The Westmount Historian

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

In this 30th issue of The Westmount Historian, we travel around the four sides of Westmount.

You will find information about an urban forest, an 18th century stone farmhouse, a railway stone arch, and a library combined with computer centre.

As our wonderfully warm days of summer are coming to a close, I invite you to think ahead to the days of autumn and invite you to exercise your walking legs.

To the north stands Summit Woods, land that was saved from development by William Macdonald, businessman and philanthropist who donated it to McGill University in 1895 for use by their Botany department. In 1940 the City of Westmount purchased 46 acres from McGill for $300,000.

The southern limits of Westmount have been defined by the Canadian Pacific Railway running along the escarpment since 1889. The Glen Arch was constructed in 1892 and the Glen Yards opened in 1906.

To the east, where Westmount meets Atwater Avenue, stands the Atwater Library. It has served the community as a library since 1920 when the Mechanics’ Institute of Montreal moved northwest from old Montreal to serve its clientele in the western end. Today it is also a computer centre.

West of the western limits of Westmount, on Côte Saint-Antoine Road, stands an 18th century farmhouse. The Décarie “pink house” has been there since the 1730s.

Enjoy walking around our city to explore its diversity.

Doreen Lindsay

WHA Fall 2012 Lecture Series

Along Côte Saint-Antoine Road

Thursday, September 20, 2012
ORIGINS of CÔTE SAINT-ANTOINE ROAD
Speaker: Doreen Lindsay, WHA president and researcher.

Thursday, October 18, 2012
FORDEN, THE CRESCENT and its ARCHITECTURE
Speaker: Bruce Anderson, Emeritus Professor of Architecture at McGill University.

Thursday, November 15, 2012
ST. MATTHIAS’ CHURCH – 100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY
Speaker: Rev. Kenneth M. Near, Rector of St. Matthias’ Church.

Thursday, December 13, 2012
FROM FARMHOUSE to NEW HOUSE
Speaker: Caroline Breslaw, WHA vice-president and researcher.

All talks take place in
Westmount Public Library 4574 Sherbrooke St. W. from 7 to 9 pm
Series prepared by Doreen Lindsay
Admission free for members – non-members $5 at door.

514-989-5510 or 514-932-6688
Crowning the City of Westmount is a 12-hectare nature reserve, wildflower and bird sanctuary. This urban forest was newly named Summit Woods on the first of November, 2010 at a City of Westmount council meeting.

The Westmount Summit is one of three hills that together form Mount Royal. Jacques Cartier named it in 1535 when he was taken there by native peoples during his second voyage to the island now known as Montreal. Our Summit is separated from the larger eastern summits by Côte-des-Neiges Road. Mount Royal is one of seven Monteregian hills, including Mont Saint-Hilaire and Mont Saint-Bruno, which can be seen from the Westmount Lookout. They were formed 125 million years ago when molten rock (magma) pushed up, but not through, the earth’s crust.

The 12-hectare piece of land that today comprises Summit Woods lay mostly undisturbed for many centuries. In 1895, Sir William Macdonald of tobacco fame saved the land from developers and presented it to the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning (McGill University) in 1895 for use by the department of botany.

(Sir William Macdonald (1831-1917) who saved the land from developers and presented it to the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning (McGill University) in 1895 for use by the department of botany. (Photo by Wm. Notman 1901, McCord Museum 11-137467.)

The land was used by McGill as the site of the McGill Survey School, which conducted activities here from 1906 to 1928. The university built a mess hall and several small shacks in which students could put out sleeping bags to camp overnight. A grass fire that occurred in 1925 damaged the site, and by 1929 there was no further use by
the school. The only remaining traces of the survey activities are four concrete blocks that were bases for meridian telescopes used to survey the stars. The blocks were sunk in bedrock and held the instruments used by students. Small shack originally surrounded each block.

In 1922, the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company erected a portable mast and small sectional hut about 10 feet by 16 feet on the property. The mast allowed CFCF, Canada’s first radio station, to broadcast all over Montreal.

