Guillaume Lamothe

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Mr. Guillaume Lamothe was chief of Police of Montreal at the time of the St. Albans raid. He was afterwards instrumental in assisting Mason, Savager, Scott and Collins to escape to England. Perhaps no one now living is so well acquainted with the true inwardness of the whole matter, and he has written a lengthy memoir, at present in possession of his son, which will not likely be published until after his death. Mr. Lamothe is still somewhat bitter over the way he was treated by the Government of the day, and asserts that politics played a very important part. Although the real sympathy of the people may have been with the Southern people, on account of Great Britain having recognized them as belligerents, there was still a well

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defined political line drawn, the Conservative being following, thoroughly in favor of the Confederacy, and while the inclinations of the Liberals tended to sympathy with the North. This however, was due rather to the policy of the respective Canadian leaders than to any real feeling in the matter. Mr Lamothe even went so far as to ~~tell~~ say that the Government of the day was perfectly cognizant beforehand of the plans being laid for the St. Albans raid, but at the time it did not suit political exigencies to interfere with them. To understand this clearly it is necessary to go back some little time previous to the St. Albans episode.

Mr Lamothe it should be remembered held his appointment under the Liberal Government, and in virtue of his position was instrumental in stopping an expedition

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which was fitted out in Montreal, the objective point being Ile St. Joseph in Lake Superior, where some prisoners were detained. The party were closely watched and openly warned, with the result that at last the proposed expedition was abandoned. This was under the regime of the Liberal government whose policy it was to be friendly with Washington. At the time of the St. Albans raid the Conservatives were in power and their policy was entirely different. It was an open secret that some coup was being hatched at the Donegani Hotel, (a building which was later converted into the Notre Dame Hospital), but no notice whatever was taken of it. In fact so apathetic was the Cartier government that they refused to pay the expenses incurred in the prevention of the intended Lake Superior expedition.

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The very important part that Mr Lamothe played after the celebrated trial is related as nearly as possible in his own words.

Mr Devlin, who was also counsel for the American Host during the trial, was also chairman of the Montreal Police committee and ~~was~~ naturally in close relations with the chief of police. When the prisoners were arrested the sum of $84,000 was taken from them and placed with the chief of Police, who in turn had it counted and sealed in presence of witnesses and then placed the parcel ~~as it~~ in the bank for safe keeping. During the trial Mr Lamothe had frequently told Mr Devlin that it would be advisable to attach the money as in case the prisoners were discharged he would immediately return it to them. But Mr Devlin was in no hurry. Mr

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Lamothe was in court when Judge Counsel discharged the prisoners, and he immediately returned to his office. ~~When they were discharged by the judge, he considered it his duty to place them in the same position as they were when put into his hands.~~ The judge's discharge, in ~~said~~ opinion, Mr. Lamothe, placed the prisoners in exactly the same position as before arrest, and consequently when they ~~prisoners'~~ and their counsel ~~came~~ arrived at his office he considered it his duty to return the money. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and the banks were closed, so he wrote an order to give parcel No — to bearer. Mr. Lamothe thought that this would be the end of his connection with the case; but next morning Mr. Devlin appeared with an attachment on the

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money, and was furious when he found he was too late. As chairman of the police committee his influence was great, and things were made so uncomfortable for the chief of police that the latter resigned, and retired to St. Charles to lie quietly. But the slanders that had been circulated about him still rankled in him.

Immediately after their discharge the raiders scattered in various directions, finding refuge in private residences and colleges. Another order for arrest had been issued and $2,000 ahead reward offered by the American and $500.00 by the Canadian Governments. As it would be impossible to lie concealed for any great length of time strenuous efforts were made to get the prisoners to England. A deputation waited on Mr. Lamothe at St. Charles and

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asked his assistance. ~~But~~ Next day he received a letter signed by a large number of friends, begging him to help them. He eventually consented, on condition that nobody should question his movements. The following day he went to St. Hyacinthe, where he met Mr. Porterfield, and the latter gentleman left everything to his discretion, it being distinctly understood that no reward should be considered in the matter, and that only absolute expenses would be accepted from those interested. ~~in the escape~~.

