

Brand Development in Quebec's Cast Iron Stove Industry:1900-1950

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Abstract

From the turn of the 20th century and up to the 1950s, many stove manufacturers operated in Canada during what has been labeled as the “glorious and golden age” of cast iron stove manufacturing (Laberge, 1980). Famous brand names remain in collective memory to this day, including Bélanger, McClary, Moffat, P.T. Légaré, and l’Islet. This paper studies brand development in the Canadian cast iron stove industry over this period to fill a void in the Canadian literature. Few papers exist on cast iron stove brand development and the thin literature covers mainly the U.S. market over the 1815-1875 period (Harris, 2008). Several clues point to the existence of deliberate branding activity at the largest Canadian foundries beyond efforts to differentiate stove types, models, sizes, names and designs. Canadian stove branding would have followed in the 19th century’s footsteps of the largest U.S. manufacturers who managed “to sell customers a full line of stoves covered by a unifying brand name that conveyed a promise of common quality” (Harris, 2008, p.720). This paper is the first to explore cast iron stove brand development in Canada. It contributes to the literature on Canadian foundries and on brand development in Canada in the first half of the 20th century. More specifically, we found that stove brand development evolved gradually in Canada, much as it had, starting a bit earlier, in the United States. Indeed, U.S. practices appear to have catalyzed stove brand development in Canada while the stove industry was consolidating and while Canadian consumerism and real purchasing power were increasing.

Introduction

From the turn of the 20th century and up to the 1950s, many founders operated in Canada during what has been labeled as the “glorious and golden age” of cast iron stove manufacturing (Laberge, 1980). Famous brand names remain in collective memory to this day, including Bélanger, McClary, Légaré, Moffat, and l’Islet. This paper studies brand development in the Canadian cast iron stove industry over this period to fill a void in the Canadian literature and to add to the very few U.S. papers that comprise the North-American literature. Several clues point to the existence of deliberate branding activity at the largest Canadian foundries beyond efforts to differentiate stove types, models, sizes, names and designs. Canadian stove branding would have followed in the 19th century’s footsteps of the largest U.S. manufacturers who managed “to sell customers a full line of stoves covered by a unifying brand name that conveyed a promise of common quality” (Harris, 2008, p.720). This paper is the first to explore the following research question: “What has led to the emergence and development of Canadian cast iron stove brands?”

Literature and Research Hypotheses

Few papers exist on cast iron stove brand development and the thin literature covers mainly the U.S. market over the 1815-1875 period (Harris, 2008). Branding development has been investigated in several other historical contexts at the firm level, including Colgate (Foster, 1975), Quaker (Thornton, 1933), Proctor & Gamble (Petty, 1985), General Mills (Gray, 1954), or Listerine (Lambert, 1927) and at the macro level for whole industries like firearms (Witkowski, 2010), brewing (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005) or automobile (Rao, 2006). Other authors analysed branding as a historical phenomenon through critical evaluations of brand development (Low and Fullerton, 1994; Schutte, 1969) and historiographies (Borden, 1946; Eckhardt, 2010). Contemporary literature on brand management is more profuse.

