

# The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

SEPTEMBER 2000

## *Flora-Lee Wagner assumes helm of WHA*

A new executive and board of directors were elected to the Westmount Historical Association at its Annual General Meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Flora-Lee Wagner took over the presidency of the Association as longtime President Aline Gubbay stepped down. Philip Dombowsky became vice-president, Andy Dodge secretary, Lee Taylor treasurer and David Freeman membership secretary.

Aline Gubbay, who has been president since the WHA was revived in 1994, received a standing ovation from the membership in recognition of her years of work and tireless enthusiasm. During her tenure the Association has built up its archives, developed a popular lecture series, newsletter and website. It worked closely with the City on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations last year and has kept citizens in tune with Westmount's history through the pages of the *Westmount Examiner*.

Still, as she reported in her president's message, the past year had been "controversial", as the Association worked to develop a heritage centre out of the former Westmount Train Station but was stalled in its efforts to raise the necessary renovation money as the threat of separation overcame the City administration. Still, she said, both the WHA and the City remain committed to the project.

Ms. Wagner, who had been vice-pres-



Photo: Doreen Lindsay

## *Montreal Melon competition to be held Sept. 24*

The Millennium weather has not been kind to the baby Montreal melon plants! First, planting was delayed by cold temperatures. Then, when no more delay was possible and the babies were outgrowing their small pots, gardeners planted outside, nursing young plants through the cool nights and sometimes torrential downpours. By the middle of July, the first flowers were seen on the plants. Now the melons are starting to set, and the competitive growers are nourishing their fruit towards competition-winning size and beauty.

The competition will be held in Westmount Park on Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, a week later than originally planned because the growing season was so late. Melons are to be judged by size and beauty. There will be an art table where children will be able to "dress" melons, and displays on "the melon in art." Art includes poetry, so lick your pencils and see what fine limericks and odes you can produce for the occasion. Ken Taylor will bring in a variety of organically-grown melons from his farm on Ile Perrot, and we hope to see some melon chutneys and marmalades in the competition. Perhaps we can even improve on the Décarie marmalade!

Watch the *Westmount Examiner* for full competition categories and progress reports. And be sure to remember September 24<sup>th</sup> as the day to join us at the melon festival.

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LEE TAYLOR CO-ORDINATOR, MONTREAL MELON PROJECT

## ***The Westmount Historian***

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## ***Editorial: The Threat to History***

**H**istory is the study of changing times. If nothing ever changed, if there was no evolution, there would be no history.

We may be watching an attempt by our legislators in Quebec City to try to wipe out history, or at least to rewrite it in their own image and to force Westmount into a role which is completely unwanted by any of its citizens.

Westmount was founded 126 years ago as a small village on the outskirts of Montreal which was evolving out of a series of farm tracts and Sulpician land grants. Canada had become a country only seven years earlier, and the new provincial administration was eager to establish municipalities out of the the seigneuries, land grants, lots and roadways which had developed outside of Montreal. The first city council included French-language farmers and settlers as well as Scottish and English landowners who had chosen sites mainly in the eastern part of the community where they could build huge mansions on sprawling acreages.

Once the municipality had been established, the rest was history. The eastern part of Notre Dame de Grâce grew faster than the western territory, and the largely English-speaking population chose to break away from the western sector by 1880 to form the Village of Côte St. Antoine, in the boundaries of what is now Westmount. Shopping districts developed, schools were established, a hospital was built. The community grew to become the City of Westmount which we know today.

While it is true that Westmount "is a creature of the province" which was established by order-in-council, it has evolved over the years, much as a child grows independent of the parents who created it. It has followed all the rules, it has flourished, it has a proud and devoted citizenry who have participated actively in the development of the province and the city.

In fact, Quebec should be proud of Westmount. Not only is it – or has it been – home to many of Quebec's wealthiest and most intelligent citizens, it is the first city to hire a general manager, its fire department has received accolades from throughout Canada and the United States, it has participated in international trade missions, the Canadian Federation of Municipalities and the Conference of Suburban Mayors. Indeed, Westmount has never shirked its responsibility to participate actively in the development of Quebec or Canada. And citizens have won awards for their activism, interest in municipal politics and overall democratic conscience.

