

# The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 2 • NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2002

## St. Joseph's Countryside by Alice Lighthall

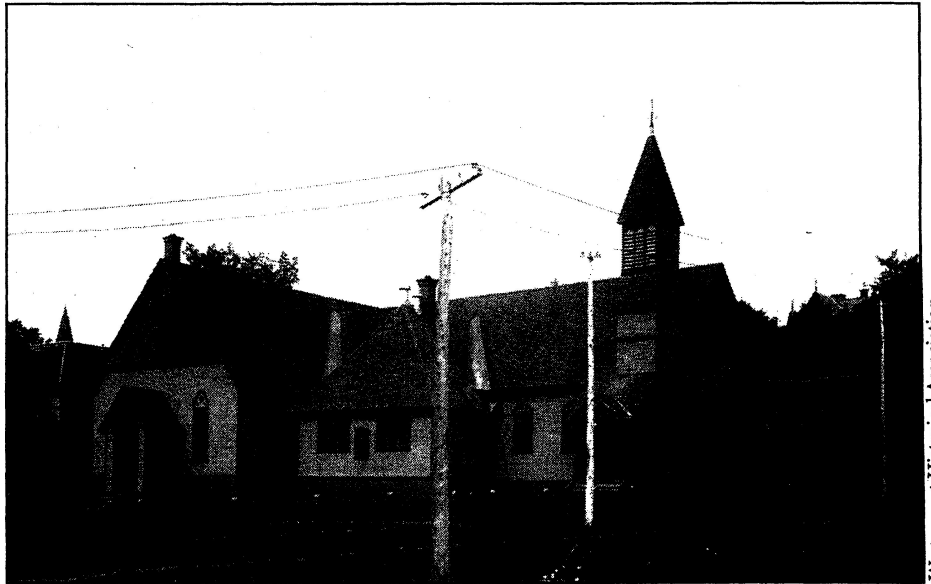
The following passages are taken from a paper entitled "St. Joseph's Countryside" ("La Contree St-Joseph"), which Alice Lighthall presented to members of the Westmount Historical Association in 1976. In the excerpts included here, Lighthall describes the first farms along Côte St. Antoine Road and recounts a childhood memory of Westmount.

After 1653 the sunny slopes of the Little Mountain caught the eye of several prospective farmers. The southwestern aspect had the best of the daylight, with the hill behind as shelter from the worst north winds.

The whole of the valley below, now filled up with houses and factories, was at that time a lake. The advantages of lac St. Pierre, or Lac à la Loutre, were undoubtedly an advantage. A farmer with land fronting the lake could disembark his vegetables and hens on canoes, or rafts, and bring them to market by water, even if the lake itself was not very deep.

The Côte St. Antoine Road was probably an Indian trail and is certainly one of the oldest on the island. In 1662 a grant of 12 arpents was made to Jean Leduc by Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve, adjoining the 30 that he already held in "La Contree St. Joseph". Whether this referred to land on Côte St. Antoine or a piece near town is not clear but it shows a new development which made expansion possible. Jean Leduc was one of three stone-masons specially brought out to introduce building in stone rather than wood, and so provide a degree of safety impossible before. From this time on a farmer's home could literally be his castle.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



Melville Presbyterian Church, Stanton and Côte St. Antoine Road.

## Spring Lecture Series Features Westmount's Uniqueness

Our four Spring lectures are devoted to celebrating our special Westmount community, which has successfully evolved through 127 years. In the process of developing from a rural area on the west slope of Mount Royal into one of Montreal's most attractive suburbs, Westmount developed some notable characteristics. Its architecture, streets, gardens, and parks flourished hand in hand with services that have contributed to the quality of life of its residents. The importance of learning and community spirit was manifest in the establishment of the first public library in Quebec, the creation of numerous schools, and the existence of several organizations that devote time and resources to people of all ages and needs.

Our first lecture will begin with personal recollections about the special spirit of Westmount and we have invited our members to offer a few comments about their own involvement and experiences.

Thursday, March 21, 2002: *The Spirit of Westmount*

Speakers: Members of the Westmount Historical Association

Thursday, April 18, 2002: *The Making of Westmount from 1870 to 1929*

Speaker: Stephen Bryce, teacher at John Abbott College, Montreal.

