

The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2004

Westmount Historical Association Celebrates 60 Years

The following is the minutes of Thursday, February 24, 1944.

Minutes of a meeting called by Mr. Roy Campbell, President of the Westmount Municipal Association, and held in Victoria Hall on Thursday, February 24, 1944 at 8.15 P.M.

It was moved by Mr. Brodie, and seconded by Mr. McMaster that Mr. W.B. Scott act as Chairman. Carried. As a secretary was needed, to record the proceedings, the Chairman proposed that Miss Kathleen Jenkins act in that capacity for the evening. Carried.

The Chairman then called on Mr. Roy Campbell, President of the Westmount Municipal Association to outline the purpose of the meeting. Mr. Campbell read the notice which had been sent out to persons who might be interested, and explained that the officers of the Municipal Association had decided to sponsor a movement to obtain and classify all historical and similar material about the City of Westmount, which might be available and useful.

Letters of regret at not being able to attend, were read from the following:

Mr. W.A. Merrill, Mayor of Westmount, Miss Lillian Hendrie, Mr. W. Jackson Rutherford, Mr. Kneeland, Dr. Lloyd Smith.

The following resolutions were moved by Mr. Campbell, and seconded by Dr. Evans:

"That the persons here present, interested in the accumulation and preservation of historical and similar information concerning the City of Westmount, its predecessor municipalities and surroundings, do now become associated for the objects under the name of the Westmount Historical Association.

That an open invitation be and is hereby extended to all others who may have like desires, to become association in this group.

That for purposes of direction of the organization, there be the following officers:

- Honorary President
- Honorary Vice President (two or more)
- President
- Vice President (two)
- Curator
- Secretary

Some discussion ensued over the name of the organization, but it was finally decided that the Westmount Historical Association seemed the most suitable, it being understood that this body would function in co-operation with the Municipal Association. All three motions were then adopted by the meeting.

Mr. Campbell proposed a slate of officers, which with some suggestions from the floor, was adopted, as follows:

60th Anniversary of the WHA

All members are invited to celebrate the
60th Anniversary of the founding of the
Westmount Historical Association.

Thursday, February 19th at 6:30 pm

WHA members are invited to come 30 minutes early on the evening of our next lecture to celebrate together with a cake and coffee. Those of you who remember the early days can prepare a story to tell.

*Our Association was founded as the
Westmount Historical Association on February 24, 1944*

continued on page 3

The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

February 2004
Volume 4 • Number 2

EDITOR:
Flora-Lee Wagner

CONTRIBUTORS:
Caroline Breslaw, Barbara Covington,
Aline Gubbay, Doreen Lindsay,
Laureen Sweeney

WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Doreen Lindsay, President
Flora-Lee Wagner, Past President
Caroline Breslaw, Vice-President
Barbara Covington, Archivist
David Freeman, Treasurer
Anne Barkman, Secretary
Elizabeth Henrik, Membership
Joan Clark
Philip Dombowsky
Peter Lanken
Richard Lord
John Sancton

WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
P. O. Box 198 Victoria Station
Westmount, Quebec
H3Z 2Y6
514 925-1404

E-MAIL:
info@westmounthistorical.org

WEBSITE:
www.westmounthistorical.org

ISSN:
1496-4066

GRAPHIC DESIGN:
Studio Melrose
514 488-7366
info@studiomelrose.ca

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Writing my President's message on this first day of the year 2004, it seems relevant to formulate my thoughts into New Year resolutions. Since we are a sixty year old association, we can think of ourselves as mature, or maturing. Much of our knowledge of the history of Westmount comes from three books written within this period. We are indebted to Dr. Helene Saly and her students at Westmount Park School who researched *Old Westmount* in 1967. We thank Sally Hoof and Aline Gubbay for their text and photographs in *Montréal's Little Mountain*, 1979. We also thank Aline for her more recent social history in *A View of their Own, The story of Westmount*, 1998.

