American mothers began to fear for the safety of their children who attended schools insulated with the mineral. In order to gain some control over the situation, in 1976 JM funded a program designed by Selikoff to research ways to detect mesothelioma cases early enough to cure them. In addition to this, in 1977 the company introduced a “no smoking” policy for its workers in all JM operations because “Research shows that asbestos workers who do not smoke cigarettes have no greater incidence of lung cancer than is found in the general population. Asbestos workers who do smoke, however, have an incidence of lung cancer that is 92 times greater than

¹⁰¹⁵ JM Annual Report, 1975, ACRF, p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁶ JM Memo, 11 August 1975, “Asbestos Chronology,” ACRF, p. 167.

¹⁰¹⁷ “Strike 75-123, February 1975,” Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts, RG 27, vol. 468, LAC, p. 1.

asbestos workers who don't smoke."¹⁰¹⁸ The tobacco industry was once again a convenient scapegoat, but the policy had little effect on how outsiders would perceive operations at the Jeffrey Mine. The federal-provincial Beaudry Inquiry of 1976 looked into the health of the province's asbestos workers after the Thetford strike, and reported that it was appalled at the levels of dust workers were exposed to each day.¹⁰¹⁹ Governments were beginning to take notice of the health problem in the asbestos industry, but loose regulations were blamed, not the inherent toxicity of the mineral.

JM's Health, Safety and Environment Vice President Paul Kotkin actually echoed this sentiment, writing, "[i]f the division cannot complete the environmental clean-up of this textile operation, then serious consideration should be given to shutting down the operation [in Asbestos]. The Jeffrey Textile Plant is an embarrassment as it does not meet J-M's standards and has not met them for a good number of years."¹⁰²⁰ Jeffrey Mine operations could not be shut down because it was the main source of JM's raw mineral and the foundation of its defence against reports that claimed asbestos was dangerous. The company introduced a policy that made the wearing of protective clothing and respirators mandatory in areas that had a higher fibre count than 1.2 per cubic centimetre.¹⁰²¹ This was well within the new limits set by the Quebec government in 1976, which dictated a maximum TLV of 2 fibres per cubic centimetre.¹⁰²² JM also effectively closed Asbestos off to outside media and medical professionals until the new mill was completed. As a result, a 1978 CBC radio report on Quebec's asbestos industry left the Jeffrey Mine out and instead spawned headlines such as, "Véritable génocide à Thetford."¹⁰²³ The press could not say the same about Asbestos, however, as the local population did not make health an issue.

The lack of agitation for health reform at the Jeffrey Mine allowed JM to pose as an industry leader in occupational safety. In its 1980 edition of *JM Today*, the company provided a "Special Asbestos Update," which stated that JM would refuse to sell its products to countries and places that would not uphold the strict health regulations placed

¹⁰¹⁸ JM Annual Report, 1976, ACRF, p. 19.

¹⁰¹⁹ R. Beaudry, G. Lagace, L. Jukau, *Rapport Final: Comité d'Etude sur la Salubrité dans l'Industrie de l'Amiante*, Le Comité, Quebec, 1976.

¹⁰²⁰ Paul Kotkin, 20 September 1977, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 173.

¹⁰²¹ JM Executive Bulletin No. E772-2, 15 November 1977, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 174.

¹⁰²² Hubert Wallot, "La salubrité dans l'industrie de l'amiante," *La vie médicale au Canada français* (February 1979), p. 157.

¹⁰²³ CBC Radio, 1978, Irving J. Selikoff Papers.

on the American asbestos industry. It denied that the company had ever withheld damning medical reports from their employees and emphasized that asbestos did more good than harm. JM products were essential in developing countries that required both shelter and reliable water and sewer systems because “[p]roviding these with asbestos cement products does not require sophisticated technology. It requires for the most part simply the importation of asbestos fiber—a material much less costly than substitute building materials such as steel, imported wood or petroleum-based products.”¹⁰²⁴ Despite its negative health effects, according to JM, the mineral still saved and improved lives.

The town of Asbestos was featured in the update as the source of all the potential good that could come from JM products. The magazine profiled Norman Chartier, who had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for four decades and was now a mill supervisor. Although we need to remember that his statements were made with the intention of boosting the image of JM and the mineral, Chartier hinted at the local cultural identity in Asbestos when he stated that no job was 100% safe, but “if a man uses common sense on the job and follows the rules set down for his protection, he’s more apt to get into trouble when he’s not working.”¹⁰²⁵ In Chartier’s opinion, workers were so fully protected at the Jeffrey Mine that the only time anything bad could happen to them was when they were at home or socializing in town, unsupervised by JM.

This was the type of information the company wanted its employees to believe and publicize. Chartier also dismissed the negative reports the industry had received recently as meaningless “propaganda” that more accurately described the situation 20 to 40 years before. He stated that the “enormous effort and energy devoted by the company over the past several years in protecting workers’ health is beginning to pay off....If you believe everything you read in the newspapers or watch on television about asbestos, then there’s no future for our industry.”¹⁰²⁶ The idea of there being no future for the industry, and therefore for Asbestos, was more terrifying to Chartier than the potential health threats the mineral caused, and it is likely other Jeffrey Mine workers felt the same.

In Chartier’s opinion, he had lived “the good life” in Asbestos thanks to the mineral and that “[u]nder today’s conditions, I’d encourage people to work in this

¹⁰²⁴ *JM Today*. 1980, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 2.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

industry. As a matter of fact, if I were starting all over again, I wouldn't hesitate—I'd apply for the same job again."¹⁰²⁷ Chartier was not worried about his health despite the fact that he had worked in one of the dustiest areas of the Jeffrey Mine since 1936. His life, and the risks he faced, was what was expected and accepted in Asbestos as part of a local cultural identity developed over generations. The company knew the strength of this identity and while JM now informed its employees of their illnesses when they were discovered, officials still believed the company had done no wrong by keeping reports secret in the past. JM justified this belief because Asbestos was a company town and if the population could not work at the Jeffrey Mine, no alternative jobs were available and the community would collapse.¹⁰²⁸ The company also released a pamphlet in 1981 entitled, "Asbestos, Health and Johns-Manville" which stated that the asbestos-related diseases of today were due to a lack of knowledge 20 to 40 years before and that no new cases would develop now that the company was aware of the risk.¹⁰²⁹ This dissertation has shown that JM 1981 statement was false: the company had known of the health risks associated with the mineral since the early 1920s when the first asbestos-related death was reported, but chose not to act because of fears of bad publicity and litigation. The Canadian medical community supported JM's claim that while carcinogenic, chrysotile was not as dangerous as other types of asbestos and working with the mineral was equivalent to smoking only 3 to 4 cigarettes a week.¹⁰³⁰

The support of the Canadian medical community was important because it legitimized JM's claim of past ignorance and drew public attention away from the issue. The Canadian medical community—both Anglophone and Francophone—was exposed to international reports detailing the epidemiology of asbestos-related disease, but chose not to investigate further, as seen with the lack of publications on the mineral during the 1980s, possibly because industrial diseases were no longer as funding-attracting or as interesting to medical researchers as "newer" disease such as AIDS were. While national and international focus on the health effects of the mineral came and went, the people of Asbestos were constantly aware of them. Dealing with risk at the Jeffrey Mine and in the community had become habit for the local population, but not because they did not know

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁰²⁸ Hugh Jackson, JM, 13 March 1981, "Asbestos Chronology," ACRF, p. 188-189.

¹⁰²⁹ "Asbestos, Health and Johns-Manville," 1981, ACRF, p. 3.

¹⁰³⁰ F.D.K. Liddell, "Asbestos and Public Health," *CMAJ*, vol. 125 (1 August 1981), p. 237.

or feel how the mineral was affecting their bodies. This chapter has shown that Jeffrey Mine workers were aware of the health issues surrounding their industry and their land not because of the Canadian medical community, French Canadian journalists, or government officials, but rather shockingly because of JM's increased willingness to finally inform employees of their illnesses when they were detected and introduce mandatory occupational health and safety measures at the Jeffrey Mine. The fact that local knowledge of the risks associated with asbestos came from the company meant that the community's understanding of the mineral's dangers was shaped by JM officials. It was difficult to deny that the health effects of the mineral were bad, but the way the people of Asbestos rooted their local identity in their connection to the land, combined with how they were made aware of the mineral's risk, meant that they remained committed to JM, and the belief that the health of their bodies was tied to the health of the industry.

Despite local support, JM continued to be plagued by litigation in the United States, where workers compensation laws made the company liable for multi-million dollar class-action suits, and bad press around the world. Relying on the supposed healthiness of Jeffrey Mine employees was no longer enough. In 1982, unable to financially support itself due to the rising costs of litigation, and anticipating 52,000 new lawsuits averaging \$40,000 each to appear in the future, the company filed for bankruptcy.¹⁰³¹ JM left the Jeffrey Mine in 1983 after having been such an important, although controversial, presence in Asbestos for more than half a century. Despite JM's bankruptcy and abandonment of the Jeffrey Mine, the people of Asbestos remained committed to the industry. Some citizens left town to seek more stable, healthy employment, but most remained.

The Quebec government under the control of René Lévesque's Parti Québécois nationalized the industry and eventually subsidized the town as a new public company named JM Asbestos took over the Jeffrey Mine. Nationalization effectively blocked any outside inquiries into the health of the workers in Asbestos¹⁰³² and began a trend in which the provincial and federal governments would support the industry by doing what JM could no longer do: denying damning medical reports, overlooking the welfare of

¹⁰³¹ James Kelly, "Manville's Bold Maneuver," *Time*, 6 September 1982.

¹⁰³² McCulloch and Tweedale, p. 133.

community members, refusing to properly label shipments of asbestos to other countries, and agreeing to sell the mineral to developing nations that would not uphold the strict health regulations needed to make the industry safer. These are actions JM could not continue, and while the government did not resort to the most severe of JM's cover-up methods—altering and suppressing medical reports, stealing lungs from dead miners and sanding off its own warning labels—its continued support of the toxic industry remain shocking.

Although government subsidies often gain coverage in the national and international press, the more significant aspect of this issue is the continued acceptance of risk in Asbestos. Generations of citizens have worked at the Jeffrey Mine surrounded by dust they knew to be dangerous, and they continue to do so today despite the widespread knowledge of how the mineral can affect human health. JM employees consistently refused to wear respirators when they were provided and chose not to push the company for better workplace safety in the years following the 1949 strike. This chapter has shown that the 1949 strike changed the way the people of Asbestos understood and accepted risk as part of their local cultural identity. In order for their community to survive, the mineral had to be safe. Because they interacted with asbestos in its purest form, right from the Jeffrey Mine, it was crucial that they did not fear the dust or what they knew it was capable of doing to their bodies. JM manipulated medical evidence and human bodies in Asbestos, but this chapter has also shown that the community played an active role in the local understanding of bodies and management of risk after the 1949 strike.