All this is history, a tale of the evolution and development of the community. It is important to consider this history before determining that, for "administrative efficiency," Westmount and the province's other thriving communities should be wiped out.

We support the mayor in his efforts to stop this madness in Quebec City, and we hope we can be a part of it. We are still trying to document many parts of Westmount's history and hope that in doing so we can convince the Quebec government it would be foolhardy and destructive even to ponder forced mergers.

ANDY DODGE

## President's Message

While much of the concentration of the Westmount Historical Association over the past year has been on the restoration/renovation of the Westmount Train Station, we have continued with a lecture series that continues to attract a large audience, our archives have received many further interesting donations and our membership grows. The WHA web site has done much to increase our recognition by others.

Westmount also continues to grow. Building sites are appearing in the city, bringing new residents, and Westmount is now more multilingual than ever. With progress comes the realization that we must preserve what we have. I personally am very aware of our heritage homes, places of worship, commercial and municipal buildings. We know of the century-plus homes in Westmount but our architectural heritage goes beyond the familiar. Westmount has been very fortunate in having internationally-renowned architects designing buildings and living within our boundaries. Their homes and others from the 1920s and later deserve to be mentioned. A committee of three is now working on maps for "Walking Tours of Westmount" which we hope to publish by this Fall.

But as Westmount grows and we preserve the past we must also work to preserve our future. The threat of amalgamation is real. Our hopes of restoring the train station have fallen victim, for now, to this threat, as our Mayor, Councillors and City administration must put all their combined efforts to stop this threat. We must be patient. With amalgamation our buildings will still stand and our heritage will remain, but it will not be the Westmount that we now live in.

FLORA-LEE WAGNER

## Lecture Series to Feature Four Family-Owned Businesses

Many small family-owned businesses have developed within the City over the years. The Westmount Historical Association has invited the owners of four businesses who have continued through three generations within the same family to talk to us in our upcoming Fall lecture series.

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, Florence Millman and her son Michael will speak about the development of their West End Gallery on Greene Avenue, a business started by Florence's mother Rose in 1941.

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, Maria Alevisatos, owner of La Transition Restaurant on Sherbrooke Street, and her brother George, who developed Catering By George! on Greene Avenue, will talk about the development of their family restaurant businesses from the original Nick's in 1920.

On November 16<sup>th</sup>, Tony Fargnoli will tell us how his father, Giantoni, started The Real Tony Shoe Shop on the east side of Greene Avenue in 1937.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, Ian Campbell along with his two sons, Glen and John, will describe the evolution of A. H. Campbell Gallery and Fine Art Framers since 1924.

We invite members to bring old bills of sale, advertisements or merchandise to these lectures to share with others.

(See insert for complete details of each lecture.)

DOREEN LINDSAY,  
CO-ORDINATOR, LECTURE SERIES



Coll: Famille Alevisatos

Nick's Restaurant, at Greene Avenue, as it appeared in 1945.

## SPRING LECTURE SERIES: COMMUNITIES AROUND WESTMOUNT: A REVIEW

ELIZABETH HENRIK

*This spring, four lectures made us aware of the similarities and differences among other island communities and Westmount. Land grants from the Sulpicians, who owned the island, established the first farm settlements. The evolution of each community depended to a large extent on its geographical location. Outremont and Westmount, located on inland mountain sides, away from commercial transportation, evolved as residential communities. So did Montreal West. However, the closeness of railway lines encouraged the emergence of some industries there. Montreal and Saint-Henri developed into commercial and industrial centers along their railways and waterways.*

### *City of Montreal, Cradle of Canadian Historical Societies, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000*

M<sup>me</sup> Hélène-Louise Dupont Élie, President of the *Société historique de Montréal*, talked about the lively economic and political climate which existed at the time of the founding of Canada's oldest historical society in 1858. Its motto, "Rien n'est beau que le vrai" (Truth is the only beauty) was created by Mr. Jacques Viger, Mayor of Montreal, founder and first president. The directors pursued their study of the history of Canada in a scientific way by acquiring authentic documents which they later bequeathed to the Society. Presently headquartered in the Allard house in Old Montreal, the Society's current activities are supported by grants for research and for the dissemination of the work of young historians.



