

Horatio Walker

(Central panel)

Born at Listowel, Ontario, in 1858, Horatio Walker made his start in Rochester and then New York City in photography before devoting himself to painting there. By 1888, he was spending the summer months in Sainte-Pétronille, where he set up permanently in the first decade of the 20th century. He died here in 1938 and is buried at St. Mary's Anglican Chapel near the Sainte-Pétronille golf course.

The Bard of the Île d'Orléans

Considered in the United States to be the most famous Canadian painter of his day, Horatio Walker enjoyed great commercial success there for many years, and his work was seen in many countries in Europe. His success rests in large part on his illustration of rural life and his majestic representation of farm animals.

Both fascinated by the traditional peaceful existence on the island and influenced by the pictorial movement in the French Barbizon school and in modern Dutch and Belgian schools, Horatio Walker created pastoral scenes, which captured the imagination of New York City dwellers through their exoticism.

In fact, what Horatio Walker saw in the farming community he observed around him was its simplicity, authenticity and stability, which he thought would offset the threat of unbridled technological advance, which had already begun to wreak its havoc in this day, at the start of the 20th century.

(Left panel)

His Contribution to Québec's Cultural Development

Anxious to preserve those fundamental values, Walker soon developed an interest in establishing cultural institutions that would promote their expression. He became involved in many ways in promoting the artistic community and the development of art in Québec. In particular, he was part of discussions held generally at his home, which led to the creation of the Montreal École des Beaux-Arts and more specifically the Québec City school, in 1921. He was involved with its development over the coming years.

On his property on the tip of the island, it was common to see him in the company of various noteworthy figures of the art world of the day, including William Brymner, Maurice Cullen, Edmond Dyonnet, Clarence Gagnon, James Wilson Morrice and Edmund Morris.

(Right panel)

The Painter's Studio

Horatio Walker established his residence in a particularly beautiful location, the very spot in fact where he liked to think Jacques Cartier had visited when he stopped at the île d'Orléans in 1535! To his house and later the studio he commissioned from architect Edward Black Staveland, he gave a purely British look.

The studio of traditionalist painter Horatio Walker was in keeping with the tradition of the day. First appearing in England in the early 1800s, likely developed much earlier by Dutch artists, the concept of the artist's studio was a large single room, whose north wall, thanks to high windows, allowed the passage of a quality and intensity of light sought by artists varied little over the course of the day and the seasons. The studio, where Horatio Walker took refuge in order to work on his art, also included a laboratory, a few bedrooms on the upper floor and a living room looking out toward Quebec City.

An English garden completed the picture. Under the sizeable trees shading it, Horatio Walker took pleasure working the beds around a pond dotted with water lilies at the feet of a Venus eager to join them...