PAST-PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Reflections on my past 13 years as president of the Westmount Historical Association: When I became involved in 1995 with the rejuvenated historical association, led by Aline Gubbay, delving into the history and development of our city and the people who have lived here has preoccupied my mind, my writing hand, and my camera eye. There are so many layers of history here. Some of it has been uncovered, but there are always more treasures to find.

Since September 2004, I have edited 24 Westmount Historian newsletters. I feel that it is important to assemble and disseminate the historical information that comes to us from our lecture series speakers each year. These WHA newsletters provide you with thematic information about Westmount to enhance your understanding of the development of our city and make it more interesting.

Members of the 2016-17 WHA Board of Directors, with our newly elected president, Caroline Breslaw, will continue to organize lectures and walks, engage members, respond to requests and manage the affairs of the Association in new and exciting ways. I will continue to give talks, answer questions, take photos, and write my column for the Westmount Independent.

In this 38th issue you will find information about visual artists who are or have been Westmount residents. Since most are well known because of their extensive careers, we have concentrated on writing about their relationship to living in Westmount. Hollywood film actress Norma Shearer, stained glass maker Charles Kelsey, photographer Gabor Szilasi, and members of the Beaver Hall painting group: A.Y. Jackson, Charles Holgate, Mabel May, and Nora Collyer. Enjoy!

DOREEN LINDSAY

WHA Fall 2016 Lecture Series

Strolling the Streets of Westmount

Westmount’s streets have undergone many transformations over the years. This series focuses on three Westmount roads – Sherbrooke, Dorchester, and the closed portion of Summit Circle. Their history will be followed, and interesting developments will be highlighted.

Thursday, September 15, 2016
The Rise of Sherbrooke Street in Westmount
Speaker: Lorne Huston, Historian

Thursday, October 20, 2016
The Changing Face of Dorchester
Speakers: Theodora Samiotis, Ward 8 City Councillor, with Caroline Breslaw, WHA President.

Thursday, November 17, 2016
From Road to Path: the Greening of Summit Circle
Speakers: Cynthia Lulham, Westmount Councillor and Commissioner of Sustainability and Parks with Nicolas Mory, arborist for Westmount

Thursday, December 15, 2016
December Social: Honouring Doreen
Gallery at Victoria Hall
Westmount Public Library, 4574 Sherbrooke St. W., from 7 to 9 pm
Admission: free for members, $5 for non-members at the door

Info@ www.westmounthistorical.org
Series prepared by Caroline Breslaw, Louise Carpenter & Lorne Huston
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

This issue of The Westmount Historian marks a transition for the Westmount Historical Association. Doreen Lindsay, its editor, has also been the president of our organization for the past 13 years. During this time, she has expanded and enhanced our activities – the fall and spring lecture series, this thematically based newsletter, walking tours, photo exhibitions, and much more. She has represented the WHA at many levels, including with the City of Westmount, Canadian Heritage of Quebec (CHQ), and Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN). To all these activities, she has brought her artistic skills, as well as her knowledge of Westmount’s heritage. Doreen continues her invaluable work as editor of The Westmount Historian.

In May, I became the new president of the Westmount Historical Association. Doreen takes on a new role as past president. Doreen and I have served together on the Board for years and collaborated on many projects. I look forward to continuing this relationship and working with the new Board on our regular activities and on exciting new endeavours, such as representing the WHA on the recently formed Westmount Local Heritage Council.

The WHA Board was elected by acclamation on May 19 at the AGM. Jane Martin assists me as vice-president, while remaining as archivist. Cynthia Grahame is the newly-elected member-at-large. Continuing directors are Pina Santillo as treasurer, Anne Barkman as webmaster and membership, Louise Carpentier as secretary, and Lorne Huston as member-at-large. A heartfelt thank-you was extended to Doreen Lindsay, who greatly extended our association’s activities and prominence during her tenure.

The WHA website (www.westmounthistorical.org) will keep you informed about upcoming WHA events and Westmount’s important heritage. Caroline Breslaw

EVENTS IN 2016

MARION PHELPS AWARD presentation on June 4, 2016

Doreen Lindsay received the annual QAHN Marion Phelps Award for 2016 from Simon Jacobs, president of QAHN. The award “recognizes outstanding long-term contributions by an individual to the preservation and promotion of Anglophone heritage in Quebec.”