How the escape was effected is a long story. Mr. Lamothe had known a cabman in Montreal, named Dumaine, who was under many obligations to him. He wrote him to come to St. Hyacinthe. Here old clothes were bought and two vehicles known as traineau were fitted up as for a chanting expedition. His password was the single word "France."

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and he was to follow the man who gave it and pick up any passengers who that man might indicate. His further instructions were that he should take the south shore road and go a short distance towards Quebec. Whenever approaching a village he was to watch the trees closely for a signal. A plain circle cut in a tree meant "go ahead," a circle with a single cross in it, was "Stop and wait," a circle with two crosses meant danger — "go back." ○ ⊕ ⊞

At this point an old friend of Lamothe, Arthur Buies, who had fought with Garibaldi, and rather loved adventure, was taken into the secret. He was to conduct the expedition proper while Lamothe went ahead, ~~and~~ reconnoitred and put out the signals. After all preparations were completed Lamothe & Buies started by the railroad from St. Hyacinthe & boarded the train

met Detective Cullen and three or four Montreal police, who informed them that a party of four raiders had been captured and that it was impossible for any of the rest to escape pass Quebec, much less escape, as all the habitants were warned and every strange vehicle would be challenged. This gave Lamothe his cue and while the party was asleep the, slipped from the train at Cartha- baskaville, made their way to Chester where they took the Bulls road and cut danger signals. Again at St. Augustine another signal was made to stop and wait for news. The next train took them back to Quebec where Lamothe consulted some friends, who advised him to go North as far as the Saguenay. In that year the ice bridge had formed at Quebec and three or four skating rinks were being well patronized, so Lamothe resolved on the daring step of

crossing to the north shore in broad daylight. Bruis was sent back to St. Augustine with the password "France," and the Iroquois with the raiders followed. The journey to the Saguenay was done in sleighs; then there was a long tramp of fifteen leagues on snowshoes until the friendly shanty was reached. Lamothe returned home, promising to come back in early spring. In the meantime the Government had discovered their whereabouts, through a mail carrier, but Minister Cartier quietly remarked – "Leave them there; we can easily get them when the ice melts."

Mr Lamothe did not wait for the ice to melt, but made another journey and took his party of four to Mr Barry's shanty at Escoumin, where it would be impossible to capture them, unless two or three hundred men were in pursuit of them. The

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story of their escape had become known in Montreal and excitement ran high. The next step was to fit out the schooner American Eagle at Quebec, ostensibly to engage in seal hunting and trading with the Indians on the Labrador coast, and on March 27, 1865, she was ready to sail, although she was locked in the ice. The enquiries the American consul had been making about the schooner, put Lamothe on his guard, so he resolved to leave at once. When darkness set in he hired men to saw the vessel out of the ice and at 9 o'clock that night under cover of darkness they were off and anchored below Ile d'Orleans. Next morning the schooner was safe, as the ice bridge prevented ~~them~~ her being followed. It was not a moment too soon, for while the vessel was still at Quebec late at night an order came from the Government-

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"Arrest Lamothe, American Eagle and all on board." No attempt was made to serve the warrant until that night, as it was thought impossible for the schooner to get out of the ice.

The passage to Escoumin was a dreadful one, the schooner being hemmed in at L'petit Havre for sixteen days with ice piled up sixty feet high. When the fugitives were found there were still greater hardships to endure, as the men had to travel on foot without snowshoes, and at some places the snow was ten feet deep. Two of the party were so exhausted that they laid down to die. In this extremity Lamothe climbed a tree and discovered a shanty, about a mile away, which proved to be the residence of one Chisholm, for whom a fortune was waiting in the United States, but who

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had married a squaw and settled down in that lone land. After a few days the party was ready to move forward again and the schooner was reached in safety. A stop was made at Sydney, C. B., then she sailed for St. Johns, where Mr. Lamothe parted company with four very grateful men, for whom rescue he had done so much.

Such in brief is Mr. Lamothe's story. A few days afterwards his schooner was wrecked at Moisie; but even this was not altogether a misfortune, as he discovered a deposit of magnetic iron ore, which developed into a valuable property.

Mr. Lamothe is not quite sure of the names of his party of four, but feels certain they were Moore, Swager, Scott and Collins.

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