Each place has its unique character. Each place has a soul. I believe that Westmount has a soul of its own that permeates each street, each building and perhaps each resident. We are the guardians of that soul.

In this New Year reaching out ahead of us, I resolve to encourage the continuation of

- **bringing together new information** about Westmount through our Lecture Series.
- **further development of our archives** through donations of photographs, letters, printed matter, and objects related to the history of Westmount.
- **collecting books** about Westmount and by Westmount authors for our WHA Library.
- **creatively searching for a contemporary use in our society** for our 97 year old Railway Station and our 265 year old Hurtubise family home.

DOREEN LINDSAY

SPRING 2004 – LECTURE SERIES

Westmount Architects at Home

Edward Maxwell, Percy Nobbs, Jean-Omer Marchand

Architects who chose to build their own homes in Westmount

Thursday, February 19, 2004

No architect – 370 Lansdowne circa 1888

Speakers: Megan Masterson and Doreen Lindsay, researchers

Thursday, March 18, 2004

Edward Maxwell (1869-1923) – 184 Côte St-Antoine (1895)

Speakers: Alison Sorbie and Christopher Dunkley, architects and owners of the house

Thursday, April 15, 2004

Percy Erskine Nobbs (1875-1964) – 38 Belvedere Road (1913-14)

Speaker: Susan Wagg – architectural historian and author of *Percy Erskine Nobbs: Architect, Artist, Craftsman*, McGill-Queen's 1982

Thursday, May 20, 2004

Jean-Omer Marchand (1872-1936) – 486 Wood Avenue (1914)

Speaker: Peter Lanken, architect

60 Years...

continued from page 1

Hon. President – Dr. W. Lighthall

Hon. Vice President – two or more – it was felt that the filling of this office could be left until a later date, although it was suggested from the floor that Mr. P.W. McLagan be asked to serve in this capacity.

President – Mr. W.B. Scott. The latter said that although he was happy to act as Chairman for the evening, he did not feel able to continue to act in this capacity pro tem.

Vice President – Miss Alice Lighthall, Mr. L. Robertson

Curator – Miss Kathleen Jenkins

Secretary – The name of Mrs. S.B. Earle was proposed, but she found herself unable to serve, and it was decided therefore to leave the filling of this office until later. It was suggested that the Secretary of the Municipal Association might feel able to act in this capacity.

Mr. C.M. McKergow suggested that

the Vice Presidents should be empowered to choose their own committees. Carried.

Miss Lighthall spoke of the history of the locality now forming the City of Westmount - of the old families both French and English, who had been amongst its early settlers - and of the various records now to be found in various archives. She named to her committee the following:

Miss Jean Lunn, Mrs. S.B. Earle, Mr. Donald Trenholme, Mr. J.J.C. Ward, Mr. W. Murray

Mr. Robertson spoke of the records, both of the present City and of the previous municipal organizations, of the City services, the public buildings, the streets etc. He named to his committee, the following:

Mr. H.B. Parker, Dr. Robert Harvie, Mr. C.M. McKergow, Mr. Albert Brodie, Mr. A.W. McMaster.

The slates of each of these committees were adopted unanimously by the meeting – and it was moved that

each Vice President should have power to add to those already chosen.

Mr. P.E. Jarman, General Manager of the City, spoke of the need for a history of Westmount, and promised that all municipal records would be open to the research workers. He expressed the hope that the history might eventually be made available to the public in the form of a small book or pamphlet. Miss Jenkins spoke of the Library's great interest in such a historical work. Dr. W.O. Mulligan pointed out that much valuable material could be found in the archives of the various churches.

Miss Lighthall stated that it was the intention of the organisers that a small exhibit should be held, perhaps in the autumn of this year. She named some magazines, rich in local information, which might be searched:

Canadian Illustrated, Canadian Naturalist, Horticultural Journal, Annuaire de Ville Marie, Mackay's Directory – predecessors of Lovell's, Westmount News, Westmount Examiner.