Photo by Gabor Szilasi

HOUSEWIFE HEROINES

l. to r. Marigold Hyde, Sarah Stevenson, Gwen Harris being interviewed by Doreen Lindsay on Friday, November 6, 2015 at Place Kensington in Westmount. They reminisced about their volunteer activities during World War II, for the Housewife Heroines project initiated by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) The article was published in the QAHN Spring 2016 Newsletter.

Photo by D. Lindsay

LOCAL HERITAGE COUNCIL

The City of Westmount recently formed a Local Heritage Council which is empowered, through Quebec’s Cultural Heritage Act (Bill 82), to identify and designate heritage sites within Westmount. The Westmount Historical Association has been named a permanent member of this important body and is represented by WHA President Caroline Breslaw. The council is composed of Julia Gersovitz (chair), Joanne Poirier (Director of Urban Planning), city councillor Theodora Samiotis (or her replacement, councillor Cynthia Lulham), architect Andrea Wolff, architect Eric Marosi, and Caroline Breslaw (WHA). Invited experts are asked to join for specific projects. Myriam St-Denis is the coordinator of the LHC for the City of Westmount.

The Westmount Historian – Fall 2016

WHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS for 2016-17

The WHA/AGM was held on May 19, 2016 in the Westmount Public Library and the Board of Directors for 2016-2017 was elected by acclamation. L.to R. Caroline Breslaw, Pina Santillo, Anne Barkman, Cynthia Grahame, Louise Carpentier, Jane Martin, Lorne Huston.

The Westmount Historian – Fall 2016

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Gabor Szilasi has been a familiar face in Westmount since settling here with his wife and fellow artist Doreen Lindsay in 1960. Their daughter Andrea was born while they lived in an apartment on Park Place, south of Westmount Park. In 1968 the Szilasis moved north of Sherbrooke to Grosvenor Avenue. Gabor decided to buy the 2-storey red brick house because it had a basement with high ceilings and a solid cement floor, excellent for constructing a photography darkroom. Today, Gabor continues to develop his negatives and make photographic enlargements on fibre-base paper.

Soon after settling on Grosvenor, Gabor began teaching photography at Cégep du Vieux Montréal (from 1970 to 1980) and then at Concordia University as associate professor from 1980 until his retirement in 1995. Beginning in 1970 with a Canada Council grant, he documented the Charlevoix area of Quebec by photographing people in their homes to show their way-of-life. He continued this documentation in La Beauce, Abitibi, Lac St. Jean and more recently in the Gaspé.

In 1993-94, Gabor photographed Westmount business owners for a local exhibition at the Visual Arts Centre. He likes to record people, places, and architecture as they exist in the present. He is influenced by the French photographer Cartier-Bresson, American Walker Evans, and fellow Hungarian André Kertész, as well as Italian neo-realism cinema.
Gabor always makes eye contact with his subjects and prefers photographing in black and white, which emphasizes structure, although he uses colour when the subject needs it. Group photographs, which mark special events and family histories, are important in his work, and each person he photographs always receives a print.

Gabor has had over 30 solo and 60 group shows. In 1990, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts commissioned him to record the four seasons of Monet’s gardens at Giverny, in France, as part of the “Monet at Giverny” exhibition. In 1997, the MMFA presented a retrospective of

Six books have been published on Gabor Szilasi’s work. Most may be found in the collection of Westmount Public Library:

• Je / I am (2005)
• Famille (2008)
• The Eloquence of the Everyday (2009)
• Liens familiaux/Family Ties (2011)

Gabor Szilasi Charlevoix 1970. Book published in 2012 by L’instant meme, Québec. Cover image is a landscape near Notre-Dame-des-Mont, Charlevoix, Québec. 144 black and white photographs taken by Szilasi in September and October 1970 in the Charlevoix region are reproduced from his original 160 negatives (4 x 5 inch).
“NUN AT AIRPORT” August 1959. This is the first photo taken by Gabor after he moved from Quebec City to live in Montreal. The photo combines both the religious and commercial elements of Quebec society.

