Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal in Westmount
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

I am awed by the legacy of educational institutions developed by the sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal within the boundaries of Westmount. Ever since 1854 when the Congrégation had the foresight to purchase a large section of land from Samuel Monk for future development, they have fulfilled educational needs here. People have forgotten their magnificent fifth Mother House constructed on the mountainside near Villa Maria in 1880 since it was destroyed by fire in 1893. We are familiar with the L’Institut Pédagogique that the Congrégation constructed in 1926 further south on this same land. In 2007 renovations were made to this building to facilitate its reincarnation as Marianopolis College.

In this Newsletter, the WHA is pleased to provide you with a glimpse into the history of the multiple moves and expansions undertaken by the Congrégation thanks to the generous and patient explanations given to us by Françoise Boisvert CND Director General of Marianopolis College and Joyce Roberts CND from the Marguerite Bourgeoys Museum.

Thanks to English teacher Sally Nelson, we are also including information about the continued educational use, by Dawson College, of the grand Sherbrooke Street Beaux-Arts former sixth Mother House designed by Westmount architect Omar Marchand.

DOREEN LINDSAY

The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Photos: WHA Archives, CND Archives

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The City of Westmount in 1908

Thursday 19 February 2009
Roslyn School opened in 1908. French Immersion began in 1965
Speaker: Joan Rothman, commissioner for Westmount School Board from 1970 to 1973 and PSBGM from 1973 to 2003

Thursday 19 March 2009
The Westmount Municipal Association; Celebrating a Centennial
Speakers: Tom Thompson and Kathleen Duncan
Westmount City Councilors and Past Presidents of WMA

Thursday 16 April 2009
POM Bakery: Pride of Montreal or Pain Orgueil de Montréal
Speaker: Peter Harrison, great grandson of founder Dent Harrison

Thursday 21 May 2009
The City of Westmount; 100 Years Ago
Speakers: Caroline Breslaw and Ruth Allan Rigby
WHA Board Members

Talks will take place in WESTMOUNT PUBLIC LIBRARY
4574 Sherbrooke Street West – 7 to 9 pm
Admission free for members. Non-members $5:00 at the door.
514-925-1404 or 514-932-6688
Villa Maria, The Mother House, St. Paul’s Catholic Girls’ School, L’Institut Pédagogique de Montréal, Collège Marguerite-Bourgeoys, Marianopolis College – Whichever organization you are familiar with, you must marvel at the energy and dedication shown by the Sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal over the years as they developed their educational programs.

In July 1908 when the Congrégation de Notre Dame de Montréal sisters moved into their 6th Mother House on Sherbrooke Street at the eastern edge of Westmount, they were already familiar with the area.

In May 1854, fifty-four years earlier, the sisters had purchased the historic Monklands property at the western edge of Westmount. It extended from Decarie almost to Victoria. The sisters developed it as Villa Maria, a boarding school for girls. By 1966 the boarding school was closed and the elementary school was phased out. Today it is a high school with five hundred students in each of the English and French sectors. East of the school, the sisters farmed the land. The farm is now a sisters’ residence called Maison Notre-Dame-du-Sacre-Coeur, at 5025 NDG Avenue. The old stone barn, or grange, was converted into a sisters’ residence and is called the Maison de la Montagne at 5021 NDG Avenue.

In 1880 the CND built their much-needed 5th Mother House on the southeastern section of the Villa Maria property. Designed by Perrault & Menard it unfortunately was destroyed by fire in 1893. Only the basement survived and today houses offices at 5017 NDG Avenue.

In 1898, St Paul’s Catholic Girls’ School was started in response to the need for education for Catholic girls in the Westmount area. The CND purchased a house which was part of row housing at 4193 Sherbrooke Street corner of Greene Avenue to offer elementary and high school classes in both French and English.

In 1926 their new L’Institut Pédagogique de Montréal (Teachers’ Training College) opened on Westmount Avenue on the land they had purchased from Samuel Monk in 1854. The CND sisters commissioned Marchand to design this educational building to accommodate approximately 400 pupils, plus study rooms for music, art, household science, physics, chemistry when the facilities in the Sherbrooke street Mother House became overcrowded. Also in 1926 both English and French sections of the Notre-Dame Ladies’ College moved in and changed their name to Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys. The Mother House moved in from 1985 until 2005. The original building was awarded an architectural medal by France.