Beginning in the 1930s, a toboggan slide on the property began at the top of the hill above Summit Circle and continued down through the Clarke property to Côte-Saint-Antoine Road. Skiers traversed the summit land, Scout leaders trained there, and the YMCA held rallies.

Westmount purchased summit land in 1940

On May 27, 1940, the City of Westmount purchased 46 acres of the summit land from McGill for the sum of $300,000, with the provision that the land remain “a park and a playground in perpetuity.” The land by that time had acquired a dual role: it provided recreation for local residents who skied and enjoyed a toboggan run during the winter months, and it was regarded as a bird and wildflower sanctuary.

Fifty pheasants were released on the mountain during the 1950s. They were provided with daily food and water, and a park ranger patrolled the forest during the summer months. Unfortunately, the pheasants are no longer there, but a variety of animals continues to live on the summit land. The most usual ones seen today are squirrels, raccoons, salamanders, garter snakes and foxes.

By 1990, the pathways and native plants had suffered considerable damage from the many walkers and other visitors over the years. Following citizens’ requests, the City contracted landscape architect Sandra Donaldson to carry out a three-year rehabilitation project to retain the property’s natural aspects and provide better-designed paths to help prevent erosion and other damaging effects.

Summit Park, as it was known until recently, is becoming better known as a nature reserve with many paths frequented by nature lovers, horticulturists, bird watchers, and people walking their dogs. Bylaws relating to park use have been enacted to help protect native plants and an array of migratory bird species. Interventions with the natural scene have been kept to a minimum.

In November 2011, again in response to citizens’ requests, Westmount officially changed the name of Summit Park to Summit Woods to reflect the true nature of an urban forest. At the same time, the Summit Woods Advisory Committee, with John Fretz as chairperson, was appointed to facilitate citizens’ involvement in its management. A permanent information board was installed on July 3, 2012, to educate visitors about interesting aspects of the newly named nature reserve.
Some of the wildflowers identified this spring by Westmounter Jane Atkinson, member of the Ecomuseum at St. Anne de Bellevue, include bloodroot, trillium, bellwort, trout lily, and false Solomon’s seal.

Some of the 27 birds seen or heard by Dr. Nicholas Acheson of McGill during one week in June 2011 include downy woodpecker, great crested flycatcher, red-eyed vireo, blue jay, American robin, bay-breasted green warbler, northern cardinal, and house sparrow.

DOREEN LINDSAY

Information from talk given to WHA by John Fretz, April 19, 2012 and from an article by Andy Dodge (Westmount Examiner, Sept. 20, 1973).
The Mechanics’ Institute of Montreal, predecessor of the Atwater Library, was founded on November 21, 1828 as an educational forum. It was to be a place for men in the trades to meet, learn and exchange ideas in the technical spheres and in the arts, and for their sons and apprentices to learn basic skills needed to work in the rapidly expanding city. It was hoped also that newly arrived young immigrants would join, because there was no other place for them to learn and to meet like-minded people (except in the pubs – and it was agreed that the pubs presented a formidable alternative).

Members of the mercantile and other elites were encouraged to support the endeavour, and so men such as John Molson, Horatio Gates, Louis-Joseph Papineau and François-Antoine LaRoque were on the early Committees of Management. It was in the constitution, though, that a certain portion of the committee had to be from the trades, and they would run the organization.

It had its ups and downs in the turbulent 1830s, moving from place to place in what is now Old Montreal, always searching for suitable accommodation for its lectures, schoolrooms, library and reading room. The organization was closed 1835-40. Later, MIM leaders took the plunge to assure permanent space suited to the needs of the organization. This first building on St. James Street (now St-Jacques), called the Mechanics Hall, was completed in 1855 during the presidency of builder and art collector Henry Bulmer. However, at the turn of the 20th century St. James Street was becoming the country’s financial centre, and the city’s resident population interested in the Mechanics’ Institute was moving westward. At the same time, it appeared that greater emphasis should be placed on the library aspects of the organization. The Mechanics Hall was

In 1962, the name Mechanics’ Institute was changed unofficially to Atwater Library. In the late 1990s it became known as the Atwater Library and Computer Centre. In 2005 the Atwater Library building was designated a National Historic Site.
Above: Tupper entrance with original doors.