Photo: Gabor Szilasi, 1959.

his work, which originated with the Musée d’art de Joliette and the National Gallery in Ottawa.

In 2009, Gabor was awarded Quebec’s highest honour in the visual arts, the Prix Paul-Emile Borduas. He was the recipient of the Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2010. His work is represented in Montreal by the Gallery Art 45.

Biographical information:

Quebec documentary photographer Gabor Szilasi was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1928. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, he bought his first camera, a Russian Zorkij, to record the reality of the people and places of Hungary at that time. Gabor immigrated with his father to Canada in 1957, eventually settling in Montreal where he worked as a photographer with the Office du film du Québec until 1971. While employed there, Gabor went on assignments to rural Quebec and photographed fashion shows in Montreal and events in the Quebec Pavilion during Expo 67. During his teaching years at Concordia University, he was also a visiting professor at the Fine Arts Academy in Krakow, Poland, and Stanford University in California.

Caroline Breslaw and Doreen Lindsay


Gabor Szilasi giving talk to WHA on 21 April 2016.
Many Montreal buildings are graced with stained-glass windows by Charles William Kelsey (1877-1975). This British artist was at the centre of a revival of stained glass in England at the end of the nineteenth century, inspired by the Gothic Revival in architecture and by a renewed interest in the crafted arts. Kelsey received his early art training in London in the Arts and Crafts tradition, and began his career with the prestigious London stained-glass firm of Clayton & Bell. In 1911, at age 34, he emigrated to the USA to work in the ecclesiastical department of the Gorham Manufacturing Company in Providence, R.I.

In 1922 Charles Kelsey moved to Montreal where, because of his British training, he received many commissions for ecclesiastical stained-glass windows. Kelsey worked in Montreal as an independent stained-glass artist, overseeing all stages of his work, carried out with the help of one or two assistants. Kelsey had studios in his homes. All but one were in Westmount: 19 Staynor Avenue (1924-1925), 418...

In Westmount, Kelsey’s work may be seen at St. Matthias Church, Westmount Park United Church (from Calvary United and Emmanuel Church), Mountainside Church, St. Stephen’s Church, Church of the Ascension, Serbian Orthodox (formerly Melville Presbyterian), and Church of the Advent.
Dorchester West (1929-1934), 4475 Western Avenue (1934-1936), 136 Clandeboye Avenue (1937-1948), and 257 Metcalfe Avenue (1948 until the end of his life). In these studios, he produced the design for each window in watercolour. This was followed by a full-sized cartoon in black and white, as a guide for the glazier who cut the glass. Then the cut glass pieces were affixed to a transparent plate glass. This “glass easel” was set up against the daylight, so that Kelsey could judge the colour and paint the shading and facial features directly on the glass in dark brown matt enamel. After the glass pieces were fired in an off-site kiln, to burn the painted pigment onto the glass, they were joined together by soldered lead lines.

Kelsey’s work is distinguished by his artistic rendering of large, expressive eyes and well-defined, thick hair of the figures and fine modelling of the painted drapery. Most of his commissions were for Protestant churches and war memorials, although he did produce windows for homes of prominent families, such as the Bronfmens. The first windows he created in Canada were for St. James United Church on St. Catherine Street and for St. Matthias Church in Westmount.


THE LAST SUPPER OF OUR LORD in east transept of Westmount Park United Church. A World War II congregational memorial window was commissioned by the church in January 1948. Text along bottom of figures is “My peace I give unto you that ye all may be one.” Photo: D. Lindsay, 2016.
his six-panel window depicting views of Montreal and the St. Lawrence from the Summit. The Kelsey archives, which contain over 400 drawings and many huge cartoons, can be found at the McCord Museum.

Caroline Breslaw with Rosalind Pepall
NORMA SHEARER: WESTMOUNT-BORN HOLLYWOOD STAR

Edith Norma Shearer became one of the biggest Hollywood movie stars of the 1920s and 1930s. Called “the first lady of the screen,” she was an internationally known star of silent and sound movies whose talents were featured in drama, comedy, and period roles.