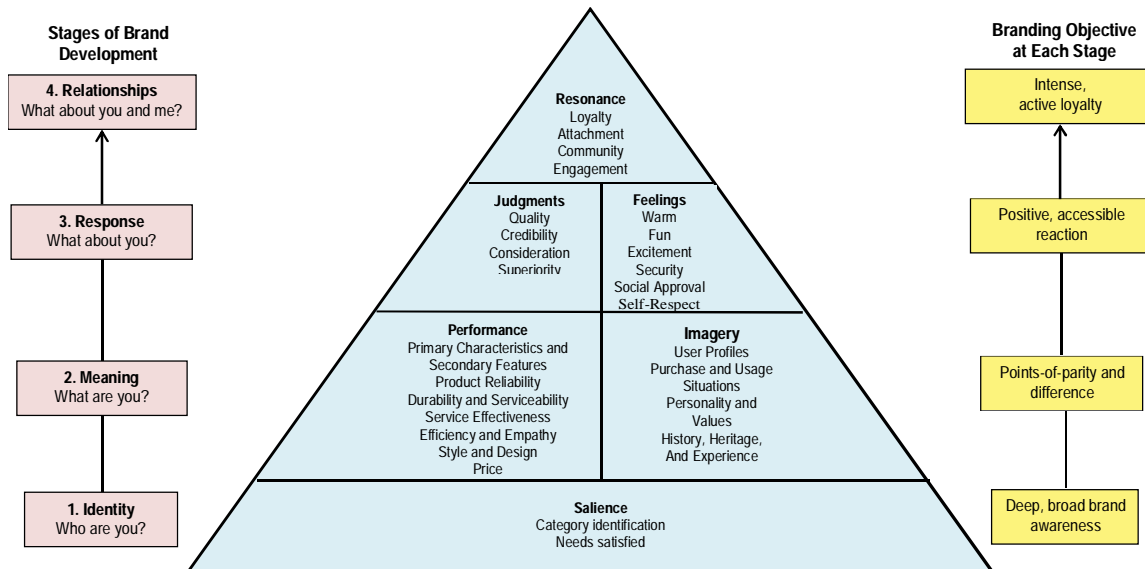
Studies focus mostly on brand development models (e.g., Kavartzis, 2005; Ghodeswar, 2008) and on brand development strategies (e.g., De Chernatony, 2001; Doyle, 2010; Keller, 1999; Malär and al., 2011; Thompson and al., 2006; Smith and Park, 1992; Dietz, 1973; Farquhar, 1989).

Harris (2008) notes that U.S. cast iron stove manufacturers hold a distinctive place in marketing history. From the early 19th century, the industry attracted the most inventive minds that kept reinventing the trade as technologies and transport evolved. Cast iron entrepreneurs started as local foundry owners-retailers because transportation challenges were imposing limits on growth. Early stoves were fragile and would arrive to faraway destinations in pieces given the travel rigours of the time. Starting in the 1830s, the most successful of these entrepreneurs centralized the industry through backward integration as transportation and mass production technologies evolved to provide access to geographically dispersed markets. The foundry owners' historical connection with their retail clientele contrasts with the vast majority of other durable goods manufacturers who were relying exclusively on wholesalers to distribute their generic products and deal with customers.

The U.S. stove manufacturers' ability to distribute their own products led them to compete increasingly to differentiate their products as natural geographical monopolies were vanishing. Marketing through printed ads, endorsements, trade shows as well as direct personal visits to potential customers, coupled with record-breaking numbers of patented stove features, were the main differentiation arsenal. As a result of competition, between the 1820s and the 1840s, the stoves became more and more similar from a general shape standpoint, but more and more differentiated in their tiny design details. This led to ever-lengthening lists of stove models and types that some pioneer firms, among the largest in the industry, started to brand under unifying names by the 1850s (Harris, 2008, p.721). Those names were initially uninspiring but soon evolved to convey strong symbolism (e.g., patriotic) to associate the products with an array of desired characteristics. Through the rest of the 19th century, branded stoves made by the largest manufacturers' competed in a national U.S. market of about 200 stove makers. Smaller local manufacturers tried to differentiate their unbranded products and marketed them fiercely while the industry was maturing in pace with mass production development. Harris (2008)'s paper leads to the conclusion that the branding of cast iron stoves in the U.S. has occurred gradually over the 19th century in pace with technological and socio-economic developments.

A gradual brand development dynamic in the historical cast iron stove industry is not surprising for at least two reasons. First, the development of national manufacturer brands in the U.S. between 1870 and 1914 has also occurred gradually for other goods due to similar macro-environmental changes: improvements in transportation, communication, production processes, packaging and trademark laws, as well as the reputation of the advertising business and the rise of consumerism (Low and Fullerton, 1994). Second, Kevin Lane Keller's brand resonance pyramid reproduced in Picture 1 suggests that there are four stages of brand development, each stage being associated with a branding objective (Keller, 2013, p.80). Interestingly, the gradual development of U.S. cast iron stove brands in the 19th century appears to have occurred in steps very consistent with Keller's contemporary pyramid, i.e. from a manufacturer's focus on satisfying needs to a desire to instill a symbolic attachment to the brand.