“Knowledge is Power” the crest of the Mechanics’ Institute of Montreal

Far left and above: Medallions representing the Arts, Science and Industry adorn three sides of the exterior of the Atwater Library building at the corner of Atwater Avenue and Tupper.

Flame of Knowledge
Draftsmanship or Architecture
Steam Engineering or Steam Power
Glassmaking
Mechanical Crafts, Speed or the Automobile
Electrical Crafts or Power
Mechanical Crafts or Water Power
Nautical Crafts
Metal Crafts
sold in 1911, and eventually demolished in the 1920s to make way for construction of the (current) Royal Bank building.

New building open from January 1920

At the urgings of lumber merchant William Rutherford, a former mayor of Westmount and the Institute’s president 1913-20, the decision was taken to relocate to Atwater Avenue in Westmount. Architects of the new building were Hutchison, Wood & Miller. The purpose-built library opened January 30, 1920 with William Rutherford officiating at the ceremony, and Westmount represented by alderman Stewart F. Rutherford.

Descendants of early MIM members

Among those in the 2012 audience was WHA director Joan Clark, who is descended from the Rutherford and Bulmer families. The first William Rutherford was president of the Mechanics’ Institute in 1889. His son, also William Rutherford, married Ida Bulmer, niece of Henry Bulmer who had been president 1851-1855. Members of the extended Rutherford family who have been president of the Atwater Library in recent years are Andrea Rutherford Burgess and Mary Leslie-Aitken among a remarkable five members of the same extended family who have served as president. Other RutHERfords have served on the Board, including, most recently, Andrea’s daughter Lynn.

Also in the WHA audience was Dr. Laurence Hutchison, an Atwater Library life member who has authored a book about his extended family. Among those active in the Mechanics’ Institute was Alexander Cowper Hutchison, a prominent architect who was trained at the Mechanics’ Institute. He later became an MIM architectural drawing teacher and Board member and mayor of Westmount, 1884-86. His brother John Henry Hutchison, a prominent builder who trained at the Mechanics’ Institute and later was the Board member heading the construction committee for the Atwater building, was a Westmount alderman. Their uncle Matthew Hutchison, an associate of the Ogilvie family milling business, was an MIM life member and mayor of Westmount 1891-93.

Another WHA participant, Mark Gallop, who grew up in Westmount, is treasurer and past president of the Atwater Library. He is a descendant of Thomas Castle, stained glass window maker, who was a member of the Mechanics’ Institute in the 1870s.

Among those in the audience was Westmount-born Barbara Fellowes, a descendant of Stanley Clark Bagg. A newly minted notary in the early 1840s, Bagg served as MIM secretary when the elected secretary, printer and publisher John Lovell went on vacation to England. S. C. Bagg later was involved in many philanthropic organizations and became an active supporter of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society.

Susan McGuire

Susan McGuire, Westmount resident and historian at the Atwater Library and Computer Centre, spoke to WHA members on March 15, 2012 about some of the early leaders of the Mechanics’ Institute whose families have strong ties to Westmount.
Walking Tour of Côte Saint-Antoine Road on Sunday October 14, 2012

We invite you to join the tour guides who will tell you about the original French habitants who were granted concessions of land along Côte Saint-Antoine in the early 1700s. As you walk along the Côte road you will also learn about some of the houses built on the original farms and how development took place.

“Along the path of Westmount’s original farms”

This walking tour is part of the 2012 Montreal Architectural Heritage Campaign Opération patrimoine architectural de Montréal 2012

Caroline Breslaw and Doreen Lindsay have researched and photographed the Côte Road and are working with the Urban Planning Department of the City of Westmount to organize the day.

The tour is free and everyone is invited. No reservations needed. Meet at the Hurtubise House, the oldest house in Westmount, 563 Côte Saint-Antoine. Tours are between 1:00 and 4:00 pm every 20 minutes in either French or English.