Norma lived in Westmount as a child from 1902-1912. Her family home was located at 507 Grosvenor Avenue just north of Sherbrooke Street. She was born in August 1902, her sister Athole in 1900, and their brother Douglas in 1899. The young Norma had a carefree childhood, making many friends, enjoying many sports (riding, skiing, skating, and swimming), and generally growing up in style. She was partly home-schooled, loved music and studied the piano for many years. During her years at the High School of Montreal which she attended until 1918, she excelled at her studies, particularly in English and diction. Her father Andrew was a partner in the family’s sawmill business, but the comfortable home on Grosvenor, which still stands today, was later sold due to financial setbacks in 1912. Shortly thereafter, the family split up and moved to more modest accommodations.

In 1920, Norma accompanied her mother Edith and sister Athole to New York in search of fame. There she obtained small parts in silent films and did modelling work but with only modest success. In 1923 she moved to Hollywood with...
hopes of relaunching a career in film. Her work was noticed and she began her rise to movie stardom. In 1927, Norma married producer Irving Thalberg, the co-founder of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studios, and began acting for MGM. Norma Shearer’s transition from silent films to early sound pictures occurred in 1929 with a leading role in the powerful film, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*. In 1930 she starred in *The Divorcée*, winning an Academy Award for Best Actress. That achievement led to a series of prestige films that brought her lasting fame, including *Marie Antoinette*, and over the years she received five more Oscar nominations for best actress in a leading role. Among her strong assets, including her ladylike brunette beauty, was the clear, well-bred voice with her Canadian (Westmount) accent. Her brother Douglas also became successful and was honoured in Hollywood as an innovative sound and sound recording engineer winning 12 Academy Awards for MGM.

Norma had two children from her first marriage with Thalberg. After her husband’s premature death in 1935, she continued to win starring roles, culminating in the 1939 production of *The Women*, a ground-breaking film featuring an all-female cast. Norma then gradually retired from acting.

*Shearer received an Academy Award for Best Actress (for *The Divorcée* 1930) and five other Academy Award nominations: *Their Own Desire*, 1929 *A Free Soul*, 1931 *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, 1934. *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936 *Marie Antoinette*, 1938.*
making her final film appearance in 1942. She married Martin Arrouge, a ski instructor and real estate developer, and spent a 40-year marriage mostly away from Hollywood.

Over the years, Norma never forgot her connection with Westmount. In June 1941 she returned to promote the Victory Loan Drive to raise money for the World War II effort. She drew a crowd of 60,000 admirers in Westmount Park, and reminisced fondly about her childhood in the home on Grosvenor Avenue.

In 1980 Norma entered the Motion Picture Country House, a retirement hospital in California for retirees from the film industry. In 1981 she was inducted into the Motion Picture Hall of Fame. She died in June 1983 at the age of 80.

Norma received posthumous local recognition for her contribution to the early days of the film industry as she was named to the Second Westmount Honour Roll, a distinction awarded in April 1991. Also she was honoured with a postage stamp in June 2008 in Canada Post’s commemorative series Canadians in Hollywood.

Louise Carpentier

Based on information from WHA lecture of February 18, 2016 by Oksana Dykyj, a film historian and Head of the Moving Image Resource Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University.
The artists who formed the group adopted the name of the street where they rented studios at 305 Beaver Hall Hill in Montreal from 1920 to 1924. This loose association was formed through friendships between artists who shared their desire to paint in a “modern” way through the use of colour, draftsmanship, and composition. They organized four group exhibitions during the four years they were affiliated. The first opened on January 17, 1921. After giving up

The founding members were: Randolph Stanley Hewton, Edwin Holgate, Alexander Young Jackson, Mabel Lockerby, Mabel May, Lilias Torrance Newton, Anne Savage. A.Y. Jackson was made president of the group.

Other Beaver Hall Artists were: André Biéler, Nora Collyer, Emily Coonan, Adrien and Henri Hébert, Prudence Heward, John Y. Johnstone, Kathleen Morris, Hal Ross Perrigard, Robert Pilot, Sarah Robertson, Albert Robinson, Ethel Seath.