Picture 1: Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Pyramid



Source: Keller, K.L. *Strategic Brand Management. Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*.p. 80.

Baillargeon and G elinas (2009) showed that Canadian cast iron stove manufacturers implemented differentiation strategies like their U.S. counterparts did. They also showed that the province of Quebec's manufacturers were publishing ads embedded with symbolism by the early 20th century (Baillargeon and G elinas, 2011). Those parallels, cues from the existing literature, the geographical proximity of the Canadian and the U.S. markets, as well as the steady improvements in transportation and communication in the two countries over the 19th and 20th centuries (Linteau & al., 1979; Maheu, 1969; McCalla, 1990; Norrie and Owram, 1991; Pomfet, 1981) lead us to hypothesize that cast iron stove brand development in Canada occurred:

- H1 Through slow and steady evolution in a gradual, incremental way as opposed to a catastrophic, sudden pattern of change and acceptance.
- H2 As a result of changes in the business environment at the macro and local levels.

Methodology

To assess the pace of brand development in the Canadian cast iron industry, we rely on three primary sources of data. The first source is a sample of newspaper advertisements published by a selection of stove manufacturers in the province of Quebec's newspapers between 1900 and 1950. We surveyed the five most prominent newspapers used to advertise stoves at the time: *Le Soleil*, *La Presse*, *La Patrie*, *Le Peuple de Montmagny*, and the *Montreal Star*. Data has been obtained from library microfiches that contain all past issues of those papers. The second source consists of foundry catalogues, a popular stove marketing tool at the time. Catalogues were obtained from private collections and from Canadian Museum of Civilization. The third source includes the first TV ads aired at the beginning of the 1950s by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. These primary sources of data will enable us to assess H1 while H2 will be assessed with complementary secondary sources found in the academic literature, trade publications, as well as government statistics. While the empirical setting focuses on stoves sold in the province of Quebec, some of those stoves were produced in other provinces.

Hypotheses are tested using traditional business history methods. We focused our analyses on a sample of five stove manufacturers that operated and published ads frequently over the studied period: B elanger, l'Islet, McClary, P.T. L egar e, and Moffat. The main reason for this selection is that these five manufacturers were publishing ads actively and have continued to operate as stand-alone autonomous companies from 1900 to 1950. Several other stove manufacturers ceased to exist during this era as a result of industry consolidation (Anger and Parenteau, 1966, pp. 79-82; Bliss, 1987; Norrie and Owram, 1991; Taylor and Baskerville, 1994). Over the 1900-1950 period, we observed over 100 distinct cast iron stove ads that were often published multiple times in several newspapers.

Catalogues have been obtained over the years as a result of our interest in the historical cast iron stove industry. TV ads have been identified and obtained following an analysis of the historical literature on Quebec’s media and sociology (Côté and Daigle, 1999).