The Congrégation has always combined inspirational teaching with architecturally inspiring buildings to provide a stimulating environment for learning. Just last year, the building was renovated to accommodate the needs of the new 2-year pre-university CEGEP Marianopolis College. (See article on page 9)

DOREEN LINDSAY FEBRUARY 2009
Sixth Mother House, 1908-1985 – 3040 Sherbrooke Street

From July 1908, when the sisters of the Congrégation de Notre Dame moved into this magnificent 700 room Beaux-Arts style Mother House on Sherbrooke Street at Atwater Avenue, until they sold it in 1982 to Dawson College, this building was home for an inspiring education centre as well as a beloved Mother House for the religious sisters.

In 1909, the year after they moved in, the sisters of the Congrégation founded a bilingual institution of higher learning for women in Quebec. The Ecole de l’enseignement supérieure Notre-Dame was called Notre-Dame Ladies’ College in English. The first graduate in 1911, Marie Gerin-Lajoie, was granted her Bachelor of Arts degree by Université Laval. By 1922 degrees were granted through the newly founded Université de Montréal. In 1926, the Ladies’ College (Arts and Science programs) moved up to a new pavilion on Westmount Avenue and changed their name to Collège Marguerite Bourgeois, then later to Marianopolis College.

Another section of the building was occupied by the commercial section known as Notre-Dame Secretarial College or The Mother House. By 1916 there were eighty-six students enrolled and courses included book keeping, business practice, banking, business correspondence, penmanship, commercial geography, stenography, typewriting by touch, indexing, letterpress, copying, manifold and mimeographing and letter filing. In the business world, the graduates were much in demand as stenographers, typists and bookkeepers. During the 1970’s training in computers was important. In 1972 the Secretarial School moved to the smaller building at 2330 Sherbrooke that Marchand had designed in 1910 on the east side of Atwater. It was not until 1997 that it closed.

By the 1970s the Mother House faced a turning point. The number of Sisters of the Congregation was declining and those who remained were aging. Educational programs had moved to other locations and developers had started to covet this amazing property in the middle of the City for development. Fortunately the building was classified as an Historic site by the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles of the Quebec Government on 19 August 1977.

In 1981 Sarah Paltiel became the Director General of Dawson College. She convinced many government people that the Mother House would be the ideal central home for the fourteen separate locations that then existed for the English language CEGEP Dawson College. Today the magnificent Mother House has been given a new, exciting life as the CEGEP Dawson College. (See article on page 8)

After the sisters sold their building, the Mother House moved up to Westmount Avenue in 1985, then, in 2005 back down to Sherbrooke on the east side of Atwater where it remains today.

Doreen Lindsay
The sisters living in the Mother House had to be self-sufficient. They established an infirmary, laundry, bakery, kitchen, print shop, and photography studio as well as facilities for making their own clothes, shoes and candles. They also managed a vegetable garden and grew grapes along Wood Avenue between de Maisonneuve and Sherbrooke.

photos courtesy of the archives of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTHER HOUSES OF THE SISTERS OF THE CONGRÉGATION DE NOTRE DAME DE MONTRÉAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st. 1659 – Stable School on the Common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd. 1670 – Big House on Saint Paul Street (fire in 1683)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd. 1683 – Mother House north of Saint-Paul St. (fire in 1769)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th. 1769 – rebuilt and expanded (expropriated by the City in 1911 (destroyed in 1912)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th. 1880-93 – Mountain Mother House, southeastern section of Villa Maria property (fire in 1893)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th. 1908-85 – 3040 Sherbrooke St. West (now Dawson College)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th. 1985-2005 – 4873 Westmount Avenue (now Marianopolis College)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th. 2005 to present – Mother House 2330 Sherbrooke Street West includes meeting rooms, offices, archives, bedrooms, kitchen and dining room.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Born in Montreal in 1872, Marchand went to Paris in 1893 to study architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts. In 1902, when he graduated, he was the first French-Canadian to receive the Diploma in Architecture from the French Government. While studying there, he was selected to design the Canadian Pavilion for the 1900 World Fair in Paris.

Marchand returned to Montreal in 1902 when he was 30 years old after studying in Paris for ten years.

He formed a partnership with Samuel Stevens Haskell, an American who had been a fellow student in Paris. They won a competition in 1904 to design the sixth Mother House for the Sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal.

The C.N.D. Mother House at 3040 Sherbrooke Street West is still standing majestically within its treed park-like block of land framed by Sherbrooke Street, Atwater, de Maisonneuve and Wood Avenues. Since 1988 it has been home to Dawson College and thus continues to be a site for educational and cultural activities. The chapel has been successfully transformed into a Library.

