

# *The Westmount Historian*

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

SEPTEMBER 2005

## *Leisure Time in Westmount – Through the Years*



*Members of the Westmount Historical Association enjoying a social meeting in the Art Gallery at Victoria Hall, May 20, 2005.*

The Art Gallery at Victoria Hall is the newest building to be constructed in the complex for leisure activities that has developed over the years around the Westmount Public Library and Victoria Hall which both opened in 1899 in Westmount Park. It was not until one hundred years after the Library and Victoria Hall were opened that this new space came into being.

It was constructed as a new physical link between the Flower Conservatory which opened in 1927 and Victoria Hall and opened to the public on the occasion of the official opening of the newly renovated Victoria Hall in June 1999. Constructed of the same grey stone as Victoria Hall, it is very well integrated into the older building.

Today it provides a much needed exhibition space for local artists to show their work. The public may look at the art exhibitions in this bright, glass-enclosed loggia, then walk into the Flower Conservatory to enjoy the flowers and continue on to the Library to relax, read or borrow books. Because it shares an entrance with Victoria Hall, there is also direct access to all of its activities.

In 1999 the architects, Fournier Gersovitz Moss, who designed this addition to Victoria Hall were awarded Le Pris Orange by Héritage Montréal, the Society devoted to saving the heritage of Montréal.

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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Leisure time in Westmount has always been energetically organized by our citizens. The information presented to us in our recent four talks about "Leisure Activities in Westmount", has been summarized in this newsletter and becomes its theme.

Since the origins of our community, people have always taken control of their leisure time to develop facilities for the activities that they desired to enhance their quality of life. In 1887, the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA), opened the athletic grounds on ten acres of land where Westmount High School now stands. These grounds provided sports fields in the summer and were flooded for skating in the winter. By 1899, a strong desire to have a Cultural Centre where citizens could participate in public meetings, enjoy swimming, and have a lodge room for group meetings, led 300 residents to present a petition to the town council who agreed to build the facilities. In addition to what was asked for, they also included a dance floor, a billiard room, a drill hall and several small rooms for chess clubs, drama groups, music and dance classes. In 1902, the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club was founded and it has continued in the same location on Sherbrooke Street near the City Hall until the present day.

Dancing has always been a popular activity. We can read Adèle Clarke's reference in 1906 to both the young people and their parents dancing "slow and stately, even the waltz was in slow time." Dancing in Victoria Hall during the famous Johnny Holmes Jazz Band era of the 1940's was certainly faster and more exuberant.

Westmount citizens' appreciation of horticulture led to the construction of a Flower Conservatory in 1927 between Victoria Hall and the Library. The ongoing annual Spring and Fall Flower Shows, which had been staged in Victoria Hall, could then be shown in the new Conservatory for everyone's enjoyment. The popularity of these events continues today.

Recently, our researching efforts have concentrated on the beginnings of Westmount. We prepared a self-guided walking tour of our first road, Côte St. Antoine, which was welcomed by many people in addition to our members.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this issue in your leisure time and I look forward to seeing you at our next series of lectures.

*Doreen Lindsay*

## **Guided walking tour of Côte St. Antoine Road and The Origins of Westmount**

**Sunday, October 2nd, 2005 – meet at Lawn Bowling Club**  
English 1:00 and 2:30 pm – French 1:30 and 3:00 pm

We will be talking about the oldest houses on Côte St. Antoine (our first road) and explaining the origins of Westmount as it developed around Stanton Street.

This is a great opportunity to refresh your memory about the origins of Westmount. The WHA was invited to present this guided walk/talk as part of the Opération patrimoine architecturale de Montréal 2005 activities.

Walking tour is free but space is limited. Please sign up at Victoria Hall after the 23rd of September (514) 989-5226.



### *Special interest to WHA members!*

#### **Hurtubise Family Home declared Historic Monument**

The Hurtubise Family Home at 561-563 Côte Saint-Antoine Road was declared an historic monument and the land was declared an historical site on December 16, 2004 by the Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de la Culture et des communications.

This field stone farmhouse was constructed in 1739 for Jean Hurtubise. It is one of the oldest rural houses on the island of Montreal and one of the rare remains of an 18th century farm on the south side of Mount Royal. It was occupied by six generations of the same family during more than two centuries. The last of the family to live in the home was Dr Leopold Hurtubise who died in 1955. Since that time, the original home at 563 has remained empty. The Hurtubise house and land are still remarkably intact and constitute an historical and architectural example of the seigneurial system on the island of Montreal.