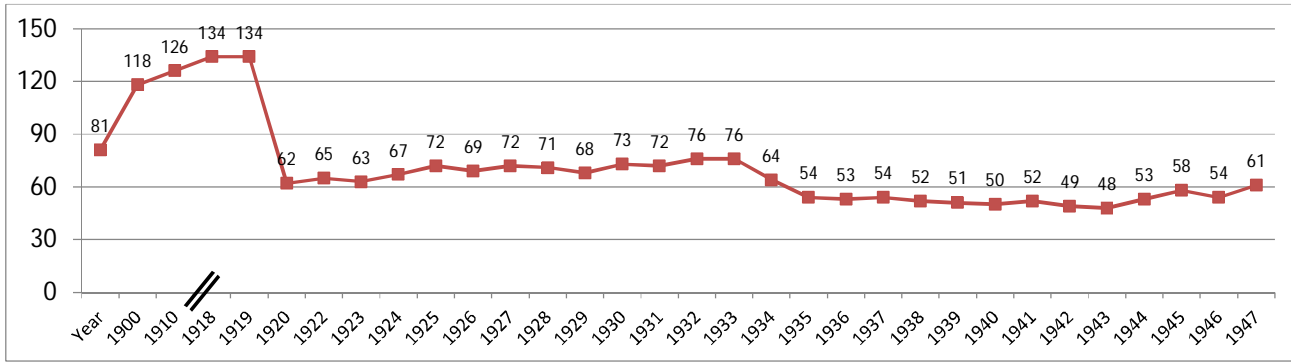
Findings

We found in the literature as well as through an analysis of primary sources evidence supporting H1. More specifically, our assessment is that the 1900 to WWI period corresponds to Keller’s (2013) second stage of brand development. By the early 20th century, Canadian consumers knew about cast iron stoves since this technology had supplanted fireplaces and furnaces over the 19th century (Lessard, 1994; Musset, 1983 and 1994). Numerous newspaper ads were promoting individual stove models with an emphasis on how the advertised model would fulfill the specific needs of potential customer beyond its primary role of providing reliable heating and cooking functionalities. Foundries were often advertising both stoves and other products in the same publication, albeit in distinct ads, and marketing campaigns were mostly seasonal because the numerous manufacturers were generalists. For instance, stove ads peaked in late summer and early fall, in preparation for winter, whereas agricultural tools were advertised during springtime in light of the coming harvest season. Other household staples were advertised less frequently but throughout the year. The name and functionality, as well as the aesthetical features of the advertised stoves represented the primary content of each ad while the manufacturer’s identification was provided for the main purposes of informing potential buyers of where to obtain the product (see Picture 2). Consistent with Keller’s second stage, stove names often conveyed French and English Canadian imagery (Baillargeon and Gélinas, 2011). As per graph 1, this corresponds to the period where the number of cast iron products producers peaked at 134, 127 of which were producing cast iron stoves.

Picture 2: Stove Advertising before 1918

 <p>Poele 'Royal'</p> <p>LES POELES qui se sont vendues dans notre district à venir jusqu'à présent sont faites d'après des patrons pris aux Etats-Unis où les conditions de climat et d'emploi ne sont pas les mêmes qu'ici.</p> <p>Aux Etats-Unis on emploie des poêles avec un petit feu afin de dépenser le moins de combustible possible, tandis que dans la Province de Québec il faut un poêle assez grand de feu et de fourneau pour réchauffer la maison en même temps que faire la cuisine.</p> <p>Nous avons encouru les frais considérables de faire des patrons en bois complets pour un poêle exactement adapté à notre climat et aux besoins de nos clients.</p> <p>Ce n'est pas un poêle copié: c'est le premier qui soit fait de ces proportions.</p> <p>Dans notre annonce de la semaine prochaine nous vous donnerons des détails.</p> <p><i>A. Belanger</i> MONTMAGNY Q.C.</p>	 <p>LE "GRAND FEU"</p> <p>La construction du "GRAND FEU" permet une capacité de chauffage du double des poêles ordinaires.</p> <p>La grandeur de son feu lui permet d'être installé avec système de chauffage à eau chaude.</p> <p>Ce poêle fut anciennement fabriqué à Québec sous les noms de "GRAND FEU" et "GRAND TRIUMPH" mais, maintenant nous le fabriquons dans nos propres Usines à l'Islet Station, où vous pourrez vous procurer tous les morceaux de réparation.</p> <p>Il y a plusieurs milliers de ces poêles en usage et ils sont reconnus pour les plus modernes et les plus économiques.</p> <p>Nous avons une ligne complète de poêles en fonte et en acier. Demandez nos circulaires.</p> <p>Nous faisons les réparations en fonte des poêles et de machinerie de toutes sortes.</p> <p>La Fonderie L'Islet Limitée L'ISLET STATION, Québec.</p> <p>Un agent responsable est demandé dans chaque localité où nous ne sommes pas représentés.</p>	 <p>PANDORA RANGE</p> <p>GARDE LE FEU TOUTE LA NUIT</p> <p>La bonne ménagère se sent toujours portée à dire au Pandora, au joyeux "Bon jour"</p> <p>Pourquoi? Parceque le Pandora a toujours un beau lit de braise chaude comme récompense pour avoir fermé les clés bien juste avant le coucher.</p> <p>Cinq minutes après avoir établi le courant d'air, elle aura un bon gros feu.</p> <p>Si elle dormait deux ou trois heures de plus que d'habitude, il y aura encore un bon feu de prêt pour elle.</p> <p>Le foyer, les courants et les clés sont si soigneusement arrangés que le Pandora peut se régler pour conserver le feu de 24 à 36 heures.</p> <p>Les propriétaires d'un Pandora ne sont pas les propriétaires d'un Pandora ne sont jamais troublés dans leur sommeil par des rêves qu'ils devront allumer un feu de nouveau le matin.</p> <p>Si votre marchand local ne tient pas le plus parfait de tous les poêles, écrivez nous directement pour le LIVRER GRATUIT.</p> <p>McClary's</p> <p>London, Toronto, Montreal, St. John, Halifax</p> <p>EN VENTE PAR LE CIE MARTINEAU</p>
<p>Source: <i>Le Peuple de Montmagny</i>, 1915.</p>	<p>Source: <i>Le Peuple de Montmagny</i>, 1916.</p>	<p>Source: <i>Le Soleil</i>, 1912.</p>