Jacques Viger, first mayor of Montreal.

Reproduced from Robert Prévost's *Montreal, la jolle entreprise*.

### *Saint-Henri, Site of the First Tanneries, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000*



Eglise Saint-Henri, 1913; demolished in 1969.

Art historian Dr. Jean Belisle presented slides illustrating three centuries of history of the community of Saint-Henri. The original tannery settlement, named Côte Saint-Pierre, was located at the junction of Lac Saint-Pierre (Lac au Loutre) and la Petite Rivière Saint-Pierre. Around 1850, the centre of the village moved south, closer to the Lachine Canal where industries began to develop. This is the area now known as Saint-Henri, incorporated as a city in 1875 and annexed to Montreal in 1905. Photographs from 1869 by Alexander Henderson, others from the 1940s, and a painting by James Duncan showed old buildings which no longer exist; others featured in Gabrielle Roy's novel "The Tin Flute" are still standing.

### *Outremont, de la Côte à la Cité, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000*

Dr. Ludger Beauregard, President of the *Société d'histoire d'Outremont*, explained the 1923 hypothesis of Aristide Beaugrand Champagne that the early Iroquois village of Hochelaga was located on the current site of Outremont. The recorded history of the area starts in 1694 with the establishment of Côte Sainte-Catherine on the northern plain of Mount Royal. The Sulpician seigneurs gave the first land grants or "censives" to three Tessier and three Gervais brothers. By the 1800s, a dozen farms existed. Their mountainside location attracted wealthy English, Scottish, and Irish businessmen from Montreal who built grand residences and villas on lands purchased from French farmers. In 1875 the Côte became the Village of Outremont.

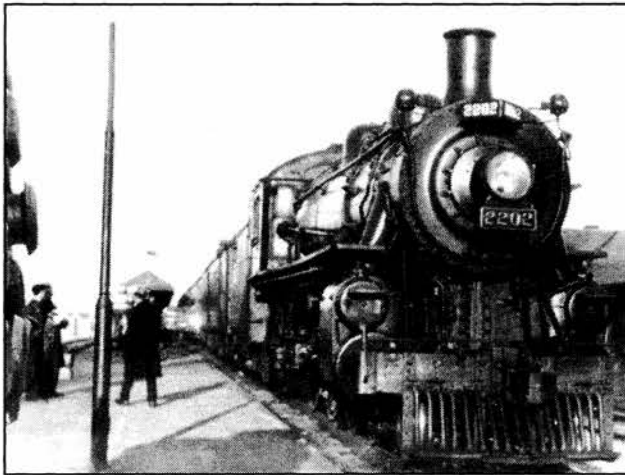


Hotel de Ville d'Outremont before 1910.

Ville d'Outremont

## Montreal West, Confluence of Railway Lines, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000

Mr. David Watson, Honorary Town Historian, explained how Montreal West evolved from farm lands owned by two Décarie families and the Leach family. Around 1875, part of the land was occupied by the original Blue Bonnet Race Track. Its clubhouse, the Halfway Hotel, stood where the Town Hall is today. The town's first name was Montreal Junction because the tracks of The Grand Trunk and the Canadian Pacific Railway converged there. The old CPR signal tower still stands and is now a museum. Railways were important in the development of many industries. From 1890, the farms were subdivided into lots and new residents, many of them CPR employees, moved in. The Town of Montreal West was incorporated in 1897.



CPR locomotive No 2202 at Montreal West station in the 1930's. Milk cans can be seen on wagon at left.

CPR Archives

ident under Ms. Gubbay, said she was planning to "get on with the job" of being an historical association, and would be working to develop the Association's various activities independent of the question of establishing a heritage centre in the train station. She said she intended to launch new fund-raising events and activities in the fall to raise money for the Association independent of the Train Station Project.

New board members elected at the Annual General Meeting include Caroline Breslaw, Elizabeth Henrik, Donna Lach and John Sancton, who join incumbents Joan Clark and Doreen Lindsay. Aline Gubbay remains on the board as immediate past president.