With such an architectural and historical treasure in our midst, the question is how can the house and land be integrated into today's society? At present it is owned by the Canadian Heritage of Quebec who are in the process of deciding its future.

Fall Lecture Series, 2005

#### **Creativity Thrives in Westmount:**

*A Writer/Filmmaker, Two Painters, and a Bookstore Owner.*

**Thursday, September 15, 2005 — William Weintraub, OC**  
Filmmaker with the National Film Board and author of *City Unique: Montreal days and nights in the 1940's and '50's* (1996) and *Getting Started: a memoir of the 1950's* (2001) has made his home in Westmount for twenty-eight years.

**Speaker: William Weintraub** will read from his new book *Crazy About Lili*.

**Thursday, October 20, 2005 — Edwin Holgate (1892-1977)**  
One of Montreal's most important artists of the 1920s and 30s. A retrospective exhibition of 165 paintings, drawings and wood engravings are being presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts until October 2. Be sure to see it before this talk.

**Speaker: Rosalind Pepall**, curator of the Holgate exhibition at the MMFA.

**Thursday, November 17, 2005 — Judy Mappin and the Double Hook Book Shop**

In 1974, Judy Mappin opened the Double Hook Book Shop with Hélène Holden and Joan Blake. This independent, speciality bookstore closed the end of July this year after 30 years devoted to selling books by Canadian authors.

**Speaker: Judy Mappin**, owner of the Double Hook Book Shop (1974-2005)

**Thursday, December 15, 2005 — Eva Prager, OC**  
Artist who specialises in painting children. Has lived and painted in Westmount for thirty years. She was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1999 for her work in founding "Children for Peace" in the 1980s.

**Speaker: Doreen Lindsay**, artist and President of the WHA. **Eva Prager** will be present to answer questions.

*These talks will take place in the Westmount Public Library from 7 to 9 pm. Lecture Series prepared by Doreen Lindsay. Admission free for members, non-members \$5. at the door.*



(left) John Clarke, 1781-1852, Chief Factor of the Hudson Bay Company, (right) Mrs. John Clarke

#### **Adèle Clarke, from her memories of her father, John Clarke, fur trader**

"Sixty years ago the evening parties of Montreal were very fashionable. They commenced at an early hour, and the fathers and mothers as well as the young ones all entered with zest into the amusements of the evening. The old ladies and gentlemen danced as much as the young people, and their dancing was regarded with ease, and the manners were unaffected and dignified and characteristic of well bred people. The dances were slow and stately. Even the waltz was in slow time... After supper the guests left, and it being very cold in winter the ladies put on their hoods and cloaks, and the gentlemen put on their coats and fur caps. My Mother speaks of this still and often tells us how happy they all looked. Some drove home, and others proceeded home with lanterns lighted."

Adèle Clarke continues to recall how they enjoyed themselves. "Something was always going on. Driving, riding, snowshowing, dancing, and games... Whist parties meeting at different houses were held once a week. There were twelve in the club... New Year was a delightful custom and was adopted by almost everyone ...New Year day visiting commenced early in the morning, and continued till late in the evening. For three days persons had often 4000 visits to make. It was rather trying being on duty during those three days from morning until night. This custom had a very good effect, meaning a kindly feeling."

*Old Montreal John Clarke: His Adventures, Friends and Family, 1906 p.43-45*

**Note:** John Clarke's father, Simon Clarke was the first English speaking land owner in Westmount. Their home was on the north east corner of present day Clarke Avenue and Sherbrooke Street

## WESTMOUNT FLOWER CONSERVATORY, 1927. RESTORED 2004



Children throwing pennies into fishpond, July 2005 photo: WHA Archives

### Westmount Flower Conservatory, 1927

In 1927 the Westmount Conservatory was officially opened. The white cascade design, constructed by the company Lord & Burnham, featured a Palm House with a central island and an adjacent greenhouse with a Fish Pond.

The steel and cast iron structure sat on a low foundation wall of brick and concrete block. The middle section had cast iron sills to which vertical steel ribs were connected. They were attached to cast iron gutters and horizontal purlins. Wood bars held up the one-eighth inch glass panels which were applied like shingles to allow water to run off. The glass was painted with limewash on the outside to protect the plants from the summer sun.

Over the years, various alterations were made. A vestibule was added and a pond was put in the main greenhouse. In 1999 the Conservatory was joined to Victoria Hall by a link through the new Art Gallery.