Thursday, May 16, 2002: *The Life and Work of Alexander C. Hutchison (1938-1921)*

Speakers: Susan Bronson, architect and Janis Zubalik, art historian

Thursday, June 19, 2002: *The Rotarians Respond to Westmount Needs*

Speaker: Haagen Kierulf, historian of The Rotary Club of Westmount

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February 2002  
Volume 2 • Number 2

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ISSN 1496-4066

## *President's Message*

It is December 3, 2001 when I write this President's Message for the *Westmount Historian*. This date is important as I have just returned from the final (let us hope not) council meeting of the City of Westmount and it is very hard for me to write this message and not be political. I have kept the agenda from tonight for the WHA's Archives. This is living history. Now more than ever we must honour our past.

Sitting in the council chambers tonight, I realized how important the history of this City is and will continue to be. What happens now is part of our history, these are very important times for Westmount. As of January 1, 2002, according to the provincial government, Westmount does not exist. Personally, I don't think so. As the song goes, 'There Will Always be a Westmount'!

I thank Mayor Trent for his continuous fight to preserve our independence. He has shouldered the burden of all 27 municipalities and never has he wavered from his belief in democracy. He is a man of our history.

Exciting things will be happening with the WHA in this new year. Our never faltering programme committee has the Spring and Fall lecture series planned out and the walking tour maps and guides are almost ready. The Archives continues to grow and donations are received.

We will continue on.

FLORA-LEE WAGNER



St. Germain House at Côte St. Antoine Road and Lansdowne. Demolished c. 1905.

Westmount Historical Association

## From the Archives

Progress continues to be made in organizing historical material in the WHA Archives. The first phase of an indexing project involving the *Westmount Examiner* has been completed. This includes an index of articles from 1935-1940 relating to Westmount's architecture and urban development and an index of obituaries (over 500) published during the same years.

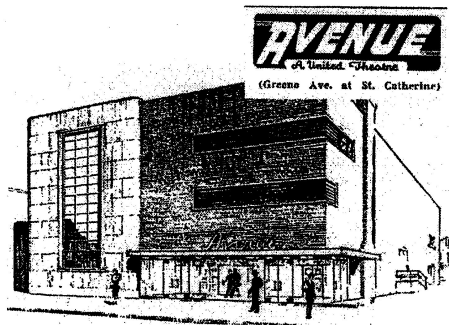
A researcher from Germany who is writing a book on Jewish soccer players has contacted the WHA in hopes of locating information about a former Westmount resident named Gottfried Fuchs. Born May 3rd, 1889, Fuchs became one of Germany's greatest soccer players, playing for Düsseldorfer SC 99 from 1904 until 1906 and for Karlsruher FV from 1906 until 1921. A member of the German national soccer team on six occasions, Fuchs is best known for scoring ten goals against the Russian team in the 1912 Olympics. Fuchs emigrated to Canada in 1937 and lived in Westmount as Godfrey Fochs until his death in 1972. Any reader who knew Mr. Fochs is invited to contact the Association.

The WHA is still interested in acquiring documents, photographs, or other material relating to Westmount's history. If you have historical material you don't wish to part with, we would be happy to arrange to borrow items in order to make copies. Anyone who would like to donate or loan material to the WHA may reach us at by telephone at 925-1404 or by email at [info@westmounthistorical.org](mailto:info@westmounthistorical.org). For recent gifts we are grateful to Craig Gamache, Terry Lightman, Doreen Lindsay, and Lee Taylor.

For an upcoming issue of the *Westmount Historian* we are seeking stories, programmes, photographs, or other historical material relating to the Avenue Theatre. The

Avenue opened in 1947 on Greene and was the first cinema built in Westmount. It closed during the early 1980s on account of declining attendance and was subsequently demolished.

PHILIP DOMBOWSKY



## ST. JOSEPH'S COUNTRYSIDE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

The other two of these early masons were Jean Desroches and Jean Descarries. Desroches bought himself out of an agreement entered into by the trio to help build each others' houses and seems to have gone off to Pointe aux Trembles, probably to build the new parish church of L'Enfant Jesus in 1674. His name appears in the roll of their General Vestry meetings. Leduc and Descarries seem to have stuck together, for their families were among the first to obtain grants on the Côte St. Antoine Road, where, along with the Hurtubise family, they formed a strong little group. The chosen location was jocularly called by their not-so-venturesome friends, "La Haute Folie", for the danger from Iroquois raids was not yet over and each of the new houses was built with a fortified cellar.