## Follow-up links prove fruitful

The Spring/Summer series of lectures of the Westmount Historical Association aimed at establishing ties with other communities surrounding Westmount through their historical associations. In order to continue and deepen the ties, our Association also organized group visits to the sites of two of the communities: Saint-Henri and Montreal West.

On May 10th, a group of Association members visited the exhibit of the *Société historique de Saint-Henri* at 5231 Place Saint-Henri. On display were the photographs by Adrien Dubuc of Saint-Henri between 1937 and 1984. A photographer since childhood, starting with a Baby Brownie Kodak camera, Dubuc has created many prize

winning photos during his long career. The 1956 photo of the burning tower, at the moment of its collapse, of the Saint-Elizabeth church has merited the prize of the Association of Professional Photographers of Canada.

The exhibits of the Saint-Henri society are open on Wednesday nights from 7 to 9 pm and are free to the public. The volunteers who receive visitors are very knowledgeable about their town and talk about it lovingly. A new exhibit will be installed in the near future.

In Montreal West, the old CP signal tower, also known as the Block Tower located at the intersection of Sherbrooke St. West and Westminster Avenue, houses a museum. Mr. David Watson has assembled the historical material on display which includes

photographs of architecture and social events of the Town. There is an old RCA gramophone on display and Mr. Watson plays old 78 rpm records on it for visitors. One of the interesting features of that gramophone is its volume control. Volume is regulated, very effectively, by the closing or opening of panels in front of the speakers.

The museum is open every second Sunday from 1 to 3 pm. The group from our Association visited on July 2nd and was given the most interesting and informative explanations by Mr. Watson. One of the features not to be missed is the details of the old-time garb and accouterments of a fireman, guarded in a glass cabinet.

ELIZABETH HENRIK

## GEORGE ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON AND THE 'ROBERTSON GULLY'<sup>1</sup>

DAVID HAMMONDS, ING.

A little more than a hundred years ago, just before the advent of the automobile, servicing of the street drain was a bigger part of the work of the road maintenance crews of a city than it is today. In the 1890s, George Archibald Robertson<sup>2</sup>, first roadmaster and later Superintendent of Works of Côte St. Antoine, renamed Westmount in 1895, tackled the drain maintenance problem and developed a design that was a combination of science, experimentation and his own experience. The design proved itself in service, was patented in 1898, and went into production. In fact the invention won him third prize in the category "Industries Étrangères", at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris.



Robertson's submission to the Fair included a fine scale model and a narrative explaining why his gully design was "the superior of any in use, or on the market today". He pointed out that, in addition to Westmount, the municipalities of Verdun, Montreal West, Outremont, Trois Rivières and Winnipeg, as well as the CPR Stock yards, had purchased gullies made to his design. Through the generosity of George Robertson's grandchildren, Caroline E., Donald M. and John G. Robertson, the WHA now has that model in its Archives. The submission is a masterpiece of fine model making and is made of cast iron, chrome plated, with three, interchangeable entry alter-

natives, all fitted into a custom made, partitioned leather presentation case.

The street drain is an essential part of urban infrastructure and is almost as old as the concept of the town itself. Westmount has no less than 1614 drains in its 51.8 km of streets and 10 km of lanes. A typical drain assembly comprises several parts. There is an entry component, a vertical shaft which is usually about 85 cm. in diameter and up to 3 metres deep from which a horizontal discharge pipe about 30 cm. in diameter, connects the drain with the storm sewer. At the bottom of the shaft there is a sump, typically 50 cm. deep which, confusingly, is also known as a catch basin or catch pit, to collect waterborne street dirt.

Although catch pits were incorporated in most gullies to trap the dirt, the accumulation was sometimes such that the discharge pipes became blocked, even if the crews were diligent in clearing them. In winter, the design of the day was such that drains tended to fill with ice at the onset of cold weather and they were useless at the onset of any thaw.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, the time and effort to keep the drains open were an important part of the work of the roads department of any municipality, and even involved the use of "steaming" to melt the ice that had built up.