In 2004 Westmount commissioned the architectural firm Beaupré & Michaud to restore the deteriorating greenhouse, reproducing as closely as possible the original structure. The masonry wall had to be demolished and rebuilt. The upper glass and metal portion was removed, restored, and then rebuilt on site. Fractured cast iron elements, corroded steel, and rotten wood windows of

the middle portion were replaced.

Certain features of the restored conservatory were not part of the original design. The vestibule has been retained. A contemporary water basin with a small wooden bridge and Italian marble waterfall has replaced the pool in the main greenhouse. The floor has been redone in slate. An electric lift has been installed to provide handicapped access from the library. Mechanical heating elements are hidden behind the wood grills of the elevated flower tables. More efficient lighting has been used. The Fish Pond in the adjoining conservatory is lined with marble and ceramic mosaics and surrounded with marble. A bronze fountain statue now replaces the one that was stolen, and frog sculptures stand in the four corners as they did originally.

On March 31, 2005 the Westmount Flower Conservatory was officially reopened. Its gleaming glass sides and domed roof provide magical views both inside and outside.

CAROLINE BRESLAW

*A lecture on the Westmount Conservatory was given on April 21, 2005 by Pierre Beaupré, Josette Michaud, and Monika Kuhnigk of the architectural firm Beaupré & Michaud.*

### Architectural Term



### Purlin

meaning a horizontal beam running along the length of the roof, resting on the principal rafters and supporting common rafters.



## THE WESTMOUNT LAWN BOWLING CLUB (1902)



*Postcard from the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club c.????*

In August 1901 three Scots (James Brown, James Baillie, and James Rodgers) held a meeting at the Westmount Municipal Offices on Stanton Street to discuss the formation of a lawn bowling club. A level piece of land at the northwest corner of Sherbrooke Street and Kensington Avenue was leased from the Monk Estate for a period of nine years at \$1000. The first formal meeting of the Club was held on May 28, 1902, with James Brown as President and his son Willie Brown as Secretary. A Clubhouse was to be built at a cost of less than \$500 and a groundkeeper was to be hired for \$9.00 a week.

The opening ceremony of the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club took place on June 28, 1902. In 1916 the North Green was added, extending the grounds up to Côte St. Antoine Road. The City of Westmount purchased the land from the Monk Estate in 1920 and leased it to the Club for \$1800 a year.

For many years the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club was exclusively male. In 1935 the wives of members formed a Ladies' Branch, but the two Clubs remained separate. Although extensions were made to the Clubhouse, the

men's and women's sides were not connected. In 1940 mixed games were permitted on Saturday afternoons. In 1989 the two sections were merged with a single president.

Over the years the Clubhouse deteriorated. In 1983 the City of Westmount purchased it for \$1.00. In 1996 the Clubhouse was demolished and a replica was constructed with a modern kitchen, men's and women's washrooms and locker rooms, and a sitting area with a brick fireplace. An electrical substation was built beneath it. New Greens were laid with a sprinkler system and lighting for night bowling. On September 27, 1997, the new Clubhouse was officially opened.

The most coveted award made by the Club each year is the Willie Brown Trophy, named after the founding member who played a major role for a half century. This Scottish sport has now existed in Westmount for over one hundred years, having celebrated its centenary in 2002.

CAROLINE BRESLAW

*A talk on the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club was given by Stanley Baker on March 17, 2005.*

## JAZZ IN VICTORIA HALL, 1918 –



*Johnny Holmes Orchestra in the 1940's*

photo: Concordia University Archives

cians, including the young piano player Oscar Peterson (1925–) whom he featured as a soloist over a six-year period from 1942 to 1948. He also hired Maynard Ferguson, from Verdun, who played trumpet and his brother Percy who played baritone saxophone. These three had already played together while attending Montreal High School. Jazz fans went especially to listen to these men play.

In 1989 five *Jazz Westmount* Sunday afternoon concerts were organized for February 19, March 5 and 19, April 2 and 16 all at 3 pm as well as a Big Band Swing Dance on April 23 at 8 pm with Johnny Holmes making a guest appearance to conduct the band.

