

The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2005

AN HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE ORIGINS OF PARKS IN WESTMOUNT



Westmount Park (originally Victoria Jubilee Park)

photo: Westmount Historical Association Archives.

Our three largest parks are:

Summit and Belvedere Parks Westmount Park King George (Murray) Park

Our parks owe their existence to citizens' strong will to preserve land for recreational and leisure activities. Over ten percent of the area of Westmount is devoted to parks and recreation.

Summit and Belvedere – 57.05 acres.
Westmount Park – 26.19
King George Park – 14.04
Westmount Athletic Grounds – 5.57
Selby – 3.08

Prince Albert Playground – 1.53
Sunnyside – 1.72
Staynor and Clandeboye
Playgrounds – 1.30
Queen Elizabeth Gardens – 1.21

Devon – .98
Argyle – .34

plus boulevards, many islands,
ends of streets and city lots.

The information is based on our 2004 Fall Lecture Series *Green Spaces in Westmount*.

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HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Over 10% of the 1000 acres of land which make up Westmount, is devoted to parks. We have thirteen parks, plus green spaces such as ends of streets and boulevards, which provide recreational and leisure activities within easy walking distance of every resident. This accessibility, which we all enjoy, is one of the recommendations put forth for a livable and environmentally sensitive community by the Local Government Commission, an international organization founded in 1997, which recently came to my attention. It also recommends trees. In addition to providing shade and pleasure, trees help cool houses in our urban environment where the heat-absorbing materials of concrete, steel, and asphalt can raise the temperature six to eight degrees. Over the years, our Parks Department has planted and maintained trees in parks and along streets. The Westmount Annual Reports show us that in 1914 the Parks department planted more than 1000 shade trees, in 1915 over 500 hard maple trees and in 1917 another 100 new trees. This planting, cutting, and pruning continues to the present day with a new interest in native plants and wildflower gardens.

Gardening was a natural activity for the first habitant farmers who lived on the land. The cultivation of vacant lots throughout the City for gardens is mentioned in the Annual Reports as far back as 1917. They tell us that in 1918, 1,250 vacant lots were cultivated for vegetables, an increase of nearly 250% over the previous year. Today, community gardening continues to be a popular healthy undertaking for many residents.

I sincerely hope that the information in this issue will add to your knowledge and enjoyment of our park lands.

Doreen Lindsay



John Sancton

John William Sancton

March 21, 1920 – December 28, 2004

John Sancton, esteemed member of the Westmount Historical Association and a Director since 2000, died on December 28 2004. We remember him as a fair and just man who made decisions based on broad personal experience and an understanding of people. We are all richer for having had him in our midst over the years.

Mr. Sancton was best known to Westmounters as the publisher of *The Westmount Examiner* for thirty-three years (1956–1989). He bought the newspaper in 1967 and settled in to become its editor, a familiar father figure who understood the importance of communications in community life. He had owned the *Stanstead Journal* for three years from 1948–1950. His newspaper career started at the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* and *The Montreal Gazette* in the 1930s. In 1966–67 he was the president of the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association. After retiring, he remained active in community affairs: a director of the Westmount Municipal Association and member of The Rotary Club of Westmount since 1968 (president in 1977–78). WHA members will remember his talk on his experiences as a World War II intelligence officer with the RCAF 401 Squadron in Europe.

There will be a public celebration of his life on Sunday, February 6 in Victoria Hall at 2:30 pm.

PARKS IN WESTMOUNT

Community Initiated Parks

We owe the creation, in 1898, of our first park, Westmount, to the visionary members of the Côte Saint Antoine Improvement Committee. They responded to the popular ideal that every town should have a central park for the pleasure and health benefits of its citizenry. The forested land in the middle of the town was not good for farming or constructing houses because of the deep ravines and streams running through it, but it made a romantic place for leisure walking and enjoying nature.

Ten of the original sixteen acres belonged to William Murray whose land extended up the slopes of the mountain. In 1895 the name of Mr. Murray's house "West Mount" was selected as the new name for the growing town. When the estate was going to be developed as a sub-division in the 1920's, citizens successfully petitioned the City of Westmount to preserve the land between Westmount Avenue and Côte St. Antoine Road for a children's playground, as well as ski and toboggan run. Following a public contest, it was officially named King George Park in 1939.