Chapter 8: Altered Authority: The Body Politic, 1949-1983

In 2004 Asbestos and Canada made international headlines at the United Nation's Rotterdam Convention when government officials prevented chrysotile asbestos from being placed on the Prior Informed Consent list of dangerous minerals, which would hinder trade of the fibre. The government justified this manoeuvre by stating that asbestos is safe, "provided it is manufactured, handled with care, and exposures to dust are stringently prevented or controlled to low levels."¹⁰³³ No mention was made of the dangers the mineral posed in its raw form. Furthermore, just because it could be used safely does not mean it would, and the government has never ensured that proper health and safety regulations are upheld in the developing countries to whom it sells the mineral. Canada mainly competes with Russia for asbestos markets in developing nations, which makes American environmental consultant Barry Castleman believe, "If the only people saying it's good are the Russians, we can deal with that. Canada saying it's good makes it more complicated."¹⁰³⁴ Castleman's reasoning is based on the idea that Canada is often seen as an "international Boy Scout"¹⁰³⁵ when it comes to human rights and safety, which makes its support of the industry shocking.

This chapter will argue that Canada's ongoing support of the industry is rooted in the local cultural identity in Asbestos, which gives the community the confidence to successfully lobby for its survival. Global asbestos trade historians Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale believe that one of the major constants in the history of the industry is "the malevolent role played by Canada in promoting asbestos use in the developing world. Canada is a member of the G8 and it carries some influence on the global stage. Its industry and government, backed by a sophisticated scientific community, have used their access to elite forums, including the WHO [World Health Organization] and the WTO [World Trade Organization], to promote asbestos."¹⁰³⁶ When examining how the people of Asbestos understood their community and their industry following the 1949 strike, however, we can see that the selling of the mineral today is based on a desperate local attempt to preserve the cultural identity formed in Asbestos through generations of

¹⁰³³ Environment Canada, "Consultation Document: Addition of Chrysotile Asbestos to the PIC Procedure of the Rotterdam Convention," (Government of Canada, 2004), p. 7.

¹⁰³⁴ "Asbestos Makeover Reignites Old Battle," *Toronto Star*, 22 November 2003, p. A01.

¹⁰³⁵ Martin Mittelstaedt, "Asbestos Shame," *The Globe and Mail*, 27 October 2007, p. 1.

¹⁰³⁶ Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 226.

confronting risks to community, health, and finances working the Jeffrey Mine posed. Asbestos has a past that far exceeds the 1949 strike. By examining the community from 1949 to 1983, this chapter will show how the people of Asbestos developed new ways to articulate their cultural identity to influence both industry and politics, and how they continue to do so by looking to their past.

“Le travail, c’est la lutte pour la vie,” 1949-1952

After people celebrated the end of the strike on the streets of Asbestos in July 1949, the local paper printed the agreement so that everyone would be aware of the terms. Although some issues would be reserved for continued arbitration, the union was to be recertified and JM would bring the striking workers back to their jobs as quickly as production rates allowed.¹⁰³⁷ The company would also expand its underground mining operations to allow for 100 more employees.

Despite the efforts of the union and the local paper, JM president Lewis H. Brown did not trust that the finer details of the agreement were being related to the workers, which made them mistakenly believe that they had won the five-month battle that had just taken place. Brown sent a letter to each JM employee in Asbestos detailing the terms of the agreement and making it clear that the company, not the working class of the community, was victorious.¹⁰³⁸ The letter emphasized that many of the striking workers would not be taken back at the Jeffrey Mine due to a global recession. Brown explained to lead arbitrator Quebec Archbishop Maurice Roy that the “reduction in employment would have taken place even had there been no strike at all. This fundamental fact of the recession in business as the basic cause of unemployment which will exist in Asbestos, is still the heart of the problem and everyone there must be made to understand the facts.”¹⁰³⁹

While there was a global recession that had impacted the asbestos industry before the strike, the five months of the conflict, which saw no fibre extracted from the vital Quebec mines, in truth meant there was now an increase rather than a drop in demand for the mineral.¹⁰⁴⁰ Brown was misleading in more than this one instance. He explained that

¹⁰³⁷ *L’Asbestos*, 8 July 1949, p. 1.

¹⁰³⁸ Lewis H. Brown, CJM President, to JM Asbestos Employees, 19 July 1949, p. 1. Société d’histoire d’Asbestos, p. 1.

¹⁰³⁹ Lewis H. Brown, CJM President, to Mgr. Maurice Roy, Archbishop of Quebec, 19 July 1949, pp. 1-2, Société d’histoire d’Asbestos.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *The Canadian Mining Journal*, August 1949, p. 54.

all the workers except those facing criminal charges would be “put back to their occupation” at their 1948 wages, but this meant any job at the Jeffrey Mine, not their former placement, which was a significant difference, especially because their original positions had been taken by strikebreakers, who, Brown explained, would not be affected by employee cutbacks due to the recession.¹⁰⁴¹ The message was clear: Brown wanted the people of Asbestos to understand and accept their defeat.

The thought that strikebreakers would keep their jobs while unionized workers who had not earned wages for the past five months had to face the uncertainty of unemployment angered the people of Asbestos. While Brown misled employees in his letter to demonstrate the degree of JM’s power over the community, and replacement workers hired by the company after 1 May were let go once the conflict was settled, only 260 strikers were taken back at the Jeffrey Mine in July. Over the duration of the strike, workers had each lost an average of \$1,066 in wages¹⁰⁴² and they were outraged that they would continue to earn nothing while strikebreakers from outside Asbestos worked their jobs. After receiving Brown’s letter, groups of men who had been on strike and who were now unemployed roamed the streets late into the night, throwing rocks through the windows of homes where strikebreakers or JM sympathizers lived, violently attacking any “scab” they encountered, and burning down a garage in Tingwick, home of many of the strikebreakers keeping their new jobs at the Jeffrey Mine.¹⁰⁴³ Local police received 15 calls in one night from townspeople afraid of the mob of workers who were expressing their anger with the current situation and their fear for the future. Although the strike was over, the ways in which it had affected the dynamics of the entire community were just beginning to be revealed.

JM responded to the threat of angry, unemployed workers by having more policemen patrol the Jeffrey Mine 24 hours a day to ensure that the disgruntled men would not attack company operations.¹⁰⁴⁴ The Jeffrey Mine was once again firmly under the control of JM, but remained a potential battleground. The local newspaper continued to deny its bias in favour of the company and decided to do its part to calm the people of

¹⁰⁴¹ Brown to Employees at the Jeffrey Mine, 19 July 1949, Société d’histoire d’Asbestos, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴² \$880 once financial aid given was taken into account. Maurice Sauvé, “Six Years Later,” in *The Asbestos Strike*, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, ed. (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974), p. 289.

¹⁰⁴³ *L’Asbestos*, 22 July 1949, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *L’Asbestos*, 5 August 1949, p. 1.

Asbestos by reporting that enough had been written on the conflict and that it needed to be forgotten,¹⁰⁴⁵ which the local population could not do with so many Jeffrey Mine employees still out of work. Furthermore, the strike was continuously discussed in Quebec, with new labour disputes that arose being compared to the one in Asbestos. The strike was over, but the years that followed would show that the pain it caused the town would not go away. The blend of local pain and province-wide celebrity directly affected how people saw their community in the years following the strike.

The post-strike community in Asbestos grew to be radically different than its pre-strike manifestation. While still confident that the Jeffrey Mine would provide for them despite their hardships, the townspeople were worried about how the strike would be settled outside of contract negotiations: they were concerned about how poor relations and power struggles between JM and the workers would continue to harm the community. In August 1949, local resident Bertrand McNeil wrote to Quebec Minister of Labour Antonio Barrette and expressed the uncertainty that reigned in Asbestos in the months following the strike: “[j]’ai 20 ans, j’avais 1 ans et demi de service et j’ai besoin de travailler. Je n’ai pas de mauvais rapports avec la compagnie. Je voudrais savoir s’ils vont tous nous reprendre où s’ils nous font attendre pour rien. Mon père a une grosse famille et une maison à payer et je suis seul pour l’aider. Je payais pour mon frère de 16 ans qui fait des études pour devenir religieux.”¹⁰⁴⁶ McNeil’s letter offers insight into the post-strike atmosphere of uncertainty in Asbestos, expressed in his desire to know if he and his fellow workers would actually be taken back at the Jeffrey Mine. His concern for his father and the rest of his family demonstrates how much townspeople depended on JM for employment and how hard it must have been for these large families to survive during the strike. McNeil’s case was brought to the attention of the arbitration board and he was told that unemployment in Asbestos would end soon, but was given no definite date to ease his worries.¹⁰⁴⁷

McNeil was indicative of the type of people who lived in Asbestos in 1949. His letter showed that he aspired to nothing more than a life of stable employment at the

¹⁰⁴⁵ *L’Asbestos*, 12 August 1949, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Bertrand McNeil to Antonio Barrette, Quebec Minister of Labour, 19 August 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Gérard Tremblay, sous-ministre du Travail, to Bertrand McNeil, 22 August 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

Jeffrey Mine. He was not a left-wing radical who wanted to overthrow the socio-political system of the province. The humble nature of McNeil's letter was echoed in September 1949 by Madame Eugène Tourigny, who also wrote to Barrette. Tourigny asked the minister why strikebreakers remained at the Jeffrey Mine while locals were unemployed indefinitely. She wrote, "[v]ous allez peut-être me trouver exigeant mais vous savez j'ai un coeur de maman et lorsque je vois mes enfants sans ouvrage cela me peine beaucoup de voir les briseurs de grève pour la plus part faire souffrir des femmes et enfants des grévistes... c'est un grand malheur pour Asbestos que cette triste grève."¹⁰⁴⁸ The sorrow she expressed over seeing strikebreakers taking the jobs of her children gave her the authority to be heard. Her letter also claimed that the strikebreakers were not simply victims of mob violence but rather they had developed a hubris that led them to intimidate local women and children. Whether true or not, this idea contrasted the idea that replacement workers were simply victims of unruly mobs of unemployed men.

Tourigny's letter was also sent to the arbitration board¹⁰⁴⁹ and showed that the involvement of the community's female population in Jeffrey Mine affairs seen during the strike was not unusual. Although the people of Asbestos had turned against Maurice Duplessis and his Union Nationale government during the strike, Tourigny's letter showed that some townspeople were still willing to ask them for help. Re-employment was a slow process, however, and the community would become increasingly self-reliant in the years to come.