Robertson's invention, which addressed most of the deficiencies of previous designs by incorporating spe-

cial geometric features, reduced blocking and the time spent on clearing. For those interested, a Technical Note discussing his invention and the context in which it was designed can be obtained from the Association's office or accessed directly on the WHA's website. The note includes a biographical annex.

When he first moved to Montreal, Robertson declared himself to be a stone mason and later a builder. Apart from the gully, he invented "several other pieces of machinery... by means of these not only are the road beds kept beautifully ploughed but every footway is cleaned after a storm for business men to pass with comfort to their occupations without special charge."<sup>4</sup> After retiring from Westmount in early 1905, he became successively a building contractor and later an Insurance adjuster. At the time of his death in 1932 the *Montreal Star* wrote "G.A. Robertson is widely mourned. Westmount pays reverential tribute at Impressive funeral."

Thanks are due to Gisberto Porporino, Ing., a civil engineer in the Westmount Public Works Department, who provided the statistics and information on current practice.

### NOTES

1. The technical name for street drains used in Canada reflects the change of economic influence from the "Old Country" to the USA. In 1900 Canadian engineers used the British term "gully" also spelled "gulley" and now, even in 2000, older Westmount Public Works employees still use the term, though the US term "catch basin" is now more

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

commonly used.

2. Robertson was born 1856 at Amherstbay, Ontario, moved to Westmount in 1885, lived for many years at 383 Lansdowne Ave., and was an employee of Côte St. Antoine/Westmount from c.1885 to 1905. The house was demolished in the late 1970s and the site is now occupied by Manoir Westmount.

3. As Robertson wrote in the text supporting his submission to the competition: "In a short time the bottom of the gully gets filled up....and water may find its way to a nearby basement window and cause a lot of damage."

4. W.D. Lighthall, *Westmount: A Municipal Illustration*, ca. 1902.

### Association's website will expand

Look for a number of additions to the WHA website during the upcoming year. Developed in July of last year, the site represented a major step forward for the Association and prompted queries on Westmount's history from places as far away as Sydney, Australia. In its present form, the WHA site includes general information about the WHA, details regarding the archives and our annual lecture series, a Westmount timeline of events, and a brief historical sketch of Westmount written in 1920 by historian, lawyer, and former mayor William Douw Lighthall.

Projected changes for the coming year include the development of an online version of the newsletter and the addition of illustrations to the timeline. For visitors interested in family history a special page will be devoted to genealogical resources on the web, while those seeking information about Westmount's architectural heritage will find a page devoted to the city's historic buildings.

We welcome contributions to the ongoing development of the WHA website, our 'virtual heritage centre'. Please contact us at [info@westmounthistorical.org](mailto:info@westmounthistorical.org), or by telephone at 925-1404.

### Thanks to Dr. Hélène Saly

The WHA wishes to thank Dr. Hélène Saly for her generous donation of over 40 books to our library, including the following:

Charles Benedict, *Westmount in Song*, Westmount: Westmount News Company, 1933.

Rev. J. Douglas Borthwick, *History and Biographical Gazetteer of Montreal to the Year 1892*, Montreal: John Lovell and Son, 1892.

W. D. Lighthall, *Montreal After Two Hundred and Fifty Years, 1642-1892*, Montreal: Witness Printing House, 1892; *A False Chevalier: The Lifeguard of Marie Antoinette*, London: Edward Arnold, 1898; *Old Measures: Collected Verse*, Montreal: A. T. Chapman, 1922.

George MacLean Rose, ed. *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*;

*Being Chiefly Men of the Time*, Toronto: Rose Publishing Company, 1888.

Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio*, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1985.