DOREEN LINDSAY

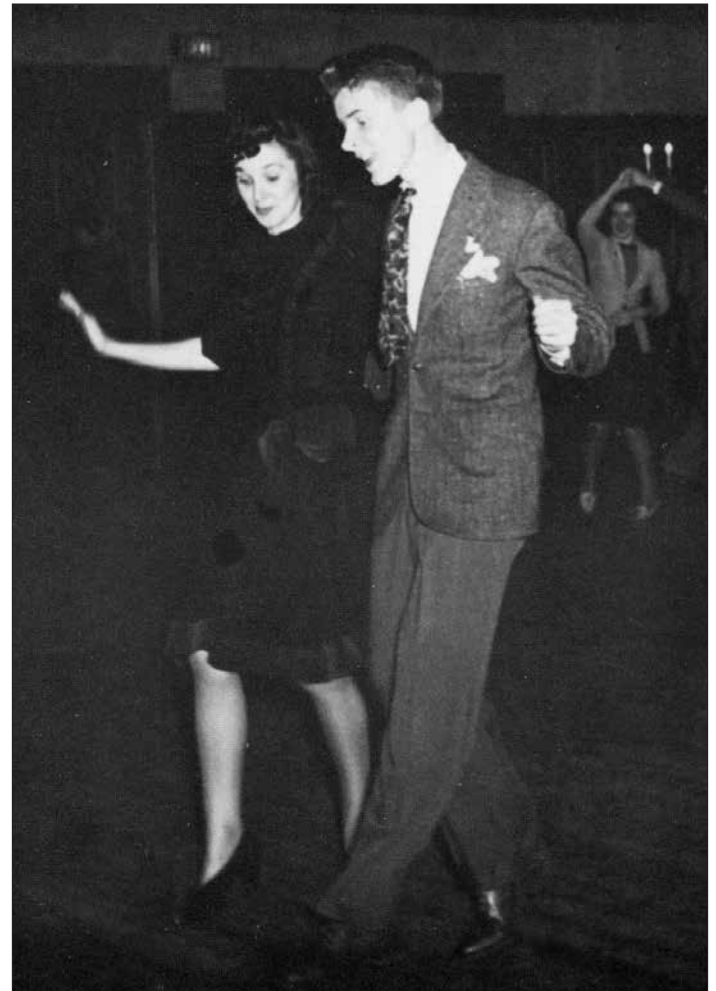
Information is based on the talk given by Nancy Marrelli on February 17, 2005 and *Such Melodious Racket, the Lost History of Jazz in Canada 1914-1949* by Mark Miller

## Jazz in Victoria Hall, 1918 –

In 1918 when The *Westmount Jazz Band* began playing on Friday and Saturday nights in Victoria Hall, a precedent was established for local Montreal Jazz musicians to play in neighbourhood halls. The Montreal clubs downtown all booked American jazz bands. This first Victoria Hall was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1923, but a new hall, designed by Westmount architect Robert Findlay opened in 1925. The *Westmount Jazz Band* (a quintet of violin, saxophone, banjo, piano, and drums) and another all white Montreal swing band, the *Cyclone Jazz Band*, continued to play for dances until 1920.

The first black Canadian band leader, Myron (Mynie) Sutton, led his popular *Canadian Ambassadors* in three Saturday afternoon concerts on April 19, May 3 and 17, 1941. These two-hour concerts began at 3 pm and were followed by dancing. Admission was 35 cents.

From 1941 to 1950 Johnny Holmes (1916 -1989) organized dances every Saturday night in Victoria Hall. He began with ten musicians, but expanded to almost twenty (five saxophones, three trombones, four trumpets including Holmes, piano, bass, and drums plus two singers, one male and one female) An average of 800 people paid \$1.50 entrance every Saturday night to listen to his orchestra, meet friends, dance, and have fun. Johnny Holmes organized everything: writing his own arrangements of popular music to develop a recognizable sound for his band, doing his own publicity, renting the hall, and hiring people to sell tickets and soft drinks. He always encouraged local musi-



*Two unknown dancers at a Johnny Holmes concert in Victoria Hall, 1940's*

photo: Concordia University Archives



## FROM THE ARCHIVES



*Speedskating at the MAAA rink c.1900*

photo: Notman Archives

### ICE SKATING, MASQUERADES AND FANCY DRESS BALLS

#### at the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association Open-Air Rink

One winter's evening in the 1890s in the Village of Cote St. Antoine there was a sudden freeze, which turned the MAAA Grounds on St. Catherine St. into a sheet of glare ice. A group of enterprising MAAA members decided to enjoy a skating party under the bright, full moon on this naturally-formed ice rink. Thus was born the idea of, what turned out to be, the very popular MAAA outdoor ice rink, which was opened to the public the following winter.