Preservation of Natural Habitat

The forested land on the Summit of Westmount Mountain had been used by residents for skiing and tobogganing long before it was officially purchased by the City of Westmount in 1940 as parkland. Compared to our other parks, there has been minimal interference by man. It is a place where people can experience the intricacies of ecosystems and see the relationships between trees, plants, flowers, and bird and small animal life. It is a unique urban woodland that hopefully will be maintained as such for future generations.

DOREEN LINDSAY

SELECTIONS FROM THE WESTMOUNT ANNUAL REPORTS.

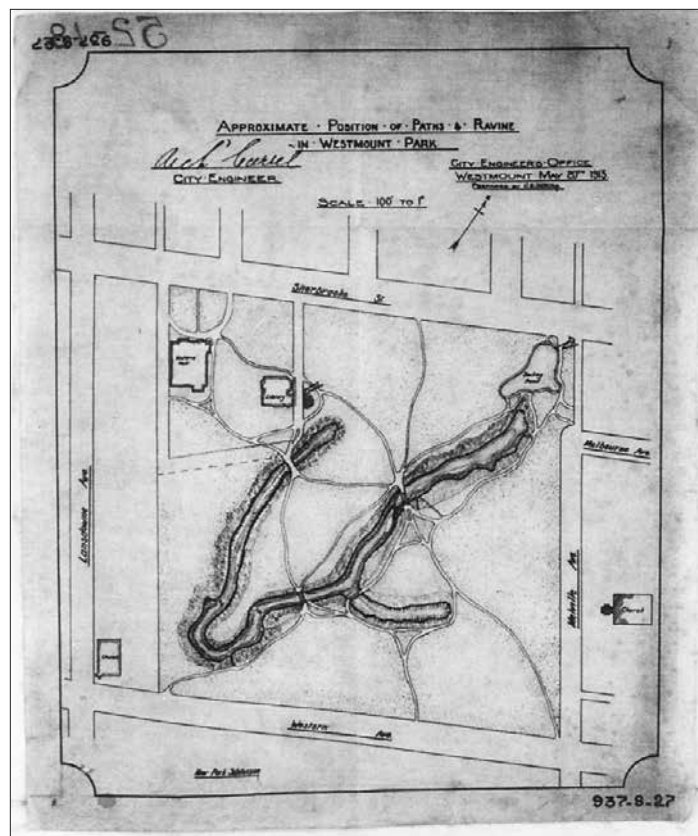
The City of Westmount Annual Reports, available in the Westmount Public Library, provide information about the early development of our parks. As early as 1905 the Parks department reported an expenditure of over two thousand dollars per year for maintenance, planting, grass cutting, care of greenhouse, and park lighting.

1915 – "The work of beautifying the City has been carried on as in former years. Over 500 very fine hard maple trees were planted and the work of leveling and dressing the boulevards was continued."

1917 – "The erection of a permanent band-stand and the holding of weekly band concerts during the summer months..."

1918 – "Unfortunately next spring we will miss the usual beautiful beds of tulips, etc., as the shipment of bulbs from Holland were torpedoed on the way over and it was then impossible to secure another supply."

1923 – "The main Westmount park as well as the 28 small parks and beauty spots throughout the city where flowers and shrubbery are maintained were greatly admired both in the Spring



Westmount Park showing paths and ravines

photo: WHA Archives

when the 20,000 bulbs of daffodil and Hyacinth were in bloom and in the summer when these were replaced by flowering plants of many varieties grown in our own Conservatory from slips. 14,000 plants of Geranium, Cannas, Petunia, Verbenia, Coleus, Amaranthus, etc. were grown, and 54,900 annuals from seeds, such as Asters, Stocks, Zinnias, Pansies, Phlox Drummondii, etc. Also over 300 shrubs and 200 maple and elm shade trees were planted in our Parks and Boulevards."

1926 – "The Floral Clock was a new attraction; the only one in Canada; besides being an interesting subject for our own citizens proved to be a great attraction to visitors ..."