The reinforced concrete framework of the large building is covered with imported light buff coloured brick from the USA. It was innovative at that time when most public buildings in Montreal were local grey limestone. The imposing bronze dome, rising above the central domed entrance dominates the long view when coming from the east along Sherbrooke Street.

After the 6th Mother House was completed, Marchand designed a home for himself at 486 Wood Avenue (1912-14) overlooking the orchards of the Priests’ Farm. For 25 years the Marchand family lived here until 1937. He designed a huge window in the front which extends the full 25 foot height of two floors. They could look out toward the Mother House and over open fields toward Priests Farm, which was part of the Sulpiciens’ Grand Séminaire on Sherbrooke Street.

In 1925 the sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame asked Marchand to design their 7th Mother House at 4873 Westmount Avenue. He was presented with a medal from France for this Beaux-Arts style building.

Between 1919 and 1923, Marchand went into partnership with Ernest Cormier who had just returned from Europe in 1918 with two diplomas and the prestigious prix de Rome. They collaborated on projects for the Provincial Government: the annex to the Palais de Justice de Montréal (1920-26) and l’École des Beaux-Arts on rue Saint-Urbain (1922-23). They worked on the reconstruction of the City Hall (1922-24) for the City of Montreal and they undertook reconstruction and enlarging projects for the C.N.D. including the stabilization of the roof of the Mother-House (1920-21).

52 Sunnyside Avenue, Westmount. One of Marchand’s last works was a private house he designed in 1930 for Léopold Fortier, a stockbroker. It reflects his very personal styles. Large windows on the south side (back) of the house provide views over the St. Lawrence River.

DOREEN LINDSAY
Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700) – First Teacher in Ville-Marie

“Marguerite’s life, informed by a profound trust in God and in people, demonstrates her unwavering conviction that education can make a difference in the individual and in society, and that if people can be brought to understand, they can be brought to reconciliation and peace.” (selected from Mission Statement in Marianopolis Collage)

Marguerite Bourgeoys arrived in Ville-Marie in 1653. (the small settlement established by Paul Chomedy, Sieur de Maisonneuve in 1642) She was a young woman from Troyes, France who gave away all her family inheritance to join the voyage with 100 men and 1 other woman in 1653 to begin a new life in New France. Her life was dedicated to serving God through educating others.

Marguerite opened the first school on April 30, 1658, with seven pupils in an abandoned stable given to her by de Maisonneuve.

The following year she founded the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal as a non-cloistered, teaching community with five women who also wanted to provide leadership in the small community. Her determination and strength led her to develop higher education for women in Montreal by continuously adjusting to the needs of the times.

The Maison Saint-Gabriel. In 1662 Bourgeoys obtained a second land grant from de Maisonneuve in Pointe-Saint-Charles. A stone house was built in 1668 where the farming-sisters cultivated and farmed to provide for the teaching-sisters. They also housed and taught the necessary skills of wilderness survival to the young women, les Filles du Roy, who came from France between 1668 and 1673 as brides for the early settlers. Today you can visit Maison Saint-Gabriel at 2146 place Dublin, Pointe-Saint-Charles. 514-935-8136

The Mountain Mission. In 1676 Marguerite Bourgeoys trained two Congrégation sisters to educate both native and colony children in the Fort of the Gentlemen of Saint-Sulpice on the south side of Mount Royal. (today’s Sherbrooke Street) When four towers were built in 1694 as part of the stone fort, the sisters set up a school in the nearest southwest tower and lived in the southeast tower. We can still visit the towers school between Côte-des-Neiges and Atwater Avenue.

Marguerite continued to give direction as she saw the need. She returned to France three times to seek help from King Louis XIV. She obtained land for larger Mother Houses as the need arose. It was in the 3rd Mother House between St. Paul and Notre-Dame streets that she died in 1700. She was declared a Saint in 1982.

Marguerite Bourgeoys Museum. In 1910 the body of Marguerite Bourgeoys was brought to the 6th Mother House on Sherbrooke Street and sealed in a marble altar in the chapel. When the building was sold to Dawson College in 1982, her remains were then moved back down to the Notre-Dame-De-Bon-Secours Chapel where a museum is dedicated to her life and educational works.

