

The City of Saguenay for the District of Arvida

Arvida was founded as a single-industry town by American millionaire **Arthur Vining Davis**, president of the Aluminum Company of America (later Rio Tinto Alcan), in 1925 when the aluminum smelter was constructed. Located 240 kilometres north of Quebec City and south of the Saguenay River between Chicoutimi and Jonquière, Arvida is a pre-planned model town whose oldest area, Sainte-Thérèse, was built in just 135 days.

In its heyday, Arvida was the largest aluminum production centre in the Western hemisphere, and workers were brought in from around the world and housed near the smelter to work with the “magic metal of the 20th century.” The scope and character of the original urban plan is evident today in the layout of the streets and arrangement of the built and natural landscapes. The unique and creative planning approach included 140 different models of single-family homes on spacious lots along winding, tree-lined streets, interspersed with residential parks, schools and places of worship that welcomed a range of Alcan employees—from managers and skilled professionals to the unskilled labour force. The innovative housing designs made good use of Quebec’s traditional building styles and wooden construction materials in a pleasing contrast to the linear uniformity of most industrial towns. The region’s familiar bell-cast and mansard roofs and other architectural components were engineered into standardized pre-cut pieces that could be quickly assembled on individual lots.

The Hon. Pierre Duchesne and Mayor Jean Tremblay



Topographic view of Arvida



But it was not just about housing. Respected Quebec architects were hired to oversee the design and construction of a range of institutional buildings: Manoir Saguenay, research laboratories, company offices, the Palace Theatre, Town Hall, Arvida Hospital, churches and schools.

In 1975, Arvida was amalgamated with nearby Kénogami and Jonquière to form the new city of Jonquière. In 2002, it then merged with Lac-Kénogami, Shipshaw, Chicoutimi, Laterrière, La Baie and Tremblay Township to create the new city of Saguenay. Now part of this larger amalgamated city, Arvida has about 12,000 residents, and the smelter and other related plants, now part of Rio Tinto Alcan, are still in operation.

For more than 20 years the City of Saguenay and Jonquière before it energetically promoted and protected its architectural and urban landscape through the creation of building inventories, development strategies, and publications made possible with the support of Quebec's department of Culture and Communications. In 2010, the City of Saguenay committed to the designation (under the *Loi sur les biens culturels*) of three heritage conservation districts, comprising 733 houses, which represents 40 % of the original model town. It also offered grant programs to support the restoration and maintenance of the company-built houses. As a result, the broad avenues with towering trees, several churches, schools and a hospital have remained intact.

Arvida./ Photo: Rio Tinto Alcan



The community itself is actively involved in raising awareness of Arvida's unique architectural heritage and cultural landscape through an ongoing plaque program, walking tours, information brochures and heritage events. Arvida's residential area now enjoys the same protection that institutional and commercial properties have benefited from as part of the formal conservation plan adopted by the municipality of Jonquière in 1999. The City of Saguenay pledged \$800,000 in the past two years alone towards its long-term plans to revitalize the district through the preservation of its heritage.



The conservation of Arvida has motivated the community to proudly protect the heritage of the wider region, as they are trustees of its rich history and will be the ones to perpetuate and disseminate stories of its past.

With the amalgamation of so many municipalities in the area since the 1970s, Arvida has had to overcome a number of political and economic difficulties associated with integration. Proponents of heritage conservation have had their challenges too, as the interests of smaller

former municipalities and their heritage assets are often subsumed by the needs of the expanded political entity. But the City of Saguenay has its sights set on making Arvida a region known on a national and international scale. It is well aware that the area holds a special place in history and is a unique asset in the city. The regeneration of Arvida continues today, and Saguenay has many plans in the works to protect the heritage of the district.

This nomination by the Comité des citoyens pour la valorisation du patrimoine d'Arvida.