The Chairman expressed appreciation to Mr. Roy Campbell, both on behalf of those present, and also on behalf of the citizens of Westmount as a whole, for the great amount of time and thought given to the preparations for this Westmount Historical Association.

The meeting thereupon adjourned.

Hurtubise House Note Cards Available



Hurtubise family home (1739)

Available from the WHA or the Westmount Library. 5 for \$10.00 or \$2.50 each.

Photo: Doreen Lindsay

Architecture definition

SOUPIRAIL, plural soupiraux:
French, from *soupir* meaning to sigh.

A ventilation opening in a cellar wall to maintain the correct temperature for root vegetables stored there. Should not be confused with MEUTRIERE, (murderess) or loophole for defence, as it was for many years at the Hurtubise House in Westmount.

FALL LECTURE SERIES IN REVIEW

LEONARD COHEN (1934 –)

Leonard Cohen home 599 Belmont Avenue

Leonard Cohen was born September 21, 1934 in Westmount and grew up in the family home at 599 Belmont near Murray Park. His early education was in local schools, first Roslyn Elementary, then Westmount High School when it was located on Côte St-Antoine. His father, Nathan Cohen, died when he was nine and his mother remarried a few years later. While attending Westmount High School, he was president of the Student Council. Throughout childhood and adolescence he gained religious training by being a member of the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue where his family were prominent members. His paternal great grandfather, Lazarus Cohen, had been president of the Shaar Hashomayim congregation from 1896 to 1902. Cohen entered McGill University in 1951 on his seventeenth birthday. During these formative years, he moved out of the

family house to share rooms on Stanley Street. He was active in the debating society and musical activities. He graduated in 1955.

In 1955, when he was twenty-four, Cohen received a Canada Council grant which he used to live in London, England and on the Greek island of Hydra. There he drafted his first novel *The Favourite Game* which was published in 1963 and contains many references to his family home and Murray Park. His second novel *Beautiful Losers* was published in 1966. Between 1956 and 1993, he produced nine books of poetry and from 1967 to 2001 fifteen recordings. It was during the sixties that he became internationally known as a composer-singer.

Doreen Lindsay

A.Y. JACKSON (1882-1974)

A.Y. Jackson home 69 Hollowell Avenue

Alexander Young Jackson, a founding member of the Canadian Group of Seven painters, was born in Montreal in 1882. He spent his early years living in affluence near the Golden Square Mile, but moved to St. Henri when his father abandoned the family. Jackson left school early and worked at the British Engraving Co. During this period, he took lessons from William Brymner at the Montreal Art Association.

In 1904 the Jackson family moved from St. Henri up the hill to 69 Hollowell Avenue in Westmount. The ground floor of this three-storey greystone duplex across from the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association grounds (now Westmount High School's playing fields) remained the family home for the next eighteen years. Jackson later did an oil sketch 'St. Henry from Hollowell Ave' (1910). In 1905 Jackson travelled to Europe where he saw the work of the Impressionists. During a stay in Paris in 1907, he took classes at the Academie Julian. While living in Westmount, he painted 'The Edge of the Maple Wood' (1910) which shows the influence of his time in Europe.

In 1913 Jackson moved into the Studio Building in Toronto. He began his routine of visiting rural Quebec in late winter, spending summers at Georgian Bay and autumns in Algoma. He worked as a war artist during World War I.

The family's home on Hollowell was eventually sold in 1922 after his mother died. However, because of his close relationship with Anne Savage (of the Beaver Hall Group of



599 Belmont Avenue

All photos: Doreen Lindsay



69 Hallowell Avenue

Painters) who lived on Highland Avenue, Jackson continued to visit Westmount.

Caroline Breslaw

MORDECAI RICHLER (1931-2002)

Mordecai Richler home 218 Edgehill Road

By the time Mordecai Richler came to live in Westmount, he was already a well-known writer. His books *Duddy Kravitz* (1959) and *St. Urbain's Horsemen* (1966) were published while he was living in England, but were based on his early years living on St. Urbain Street in Montreal. However, when Richler moved to Montreal from London in 1972, he chose to live in Westmount.