The self-reliance of the community was seen in October 1949, when town council began negotiations with the Shawinigan Water & Power Co. to install power lines in the newer sections of town.¹⁰⁵⁰ The establishment of new power lines was normally something JM would have facilitated, especially considering streetlights were needed for Jeffrey Mine employees working nightshifts. The situation in Asbestos had changed since the strike and the way town council distanced itself from JM was simply one indication of this.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Mde Eugène Tourigny to Antonio Barrette, Quebec Minister of Labour, 8 September 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Donat Quimper, l'Assistant sous-ministre du Travail, 12 September 1949, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 5 October 1949, p. 79.

The town officially took control of its electricity on 12 December 1949 and purchased trucks to help transport and install the poles required for the new lines.¹⁰⁵¹ The year ended with JM and the local newspaper hoping for peaceful company-community relations in the future,¹⁰⁵² but many former strikers remained unemployed and everyone worried about future contract negotiations. As 1950 began, however, it became clear that a new era had as well. JM sent American Karl V. Lindell to replace G.K. Foster as president of CJM. Foster had become wildly unpopular in Asbestos since his involvement in the brutality of the provincial police at the Hotel Iroquois during strike, and JM was wise to replace him. In an attempt to improve company-community relations, Lindell spoke to townspeople of his hopes for the future and his commitment to learn French. The town remembers Lindell fondly even today as being someone who brought a new attitude of cooperation and consideration to Asbestos.¹⁰⁵³

Lindell's attitude complemented the approach town council now took with community affairs. In February 1950, "le conseil demande instamment à la Canadian Johns-Manville Co. Ltd., de faire tout en son pouvoir pour trouver dans son industrie de l'emploi pour les personnes sans ouvrage qui demeurent à Asbestos."¹⁰⁵⁴ Council was frustrated with the company's handling of re-employment and made it clear that JM's priority should be the citizens of Asbestos, not strikebreakers. If Lindell was sincere in his commitment to the community, he needed to return the formerly striking workers to their jobs at the Jeffrey Mine. The majority of these workers were taken back by April.

A week following this demand, the collective agreement between the workers and JM that had been pending since December 1948 was finally signed. The workers received a 10-cent per hour raise, one additional paid holiday, and two weeks of vacation after being employed at the Jeffrey Mine for three years.¹⁰⁵⁵ These terms failed to address the major issues of land use, dust control, and the desire for employees to have a say in company promotions the strikers had fought for at the beginning of 1949. Their acceptance of the terms shows us how desperate workers were to return to their jobs at the Jeffrey Mine. These were battles the workers could fight in the future.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 7 December 1949, p. 92.

¹⁰⁵² *L'Asbestos*, 29 November 1949, p. 1, and 20 December 1949, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵³ Réjean Lampron, Marc Cantin, and Élise Grimard, *Asbestos: Filons D'histoire, 1899-1999* (Asbestos: Centenaire de la ville d'Asbestos, 1999), p. 238.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 15 February 1950, p. 108.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *L'Asbestos*, 21 February 1950, p. 1.

The community saw the new contract as an achievement because it officially ended the strike, but many worried about how the conflict had affected the town's image. New labour disputes in Quebec were still being compared to the one in Asbestos, which prevented the town from moving past the painful memories it caused.¹⁰⁵⁶ Furthermore, Duplessis used the violence of the strike to reinforce his anti-communist *loi du cadenas* and limit the power of unions in Quebec.¹⁰⁵⁷ When Archbishop of Montreal Joseph Charbonneau was removed from his position and forced into a west-coast retirement in February 1950, the international press believed it was because of the role he played in the strike.¹⁰⁵⁸ Many also speculated that Sherbrooke's bishop, Philippe Desranleau, would soon follow Charbonneau for similar reasons, but his untimely death prevented it. The strike was becoming part of Quebec's political culture and the people of Asbestos were awarded a power they neither sought nor fully understood.

Although they heard through newspaper reports how the strike was transformed into legend outside the community, townspeople remained removed from it and continued to focus on their work at the Jeffrey Mine. Despite Brown's previous recession claims, in April 1950 the company announced that it had a \$70,000 surplus from 1949 that it would share with its employees, almost all of whom had been hired back.¹⁰⁵⁹ Part of Lindell's approach to industrial relations in Asbestos, JM's profit sharing fed the cultural identity because it acknowledged the important local role employees had in the global industry. Despite the positive feelings this bonus brought, Asbestos held a referendum in May and the town voted to spend \$100,000 to attract new industries to the community.¹⁰⁶⁰ The unemployment problem following the strike reinforced a lesson the people of Asbestos already knew: relying on a single industry and employer was dangerous. A new industry has never come to Asbestos, however, which has influenced the development of the local cultural identity and forced townspeople to accept that without the asbestos industry, the community would not survive. This knowledge is part of the reason why the people of Asbestos continue to fight for the survival of their industry today.

¹⁰⁵⁶ See, for example, *L'Asbestos*, 28 February 1950, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jacques Casgrath, Conseiller to Louis Coderre, Sous-Ministre, M de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 24 August 1951, BANQ, BANQ, P659 7C 018 05-02-008B-01; 1982-11-008\1.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *America*, 8 April 1950, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 11 April 1950, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 16 May 1950, p. 2.

Despite the referendum, company-community relations continued to improve under Lindell's management. In 1950 the company celebrated both St-Jean-Baptiste Day in June and Labour Day in September with its employees and their families for the first time.¹⁰⁶¹ Union heads were present and the militant curé Camirand gave a picnic mass. Unheard of just a year before, the workers and the company had come to terms with the power each held in the community and were able to coexist because of their understanding. Twenty-nine new members of the Quarter-Century Club were inducted in 1950, bringing the total number of employees who had worked at the Jeffrey Mine for at least 25 years up to 205, which was longer than many JM officials in Asbestos.¹⁰⁶² By October, almost half the town's population worked at the Jeffrey Mine, matching the pre-strike employment rate.¹⁰⁶³ Authority in Asbestos was shared between the workers, JM, and town officials because they knew they depended on each other for survival. Town council did not suddenly renew its close ties with JM when it came to infrastructure, however, and council purchased its own snowplows to clear the winter streets so it would not have to rely on JM as it had in the past.¹⁰⁶⁴

A balance between dependence and independence was maintained in Asbestos into 1951 when a new collective agreement was signed with little dispute between the company and union representatives.¹⁰⁶⁵ The workers received a 15% wage increase, a bonus for those on night shifts, one more paid holiday, and a social security plan that both JM and its employees paid into equally, which were significant accomplishments. The company also promised to rehire all of the remaining workers who had been unemployed since the strike within three months. These harmonious relations led the local paper to write that there was no news report because "C'est tranquille, dit-on, à Asbestos"¹⁰⁶⁶ There was no conflict in the community just two years after the most bitter strike the town had experienced, a sign of the new spirit of cooperation and cohabitation in Asbestos.

The new spirit was further illustrated in May 1951 when JM opened Jeffrey Mine operations to the community to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the pit. This contrasted

¹⁰⁶¹ *Le Citoyen*, 20 June 1950, p. 1, and 5 September 1950, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶² *Le Citoyen*, 31 October 1950, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶³ "Asbestos: Where We Live and Work," *Johns-Manville News Pictorial*, October 1950, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 29 November 1950, p. 172.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Le Citoyen*, 30 January 1951, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Le Citoyen*, 27 February 1951, p. 1.

the heavily guarded property during the strike of 1949, and over 3,500 people visited.¹⁰⁶⁷ JM also acknowledged the importance of working at the mine to the people of Asbestos when Lindell stated in his Labour Day message that “Le travail, c’est la lutte pour la vie. Le Créateur nous a entourés de richesses qu’Il veut que nous exploitions à notre profit.”¹⁰⁶⁸ Work, religion, and the Jeffrey Mine were interwoven for the townspeople who built their lives and cultural identity around them.

These good relations occurred independently of how others were beginning to see the community and what it could represent. In the summer of 1951, 75 union heads representing miners throughout Quebec held their annual meeting in Asbestos.¹⁰⁶⁹ The town had maintained its reputation for being a place of importance for the labour movement in the province. Because industrial relations had improved remarkably, local workers continued their belief in the strength of unions, as it was the CTCC that had JM drop the charges against labour leaders Rodolphe Hamel and Armande Larivée, along with 19 others, for their roles in the riot of May 1949 as part of contract negotiations at the end of 1951. The union also convinced the company to finally rehire the last remaining worker who had not been taken back at the Jeffrey Mine since the strike and to return all its workers to their original positions.¹⁰⁷⁰ JM and its employees were on excellent terms in the early 1950s, but this was largely due to Lindell. The people of Asbestos continued to remember the pain the strike caused the community, and expressed it by directing anger towards Premier Duplessis.

Asbestos had previously voted in favour of the Union nationale by electing Mayor Albert Goudreau as their provincial representative, but his popularity had disappeared in 1949 and he was defeated in the next municipal election. Goudreau remained committed to Duplessis and to representing the people of Asbestos despite this loss, but when he campaigned in the 1952 provincial election, he was harassed by townspeople.¹⁰⁷¹ They had not forgotten how the government sent provincial police to the community and Goudreau’s ineffectiveness in sending them away.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Le Citoyen*, 15 May 1951, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Le Citoyen*, 31 August 1951, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 18 July 1951, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Suavé, “Six Years Later,” p. 284.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Le Citoyen*, 28 July 1952, p. 1.

Local support for candidates in the Quebec election of 1952 was shown much in the same way support for the strike of 1949 was in Asbestos: through church alliances. On 3 July, Goudreau held a Union nationale rally with Minister of Industry and Commerce Paul Beaulieu in St-Isaac Jogues, the church that was boycotted during the strike because its priest was against the conflict. Hundreds of disgruntled local residents attended, but only one was brave enough to yell, “Parlez-nous de la grève!” Beaulieu condescendingly replied, “La grève, c’est une affaire réglée, mon garçon,” which only further angered the crowd.¹⁰⁷² Despite harmonious company-community relations, the strike was not a settled affair and Liberal candidate Émilien Lafrance would not make the same mistake. The Liberals held their rally at St-Aimé, the church of choice for the workers during the strike and still a politically charged place because of the police violence in May 1949.