By 1690 the group of settlers on the western hill was established. The Leducs were there, the Hurtubise house had just been finished, and the three Decary brothers, Paul, Michel and Louis (sons of Jean Descarries), had received their extensive grants (land bordered by "le Ruisseau, qui sort du petit lac de la petite montagne") and divided the land to suit themselves. By the first decade of the 18th century the whole district had been allotted to farms.

Many of us older citizens can still remember the lovely fields and orchards of the region. One of my own vivid recollections is of a winter's day when four of us school girls started out on snowshoes from our Westmount homes for a tramp to Kensington (N.D.G.). A gentle snow was falling and we tramped lightheartedly over the drifts. When we turned to come home we realized that the wind that had been with us was much stronger when it had to be faced. We were in for a hard struggle. We stopped and held a council of war. We were cold and tired and, looking over the white landscape, we saw that we had come farther than we intended.

The nearest house in sight was one of the two Brodie farmhouses on the Upper Lachine Road. We decided to make for that. We knew the family and could count on getting warmed up before the hard tramp home. We turned south and fought the wind. One of the four, however, had come to the end of her resources. She fell down in the snow exhausted. We were really alarmed. We pulled her up and dragged her along, not daring to let her give in. But we were all tired and the house seemed too far to reach. At this point, a jingle of bells told us that help was near. A farmer appeared in his little red berlot, drawn by a good strong horse! Our lives were saved. He took us aboard and drove us in as far as Victoria Avenue, by which time we had recovered enough strength to trudge the rest of the way home.

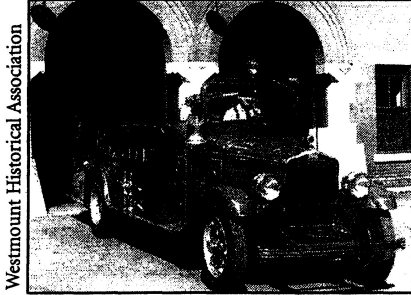
ALICE LIDTHALL

## FALL LECTURE SERIES IN REVIEW

### *Westmount Fire Brigade*

Captain Craig Davis  
September 20, 2001

In 1892, the Westmount Fire Brigade was established to protect the 3,000 residents and 600 homes of the community. The first fire station was located behind the old city hall on Greene Avenue. It had a fire/police chief, two constables and two horses with a horse-drawn hose reel. Fire boxes in strategic locations were connected to the pumphouse on Clarke Avenue. In 1895 the fire station was moved to Stanton Street where it continued to share premises with the police department.



*Westmount Fire Station, Stanton Street*

The Fire Station on the first floor held the fire hall, a sleeping room and stables. The horses had difficulty climbing the hills, so in 1912 Fire Station No. 2 was built at the corner of The Boulevard and Victoria Avenue. It was designed by Alexander

Hutchison, Westmount mayor and architect. It was used regularly until 1982 when the number of firefighters declined, but has been used since then for various trucks, events and programmes of the fire department and the Emergency Measures Team.

The Westmount Fire Brigade has led many initiatives over the years. In 1927 it was the first motorized fire department in eastern Canada. It became the first unionized fire department in Quebec in 1944. Its Junior Firefighters' Programme, developed in 1967, was copied nation-wide. In 1975, it launched the first paramedic-type fire department ambulance in Quebec. In 1987, Westmount became the first municipality in the country to require sprinkler systems in new buildings.

On December 31, 2001, Westmount's forty firefighters and equipment were distributed to the new Montreal "megacity" fire department. The Westmount Fire Brigade's 110-year history was a source of pride in this community.

CAROLINE BRESLAW

### *150 Years of the YMCA in Montreal*

Claire Rosenberg & Janis Zubalik  
October 18, 2001

The Montreal YMCA, founded in 1851, was the first "Y" in North America. Alexander Hutchinson (later Mayor of Westmount) designed the first building it owned on Victoria Square in Old Montreal. As the population of Montreal grew, branch buildings were constructed to serve the local communities. The Westmount Y at the corner of Sherbrooke Street and Arlington Avenue was one of three new premises to be built in 1912. Housed in a three story brick building, it featured a large fireplace with a carpeted foyer and a gymnasium on the first floor. The basement contained a mosaic-tiled pool fed by a well, showers, and separate locker rooms for men and boys. On the second floor, there was a billiards room with four full-sized tables, a running track around the upper level of the gym, a dining room and a kitchen. Dormitories were provided for professional young men on the third floor.