Graph 1: Number of Cast Iron Product Manufacturers in the Province of Quebec, 1900- 1948



Source : ANGER, F.-A. Anger and R. Parenteau, *Statistiques manufacturières du Québec, 1665-1948*, pp. 79-82.

After WWI and up to the 1930s, the number of cast iron producers dropped sharply (see Graph 1) due to market consolidation. Manufacturers developed specializations and increasingly the largest urban ones gained a competitive advantage through economies of scale (Heron, 1988; Heron and Storey, 1990; Kilbourn, 1960). Consistent with the U.S. pattern, albeit a few decades later, improvements in transport and communication allowed producers to increase the geographic span of their distribution network, leading many isolated producers to lose their natural monopoly. Stove technology, which was often copied from abroad since the beginning of the century (Lessard, 1994; Moussette, 1983 and 1994) had somewhat peaked already and manufacturers then devised to move on to Keller’s third stage of brand development (Picture 1). During this period, we observed an increasing number of ads putting forth not a specific stove model, but rather the stove manufacturer with the objective of generating positive associations in consumers’ minds regarding the attributes of a whole range of stove models (see Picture 3).

Picture 3: Cast Iron Stove Ads promoting Several Stoves under the Same Brands during the 1920s

Source: *Le Soleil*, 1923. Source: *Le Soleil*, 1920.

The 1930s marks the beginning of the fourth Keller stage of cast iron stove brand development. A first clue is that brand names had then taken their final shape. For instance, Légraré dropped the founders’ “P.T.” initials from its brand name. Another example is that of General Steels Wares Limited of Toronto, which went as far as to rebrand its products under the valuable the McClary brand which belonged to the smaller London, Ontario-based McClary Manufacturing Company they had acquired in 1927, along with the Thomas Davidson Company and Sheet Metal Products of Montreal, E. T. Wright and Sons of Hamilton, A. Aubry et Fils of Montreal and the Happy Thought Foundry of Brantford (The Canadian Manufacturers' Association, 1967).

Another clue pointing to Keller’s fourth branding stage is that the newspaper ads strategies of our sample of foundries changed noticeably during the 1930s. The number of ads published fell sharply compared with previous periods. The brand names now dominated practically all ads and catalogues. And foundries proceeded to brand extensions by no longer advertising stoves only, but often a full array of household products that they did not necessarily produce themselves and that were not even made of cast iron (e.g., furniture, see Picture 4).

Picture 4: Ads Promoting Several Products, 1940s’