Lafrance dared Duplessis to come to Asbestos and say that he sympathized with the workers. Carrier Fortin, a CTCC lawyer, also spoke and said, “Duplessis a plus que prouvé son aversion pour la classe ouvrière...Si vous, travailleurs, le reportez au pouvoir, vous serez en lutte ouverte avec le gouvernement...Mais il y a un jour par 4 ou 5 ans où les ouvriers sont les maîtres, où ils sont les plus forts. Ce jour-là, c’est à eux de se prononcer.”¹⁰⁷³ Calling the workers “masters” and inviting them to engage in battle with the Duplessis government through their votes was an effective election strategy for the Liberals, who knew that Asbestos was theirs to lose. That Goudreau had asked the crowd at St-Isaac Jogues if they thought things would be better if the community returned to a time before Duplessis showed that he did not understand his constituents at all. They did not want to go back in time: the people of Asbestos were looking to the future.

The Duplessis government was re-elected in almost every riding in Quebec, but Asbestos was one of the few places outside of Montreal where the Liberals won.¹⁰⁷⁴ The Union nationale dropped 17% in the popular vote and the Liberals increased their presence in the legislature from eight seats to 23. The people of Asbestos celebrated the results in the streets of the town and in the basement of St-Aimé, happy to have won this battle.

¹⁰⁷² *Le Citoyen*, 11 July 1952, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Le Citoyen*, 8 August 1952, p. 1.

“Une personnalité remarquable se révèle,” 1953-1972

The town of Asbestos continued to vote Liberal until 1970. Although Duplessis visited the town in 1954 to open a new mill at the Jeffrey Mine,¹⁰⁷⁵ townspeople would not forgive him as they seemed to forgive JM. Company-community relations in Asbestos continued to be good, with JM now providing a minimum pension of \$110 per month for its retired employees.¹⁰⁷⁶ The company and its workers had come to an understanding about the important roles both played in the success of the community and the industry. JM continued to run PR campaigns in Asbestos and in May 1955, its employee newsletter emphasized the importance of JM workers in an article in which a son questioned his father on the value of his job. The father replied, “Mon fils, il est vrais que je porte des habits de travail, et que je me souille les mains. Mais, n’aies pas honte de dire bien haut à tes compagnons que la fibre d’amiante, que j’aide à usiner et à manufacturer, joue un rôle dans l’industrie nationale et mondiale.”¹⁰⁷⁷ While it was a fictional conversation, this article highlighted some major characteristics of the cultural identity in Asbestos. Jeffrey Mine workers were proud of the role they played in the global industry, and it was common in the community for sons to follow fathers into employment at the mine.

Articles like this spoke to the issues that concerned the community, supporting the idea that their labour, while dirty, was valuable and should be appealing to their children for future careers. A group of intellectuals from outside Asbestos, however, overlooked these local issues and attempted to assign the community different priorities. Pierre Trudeau’s *La grève de l’amiante* was released in 1956 and detailed how the 1949 strike in Asbestos radically changed Quebec society and politics. Trudeau was especially effective at using the strike to shape the Quebec he envisioned, which was one where French Canadians rebelled against their foreign employers and claimed their natural resource industries for themselves.¹⁰⁷⁸ Maurice Sauvé wrote the only chapter in the collection that actually studied the community in detail and acknowledged the harmonious industrial relations in Asbestos since the conflict. Sauvé also showed that many of the demands

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 133.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Le Citoyen*, 7 November 1952, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Entre Nous* (The Canadian Johns-Manville Company Ltd., May 1955), p. 3.

¹⁰⁷⁸ See, for example, Pierre Trudeau, “Epilogue,” *The Asbestos Strike*, pp. 344-345.

made by the workers in 1949 had been implemented, making JM employees the best paid miners in the country.¹⁰⁷⁹

Despite this perspective, Sauvé's chapter was overshadowed by Trudeau's introduction and conclusion. These pieces announced a radical change in Quebec's socio-political culture and, according to Trudeau biographer John English, "immediately set off intellectual explosions,"¹⁰⁸⁰ discussed in newspapers, journals, and academic and religious circles throughout the province.¹⁰⁸¹ While not everyone agreed with Trudeau, his personality and convictions gave first the collection, then the town of Asbestos, a degree of power the community did not appreciate. No mention of the collection was made in either the local paper or town council minutes, which was unusual because these were the venues in which the community's wider reputation was often discussed. This absence was explained in the 1999 local history of the town, which stated that the collection "n'est pas sur les résultats de la grève que le débat entre chercheurs va se faire... Nous souhaitons plutôt apporter une attention particulière au débat local, voir en quoi ce conflit va modeler la conscience collective des gens d'Asbestos."¹⁰⁸² The townspeople were not concerned with what a group of intellectuals read into their local conflict: they knew what it meant to the community and that was what mattered. While Trudeau's collection did not anger the people of Asbestos, it did not concern them.

The strike was deeply personal for the community and taking it out of its local context put their painful memories on display. Quebec labour historian Jacques Rouillard writes that Trudeau's book, not the strike, affected how the province viewed its working-class in the decades to come,¹⁰⁸³ which was a reflection of how the community viewed the strike and the publication. The people of Asbestos did not see themselves as being at the forefront of radical political change and they did not want the notoriety that came with this new reputation. Instead, the community remained focused on working the Jeffrey Mine, which brought their attention to the fact that a small portion of JM's workforce came from the communities surrounding Asbestos.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Sauvé, "Six Years Later," p. 280.

¹⁰⁸⁰ John English, *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau: 1919-1968* (Toronto: Knopf, 2006), p. 256.

¹⁰⁸¹ See for example, André Laurendeau, "Sur cent pages de Pierre Elliott Trudeau," *Le Devoir*, 6-11 October 1956, and Jacques Cousineau, "Le Sens d'une Grève: Une Interprétation Controuvé," *Relations* (December 1956).

¹⁰⁸² Lampron, et al, p. 222.

¹⁰⁸³ Jacques Rouillard, *Le Syndicalisme Québécois: Deux Siècles d'Histoire* (Montreal Boréal 2004), p. 135.

Although this had always been the case, the strikebreakers the company had hired in 1949 came from these neighbouring towns and turned the local population against anyone at the Jeffrey Mine who was not from Asbestos. Although it had no authority to do so, council lobbied JM to stop hiring workers from outside the community and tried to encourage non-local employees to move into Asbestos by offering free rent for a year and a special discount at certain local stores.¹⁰⁸⁴ Council attempting to attract new residents by reducing living expenses directly defied their own Règlement 163, which was passed in 1927 and levied an extra tax on all residents who had not lived in the town for at least a year.¹⁰⁸⁵ Following the 1949 strike, if people were going to profit from the community, they had to be contributing members of it, not outsiders who took what they wanted and left. The changed attitude towards non-locals helps illuminate the cultural identity of the post-strike community in Asbestos, showing us how the presence of strikebreakers during the dispute solidified the connection between townspeople and the Jeffrey Mine. They did not want people who were not part of the community to disrupt this connection.

Because of Trudeau's collection, the people of Asbestos could not keep their history free from the political discourse of the province.¹⁰⁸⁶ This became even more apparent 10 years later when Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) member Pierre Vallières wrote *White Niggers of America* from jail and rooted the terrorist movement in the 1949 strike. Vallières argued that the workers took control of Asbestos and, "refused to obey their leaders, including Jean Marchand, and even their curé. Duplessis' police crushed their revolt, and this action aroused the people against the monarch of 'the great darkness.'"¹⁰⁸⁷ Vallières' gross misrepresentation of the strike and the people of Asbestos exceeded the claims in Trudeau's 1956 collection. In reality, townspeople continued to have warm feelings towards Marchand because of his role in the strike and they remembered the support Laporte gave them while reporting for *Le Devoir*. Despite the sentiments of the local population, these books influenced the way Asbestos would be

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 August 1958, p. 198, and 5 August 1959.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 June 1927, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁸⁶ For in-depth studies on this, please see Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism Versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), Susan Mann, *The Dream of a Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), and Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social and Political Crisis*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec Terrorist*, Joan Pinkham, trans. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 41.

treated in the coming years within Quebec's political realm. This was first seen with how Trudeau's collection impacted the provincial election of 1960, which saw Liberal leader Jean Lesage running against the Union nationale's Antonio Barrette, Minister of Labour during the 1949 strike. Asbestos was used as political capital during the campaign. Lesage attacked Barrette's image by invoking the strike and continuously stating, "pendant la grève sanglante de l'amiante, Barrette était aux Bermudes" with JM officials.¹⁰⁸⁸ Although there had been relatively little blood spilled in the 1949 strike, it was now seen as "bloody" in the collective memory of Quebec. Lesage's accusation was reported throughout the province and Barrette had to address the newly symbolic nature of Asbestos and its strike.

J-Osias Poirier was the Union nationale's candidate for the town's riding and Barrette spoke in Asbestos to try to convince them he had always looked after their interests.¹⁰⁸⁹ What Barrette failed to understand was that the people of Asbestos still had not forgotten that he and Poirier, the editor of the local newspaper, had taken JM's side during the strike; the people were not ready to forgive either of them for this betrayal. With their new campaign slogan, "C'est le temps que ça change," the Liberals were victorious in the election of 1960. The people of Asbestos were happy knowing that the Union nationale was out of power, but they were also fully involved in the new political reality of the province. Because of the government's interest in natural resources and the province's interest in Asbestos, Minister of Natural Resources René Lévesque visited the community in 1961 to talk about the importance of the Jeffrey Mine to Quebec.¹⁰⁹⁰ Jean Lesage followed Lévesque, and announced the plan to nationalize the hydroelectric industry there as part of his "Maîtres chez nous" election campaign.

Nationalization of hydroelectricity would see the province take control of the industry from individual companies to make it a government corporation. Lesage told Asbestos that this was the time to take Quebec's economic destiny in hand and that it was necessary for French Canadians to control the province's profitable resource industries.¹⁰⁹¹ Lesage believed this message would be well received in the community because an American company owned the Jeffrey Mine. Lévesque followed Lesage in

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Le Devoir*, 18 June 1960, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Le Citoyen*, 1 April 1960, p. 1, and 28 December 1964, p. 154.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 154.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Le Citoyen*, 27 September 1962, p. 1.

October, speaking for two hours to the townspeople of his plans for the nationalization of Quebec's natural resources.