Although the YMCA was originally founded to meet the religious, social and educational needs of young men, by the time it was established in Westmount it included sports and recreational facilities. It made these available to youth from Point St. Charles and Côte St. Paul, as well as to the local residents. The Westmount Y was renovated and expanded in 1989. It continues the tradition of community service. Health and fitness represent only 25% of its programmes. The major party is community service - nowadays for both sexes and all age groups.

CAROLINE BRESLAW



*Westmount YMCA, built in 1912 on the corner of Sherbrooke and Arlington.*



## 401 (City of Westmount) Squadron

John Sancton  
November 22, 2001

Westmount became a part of the fledgling Royal Canadian Air Force as early as 1934, when the 115 Squadron was created and moved into the former Bell Canada building at the southwest corner of Sherbrooke Street and Metcalfe Avenue. At the start of World War II, in September 1939, the auxiliary unit was combined with the First Squadron of the Permanent Force, then stationed at Trenton, Ontario.

The new 1 Canadian Fighter Squadron was equipped with Hawker Hurricane aircraft but welcomed the Westmount-trained pilots and ground crew, including airframe and aero-



Members of the Royal Canadian Air Force

engine mechanics, electricians, wireless technicians, and clerks. They landed in the U.K. in June 1940, and were first stationed on Salisbury Plain. After being re-equipped with newer Hurricanes (later with Supermarine Spitfires for the rest of the war), they were moved to Croydon, in south London, where they fought with distinction in the Battle of Britain. Westmounters who participated included Paul Picher, Dal Russel, Gordon MacGregor, Hartland Molson and Frank McGill. The squadron was renamed 401.

John Sancton joined the 401 as an airman-photographer in early 1942 and was quickly commissioned as squadron intelligence officer. In 1944, the 401 squadron was the first allied air force to fly from a base in the Normandy beachhead and operated through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. After the war it became a Reserve squadron and was disbanded in 1966. It was awarded the Freedom of the City of Westmount. Its colours, displaying its battle honors, are on display in Westmount City Hall.

DOREEN LINDSAY

THE WESTMOUNT HISTORIAN

## Before there was Westmount

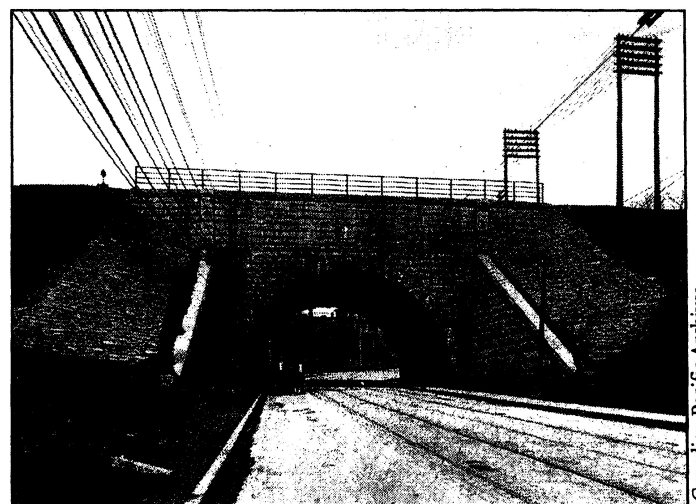
David Hammond  
December 13, 2001

Limestone is the principal bedrock of Westmount, underlying 95% of the area. The deposits of soils of diverse origin were laid down 100,000 years ago and reach a maximum 10 feet in thickness at the beginning of the "flats" around Sherbrooke Street.

Westmount, as part of the larger Mount Royal, is one of eight Monteregian Hills of southwestern Quebec. Formed of liquid rock, or magma, they pushed up from below the earth's solid crust and melted the limestone. This magma solidified into igneous rocks known as gabbro and syenite, which can be seen as dark vertical (dikes) and horizontal (Sills) lines in the 300 metre long face of the old Westmount Corporation Quarry on the south side of the valley through which Côte des Neiges road passes. Some metamorphosed limestone can still be seen in old quarry walls at the end of Stanton Street and at the junction of Sunnyside and Belvedere Road.