434 ELM AVENUE was the family home of Mabel May. Her father, who was the mayor of Verdun, bought the house in Westmount. Mabel May lived in the family home when she was young, then before and after returning from art studies in France. Photo: D. Lindsay 2016.
their rented space in 1924 because it was too expensive, many continued to maintain studios in their homes and meet together.

Most of the group’s artists had studied with William Brymner (1855-1925) influential director of art classes at the Art Association of Montreal (today the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).

**Strong links to Westmount**

Four members of the group lived here. Andrew Young (A.Y.) Jackson (1882-1974) lived with his family in the upper duplex at 69 Hallowell Ave. below Dorchester Avenue overlooking St. Henri from 1904 to 1922. André Biéler (1896-1989) lived a few streets away at 98 Columbia Avenue below Dorchester.

Mabel May (1877-1971) and Edwin Holgate (1892-1977) lived in Westmount in their youth. May lived at 434 Elm Ave. and Holgate grew up just two streets west at 44 Rosemount Avenue. Like Biéler, Holgate attended Westmount Academy on Côte St. Antoine Road (today Selwyn House School), graduating in 1910. He was invited to join the Group of Seven painters based in Toronto in 1929 as its eighth member. Later he and his wife Frances Rittenhouse lived in the Saxony Apartments at the corner of Sherbrooke and Clarke just two blocks from where he had grown up.

Nora Collyer (1898-1979) was the youngest member of the group. After her father’s death in 1946, she moved into a duplex on Elm Ave. in 1953 with her friend Margaret Reid. They sold it in 1967 because the upkeep was too expensive. She died just two years after her friend on Elm Ave. in 1971.

Others moved to Westmount in their later years. Hal Ross Perrigard (1891-1960) moved to 418 Claremont and Adrien Hébert (1890-1961) bought a house at 20 Springfield towards the end of his life.
The group members rarely painted scenes from life on the quiet slopes of Westmount. They tended to favour portraits or city themes from Montreal or the Quebec countryside. One exception is a painting of Stanley Presbyterian Church at the corner of Westmount and Victoria Avenues, painted by Albert H. Robertson in 1923. Today this building is the Westmount Seventh Day Adventist Church.

**Ethel Seath (1879-1963)** taught art at The Study, a Montreal private girls school that moved into Westmount in 1960. Although Seath did not live in Westmount, she was an inspiring art teacher who taught at the Study from 1917 until 1962.

**LORNE HUSTON AND DOREEN LINDSAY**

Information obtained during WHA Beaver Hall Group lecture by Elena Kruger on January 21, 2016.
NEW ACQUISITIONS


THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF ANNA SWAN by Anne Renaud. Cape Breton University Press, 2013. Donated by Anne Renaud


Imagery: The Westmount Experience, Nov. 23, 1994 (final issue). Donated by Allan Aitken

Small photos of four Montreal sites, ca. 1950. Donated by Suzanne Wibe.

Genealogical profile of Harris Vineberg and his family by Malca Friedman, 1988. Donated by??

Unpublished manuscript chapters relating to the Montreal years of former Hollywood actress Norma Shearer. Donated by Oksana Dykyj on behalf of Donald Feltham on the occasion of her lecture to the WHA on Feb. 18, 2016.

Several files of historical information about early Westmount mayor and prominent businessman James Kowley Ward and his family, researched and prepared by the late Gary Aitken, and used for his presentation to the WHA in October 2009. Donated by Valerie Aitken

Printed memorabilia: Westmount Academy Bulletin 1911, brochure of the 58th Regiment Westmount Rifles (Canadian Militia) ca. 1970, Ohman’s Jewellers paper calendar from 1964, and 3 small bookplates issued by the School Commissioners of Westmount. Donated by Mark W. Gallop

Newspaper The Westmount Experience, Nov. 23, 1994 (final issue). Donated by Allan Aitken

Printed memorabilia: Westmount Academy Bulletin 1911, brochure of the 58th Regiment Westmount Rifles (Canadian Militia) ca. 1970, Ohman’s Jewellers paper calendar from 1964, and 3 small bookplates issued by the School Commissioners of Westmount. Donated by Mark W. Gallop

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We sincerely thank all those who have donated original items to the archives, or published materials for our reference shelves. Jane Martin, WHA Archivist