After more than a twenty-year absence, spent mainly in Paris, Ibiza, and London, Richler, his wife Florence, and their five children (Daniel, Emma, Noah, Martha and Jake) moved into a large, three-storey house at 218 Edgehill Road above The Boulevard. While living there, Richler wrote *Joshua Then and Now* (1980). During this period, his stepson Daniel worked at the CHOM radio station on Greene Avenue. His son Noah attended St. George's High School. One of his daughters, Martha, went to Roslyn School. The role of Jacob in the film version of his children's book *Jacob*



218 Edgehill Road

Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang was played by a student from Roslyn.

Richler was an infrequent visitor to the rooming houses his mother, Leah Rosenberg, operated in Westmount, first on Staynor Avenue and later on Hallowell Avenue. He attended various functions at Charles Bronfman's home in Upper Westmount. These visits provided material for his novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here* which was published in 1989.

After leaving Edgehill Road, the Richlers lived on Wood Avenue, while the family continued to spend summers at their property on Lake Memphremagog.

Caroline Breslaw

MARY MEIGS (1917 – 2002)

Mary Meigs home 427 Grosvenor Avenue

Mary Meigs bought her house at 427 Grosvenor Avenue in 1987 when she was seventy years old. While living here Mary became celebrated as one of the women in the National Film Board film *A Company of Strangers*. Her experiences while making this film are told in her book *In The*

continued on the next page

Reviews...

continued from previous page



427 Grosvenor Avenue

Company of Strangers (1991). Mary filled her home with works of art brought back from her many travels around the world, as well as her own paintings and wood carvings. She was aware of the architectural integrity of the street and added to it by replacing the missing finial at the roofline of her house which led to a neighbour doing the same. Before buying this house, Mary had lived in a house on Avenue du Musée in Montreal which she had bought in 1975 when first arriving in Montreal.

Mary was born into a prominent New England family whose wealth permitted her to steep herself in developing her creative talents. Her first her art works were visual. It was only after coming to Montreal that she began to write. Her first autobiography, *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait* (1982), was written when she was sixty-four followed by *Medusa Head* (1983), *The Box Closet* (1987) and *The Time Being* (1997), all autobiographical writings.

She lost her twin sister and two brothers in 1998. The following year she suffered the first of many strokes, but continued to live on Grosvenor Avenue until she passed away at the age of eighty-five in 2002.

Doreen Lindsay

Streetscapes



When François Dollier de Casson was selected in 1666 to go to New France as a Sulpician military chaplain, the young French priest considered himself a victim.

But once immersed in the pioneer life, he became one of the early builders of the colony as explorer, fourth superior of the Sulpicians in New France, seigneur of Montreal Island, parish priest of Trois Rivières and Ville Marie and vicar general of the diocese of Quebec.

He went on missionary expeditions, claimed land on Lake Erie for the king of France and laid out the first streets in Ville Marie. He built its first church, wrote its first history and began the digging of the Lachine Canal, which was still under way at his death in 1701.

His stubbornness, ability as a conciliator and the respect he earned from the Indians helped make him one of the important figures of Montreal's early history.

It was during his tenure, in 1671, that the Sulpician seminary built its mountain fort on Sherbrooke Street near Atwater, providing the security needed for a few brave settlers to build their farms to the west in what would become Westmount.

It was here, on the original farm lands of the mountain fort, that today's Priests' Farm district of Westmount was developed in the 1920s and de Casson Road named in his honour.

Soon after arrival in New France, he made several expeditions of exploration, helping French soldiers in outposts and learning the Algonquin language. In 1559 he began a missionary expedition by canoe to the Ottawa tribes, initially accompanied by the explorer LaSalle before being left with other Sulpicians to winter alone on the north shore of Lake Erie. There, he raised a cross and took the territory for France.