1927 – "A beautiful new steel frame Palm House of Lantern type, measuring thirty-five by sixty feet was constructed...."

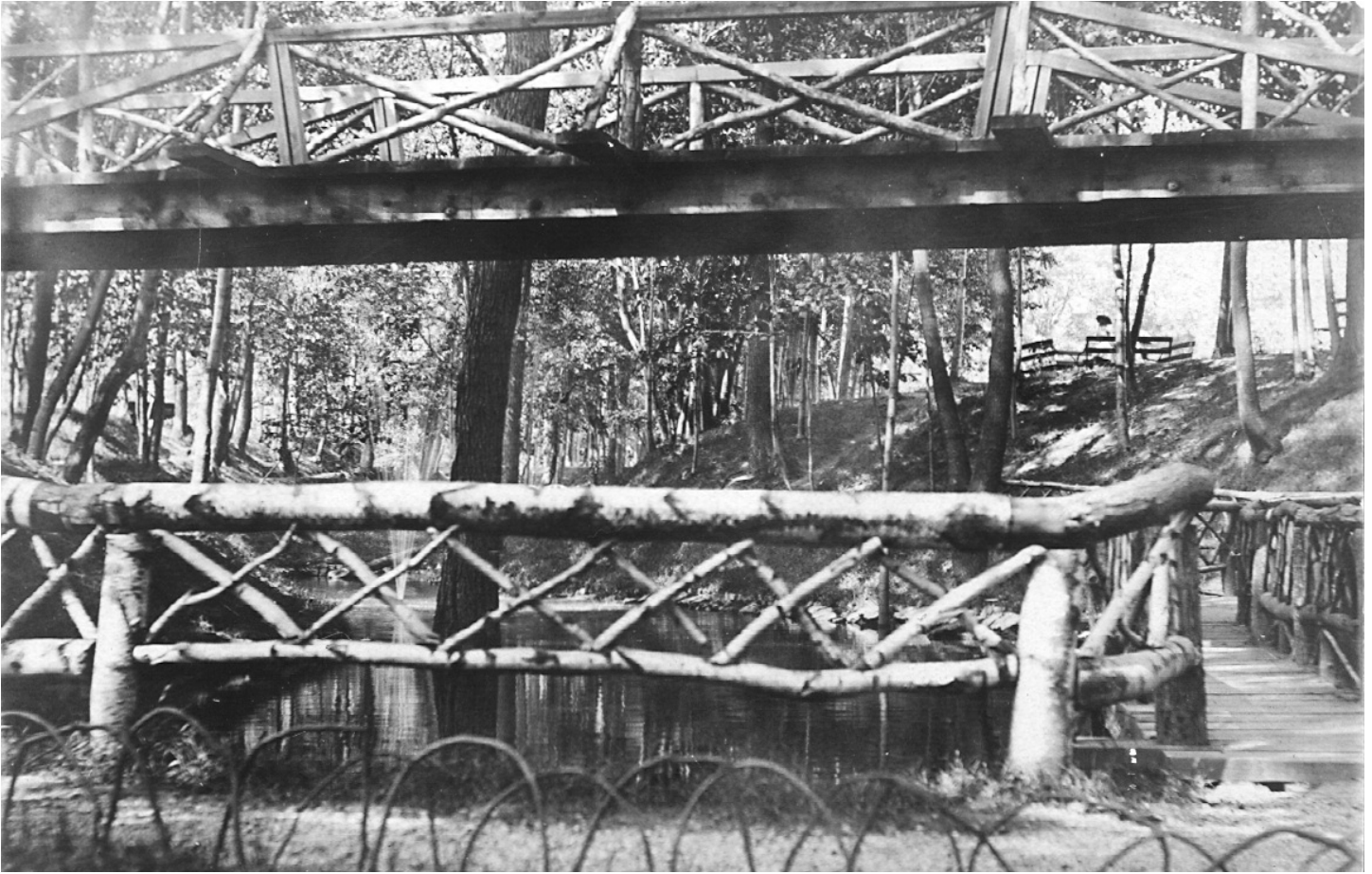
The area of the Parks and Play-grounds has been increased by nearly one half million feet of land by the acquisition of the Murray property ..."