Although the bitterness between JM and its employees had diminished in the years following the strike, the people of Asbestos rallied behind the “Maîtres chez nous” plan. The Liberals won a majority government in 1962 and the local newspaper proudly displayed Lesage's victory statement about the people of Quebec finally becoming masters in the province.¹⁰⁹² Despite this rhetoric, JM was not concerned with the election because officials had a larger issue to deal with: health. The growing international awareness of asbestos-related disease had become a main focus for the company, and upon Lindell's insistence, QAMA aligned itself more fully with the federal government in hopes that it would prevent any new regulations being passed that would hinder production.¹⁰⁹³ Lindell also spoke to the people of Asbestos and urged them to work with the company to fight against the mineral's tarnished image.¹⁰⁹⁴

JM did not suspect Lesage's message would have a great impact on its employees, but it did. In May 1967, sixty-eight men who were a part of the bagging crew at the mine walked off the job.¹⁰⁹⁵ This was the first labour dispute in the community since 1949—a remarkable fact, given Asbestos' history—but it shows the degree to which the population had grown averse to strikes. The men walked out because of a disciplinary problem in the mill, but the union instructed them to return to work and they did. The walkout, while short, demonstrated that Jeffrey Mine workers remained confident in their important roles at the mine and would take action whenever they were challenged.

The 1967 strike also showed the power the union still had in Asbestos, which was worrisome for JM. The federal election of 1968 saw Trudeau, Marchand, and Gérard Pelletier run for office. All three had been present in Asbestos during the 1949 strike and, with Trudeau's 1956 collection, had a hand in turning the conflict into a political symbol, although Marchand did not contribute a chapter. JM worried that new Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson “might try to be more friendly with labour, should Trudeau and Marchand become the leaders in Ottawa; as a result industry could be affected.”¹⁰⁹⁶ Trudeau,

¹⁰⁹² *Le Citoyen*, 15 November 1962, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹³ Quebec Asbestos Mining Association, QAMA Meeting Minutes, 14-15 December 1965, QAMA, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Le Citoyen*, 17 October 1967, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Department of Labour/Strikes and Lockouts, Strike 67-192, 3 May 1967, LAC RG27, vol 3590.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Quebec Asbestos Mining Association, QAMA Meeting Minutes, March 1968, QAMA, p. 8.

Pelletier, and especially former CTCC secretary Marchand, knew of the health risks of asbestos and of the history foreign companies like JM had of treating their French Canadian employees poorly. If there was an industry in Quebec primed for nationalization as hydroelectricity had been, it was asbestos, and these federal politicians had the power to influence Daniel Johnson into making it happen.

The three men were elected in April 1968 with Trudeau as Prime Minister and Marchand and Pelletier serving in his cabinet. JM reacted to their victory by going on the offensive and meeting with union leaders and town council to negotiate the rebuilding of a factory that was being destroyed because of health violations.¹⁰⁹⁷ Despite their continued reliance on their union and their aversion to the Union nationale, the people of Asbestos were not full participants in the socio-political revolution sweeping Quebec in the 1960s. They supported the CTCC becoming the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and breaking away from the Catholic Church in 1960, and they were comfortable with the CSN demanding that the provincial government make French the official workplace language in order to change the socio-economic structure of Quebec.¹⁰⁹⁸ When the CSN supported striking Montreal postal workers launching a political war against the federal government in the Lapalme Affair of 1970,¹⁰⁹⁹ however, the community was shocked.¹¹⁰⁰ Later that year, when the CSN criticized the Trudeau government for invoking the War Measures Act that sent the Canadian military into Montreal to combat the FLQ, which had kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross and murdered Quebec Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte, the people of Asbestos felt that the union had become too radical and no longer represented the interests of Jeffrey Mine workers. The town protested the radical actions of the CSN when Jeffrey Mine employees voted to break with the union in 1972 because they believed “le statue quo [of the CSN] étant inacceptable et le nettoyage impossible.”¹¹⁰¹ Workers did not want the union representing them and longer, nor did they like their painful history being a

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 8 April 1969.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Jacques Rouillard, *L'Expérience Syndicale au Québec: Ses Rapports avec l'État, La Nation et l'Opinion Publique* (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 2008), pp. 152-153.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1990), p. 285.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 204.

¹¹⁰¹ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 204.

political tool for any organization. A few weeks later, the local union joined the more moderate Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD).

“un tel conflit devient quelque chose de spectaculaire,” 1973-1983

Content with their new, more moderate union, at the end of 1972 the workers at the Jeffrey Mine produced 13% of the global supply of asbestos and shipped 94% of it to over 70 countries.¹¹⁰² Because asbestos companies were increasingly worried about the health effects of the mineral negatively affecting trade, they formed the Asbestos Information Committee, an international association between Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom that would promote the industry.¹¹⁰³ Although QAMA did not think the Canadian industry was as threatened as those in other countries, it joined the new organization because the CSN came out against the ways in which companies had diminished the health effects of the mineral.¹¹⁰⁴

Fortunately for JM, its Asbestos employees were no longer members of the CSN and were proud of their local contribution to the global industry. Relations between the company and the workers were no longer as harmonious as before, however, because of the land expropriations that were taking place throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The community discord was expressed in the local newspaper’s special edition on the 75th anniversary of the town in 1974. The paper not only memorialized all the neighbourhoods that had been destroyed by the expanding Jeffrey Mine, but also dedicated three pages to the 1949 strike. In these pages, the paper stated, “on ne peut ignorer que ce souvenir est tellement bien buriné dans le coeur et l’esprit de bien des gens que, pour plusieurs, il serait presque vain de rappeler cet événement important,” and described it as “l’épisode le plus dramatique du syndicalisme au Québec.”¹¹⁰⁵ While they disagreed with those outside the community appropriating their past for political ends, the people of Asbestos had grown accustomed to its symbolic value. The paper explained that because of the major political and religious figures involved in the strike “on peut dire qu’un tel conflit devient quelque chose de spectaculaire.”¹¹⁰⁶ The continued use of the conflict by major political figures in Quebec suggests that the spectacular nature of the conflict, and thus of the

¹¹⁰² Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources, “1972 Report,” p. 1, QAMA.

¹¹⁰³ Asbestos Information Committee Minutes, United Kingdom, 16 October 1973, QAMA.

¹¹⁰⁴ J.C. McDonald, McGill University, to CSN, 25 October 1974, QAMA.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Le Citoyen*, 28 December 1974, p. 114.

¹¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

people of Asbestos, remained in the 1970s and began to influence the local political culture, suggesting that the community had a significance that surpassed the industry.

The special edition also featured letters from Pierre Trudeau congratulating the town on its anniversary and Gérard Pelletier reflecting on his experience during the strike. Trudeau remained convinced of his 1956 interpretation of the strike and claimed that the townspeople always had a remarkable faith in the future and possessed a courage and a determination that the entire country admired,¹¹⁰⁷ which further supported the idea that the community possessed an importance beyond its role in the asbestos industry. Pictures of Trudeau, Pelletier, and Marchand in Asbestos were displayed throughout the special edition, although there remained no mention of Trudeau's collection on the strike, as an English translation was released.

As head of the new sovereignist Parti Québécois (PQ), René Lévesque was also featured in the special edition. Lévesque held his party's regional convention in Asbestos in 1974 and the local newspaper further encouraged the idea that the town had a significance unrelated to the industry by claiming that any politician who wanted votes in Quebec had to visit the community and sympathize with its working class.¹¹⁰⁸ Although it helped solidify this idea as part of the local cultural identity, this was a daring claim to make as the industry began to suffer global collapse because of increased awareness of the mineral's health risks.

The political attention Asbestos received in the 1970s gave townspeople the impression that the industry and the community were not as threatened by negative global opinion as first believed. Driven by the confidence, from 19-21 February 1975, 2,000 Jeffrey Mine workers went on strike to gain a wage increase, health insurance, and shifts that were at least 8 hours long each day.¹¹⁰⁹ The dispute was quickly resolved with both sides compromising for the sake of production.

With the slow global collapse of the industry, workers in Asbestos did not strike again. To push the company too far with labour issues would be to tip the balance needed to maintain the success of the Jeffrey Mine. The history of Asbestos had shown townspeople that when JM suffered, the community suffered in turn. Coinciding with the

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 210.

¹¹⁰⁹ Department of Labour/Strikes and Lockouts, Strike75-123, LAC RG 27, vol. 3634, February 1975.

balanced approach to industrial relations in Asbestos was the election of Lévesque's PQ government in 1976, which marked an official passing of the early 20th century pan-Canadian nationalism espoused by politician and journalist Henri Bourassa in favour of a pro-Québécois nationalism. While not all PQ supporters were sovereignists, they did share an awareness of the need for French Canada to assert its authority over its own destiny, and Lévesque was the spokesman for the "maîtres chez nous" movement in Quebec. Asbestos articulated this awareness when it supported the Association des Gens de l'Air du Québec's struggle for language rights. Town council justified this support when it declared, "l'enjeu de cette lutte, c'est la reconnaissance de la langue française sur notre propre territoire...[Qui] nous échappe au profit des anglophones des provinces voisines...[et] cela influera grandement sur notre avenir économique."¹¹¹⁰ This was an important stance for the people of Asbestos to take because of their bicultural heritage and reliance on an Anglophone company for their success.

This dependence was subject to change, however, as Lévesque targeted asbestos as the next resource industry to become nationalized and made a government corporation as he had promised the townspeople when campaigning for Lesage in 1960. Although the industry was suffering, it continued to be profitable and the 1949 strike had become such a powerful symbol of modernity and Québécois strength in the political discourse of the province that the PQ found the industry especially desirable. The Quebec government created the Bureau de l'amiante in 1977 to study the economic potential and health risks of the mineral.¹¹¹¹ Believing the benefits outweighed the risks, the PQ began the process of nationalization, which worried JM. The company admitted that nationalization would create 7,000 to 8,000 new jobs due to government capital used to increase the manufacture of asbestos products,¹¹¹² but officials were wary it threatened their position in Asbestos. Nevertheless, JM's 2,500 workers voted in favour of nationalization because government officials told them it would rescue the community from the industry's

¹¹¹⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 6 October 1976.

¹¹¹¹ Marc Vallières, *Des Mines et des Hommes: Histoire de l'Industrie Minérale Québécois des Origines au Début des Années 1980* (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1989), p. 257.

¹¹¹² J.A. McKinney, CJM President, to René Lévesque, Premier of Quebec, 14 February 1977, BANQ, E78 S999 7A 009 03-06-004B-01; 1993-06-004\12.

problems.¹¹¹³ Furthermore, because the town housed the largest chrysotile mine in the world, Asbestos was sure to have a leading role in the new organization of the industry.

Nationalization was going to be the salvation of Asbestos, and Lévesque would bring it to the town. The new Premier of Quebec had already proven himself to the townspeople by rewriting many of the province's labour laws and passing Bill 45 in July 1977, which forbade the employment of strikebreakers during a legal strike, guaranteed the reemployment of striking workers once disputes were resolved, and implemented the mandatory contribution of union dues from all workers, unionized or not.¹¹¹⁴ These reforms made Quebec a leader in North American labour legislation¹¹¹⁵ and were things the workers in Asbestos had been fighting for since 1949.