Doreen Lindsay

Thank you to our loyal members who show your support by attending the Lecture Series and sending your fees which make it possible to publish and mail out this newsletter. Thank you to Barbara Covington, our archivist, who devotes many hours of time to keeping our acquisitions in professional order. Thank you to David Freeman, our devoted treasurer, who manages our finances with dignity. Thank you to Ann Barkman, our membership manager, who diligently keeps track of everyone and manages the Web site. Thank you to Caroline Breslaw, who is such a dependable vice-president and co-organizer of the Lecture Series. Thank you to Ted Sancton for his good natured and always patient preparation of the Newsletter and to Copy Resolutions for their excellent printing.

Thank you for your 2007-2008 donations: Atchison and Judith Philpott, Dan J. Sullivan, Michel Vauchon, Jean Turgeon, Sarah Aitken, Lawrence Hutchison, Mary Ross, Rosalyn Moquette, Eleanor Hynes, Shirley Wallace and Patricia Claxton.

Marguerite Bourgeoys painted by Jeanne Le Ber on the day of her death, 12 January 1700
Dawson College, the first English-language CEGEP in Quebec, has been in Westmount since it was founded 40 years ago. Named after Sir William Dawson, geologist and principal of McGill University in the late 1800's, Dawson College opened its doors at 350 Selby Street in 1968 in the former Frosst pharmaceutical building. In 1970, a second campus was begun on Viger Street. As the student population grew, buildings were rented throughout Westmount and Montreal. Other buildings in Westmount were the Richelieu Building at 990 du Couvent, the Lucas Building at 3401 St. Antoine, the Air Canada Building on Saint Catherine Street, and the nearby Dome Theatre on Notre Dame Street in Saint Henri.

The faculty was comprised of equal numbers of men and women from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Their creative, dynamic approach to this new level of education welcomed many students who might not otherwise have been motivated to continue with their education.

In 1982 Sarah Paltiel, Director-General of Dawson College, negotiated the purchase of the Mother House of the Congrégation de Notre Dame at 3040 Sherbrooke Street West. This massive six-story building, designed by Beaux Arts architect J. Omer Marchand and his partner Samuel Stevens Haskell, opened in 1908 on land purchased from the Sulpicians.

During the two and a half year renovation carried out by the college, 95% of the interior was demolished. Four rooms (the chapel, the refectory, a large dormitory, and the meeting room) were protected by a heritage classification. The chapel was converted into the college library, the refectory remained a cafeteria, the dormitory was reduced in size and transformed into the Rose Lounge, and the meeting room became the Board Room. The main staircase and the wooden floors could not be salvaged. One percent of the construction budget was spent on art, as was required for public buildings by the Quebec government. In September 1988 classes began on the new Atwater campus.

Over the years, additions have been made to the original H-shaped building. Between 1988 and 1995 a half wing and a new construction along de Maisonneuve were linked with an entrance at 4001 de Maisonneuve Avenue, providing access to the Metro. In 1997 a subterranean gymnasium with a mechanical engineering lab below was built. The new theatre facing Atwater Avenue is the most recent construction. Dawson College continues the commitment to education of the previous owners of the property, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame.

CAROLINE BRESLAW
Marianopolis College celebrated its centennial in 2008. It has twice been located in Westmount. In 1908, the Congrégation de Notre Dame, founded by Marguerite Bourgeoys, established the first independent college for girls in Quebec, with an English section known as Notre Dame Ladies’ College. The college was affiliated with Laval University and followed the courses and examination requirements of that institution. It was housed in a wing of the Mother House of the CND at 3040 Sherbrooke Street West (now Dawson College).

In 1922 the college’s affiliation was transferred to the recently founded University of Montreal. J. Omer Marchand, the architect of the Mother House, designed a building for the Congrégation on Westmount Avenue at the top of Claremont Avenue. It was known as Marguerite Bourgeoys College when it opened its doors there in 1926, sharing the building with the L’institut pédagogique.

In 1943 the school moved to the corner of Guy Street and Dorchester Boulevard (where Mount Saint Mary Convent had previously been housed) and was renamed Marianopolis College. It followed the curriculum of English-language universities, including programmes in general science and honours chemistry.

Following a fire in 1945, the college moved to 3647 Peel Street (also known as the Shaughnessy House). It offered rigorous academic programmes, with two unique to Marianopolis – Programme M, designed to help women return to school on a limited basis, and a Professional Music Programme in conjunction with McGill University’s School of Music. In 1969 Marianopolis opted to become a private college with a 2-year programme in the newly instituted CEGEP system. The initial class included male students for the first time. The degree programme was phased out in 1972.