1929 – "Over seventy-five thousand annuals grown in our conservatories were planted in the park flower beds and various borders around the City."

1931 – "Increased attention was given to the shade trees on our streets. We now have a Tree Doctor on our regular staff, and some 2,225 hours were spent in bracing, waterproofing, excavating and dressing cavities and freeing trees of caterpillars."

1933 – "Fifty Cherry Trees, sent from Japan as a gift to the City from Hon.H.M. Marler, Canadian Minister to Japan, was planted in Murray Park."

WESTMOUNT PARK, 1898



Westmount Park (originally Victoria Jubilee Park)

photo: WHA Archives.

Westmount Park is our oldest park. When the Village of Cote St. Antoine became a town in 1890, the Cote St. Antoine Improvement Committee proposed the creation of a park to provide a use for this wooded area crossed by streams and ravines. In 1898 the land was named Victoria Jubilee Park in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The occasion was also marked by the construction of Westmount Public Library and Victoria Jubilee Hall, both designed by Westmount architect Robert Findlay. The original hall, which was destroyed by fire in 1924, was replaced by the present Victoria Hall in 1925.

In 1910 the park was extended south of Western Avenue (present-day de Maisonneuve Boulevard). The City hired M.J. Howard Manning in 1912 to landscape the park in the spirit of Frederick Olmstead, the American landscape architect. It remained mainly in its natural state, although some of the ravines and the Glen Stream were filled in. The remaining ravines had cobblestone retaining walls to stop erosion and were crossed by twig bridges.

Additional land was acquired at the corner of Lansdowne and Sherbrooke. In 1926 the floral clock was

installed on the newly acquired section. The Flower Conservatory was built adjoining the library by Lord and Burnham in 1927. During the 1920's and 30's, a more formal style of landscaping was undertaken for the paths and plant beds. Two fountains were installed and the banks of the ravines were planted with grass and shrubs.

In 1963 the Chicago firm of McFadzean and Everly gave the park a facelift, using cement for paved pathways and as raised borders around flowerbeds and trees. The water-course was redesigned to include a waterfall and an island for ducks. A new children's playground and a shuffleboard court were added. A revamped sailing pond at Melville and Sherbrooke and the Centennial Commemoration Monument nearby were built in 1967. In 1985, when de Maisonneuve Boulevard was closed to traffic, Montreal landscape architect Ron Williams was asked to design bicycle and walking paths to replace the roadway. The City has continued its environment-friendly policy by not using pesticides for over fifteen years and by planting more indigenous species in the twenty-six acre park.

CAROLINE BRESLAW

KING GEORGE (MURRAY) PARK, 1929

By 1929 Westmount had acquired as parkland the section of the William Murray Estate lying between Westmount Avenue and Cote St. Antoine Road. This land was originally part of a large concession granted by the Sulpicians to Paul Desroches in 1705 after the construction of Cote St. Antoine Road. It was passed on by his widow to her brother Jean-Baptist Leduc in 1725. The Leduc family kept the farm until 1845 when it was purchased by two Toronto investors.

By 1857 William Murray was the owner of the land that had been the Leduc farm. Murray was a prominent and wealthy businessman, founder of the Beaver Steamship Line. He built his family home north of Cote St. Antoine and called it West Mount because of its location on the west



William Murray House called "West Mount" photo: WHA Archives.

side of the little mountain. In 1895 the Town of Cote St. Antoine became Westmount, adopting the name of William Murray's home. Murray's eldest son, Alexander, also built himself a home on the property.

In 1926 the citizens of Westmount learned that a housing development was to be built on the Murray estate. As a result of a large public protest, the City expropriated the property. In 1929 the park was officially opened. At the time, the two Murray residences were still standing within it. Tennis courts, wading and sailing ponds, a skating rink, a nine-hole golf putting green, and two playgrounds were built. The top portion of the park was leveled for a playing field. In 1936 the William Murray home was demolished and a pavilion with a clock tower, designed by Robert Findlay, architect of Westmount Public Library and Westmount City Hall, was erected as a comfort station.