The next year, he became the

superior of the Montreal seminary. As seigneur of the island, he set out to organize Ville Marie, whose population had grown to about 1,500. He drew up a plan of its first streets, laying out St. Jacques, Notre Dame, St. Joseph, St. Paul, St. Pierre and St. Gabriel and refused to allow the sowing of crops in these areas.

He encouraged education, even to the extent of inviting a school into the seminary, for which he was criticized by the order's superior in Paris.

De Casson spent the last 20 years of his life trying to generate support for the building of the Lachine Canal so canoes could avoid rapids at Sault St. Louis. His plan was for flour mills to be built on the canal banks to help finance the project. Initial work was stopped with the massacre of Lachine inhabitants by the Iroquois in 1689, but he committed Sulpician money to continue the work in 1700. The canal project was abandoned again after his death a year later.

More than 200 years would pass until the subdivision of the Sulpician farmland and de Casson Road was laid out, curving east from Wood Avenue and south to Barat Road. Houses were built between 1926 and 1930 by developer L.E. Schemm and architects Shorey and Ritchie, according to the Westmount's Character Area study.

On April 20, 1927, the street was officially named by bylaw.

It's a winding road inspired by the Garden City movement in England, having semi-detached houses of Anglo-Norman style. Those on the north side have steeply-pitched roofs while on the south homes have flat roofs. All are Class 2 in heritage value. Tidy green lanes running behind properties on both sides of the street are considered among the most attractive in Westmount.

Laureen Sweeney

From *The Westmount Experience*

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Westmount Architects

The Spring lecture series will be dealing with the topic of Westmount Architects and their homes, so here are a few notes from The Archives as an introduction to the topic.

At the turn of the century Westmount was changing from a country area with farmland to an urban residential area with accompanying services, like schools, shops, roads and transportation, a library and various municipal buildings. New residents required houses and employed architects and builders for this purpose. A number of the architects not only designed residences for clients but also decided to build their own homes in Westmount.

ROBERT FINDLAY (1859-1951)

Robert Findlay was born in Inverness, Scotland and worked in Inverness and Glasgow before coming to Montreal in 1885, where he joined the firm of A.F. Dunlop, before opening his own firm in 1890. Findlay designed many public buildings in Westmount, including the public library (1899), the first free public library in the province, and Victoria Hall (1898), a sports/community centre designed to harmonize with the library building, and Westmount City Hall (1922). He lived on Olivier Avenue, in a charming Victorian semi-detached house, before building his own pair of houses on Lansdowne Avenue. Robert Findlay also made a contribution to the professionalization of architecture in the province, becoming a founding member of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects in 1894.

JEAN-OMER MARCHAND (1872-1936)

A Montrealer, who studied at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, 1893, returning to Montreal in 1902, after receiving a diplôme from the French government, (the first granted to a Canadian). At home, he received commissions from the Sulpicians to design a book repository for the libraries of the Grand Séminaire and the Collège de Montréal, which he had attended, and the expansion of the Grand Séminaire's chapel. On the recommendation of the Sulpicians, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame engaged Marchand to design the new Mother house (now known as Dawson College) at the corner of Atwater and Sherbrooke, a majestic building with its beautiful chapel and domed neo-baroque entrance, set in a parkland setting of trees and lawns. Marchand designed his own home on Wood Avenue, especially to contain his own collection of art, with its dramatic windows and recessed entrance door.

PERCY NOBBS (1875-1964)

Nobbs, another Scot, was born in Haddington, Scotland, and studied at the University of Edinburgh and worked in

London, before emigrating to Montreal in 1903. He was the second Macdonald Professor in Architecture at McGill University and designed a number of the McGill buildings we see today; for example, McCord Museum (formerly the McGill Student Union) which in its palazzo-type simplicity, was very original for Montreal at that time with its many "Beaux-Art" type structures. He designed many homes in Westmount, including his own on Belvedere Avenue, and a group of homes called Grove Park. He believed firmly in environmentally sensitive architectural design, which blended structure with the surroundings. This was reflected in his membership in the Town Planning Institute of Canada.