The PQ was more concerned with the interests of Quebec's working class than the success of the multinational companies that owned many of the province's natural resources, and this worried JM officials. Still believing in the profits the Jeffrey Mine could bring them, JM objected to government control of the industry. When this objection was leaked to the press in 1977, however, company president J.A. McKinney attempted to spin it in a positive way. Not wanting to offend the provincial government during a time of industrial uncertainty, McKinney wrote to Lévesque, "[o]ur attitude from the beginning has been one of cooperation and not confrontation...Our statements have consistently reflected our belief that your actions...will be responsible and constructive. We will continue to support your efforts to improve the economic well being of Quebec through betterment of the asbestos industry."¹¹¹⁶ JM did not want to antagonize the government, but officials were not sure how to survive during the nationalization of the industry.

The government passed Bill 70 in 1978 to form the Société nationale de l'amiante to promote the production and trade of the mineral. In order to make the industry a crown corporation under Quebec's Minister of Natural Resources, the government spent \$200 million buying the rights to the Thetford mines from the Asbestos Corporation and \$50

¹¹¹³ Michel Carpentier, le chef de Cabinet Adjoint, to Jeannot Picard, CSD, 28 April 1977, BANQ, E78 S999 7A 009 03-06-004B-01; 1993-06-004\12.

¹¹¹⁴ Morton, p. 292.

¹¹¹⁵ Rouillard, *L'Expérience Syndicale au Québec*, p. 150.

¹¹¹⁶ J.A. McKinney, CJM President, to René Lévesque, Premier of Quebec, 24 October 1974, BANQ, E78 S999 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006\2.

million on plans for expansion and promotion.¹¹¹⁷ JM officials refused to sell the rights to the Jeffrey Mine, which they believed was still profitable and worth more than the province was offering. Not being able to force JM to sell the Jeffrey Mine, the Quebec government became the company's leading competitor in the country.

Not being included in the nationalization of the industry frustrated the people of Asbestos, who remained under the control of an Anglophone American company. Not being part of the new plan to revolutionize the industry and save it from collapse was worrisome, especially when the government held the first Fête de l'amiante to promote and bring positive attention to Thetford in 1978.¹¹¹⁸ The town and the Jeffrey Mine were left out of provincial efforts to restore the industry.

Community members attempted to boost the image of Asbestos themselves by requesting that JM repaint the exteriors of the factory buildings at the Jeffrey Mine to beautify the town,¹¹¹⁹ but the company had a different strategy. In 1979, JM official J.R.M. Hutcheson wrote Yves Bérubé, Quebec's Minister of the Environment, complaining that the company was paying 71% of its profits in taxes.¹¹²⁰ Hutcheson said that if the province continued to tax the company this much, the company would be forced to reconsider its future in Asbestos. The attempt by local residents to beautify the town reveals their commitment to the community and its future success. Hutcheson's complaints and threats show how unattached JM was to Asbestos: as soon as business became too difficult, the company would leave. The lack of attachment or responsibility JM felt towards Asbestos was demonstrated again in June 1980 when the company protested the new fixed price for the mineral that the Société nationale de l'amiante established and informed the government that it expected Jeffrey Mine shipments to decrease in the coming years.¹¹²¹

The government had begun to realize the industry was not as profitable or stable as it seemed, and was no longer looking to expand its nationalization plans, so JM's

¹¹¹⁷ *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1978, p. 132.

¹¹¹⁸ "Fêtes de l'amiante," BANQ E69, 3A 017 03-07-005A-01; 1989-03-005 1.

¹¹¹⁹ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 20 September 1978.

¹¹²⁰ J.R.M. Hutcheson, CJM Administrative Council, to Yves Bérubé, Quebec Minister of the Environment, 11 June 1979, BANQ, E78 S999 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-0062.

¹¹²¹ CJM to D. Perlstein, Société nationale de l'amiante President, 17 June 1980, BANQ, E78 S999 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-0062.

threats were well timed.¹¹²² JM was not only prepared to act on these threats, it was forced to do so because of the rapidly declining market for asbestos. In September 1980, the company reduced the working days for 150 of its employees at the Jeffrey Mine from six to five,¹¹²³ and in January 1981, 400 workers were laid off. The fact that so many employees worked six days a week until the end of 1980 shows that JM was trying to extract as much raw asbestos as it could before the industry collapsed. Shift reductions and layoffs worried the people of Asbestos, who knew that the market showed no signs of a rebound. Town council sought the advice of the Société nationale de l'amiante and formed a committee composed of the local union, the company, and both the federal and provincial Ministries of Labour to solve the unemployment problem in Asbestos.¹¹²⁴ Because of the rising amount of litigation the company was facing in the United States, the continued collapse of the global industry, and the price-fixing and taxation policies of the Quebec government, JM would soon opt out of trying to solve the problem.

Although JM remained in charge of the Jeffrey Mine until 1983, by 1981 it was no longer financially sustainable. The community would have to ensure it survived the industrial crisis itself. The population of Asbestos had already dropped from 10,254 in 1971 to 7,967 in 1981 and this exodus had to be stopped.¹¹²⁵ No longer considering JM a vital part of the community, council and unemployed workers held meetings throughout the year to try to solve the crisis of a collapsed industry. In a major policy shift, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) stopped attacking the industry's health issues to help it survive.¹¹²⁶ When considering the best interests of its members, the union understood that jobs were more important than health. While it continued to advocate for occupational health and safety regulations to protect workers from industrial disease, the CLC no longer made the toxicity of the mineral a major issues, stating instead that it could be extracted and processed safely if proper regulations were followed.

The people of Asbestos appreciated the support of their industry. Not knowing what the community would do if the markets completely collapsed, townspeople became

¹¹²² *Canadian Mining Journal*, February 1978, p. 132.

¹¹²³ Jean-Guy Léger to Yves Bérubé, Quebec Minister of the Environment, 25 August 1980, BANQ, E78 S999 7D 024 02-01-001A-01; 1985-02-006V2.

¹¹²⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 21 January 1981, p. 168.

¹¹²⁵ Vallières, Marc. *Des Mines et des Hommes*, p. 367.

¹¹²⁶ Laurie Kazan-Allen, "Canadian Asbestos: A Global Concern," (International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, 2003), p. 38.

comfortable with government protection, to the point of expecting it. The expectation of government aid remains today and differs greatly from the fiercely independent community this dissertation has shown Asbestos once was, showing just how dramatically the local cultural identity changed in order for townspeople to adapt to the realities of a collapsing industry. Council used the money it received to create new jobs for its citizens and generated 72 temporary positions for the summer and an additional 114 with more funding.¹¹²⁷ These efforts were not enough, however, and in March the Comité des Chômeurs requested that the local outdoor skating rink remain open as long as weather allowed and asked for the donation of a ping-pong table in order to give unemployed Jeffrey Mine workers something to do.¹¹²⁸ The community had become a place where people drifted from activity to activity with no real purpose and no real connection to the Jeffrey Mine. Their cultural identity was shaken.

The people of Asbestos had worked throughout the community's history to negotiate a balance between the interests of the workers, the company, and the town council, but with the collapse of the industry, JM began to opt out. Council funded activities for its unemployed citizens, but it was not successful in generating jobs. The Jeffrey Mine defined Asbestos and the land was the community's reason for existence. Aside from providing temporary summer jobs and activities, there was little the town could do to help its citizens.

Fortunately for Asbestos, both the provincial and the federal government were supporting its cause. Council met with the PQ cabinet minister Yves Duhaime in March 1982 to discuss how his government would help the community. Duhaime had just returned from a European trip to evaluate the global market for the mineral and suspected the industry would soon rebound.¹¹²⁹ In June 1982, the Department of National Defence contacted town council and asked to extend their business agreement for another 5 years.¹¹³⁰ This meant that Jeffrey Mine fibre would continue to be used in military equipment despite growing health concerns. The federal government also showed its support at Montreal's 1982 World Symposium on Asbestos when Minister of Industry Herb Grey spoke out against countries that banned shipments of the mineral, and sought

¹¹²⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 16 February 1982, p. 108.

¹¹²⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 2 March 1982, p. 114.

¹¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁰ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1 June 1982, p. 154.

markets in developing nations.¹¹³¹ Grey also stated that 9 out of 10 Canadian provinces supported the continuation of the industry because the health risks were manageable.

The provincial and federal governments were aware that reinvention possibilities were limited for a place named Asbestos, but while its population was not large and the revenue from its industry dwindled each year, the community refused to be abandoned. International asbestos markets had collapsed and there was no sign public opinion on the mineral would change. The land was scarred by a century of mining and Asbestos and Thetford were too far away from Montreal and Quebec City to be viable for smaller scale industrial development: they had to be closed and there were ways to do so without it looking like the province was abandoning the people. The government instead chose to sustain the dying industry and its collapsed communities to avoid having to address the problem of entire towns of unemployed asbestos workers in l'Estrie.

While JM did not see itself having a future in Asbestos, it asked the Canadian government for \$35 million in order to support the industry. An earlier Récupération Régionale Richmond-Wolfe project had only created 9 new jobs in the region¹¹³² and so chances were good that the funding JM asked for would be granted, as the continued mining of asbestos was the only way the town would survive.¹¹³³ By the start of February 1983, the people of Asbestos were more hopeful about their future and JM told town council that the company was optimistic about the Jeffrey Mine's future.¹¹³⁴ The company's optimism was contagious and townspeople expressed their hope for the future by organizing community activities to keep spirits up while waiting to be sent back to the Jeffrey Mine.¹¹³⁵ Their hope was short-lived. A week later, JM suddenly lost its optimism and revoked its request for money from the federal government.¹¹³⁶ The company would not be rehiring any of its laid-off workers in the near future and in June 1983 it sold the Jeffrey Mine to a handful of JM executives and left Asbestos. It was now up to the town to solve its problems.

The survival of Asbestos depended on new industrial development and in the spring of 1983, council allocated half a million dollars to attract new industry, and

¹¹³¹ *Canadian Mining Journal*, July 1982, p. 19.

¹¹³² *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 4 January 1983, p. 247.

¹¹³³ *Le Citoyen*, 10 August 1982, p. 1.

¹¹³⁴ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 1 February 1983, p. 13.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 17, and *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 15 February 1983, p. 21.