In 1939 the park was officially named King George Park to commemorate the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Due to a shortage of men and resources during

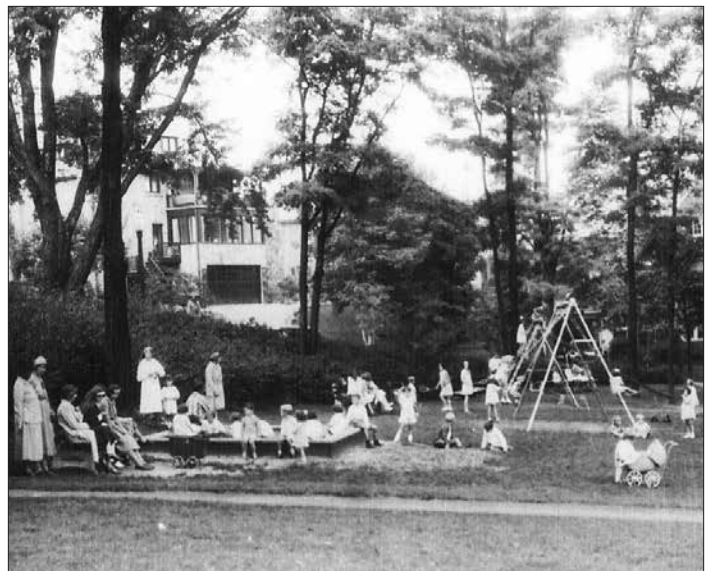


Mayor Walter A. Merrill, K.C., speaking at the 1939 tree planting ceremony and the re-naming of Murray Park. Other members of council, in rear, are from the left aldermen B. Panet-Raymond, K.C., Irving P. Rexford, W.B. Scott, K.C., Douglas Lorimer and C.K. McLeod.

photo: WHA Archives.

World War II, no annuals were planted or pruning done. Students were hired for the first time as gardeners and women were employed as park supervisors. This fourteen-acre park remains a favourite spot for many Westmounters, continuing to provide leisure activities for the whole family.

CAROLINE BRESLAW



King George (Murray) Park children's playground, 1931

photo: City of Westmount Archives

THE SUMMIT AND BELVEDERE PARKS, 1940



Pond on Summit of Westmount Mountain c. 1880-1900

photo: WHA Archives.

The Summit is one of three peaks having the same geological formation as Mount Royal. It is separated from the other peaks by steep slopes to the north and Côte-des-Neiges Road to the east. It is 630 feet above sea level.

In 1895 Sir William Macdonald of the McDonald Tobacco Company donated land on the summit of Westmount to The Royal Institute for the Advancement of Learning, now known as McGill University, for its Botany department. It was used instead by the McGill Survey School which set up the Macdonald Observatory during the 1920's. The University built a mess hall, several small shacks and a campground for students. (Cement bases for the telescopes can still be seen on the site just above the present-day Look Out on Summit Circle.) The rest of the area remained a wild flower and bird sanctuary. There was a toboggan run down to Côte Saint-Antoine Road. In 1922, a portable radio mast and hut was used by North America's first radio station, CFCF, to broadcast all over Montreal.

In 1940, the Town of Westmount bought 46.20 acres from McGill, with the stipulation that the lands remain a "park and playground in perpetuity". Minimal intervention was