EDWARD MAXWELL (1867-1923)

Edward Maxwell was a Montrealer, but American trained, who designed many Westmount homes including his own and his father's on Côte St. Antoine. He was also a favoured architect of the wealthy residents of the Square Mile. Among his commercial buildings were the Montreal Stock Exchange (now the Centaur Theatre) and Henry Birks and Sons jewellers.

Bibliography

MONTREAL METROPOLIS 1880-1930, edited by Isabelle Gournay, France Vanlathem. Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998.

A VIEW OF THEIR OWN. THE STORY OF WESTMOUNT, by Aline Gubbay. Montreal: Price-Patterson, 1998.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

THE SQUARE MILE : MERCHANT PRINCES OF MONTREAL, by Donald MacKay. Vancouver; Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987.

A history of the Square Mile where two thirds of Canada's rich and powerful lived in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Illustrated with photographs by William Notman.

MY EVENTFUL LIFE. STEPHEN JARVIS, U.E. 1756-1840, by Ann Jarvis Boa. Montreal: Price-Patterson, 2002.

A biography of Stephen Jarvis, United Empire Loyalist and ancestor of Westmount author Ann Jarvis Boa. WESTMOUNT EVENTS. 1989-1990.

Four video recordings covering the 1989 Westmount Art Festival, with Sheila Lawrence, Dance, Jazz Westmount 89, with André White, and Ranée Lee, and the City of Westmount, Vin d'honneur ceremony, April 1990.

Donated by May Ebbit Cutler

Barbara Covington, Archivist

LOCAL TREASURES

One day last week, walking along de Maisonneuve from Atwater, I saw for the first time the extensive additions built over the last few years to accommodate the expanded student enrolment at Dawson College. Due to the careful massing of forms and the choice of building materials, the additions have been well integrated with the older structure.

I was reminded of the time when Dawson College first moved onto this site in the 1970s. This was achieved only after prolonged and persistent negotiations, initiated by Dawson's Director General, Sarah Paltiel, with the Quebec ministers involved. Finally, reluctantly, they were persuaded to agree to locate the new campus in the buildings and on the grounds of the *Congrégation de Notre Dame*.

The main building had originally been designed in 1905-8, by architect Omer Marchand, as the Mother House of the *Congrégation de Notre Dame*, a teaching order founded by Marguerite Bourgeois, an early pioneer in Montreal's settlement. It proved to be a strong argument in Dawson's favour that in its hands the complex would continue in the field of education.

When the projected move was first announced, however, it was greeted with dismay by residents of the surrounding streets. But fears of the vandalism which they thought would surely follow a student invasion proved unfounded. Patrick Woodward, the new Director General commented later "the building (it is Marchand's masterpiece) exerted its own positive influence. It has not been necessary to impress the students with the need to respect their surroundings – they have simply done so." The beautiful chapel was converted into the finest

College library in Montreal. It can be viewed by the general public and is well worth a visit. Go up the front steps and through the main doors and the chapel/library lies a short distance ahead.

In the 1950s the last open green space in the area was swallowed up in a large apartment complex. Many residents remember the farm which previously occupied the land, where you could buy farm produce and flowers. That is how close we are – one generation away – from Westmount's development as a rural-to-urban suburb.

The bells are ringing at St. Leo's Church. It must be noon. You can set your watch by the chimes, rung twice a day, at noon and six p.m. I climb the few stairs to the main door, as I often do, and enter the tranquil space. This



WOOD CARVINGS

beautiful interior is now classified as a federal heritage site. We are fortunate in having access to such a work of art.

Note: The *Congrégation de Notre Dame* is to be a major player once again in another move which will surely have impact on the neighbouring streets. Marianapolis College, a private English CEGEP is to move into Omer Marchand's other great building in Westmount, the former *École Pédagogique*, along Westmount Avenue.

Aline Gubbay



CEILING MURALS IN ST. LÉON'S