The image contains two newspaper advertisements. The left advertisement is for 'LE GARE' and features several product listings: 'Jolie salle à déjeuner' with a table and chairs for \$44.50; 'Mobilier de Chambre' for \$128.; 'Poêle "Frontenac"' for \$99.50; 'Superbe studio chromé' for \$99.00; 'Le "Normandie"' for \$77.40; 'Westinghouse' Model 'Table' for \$94.50; 'Model 'Console'' for \$129.98; 'Laveuse "Blackstone"' for \$86.95; 'Planche à Repasser' for \$1.35; and 'Carrosse pliant' for \$9.95. The address is 'LA COMPAGNIE LEGARE LIMITEE - 142, rue SAINT-JOSEPH'. The right advertisement is for 'A. BÉLANGER' celebrating its 80th anniversary. It features a large bedroom set for \$114.50 and a dining table for \$80.00. The text includes 'Soyez Arisés', 'ATTENDEZ LES AUBAINES DE NOTRE VENTE DU 80° ANNIVERSAIRE', and 'Ces Aubaines dans le domaine du meuble vous seront offertes par nos 15 magasins à travers la province'. The address is 'MONTMAGNY - QUÉBEC - HULL - TR. DES RIVIÈRES - SHERRBROOKE - DRUM MONVILLE - FARGHAM - ROUTH'.

Source: Le Soleil, 1940.

Source: Le Peuple de Montmgny, 1948.

The Bélanger Foundry provides the best illustration of achieving resonance as per Keller’s (2013) fourth stage of brand development. In 1947, it began its association with actress Amanda Alarie who was utterly famous in Quebec for her “Joséphine Plouffe” role (or Mother Plouffe as she was always referred to) in the radioshow, and then later television show, *La famille Plouffe*. The Plouffe family depicted a germinal building block of Quebec women’s emancipation because the clan was unofficially, but effectively, matriarchal. Mother Plouffe at the time embodied comfort, stability and security and her dominance over her *faire-valoir* husband conveyed growing feminist aspirations (Beaudet, 1978). Bélanger could not have found a better spokesperson to resonate with the vast majority of Quebec’s French-speaking women who were confined to a housewife role, who were the last in Canada to gain the right to vote in provincial elections in 1940, and who were the actual decision-makers for household good purchases (Côté and Daigle, 1999, p.199).

Picture 5: Bélanger Stove Ads featuring “Maman Plouffe”, 1949



Source: Laberge, A., *Histoire de la Côte-du-Sud*, p. 438.

Overall, our analyses support H1 and suggest that the branding of cast iron stoves occurred gradually over the first half of the 20th century by phases consistent with the brand development stages of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Pyramid (Picture 1).

We also found evidence supporting H2. The gradual branding of Canadian cast iron stoves in the first half of the 20th century appears to be very similar to what had happened in the U.S. roughly 20 to 30 years earlier. This cannot be explained by the geographical distance between the two markets because most U.S. stove manufacturers were physically located in New England and were shipping throughout the U.S., i.e. often much farther than to the province of Quebec, by the 1920s (Lessard, 1994, p. 94; Hogan, 1971; Taylor and Baskerville, 1994). What appears to have allowed Canadian manufacturers to develop and brand their stoves two to three decades after their U.S. peers is a mix of environmental conditions.

The most important factor explaining why the Canadian cast iron stove industry was able to lag the U.S. by two or three decades is protectionism. Tariffs were used at the time by all levels of Canadian and U.S. government to protect local industries according to their priorities (Bischoff, 1992; Dubuc, 1959; Linteau & al. 1979; Kilbourn, 1960; Taylor and Baskerville, 1994). Those barriers have shielded Canadian manufacturers from the threat of U.S. goods that were produced more cheaply and at a much larger scale.

Lack of transportation and communications has also certainly helped to shield the Canadian cast iron stove industry from the U.S. threat. Canadian railways have shaped the country by unifying the provinces from the east to the west coast. Railways have not developed from north-south initially (Norrie and O'ram, 1991; Maheu, 1969; Taylor and Baskerville, 1994), and border tariffs impeded the free flow of goods at the time. Beaudoin (1984) and Courville & al. (1995) have demonstrated the importance of transportation in the success of Quebec's foundries. Those closer to rivers and railways have succeeded better than their competitors. The rigour of Quebec's climate may further explain why the Canadian and the U.S. cast iron stove markets may have developed in parallel. Several ads published in the early 20th century by Canadian manufacturers explain how well-adapted to the local weather their stoves were as opposed to poor copies of foreign products. For example: "Because they are specially built for the climate of the Province of Quebec. Because our models differ entirely from those of American foundries..." (Bélanger Foundry ad, *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, October 1912).