¹¹³⁶ *Le Citoyen*, 8 February 1983, p. 3.

partnered with federal Minister of Employment and Immigration Lloyd Axworthy and the Société nationale de l'amiante to create 300 new jobs with almost \$10,000 given for industrial development,¹¹³⁷ but no new industry has since come to the town. While the workers, company, and council had not always cooperated with each other, there was stability in their relationship. Without the company and its global reach, the community lost a portion of its local cultural identity and was left with an uncertain future. Projects and subsidies continued to pour into the town and there were hopes for a time that the community would become a regional centre for a variety of educational and health services.¹¹³⁸ These efforts were in vain. The Jeffrey Mine is so large and physically central in the town that it cannot be covered up and Asbestos is not a community that can be reinvented. Although the industry has collapsed, the people of Asbestos remain, committed to their past, and waiting for a new creation story.

¹¹³⁷ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, 19 April 1983, p. 50, and 17 May 1983, p. 63.

¹¹³⁸ *Procès-verbal*, La ville d'Asbestos, October 1983, p. 107.

Conclusion: Surviving Collapse, Asbestos Post-1983

In 2009 I was interviewed by Lorraine Mallinder, an investigative journalist reporting on Canada's continued support of the asbestos industry for BBC Radio. As I explained to her the local historical context of this support, mainly the depth of the interconnection between people and the natural environment, Mallinder interrupted me, asking if what I was saying meant that I was "pro-asbestos." The question was startling, because knowing what the mineral does to the human body has convinced me that the industry is dangerous and cannot continue. Reflecting on what I had told Mallinder, I realized why she had become confused and I explained that after all my research and writing, while I was not pro-asbestos the mineral, I was pro-Asbestos the community.

This dissertation has shown that the history of Asbestos—glory and shame, rewards and sacrifices—was driven by the complex interaction between the people of the community and the land, as they worked together locally to supply a global industry. In the process, townspeople developed a cultural identity rooted in this interaction that has given them a pride, an ambition, and a confidence, which has enabled them to keep the industry alive through government support. Contemporary critics of this support calling for its immediate end¹¹³⁹ fail to consider the local perspective of the issue and how we as a society are to manage collapsed resource communities. Closure is one option, of course, but it would be more effective and appropriate to find solutions that address and maintain the historical interconnection between people and the natural environment.

The situation surrounding Asbestos the place and asbestos the mineral in Canada today has much to do with the marked lack of interest the national press and the national medical community had in the issue during the second half of the twentieth century. The lack of outside interest and pressure allowed the people of Asbestos to further develop and refine their local cultural identity around the Jeffrey Mine and their historical, complex interaction with the land. Contemporary press coverage of the community attacks this identity without attempting to understand it. The townspeople are confronted with the realities of their past each day, inscribed on the land around them, dominated by

¹¹³⁹ See, for example, "Asbestos Makeover Reignites Old Battle," *Toronto Star*, 22 November 2003, p. A01, Martin Mittelstaedt, "Asbestos Shame," *The Globe and Mail*, 27 October 2007, p. A01, and Kathleen Ruff, "Deathbed Reprieve for Killer Industry?" *Toronto Star*, 6 June 2010, p. 1.

the Jeffrey Mine, on their own bodies and those of their family and friends who have died, and on the local cultural identity of the community, uncertain of its future.

The collapse of Asbestos was unlike that of other mining communities like Cobalt, Ontario, or St. Clair, Pennsylvania, because the local mineral deposits have not been exhausted.¹¹⁴⁰ It was different than the bust of the uranium towns of the American west, which survive by marketing their communities to tourists in search of 1950s nostalgia-inspiring destinations.¹¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Jeffrey Mine employees have never tried to romanticize the work they do unlike Cape Breton coal miners who sing in the “world-renowned” Men of the Deeps choir dressed in their work uniforms, overshadowing occurrences of coal worker’s pneumoconiosis¹¹⁴² (black lung disease) and putting a positive, friendly image on another deadly industry that has allowed them to effectively lobby for the establishment of new coal mines as recently as May 2010.¹¹⁴³ In fact, throughout their history and during the present collapse, Jeffrey Mine workers were, and continue to be unlike other asbestos industry employees, including those who worked for JM. They were not the industry’s only miners, they were not its only French Canadian workers, but this dissertation has shown that the community interpreted its local role in the global industry in such a way that complicates and challenges the international literature on the asbestos industry that places workers firmly in the role of victims, not agents.¹¹⁴⁴

Their past agency has carried through to the present, and instead of fighting for workers compensation, they instead utilize a lobbying strength greater than a town of 6,000 typically has in order to keep the industry—and the community—alive. “Asbestos” is more than the name of the community: it is a past, it is a heritage, and it is a fundamental part of the town’s cultural identity. Because of their continuous lobby of the

¹¹⁴⁰ For more information on these communities, please see: Charlie Angus and Brit Griffin, *We Lived a Life and then Some: The Life, Death, and Life of a Mining Town* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1996), Anthony F.C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town’s Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

¹¹⁴¹ See, for example, Michael A. Amundson, *Yellowcake Towns: Uranium Mining Communities in the American West* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2004).

¹¹⁴² Known more commonly as “black lung disease” with symptoms and pathology similar to asbestosis and silicosis.

¹¹⁴³ “Singing coal miners dig for new talent,” CBC News, 3 May 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/nova-scotia/story/2010/05/03/ns-coal-miners-men-deeps.html> (Accessed 7 July 2010).

¹¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Paul Brodeur, *Expendable Americans* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), Paul Brodeur, *Outrageous Misconduct* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

provincial and federal governments, the Jeffrey Mine continues to be worked today, although only for half the year, while during the other six months much of the local population survives on unemployment insurance. Once described as heroes who helped the allies win the First and Second World Wars, townspeople are now criticized for supplying asbestos to developing countries that do not uphold strict occupational health and safety regulations for handling the mineral. International criticism was seen on 24 June and 1 July 2010, Quebec's Fête nationale and Canada Day, respectively, when anti-asbestos organizations held demonstrations in several countries to protest continued government and local support of the industry.¹¹⁴⁵

This has been a steady, yet radical local-global reorientation for the people of Asbestos since the early 1980s, and many have left the community due to lack of work. Schools are boarded up, houses are for sale, and the local cultural identity, so rooted in a connection to the land, has been profoundly shaken with the collapse of the industry, as have the town's political, economic, and societal foundations. The name of the community once connoted notions of safety and reliability, but now it invokes ideas of cancer and death, and the people who have remained in Asbestos have had to reconcile their cultural identity to accept this transformation while continuing to have faith in the land and their ability to work with it for survival. The Jeffrey Mine continues to have the potential to be a profitable asbestos mine if the international image of the mineral became favourable once again, which allows the community to hope for its revitalization as they continue to root their identity and their future in the land.

The purpose of this study has been to question the historical interaction and exchange of bodies of land, human bodies, and the body politic. The insistence of G. Claude Thérout at the Société d'Histoire d'Asbestos that we must understand asbestos the mineral in order to understand Asbestos the place played a fundamental role in pursuing the answer to this question. Asbestos houses the largest chrysotile mine in the world, but the physical, psychological, and political impact of the Jeffrey Mine has never been mentioned in previous studies on the community or the mineral, which have focused only on the 1949 strike or on the diseases asbestos causes. By using sources never

¹¹⁴⁵ "Quebec cancer walk nixed over asbestos spat," CBC News, 6 July 2010. <http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2010/07/06/montreal-cp-asbestos-cancels-cancer-walk.html?ref=rss> (Accessed 7 July 2010).

examined before and by looking at the global issues facing the community from a local perspective, this study has shown how the people shaping the land in Asbestos led to the land shaping them and their community. This dissertation has also challenged the historiography on resource communities, the asbestos industry, and environmental history, showing what can be gained by looking beyond declensionist narratives of destruction and victimization.

If not for the land, and the mineral found in it, the community as it was and as it is would not exist. Every decision that was made in Asbestos by the working class, the town councillors, or JM officials was made with consideration to the land and how it would impact the future of the industry and the community that relied on it. Over their history of interacting with the land, the people of Asbestos developed a balanced system of land use and a sense of ownership of the Jeffrey Mine, which they were never hesitant to defend, as seen in the labour disputes and civil protests against mine expansion this dissertation has highlighted. With this balance and ownership came a sense of trust in the land. The continued reluctance of Jeffrey Mine workers to wear respirators and the fact that the 1949 strike was the only time they raised the issue of occupational health with JM and the media demonstrates that local residents were not committed to the town because of a steady paycheque, but rather because of their connection to the land and the local cultural identity they created with it. The understanding of risk in Asbestos is remarkable, as it was based on a combination of bodily knowledge and several exposés that informed them the mineral was dangerous.

Agricultural land has been an important historical figure in much of Quebec's past, but this history of Asbestos has shown how the people of the province became attached to industrialized land, which had powerful effects on the identity and pride of the local population. The land could not and would never be harmful as long as a balance was maintained between people and place. Critics and organizations from outside Asbestos were, and still are, unable to understand this need for balance, and even though the industry has now lost any resemblance to the profitable one it once was, the land remains the same, and the people who choose to remain in Asbestos will continue to defend it.

This dissertation has shown the great lengths to which JM went to keep medical reports and discoveries on the dangers of the mineral from the people of Asbestos and the

general public, while slowly introducing inadequate dust control measures at the Jeffrey Mine. By funding confidential medical studies rather than informing employees of their illnesses or the risk the mineral posed to their bodies until the 1970s, the company used the people of Asbestos as scientists used mice in a laboratory, watching and waiting for the progression of disease. This study has in no way attempted to excuse JM's actions, but I have placed them in the local context of Asbestos and compared them to the ways Jeffrey Mine workers learned of, and reacted to, the knowledge of what the mineral could do to their bodies. It is here that we can advance our understanding of how a lack of action to insist on better dust control methods at the Jeffrey Mine and in the community can be seen as a reaction, an acceptance of risk. Medical knowledge and bodily knowledge combined in Asbestos, sometimes complementing each other, sometimes clashing. One of the major clashes occurred during the 1949 strike and drastically changed how human bodies were seen and used in Asbestos. Townspeople read Burton LeDoux's exposé on the health effects of the mineral just before the strike and the things he highlighted were things they recognized in their own bodies.