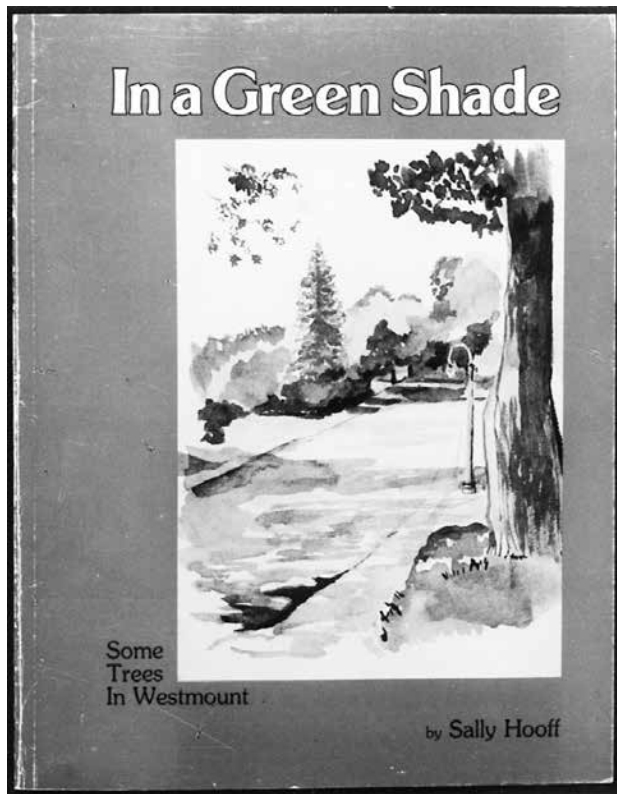
the strategy for the site. Fifty Laurentian pheasants were introduced. The area was used by local residents and others for recreational activities: nature walks, dog walking, bird watching and cross country skiing.

By the mid 1980's, the woodland was showing signs of over-use. Following a forestry report made in 1987, a three-year rehabilitation project was undertaken in 1990 by landscape architect Sandra Donaldson. There are three types of forest: a Red Oak forest central and to the north (40% of the trees are estimated to be 90 to 125 years old), a Black Cherry forest at the east point, and a Mixed Forest to the south which includes the Manitoba and Norway Maple, Sumac, and Hawthorne. Many wildflowers are visible: trillium, aster, yellow rocket, goldenrod, wild parsley, and burdock as well as bushes of honeysuckle, thimble berry and current.

The Summit is a natural ecosystem within an urban surrounding. Used by nature lovers, bird watchers and dog walkers, it gives the illusion of being an untouched forest and perhaps should be more correctly called a SUMMIT FOREST or SUMMIT WOOD.

DOREEN LINDSAY

FROM THE ARCHIVES



**In A Green Shade; Some Trees In Westmount,
by Sally Hooff.
Montreal: Les Livres Trillium Books, 1984.**

I became re-acquainted with this unusual little book, when I was looking for a topic for this issue of the WHA newsletter, which is dedicated to the parks and gardens, trees and flowers of our beautiful city.

Sally Hooff was a Westmount resident who was keenly interested in Westmount history and was a co-author with Aline Gubbay, of the book "Montreal's Little Mountain: a Portrait of Westmount. La Petite Montagne: Un Portrait de Westmount", which is one of the definitive guides to Westmount architecture, published in 1979. She has gone one step further into the history of our city with this book of notes and line drawings of trees and leaves with their backgrounds of Westmount buildings and monuments. She pays great tribute to our civic landscape gardeners who contribute so much to the beauty of our surroundings. She suggests looking uphill to the trees in their summer foliage enfolding the houses on the mountain, and then looking downhill from the Summit to the vista of various foliages which are pierced here and there by chimneys, turrets and roofs.

The title page of the book has a line drawing of a sculpture by George Hill outside the Westmount Public Library,

which depicts a tree and bears the inscription "Tongues in Trees: Books in the running Brooks". She dedicates the book to "all who maintain gardens, large or small, public or private".

The book is divided into Conifers and Deciduous Trees, and not only describes various tree specimens giving their history and origins, but locates them in our city with drawings which include their architectural backgrounds. There is the ginkgo tree on Arlington Avenue, Douglas fir trees in Murray Park above the rock garden, old willows in Westmount Park and the horse chestnut tree in front of St. Matthias Church on Cote St. Antoine Road at Church Hill.

What a wonderful walking tour of Westmount could be undertaken this summer with this book in hand, locating the various species described by Sally Hooff. It is quite possible, given the longevity of trees, that most of them would still be there, even 20 years later.

BARBARA COVINGTON, ARCHIVIST

The first three lectures will take place in the Westmount Public Library, 7 to 9 pm. For the forth lecture you are invited to The Gallery of Victoria Hall.