From 1975 until 2007, Marianopolis College was housed at 3880 Cote des Neiges Road on a property owned by the Sulpicians. It opened a modern sports complex called the Annexe there in 1987.

In August, 2007, Marianopolis moved back to the former Mother House of the CND at 4873 Westmount Avenue, after extensive renovations to the building and the construction of an underground gymnasium. The space is leased from the Congrégation. The former chapel has become a library (as it was in 1950 when it was built). There are currently about 1,800 students from many cultures, faiths, and social and economic backgrounds attending the institution.

CAROLINE BRESLAW

Marianopolis’ earlier homes: (left to right) Guy Street and Dorchester Boulevard (Mount Saint Mary Convent), 1943; 3647 Peel Street (Shaughnessy House), 1945; and 3880 Cote des Neiges Road (Sulpician property), 1975.

Top photo: Marianopolis College current location, 4873 Westmount Avenue since 2007.
Photos selected from Landmarks of Learning: A Chronicle of the Dawson College Building and Site.
Landmark of Learning:
A Chronicle of the Dawson College Building and Site.
Text and research by Gary Evans.
[Montreal: Dawson College, 1992]

This remarkable sixteen page booklet describes the magnificent building with beautiful grounds at the southwest corner of Sherbrooke and Atwater, which was built as the Mother House of the Congrégation de Notre Dame, and, which in the 1980s became what we know today as Dawson College, the largest English language CEGEP in the province.

Previous to 1904, the Congrégation of Notre Dame had had several Mother Houses in various locations in Montreal, which had been destroyed by fire. So in 1904, when the Sulpicians, whose seminary is located at the northeast corner of Sherbrooke and Atwater offered the Sisters a parcel of their land southwest of the seminary the Sisters decided to purchase it as the site of their new Mother House, for the sum of $150,000. The Sulpicians had received their land in 1663, from the “Sun King” Louis XIV of France in exchange for taking on the debts of the Company of 100 Associates. The Sisters chose a young Canadian architect, Jean Omer Marchand, whose design for the Mother House was in direct opposition to the traditional style for religious buildings found in Quebec. He chose a contemporary Beaux-arts style, using imported yellow brick for the façade, instead of the usual Montreal grey stone. The building was laid out in the form of an “H”, with a decorative entrance, a beautiful chapel, and outside an imposing copper dome topped by a statue of Notre Dame de la Garde, which is a replica from a church in Marseille, France. This statue, although hit by lightning in 1946, is still in place today and can be seen spotlighted at night, amid the roof tops of the city.

“On April 28, 1982 Dawson College received ministerial permission to make its bid on the property”, the imposing Congrégation de Notre Dame Mother House and grounds.

This was a landmark decision taken to consolidate the sprawling Dawson College campus into one centrally-located site. The purchase price was $12.2 million with an estimated $32 million needed for interior renovations, the exterior to remain intact. The provincial government’s backing of this project was taken by many as support for the continuation of Anglophone higher learning in the province.

The booklet has many old photographs from the Notman Collection at the McCord Museum, the Canadian Centre for Architecture and from our own archives as well. A number of these photographs have been reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter and show scenes of the Sisters’ self-sustaining community activities, in the print shop, classrooms, sewing room, laundry room, kitchens and dining hall. It is well-written and a carefully-compiled record of one of the many heritage buildings in our community, located at the entrance to Westmount.

BARBARA COVINGTON, ARCHIVIST

After an hour long meeting with the Minister of Education Camille Laurin, Paltiel had his promise of support for a centralized Dawson CEGEP: “Madame je vous promets une solution juste et équitable.”

Cheque for $12,200,000 signed by Sarah Paltiel, Director General of Dawson College on 11 August, 1982.
NEW ACQUISITIONS

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Donated by the author

Donated by Nancy Dunton

Donated by Nancy Dunton


LES ORIGINES DE MONTREAL: MEMOIRES DE LA SOCIETE HISTORIQUE DE MONTREAL.

Donated by Doreen Lindsay

THIS IS OUR WRITING, by T.F. Rigelhof. Erin: The Porcupine Quill, 2000
Donated by the author


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Pamphlets donated by Joyce Roberts:
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NOTRE DAME SECRETARIAL COLLEGE 1907 – 1997. CELEBRATION 90 (pamphlet)

BARBARA COVINGTON, ARCHIVIST, 18-12-08