Westmount gets 40 inches of rain on average. Over a period of 10,000 years the rain and melting snow have run off the steep slopes, eroding the soil and dumping it as it slowed down at the edge of the "flats". Many natural springs developed on the slopes between Sherbrooke Street and The Boulevard. Some streams converged in Westmount Park, making it undesirable for development, then ran south through The Glen to Petit Lac St. Pierre in St. Henri. One stream ran under the old Pom Bakery to Lithcoe Farm and pond. Others ran parallel to Saint Catherine Street and de Maisonneuve Boulevard.

DOREEN LINDSAY



Glen Bridge - "Erected 1892 by the Council of Côte St. Antoine".

Canadian Pacific Archives

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## La papeterie Fry's

JOHN W. SANCTON

Dans les années 1920, les enfants de Westmount qui vivaient au coeur de la ville savaient exactement quoi faire de leur allocation hebdomadaire de 5 sous. Ils se rendaient chez J. S. Fry's, sur la rue Sherbrooke, à l'est de Victoria, et faisaient provision de bonbons à un sou.

Pour un sou, on pouvait acheter deux bonbons lune de miel, au sujet desquels circulait la folle rumeur qu'ils étaient fabriqués à partir de ce qui avait été balayé du plancher de la manufacture de bonbons. On trouvait aussi des casse-gueule (quatre pour un sou), boules rondes et dures qui étaient faites d'un enrobage sucré quelconque presque impossible à casser avec les dents et contenaient une petite noix d'un goût très ordinaire que l'on atteignait en suçant très longtemps le bonbon. Les bâtonnets de réglisse rouge ou noire se vendaient un sou l'unité.

Les bandes dessinées étaient étalées sur une grande table à l'arrière du magasin. L'assortiment de Mr Fry comptait beaucoup plus que les feuillets humoristiques du journal *The Standard* (hebdomadaire anglophone du samedi, depuis longtemps disparu) ou du journal torontois *The Star Weekly*. Les bandes dessinées provenaient d'Angleterre et arrivaient

chaque semaine à bord d'un des transatlantiques qui faisaient la navette entre The Clyde, Liverpool ou Southampton et Montréal. Le contenu varié de Chums, une des publications les plus populaires, suscitait l'intérêt et éveillait l'imagination de tous les jeunes mâles. On offrait aussi beaucoup de publications à sensation comme *The Thriller*, consacrées aux meurtres crapuleux et autres monstruosité, qui n'avaient rien à envier aux émissions télévisées d'aujourd'hui.

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## Souvenirs de Macy's

MARILYNN VANDERSTAY

Parlez de Macy's à un diplômé d'âge mûr de l'école secondaire Westmount ou de l'école St-Léon et voyez ses yeux s'illuminer. Situé au coin nord-ouest de la rue Sherbrooke et de l'avenue Victoria, Macy's était le haut lieu de la restauration

**M A C Y ' S**  
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rapide pour les jeunes de Westmount, avides de bouffe minute. Il y a 35 ans, on y commandait des frites grasses recouvertes de sauce épaisse, accompagnées de grands verres de Coke aux cerises.

Plusieurs d'entre-nous qui avons grandi dans les années hippies, à la fin des années 60, se souviendront d'avoir rencon-

tré des amis chez Macy's pour bavarder, assis sur les tabourets du comptoir ou entassés sur une des banquettes à l'arrière. « Nous flâmons des heures en mangeant nos frites et en sirotant notre Coke », se souvient John Taylor, un ancien résident de Westmount et adepte de Macy's qui a grandi tout près. Il n'y avait pas vraiment d'ambiance dans le restaurant, sauf la buvette. « Aucune décoration, mais de gentilles serveuses », de dire John.

Macy's n'avait pas de juke-box. Pour la musique, il fallait aller boire son Coke aux cerises chez Nick's sur l'avenue Greene. Ou aller chez la « Baronesse » au coin de Décarie pour déguster une coupe glacée recouverte de sirop au chocolat en écoutant « Running Bear » sur son juke-box à 5 sous. Mais là, pas de Coke aux cerises.

Ainsi, la jeunesse de Westmount se réunissait chez Macy's pour des heures de plaisirs gastronomiques et de conversation, jusqu'à ce que le feu ravage le restaurant au début des années 70. Macy's a offert aux jeunes de Westmount un endroit bien à eux, sécuritaire, et sous étroite surveillance policière.