Socio-economic factors have also certainly played an important role in cast iron stove branding development. The comparatively late development of Canadian brands is consistent with the relative poverty (Charland, 1992) and illiteracy (Dufour, 1997) of the Quebec people in the first half of the 20th century. Poverty has delayed the rise of consumerism in the province and thereby the effectiveness of branding strategies. It was not until the period between 1930 and 1960 that marketing efforts in Canada enjoined households to identify with consumption patterns presented as dominant, permanent and universal (Côté and Daigle, 1999, p. 198). Illiteracy was also making printed ads of the late 19th century and early 20th less effective than it was in better educated markets. Finally, a majority of Quebecers speak French. The language barrier has certainly limited the interest or the ability of foreign stove producers to develop resonating brands for the local population (see Baillargeon and Gélinas, 2011). Some resonating branding successes in Quebec could not have been imported. For instance, Bélanger Foundry's "Mon beau poêle Bélanger"¹ ran in printed ads from the 1910s, and carrying on television ads starting in the early 1950s until the company's acquisition by the John Inglis and Company (now Whirlpool Canada) in the 1980s. Like spokesperson Mother Plouffe who pronounced those words, the slogan is still imprinted in collective memory and Bélanger stoves remain very collectible today.

But did environmental barriers make the Canadian cast iron stove market completely immune to the influence of what occurred in the U.S.? Several signs lead to conclude that it was not. Plagiarism was rampant among stove manufacturers in the pre-WWI period Baillargeon and Gélinas (strategic imitation proceedings) and, as discussed earlier, some manufacturers were advertising the merits of their stoves developed for the local climate, as opposed to copies made from foreign patterns. This implies that copies of U.S. stoves were available on the Quebec market. So the technological developments in the U.S. may well have been copied in Canada as the numerous stove manufacturers were striving to differentiate themselves. It is also well known that Mr. Bélanger, the owner of the Bélanger Foundry, was a regular traveler who came back from trips abroad with suitcases of foreign manufacturers' product catalogues (Côté, 1990; Hébert, 1996; Laberge, 1993). This rampant copying was facilitated by soft, ineffective, or in-existent enforcement of patent laws, especially across borders (Moser, 2003).

¹Translation: *My beautiful Bélanger stove*

Overall, the evidence suggests that, consistent with H2, the evolution of local and macro business environment conditions has shaped the evolutions of cast iron stove brands in Canada. The influence of the U.S. market is indirect however because tariffs and underdeveloped means of transportation and communication limited U.S. manufacturers to the role of models to be imitated by Canadian manufacturers as opposed to the role of competitors directly involved in the shaping of the industry's business practices.

Conclusion

We found the earliest evidence of Canadian stove brand emergence in the first half of the 20th century among foundries that were already reputable not only for their stoves, but most often for manycast iron household, industrial and agricultural goods. Starting mainly after WWI, marketing activities of branding leaders started to focus on the brand as opposed to a stove model, name, style, quality or functionalities. Consistently, ad campaigns were changed from seasonal efforts to promote a specific product to year round campaigns to promote brands attached to numerous products. By the 1930s owners of the most resonating stove brands proceeded to brand extension strategies in order to sell wide arrays of household goods they did not even manufacture themselves.

This study contributes to the literature on Canadian foundries and on brand development in Canada in the first half of the 20th century. Our findings are consistent with the two research hypotheses. More specifically, we found that stove brand development evolved gradually in Canada, much as it had, starting a bit earlier, in the United States. Indeed, U.S. practices appear to have catalyzed stove brand development in Canada, even though U.S. stoves could not reach the Canadian market, as the stove industry was consolidating and while Canadian consumerism was rising.

The paper has limitations that represent opportunities for further research. First, the sample selection includes five of the most successful foundries. This may introduce a survivor bias in the format and content of the ads that were analyzed. A comparative study of marketing and branding efforts between the ads of the successful and unsuccessful foundries could shed additional light on the evolution of Canadian cast iron stove branding during first half of the 20th century. Second, even though enough environmental factors have been identified to conclude that the evolution of the Canadian and Quebec business environment has shaped the evolution of stove branding, further analyses could reveal additional factors that have not been analyzed in this study.

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