The strike was such a traumatic event for the community that in order for it to end, the people of Asbestos had to put their concern for their lives behind concerns for their livelihoods. If stricter health regulations were put in place, production would slow and impact both the local and global economy. With the onslaught of international negative publicity due to the mineral's health effects, the people of Asbestos put their bodies on display to defend the Jeffrey Mine and the mineral it contained. The land had to be safe and the people had to be healthy for the community to survive, and this belief remains strong in Asbestos today. In June 2010, the Canadian Cancer Society, which has only come out against asbestos in the past three years, wrote to the Quebec government urging it to stop supporting the industry because the mineral continues to cause the deaths of around 90,000 people annually all over the world.¹¹⁴⁶ The people of Asbestos reacted immediately and fiercely to this perceived attack and cancelled the town's annual Relay for Life, for which they have raised almost \$350,000 for cancer research over the past four years. André Beaulieu, a representative from the Canadian Cancer Society, attributed

¹¹⁴⁶ "Quebec cancer walk nixed over asbestos spat," CBC News, 6 July 2010. <http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2010/07/06/montreal-cp-asbestos-cancels-cancer-walk.html?ref=rss> (Accessed 7 July 2010).

the town's reaction to their concerns for their economic future, which is a simplification of the complex local cultural identity of Asbestos. Mayor Hughes Grimard challenged Beaulieu's assumption and explained that, "We want to work with our partners and not with our detractors...It's our past, it's our history, therefore the population is united in support of the mining industry."¹¹⁴⁷ The local cultural and community identity this dissertation has traced, although battered by recent realities, remains strong. The cancers the people of Asbestos are suffering from are fast-acting, painful, and often incurable,¹¹⁴⁸ yet they continue to support the industry, perpetuating the deadly cycle of work and disease that has existed in the community for over a century. The decision to stop supporting the Canadian Cancer Society could not have been made easily, but the importance of history to Asbestos—the history this dissertation has examined—trumps the severity of risk and disease.

Everything in Asbestos has occurred in the extreme: land exploitation, profits, labour disputes, global renown, and industrial collapse. The global rejection of the mineral led to the collapse of the community and the loss of JM, an important presence in the town from 1918 to 1983. The different factions of the town did not always exist harmoniously, and often went through periods of great animosity, as seen with the 1949 strike, but through constant negotiation and recognition that they shared common goals, a unique and fierce identity was created in Asbestos; that identity did not leave with JM in 1983. When faced with the collapse of the industry, the community clung to this identity and their trust in the land, which has allowed them to keep the Jeffrey Mine in operation and the community in existence.

The provincial and federal governments have been receptive to the continued support of Asbestos and its industry since 1983. This has required government officials to use tax revenue to subsidize the industry and to minimize the negative health effects of the mineral in order to keep international trade and health organizations from banning asbestos in the global market. In 2005, the Canadian government attempted to justify its actions when it filed an official World Trade Organization (WTO) complaint against France for banning imports of asbestos, claiming that France was discriminating against

¹¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁸ The Canadian Cancer Society provides financial support, group therapy, and palliative care to many community members dying of asbestos-related cancers. Ibid.

one of Canada's cultural industries.¹¹⁴⁹ Under WTO rules, cultural industries were exempt from international policies and regulations on issues like health and safety. Whether the government called asbestos a national cultural industry because it understood the deep connection the people of Asbestos had with the land they worked, or whether it was simply a useful loophole in global politics is unclear, but it does help us look at the local-national-global issues raised by the community of Asbestos from a new perspective.

This dissertation should encourage us to question our assumptions of how people and the natural environment interrelate, and reconsider how and why communities internalize and accept risk. In doing so, we can gain a more holistic understanding of resource communities and how they reflect and influence debate surrounding commodity flows, industrial pollution, and environmental justice on a local and global scale. This renewed perspective will help us create new solutions to address the problems facing collapsed resource communities that sufficiently include their attachment to the natural environment they live and labour in, and to the global trade networks they supply.

Although it is small, Asbestos has global reach, and this study of a single community has also been a study of massive environmental change, controversial health and safety issues, and clashes between local and international responsibilities. The experiences the community, the province, and the nation have gained through the history of Asbestos can lead to a re-evaluation of the way Canada industrializes and markets its natural resources today. Many parallels can be drawn between Asbestos and the Alberta tar sands, as millions rely on the oil found in communities like Fort McMurray, just as people once relied on the asbestos found in the Jeffrey Mine. The natural environment in Alberta is undergoing radical technological changes because of the market demand for oil, despite the fact that global organizations are working against the industry and towards reducing the use of petroleum because of its negative effects on the environment and human health.

The situation unfolding in places like Fort McMurray mirrors what happened in Asbestos when the public became aware of the health risks of the mineral. Just as asbestos was to Quebec, oil is a main supply of wealth and employment in Alberta and it will be extremely difficult to forego, having become a fundamental part of the economy

¹¹⁴⁹ Michael Hahn, "A Clash of Cultures? The UNESCO Diversity Convention and International Trade Law," *Journal of International Economic Law*, vol. 6, no. 3 (September 2006), p. 551.

and local cultural identity. When a reliable, more environmentally friendly and sustainable replacement for oil comes to market, communities like Fort McMurray could collapse much in the same way as Asbestos did in the 1980s, and all that will be left is an industrialized natural environment built for an industry that is no longer viable, populated by people who no longer have stable employment opportunities. The governments of Quebec and Canada subsidize the Jeffrey Mine and Asbestos to the detriment of the country's international reputation, and it is possible that the same will happen in Alberta with the petroleum industry. As long as there is demand, there will be supply, and what reporters and officials of international organizations fail to understand when they criticize this support is the historical and personal context of communities rooted in the industrialization of the environment. There is an intimacy that forms through life and labour in resource communities. Cultural identities based on past glories, if understood from the perspective of the local population, are difficult to challenge and change. This dissertation has show how international responsibility can clash with local obligation and the choice communities and governments have to make in order to survive are not always easy. The industrialization of the natural environment may be inevitable, but this study of Asbestos should inspire us think of new ways to interact with the land, to use new technologies, to rely on governments for guidance rather than damage control, and to manage our own ambitions.

The way land, people, and politics interact in this examination of Asbestos also advances our understanding of how humans articulate their connection with the natural world. While each of these elements has had their own role in the history of Asbestos, they reflect and shape each other, providing catalysts and cautions for change and shaping a strong cultural identity. In Asbestos, the land is more than toxic, the people are more than statistics, and the community is not something that history just happened to. This was and is a living, breathing, working society. By remembering that the land, the people, and the community depend on each other for existence, we can draw larger conclusions about the way nature and culture interact. They are not mutually exclusive, and to treat them as such is to ignore the richly textured traditions negotiated between people and place that have shaped cultural identities and have allowed a resource community like Asbestos to survive collapse.

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Appendix

Confidential Sources

In the course of exploring the global asbestos trade, historians David Egilman and Geoffrey Tweedale compiled a considerable body of primary sources about the Canadian industry, via archival research and legal subpoena. They were generous enough to share much of this material with me.

What follows is an accounting of these sources as they were used in this dissertation. More details as to the sources can be provided upon request.

Asbestos Claims Research Facility, Aurora, Colorado, United States of America

All documents from this archive have been obtained by David Egilman via a combination of access to the archives and legal subpoena. The Research Facility is run by the Claims Resolution Management Corporation, which states that the “facility is available for use by beneficiaries of the Manville Personal Injury Settlement Trust and others who are interested in asbestos claims, litigation and history. The Research Facility contains a collection of more than 32,000 boxes, 7,200 rolls of microfilm, and 5,000 subject-related and witness files turned over to the facility by the Johns-Manville Corporation.” (For more information, please see: <http://www.mantrust.org/> “Asbestos Claims Research Facility.”) Egilman, archivist Maggie Baumgardner, and the facility’s legal counsel, Jared Garelick, have each given me permission to use these files.

“Asbestos Chronology”

This 200-page document was created during workers’ compensation litigation against JM in the United States. It provides correspondence between JM officials and the medical professionals under their control from the 1890s to the 1980s, detailing the health and safety issues arising in all JM operations, including Asbestos, Quebec.

“Doc 7”

This is Egilman’s name for a document he created in September 2001 using ACRF documents comparing published medical reports and confidential medical research funded by JM in the early 20th century.

Dr. Wright to Dr. Knight, 1926.

A letter arranging the establishment of McGill University’s Industrial Health Department with funding from JM and Sun Life Insurance, explaining that a degree of company control over what the department produced would be acceptable.

Frank G. Pedley, “Report of the Physical Examinations and X-Ray Examination of Asbestos Workers in Asbestos and Thetford Mines, Quebec,” 1930.

A confidential medical report submitted to JM and detailing the occurrence of asbestosis in Jeffrey Mine and Thetford Mine workers.

Kenneth Smith, “Industrial Hygiene—Survey of Men in Dusty Areas,” 1949. A confidential medical report commissioned by JM that details the results of Smith’s study on the health of 708 Jeffrey Mine employees.

David C. Braun and Daniel T. Truan, “An Epidemiological Study of Lung Cancer in Asbestos Miners,” 1957.

A confidential report for the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association detailing the occurrence of asbestosis and lung cancer in the workers at the Jeffrey Mine and at Thetford Mines.

Herbert E. Stokinger to Daniel C. Braun, January 1958.

A letter from the editor of the American Medical Association’s Archives of Industrial Health thanking Braun for his published study on asbestos and human health and saying it confirmed his own suspicions that the mineral was not harmful.

Turner & Newall Corporate Archives, Manchester, England

Turner & Newall was a British asbestos manufacturing company with holdings in Quebec (including a mine in Thetford). All relevant documents here were obtained via legal subpoena by Geoffrey Tweedale, who has granted me use of the files.

R.H. Stevenson, “Asbestosis: Talk by Dr. Stevenson to Quebec Asbestos Producers,” May 1938. A Transcript of a talk Stevenson gave to convince Quebec asbestos producers that Canadian asbestos was safe and did not cause industrial disease like South African asbestos did. Correspondence between Turner & Newall officials suggesting that Stevenson was wrong in his conclusions are attached to the transcript.

R.H. Stevenson, “Asbestosis,” 1940.

An industry report compiled by Stevenson detailing the absence of asbestosis in Jeffrey Mine workers and explaining his methods of diagnosis. Letters between Turner & Newall officials discussing Stevenson’s results are also included in this document.

J.F. Knox, “Report on Visit to Thetford Mines, Asbestos, and Montreal,” December 1964. A report detailing Knox’s observations on working conditions at the Jeffrey Mine, suggesting that they were not up to British standards of occupational health and safety.

Quebec Asbestos Mining Association (QAMA) Minutes of the Annual Meetings, 1950s-1970s. Details the discussion and decisions of heads of the companies operating Quebec’s asbestos mines. QAMA destroyed its files when it dissolved, and as a result these minutes are unavailable in Canadian archives. Turner & Newall, however, as a member of QAMA, retained a copy. Tweedale shared his full run of the organization’s annual meeting minutes with me.

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