### Other books received

Sheila M. F. Johnston, *Buckskin and Broadcloth: A Celebration of E. Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake 1861-1913*, Toronto: Natural Heritage, 1977; Hereward Senior, *The Loyalists of Quebec, 1774-1825: A Forgotten History*, Montreal: Price-Patterson Ltd., 1989. Gift of Aline Gubbay

W. D. Lighthall, *Old Measures: Collected Verse*, Montreal: A. T. Chapman, 1922. Gift of John Johnston

Aline Gubbay and Sally Hooff, *Montreal's Little Mountain / La Petite Montagne: A Portrait of / un portrait de*

*Westmount*, Westmount: Trillium Books, 1979. Gift of Haagen Kierulf

Marie-Claude Lespérance, *L'Art public à Montréal*, Montreal: Les Éditions Logiques, 2000. Gift of Doreen Lindsay

Esther Trépanier, *Peintres Juifs et Modernité/Jewish Painters and Modernity, Montréal 1930-1945*. Montreal: Centre Saidye-Bronfman, 1987. Gift of Harry Mayerovitch

Jacques Pharand, *À la belle époque des Tramways*, Montreal: Les Éditions de L'Homme, 1997. Gift of Jacques Pharand

David Watson, *A Pictorial History of the Town of Montreal West, Quebec*, Montreal: The Old Montreal West Historical Society, 1997. Gift of David Watson

## RECENT ARCHIVE ACQUISITIONS

Postcard views of Westmount, including depictions of Victoria Jubilee Hall, the Floral Clock, the Westmount Public Library, and Westmount Park.

Gift of Philip Dombowsky

Correspondence, programmes, minutes of meetings, etc. relating to Arts Westmount, 1982-1992.

Gift of Nina Finkel

Westmount Directory and Year Book, 1957-58; booklet published on the occasion of the opening of Westmount High School, 19 October 1961.

Gift of Aline Gubbay

Papers and slides relating to Arts Westmount, 1982-1992.

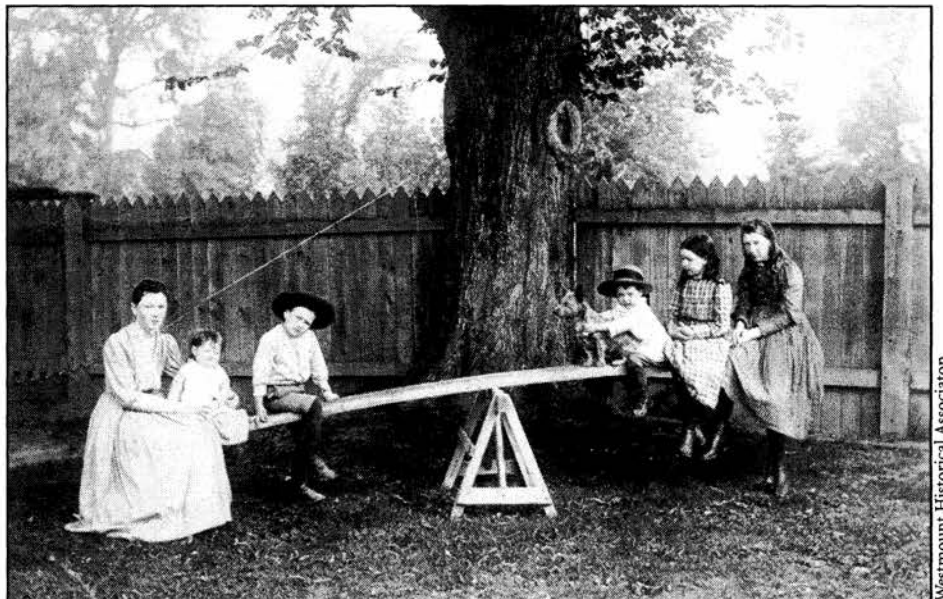
Gift of Doreen Lindsay

Model of the 'Robertson Gully', designed by George Archibald Robertson, Superintendent of Works, Town of Westmount, ca. 1898.

Gift of Caroline E. Robertson, John Grant Robertson, and Donald Martin Robertson (see article)

Pamphlet entitled 'Memorial Address by Rev. F. W. Kerr, D. D., in Memory of The Late King His Most Gracious Majesty George The Fifth, Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1936 in St. Andrew's Church, Westmount, Quebec'; City of Westmount Annual Report, 1958; Revisions of Westmount Residents' Handbook, January 1962; postcard showing the Westmount Bowling Green, ca. 1915.

Gift of David Watson (Montreal West Historical Society)



Westmount Historical Association