Spring Lecture Series, 2005

Leisure Time in Westmount

*Jazz, Lawn Bowling, the Flower Conservatory,
and a Walking Tour*

February 17, 2005 –

The Jazz Age at Victoria Hall – 1940's

Speaker: Nancy Marrelli, Director of Concordia University's Archives and author of *Stepping Out: The Golden Age of Montreal Night Clubs 1925-1955*

March 17, 2005 – *The Westmount*

Lawn Bowling Club and What Lies Below

Speaker: Stanley Baker, a Director of the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club

April 21, 2005 – *The 2004 Restoration of the Westmount Flower Conservatory.*

Speaker: Beaupré and Michaud architects.

May 19, 2005 – *Members' Social Evening + Walking Map of Côte Saint Antoine Road.*

Members meet in the Gallery of Victoria Hall at 7pm.

Bring memorabilia of the Jazz years, the Lawn Bowling Club, or the Flower Conservatory, to share over coffee and cookies. This is an opportunity to have your photograph taken with your "memorabilia."

A Walking Tour map of Côte Saint Antoine Road will be explained and handed out by Caroline Breslaw and Doreen Lindsay.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

City of Westmount Commemorative Bookmark, for the Royal Visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on May 16th, 1939.

Commemorative Coin and Spoon for the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, May 12, 1937.

Donated by Roslyn Walker

Felt W from Westmount Junior High School (WJHS)

School Belt, Ring and Pin with crest from WJHS

Roslyn School pin

HI-Y pin

Donated by Nancy Gallop (Willis)

Roslyn School Pin, and Westmount City Pin

Donated by Rosetta Elkin

Westmount High School, purple cap
Westmount High School Memorial Honour Roll, 1939-1945

Westmount High School Annual, 1931

Donated by Richard Lord



City of Westmount commemorative bookmark for the Royal Visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, May 16th, 1939.



*Westmount Junior High School Pin,
Roslyn School Pin, HI-Y Pin*

THE ROMANCE OF ROSEMOUNT AVENUE, researched and compiled by Barbara Moore. June 2004.

Donated by Barbara Moore

MOLSON; the birth of a business empire, by Douglas Hunter. Toronto: Viking, 2001.

CANADA; the foundation of its future, by Stephen Leacock. Montreal: Privately published, 1941.

Donated by Doreen Lindsay.

BERNIE, by Harry Mayerovitch. Westmount: H. Mayerovitch, 2000.

CETTE ARCHITECTURE QUI NOUS PARLE... en façon de notre monde, by Harry Mayerovitch. Montreal: Robert Davies, 1996.

JIBES, JABS & JEERS: in verse and line, by Harry Mayerovitch. Montreal: Westmount Examiner, 1987.

KAPUT, by Harry Mayerovitch. Westmount: H. Mayerovitch, 1993.

LIMERICKS FOR HERETICS, by Harry Mayerovitch. Montreal: Groupe Litho Graphique PPSD, 2002.

ONCE OVER LIGHTLY; in verse and line, by Harry Mayerovitch. Westmount; H. Mayerovitch, 1973.

OVERSTREET; AN URBAN STREET DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM, by Harry Mayerovitch. Montreal: Harvest House, 1973.

RETROSPECTIVE 1929-1989, H. MAYEROVITCH. Montreal: Centre Saidye Bronfman, 1989.

THE OTHER ONE, by Harry Mayerovitch Montreal: Harvest House, 1973.

TWENTY DRAWINGS, by Harry Mayerovitch. [A studio, signed, 1973]

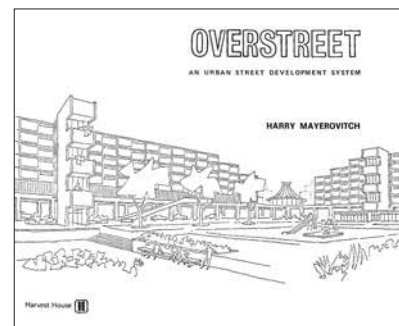
WAY TO GO, by Harry Mayerovitch. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2004.

... And ...

Westmount Chimney Sweep Badge, 1969.

Westmount Dog Tags, 1924-1963

Donated by the Harry Mayerovitch Family



Mayerovitch's 1973 book Overstreet



1929-1989 Retrospective book by Harry Mayerovitch