There were two other rinks in Montreal, the Crystal Rink at the corner of Dorchester and Guy and the Victoria Rink at Dorchester and Stanley. These were called indoor rinks as they were covered, but as artificial ice was not made in Canada until 1911, the indoor rinks differed from the outdoor rinks only in giving some protection for the elements.

The MAAA outdoor rink was much larger than any other rinks of the time, 330 by 150 feet of skating surface. It was open daily, except Sunday, with evening skating under twenty arc lights. If the rink had to be closed for inclement weather or poor ice conditions, red lights at the top of the MAAA flag poles were lit to warn residents of the closure.

The outdoor rink turned out to be an extremely popular winter activity for the population, and an unexpected money maker for the MAAA. A pavilion at the Grounds was renovated to accommodate bands such as the Royal Scots or the Victoria Rifles, who played for the skaters certain evenings. The rink was always full, and one of the

great winter attractions were the masquerade carnivals staged several times during the season. Costumed skaters would attend the masquerades dressed as naval officers, Red Cross nurses, trappers, etc. These masquerades were important social events in the winter calendar for the general population.

Eventually the MAAA built a track for speed skating around the outside of the rink which attracted many Montreal athletes, including Louis Rubenstein who was World Speed Skating champion in 1890. In fact, the Canadian Speed Skating championships of 1894 were held at the MAAA rink and attracted thousands of spectators.

In the late 19th century, ice skating for pleasure was one of the most popular winter leisure activities enjoyed by the residents of the Village of Cote St. Antoine.

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BARBARA COVINGTON, ARCHIVIST



*Waltzing on skates at the MAAA rink*

photo: Notman Archives

## NEW ACQUISITIONS



*Westmount Lawn Bowling Club 100-year pin*



*Westmount Montreal-Lawn Bowling Club felt badge*



*Westmount Pin*



*Pin from William Murray's home "West Mount"*

ETCHED IN STONE: LIFE AND PRINTS OF ERNEST NEUMAN, by Brian I Oickle. [Montréal]: Montréal Print Collectors Society, 2004.

ETUDE PATRIMONIALE DE LA MAISON HURTUBISE, by A.M. Stewart and L. Robichaud. Québec: Institut de l'histoire de l'Amérique française, 2001.

HARD WINTER RAIN, by M. Blair. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2004. (Donated by M. Vanderstay)



*Skiing at 12 Sunnyside*

IMPRINTS III: DISCOVERING THE HISTORIC FACE OF ENGLISH QUEBEC, by Ray and Diana Baillie. Montréal: Price-Patterson, 2004.

THE MOLSONS: THEIR LIVES AND TIMES 1780-2000, by Karen Molson. Willowdale, ON: Firefly Books, 2001. (Donated by D. Lindsay)

THE TRAIL BREAKERS; THE RED BIRD SKI CLUB, by Robert Stewart. Montréal: Red Bird Ski Club, 2000.

SLOW DANCE; A STORY OF STROKE, LOVE AND DISABILITY, by B.S. Klein. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 1997. (Donated by M. Vanderstay)

STEPPING OUT: THE GOLDEN AGE OF MONTREAL NIGHTCLUBS 1925-1955, by N. Marrelli. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 2004. (Donated by the author)

TELL ME WHY NIGHTS ARE LONELY, by M. Gold. Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue: Shoreline, 2004. (Donated by M. Vanderstay)

VERITAS; A HISTORY OF SELWYN HOUSE SCHOOL MONTREAL 1908-1978, by Edgar C. Moodey and Robert A. Speirs. Westmount: Selwyn House Association, 1978.

Collection of books by Mary Meigs, donated by Doreen Lindsay.

Various Cards & Correspondence, circa 1928, donated by Rosemary Lyndon.

JAZZ WESTMOUNT (video), donated by May Cutler.

Pin from William Murray's home, "West Mount", donated by Lawson and Shirley Dugan.

Westmount Pin, donated by J. Breslaw

Westmount Lawn Bowling Club, 100-year pin, donated by Margaret T. Ross.

Lawn Bowling Bowls (three); Westmount Montreal Lawn Bowling Club felt badge; Donated by Sidney and Helena Langdon.

Westmount Bowling Club Poster, circa 1905, donated by Westmount Bowling Club

Photograph of Skiing at 12 Sunnyside, circa?, donated by Roslyn Walker.

Photograph of Gertrude Walker, by W.M. Notman & son, donated by Roslyn Walker.

Six postcards of Westmount, donated by Janet MacKinnon