Westmount was designated a National Historic Site in 2012

On January 17, 2012, most of the area of the City of Westmount was officially designated a national historic site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, a division of Parks Canada. This designation was based on the diversity and integrity of our Victorian and post-Victorian architecture and on good urban planning. Two University of Montreal urban planning students, (Daniel Paquin and Jean-Francois van der Plancqe), first made the nomination in 2000. Karin Marks, who was Mayor at the time made an official request in 2003 and sent a letter in 2008.
The Décarie “Pink House” constructed between 1731 & 1742

The Décarie house at 5138 Côte Saint-Antoine Road, located in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, not far from Westmount’s western boundary, is among the oldest homes still standing on this historic road – the most important transportation route in the locale’s early history.

In 1698, the land where the house would be built was ceded to Michel Décarie (1656-1716) and Louis Décarie (1660-1730). It was then inherited by Michel’s eldest son François (1693-1760), who built the house between 1731 and 1742. These dates are based on the aveu et dénombrement of 1731 that recorded a wooden building on the land and a donation of property document signed on April 15, 1742 between François and his younger brother Joachim. In it, the dwelling is described as “une maison de pierre couvert de planches et cheminée de pierre.”

It was a small house, only 29 feet square (French measure) and was built with local fieldstone. (Today the house is almost twice as large as the original stone building.) Between 1870 and 1874, Félix Décarie extended the house on the east side after he inherited it from his father Joseph Décarie (1814-1890). It was Joseph who also required Félix to cover the house with brick. There exists a contract of sale from 1834 to Gervais Décarie that describes the building as “falling into ruin”, that might have been the reason for cladding in brick. Also, Joseph operated a brickyard in the Glen.

Michel Décarie House, one of the earliest 18th century houses built on Côte Saint-Antoine Road. It was built using local fieldstones between 1731 and 1742, then was covered with brick between 1870 and 1874 by Félix Décarie. Today it is the Claxton residence at 5138 Côte Saint-Antoine Road.

大姐 Patricia Claxton, present owner, in the study of the 1870 addition to the east side of the original house.
Back of house facing the garden showing kitchen and porch additions by Brooke Claxton after he purchased the property in 1925. It was also Claxton who later had the bricks painted pink.

Southwest corner of Décarie house showing brick cladding added between 1870-74, and the original fieldstone construction exposed under the porch roof.

"Que maintenant la maison, batimens et clotures sur la dite terre seroient dans un état menaçant ruine par conséquent demanderoient de grosses indispensables & urgentes reparations."

Côte-Saint-Antoine at that time was a small settlement; the census of 1825 lists only 145 inhabitants. In the 1870s, other houses in the area were constructed with brick. The Joseph Décarie house on adjacent Vendôme Avenue, virtually opposite the “pink house” on Côte-Saint-Antoine, was built using brick on the sides and rear. The Hurtubise family, living at 563 Côte Saint-Antoine Road, added a brick annex to their fieldstone farmhouse.

Jean Décarie, the patriarch of the family, was a stonemason by trade, and his family owned several stone quarries, as well as a brickyard in the Glen. After Côte Saint-Antoine became the Town of Westmount in 1895, a large incinerator was built on the site of the brickworks’ kilns. Many years later, in 2003, the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) received provincial approval to build on the site of the Glen brickyards. The MUHC bought the 43 acres of land from the Canadian Pacific Railway, who had operated the Glen Yards in that location for nearly a century – from 1906 to 2004.

The largest quarry owned by the Décarie family was located at the top of what is now Stanton Street, above the Westmount fire and police stations. Pierre Décarie and his father Paul had purchased the land in 1913 and developed it as a large stone quarry. A smaller Décarie quarry was located to the west of Westmount on property near present-day Villa Maria School.

The Décarie families were also very successful farmers, and were particularly renowned for their muskmelons, also called Montreal melons. There are many descriptions of the good soil and sunny hillside exposure that provided

Décarie Stone Quarries shown above Côte Saint-Antoine Road.
(H.S. Sitwell Fortification Survey 1871)
The Décarie family was famous for growing muskmelons (sometimes called mushmelon or Montreal melons) in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Photo made in 1893 by Westmount photographer Robert Harvie shows fields well irrigated by water from mountain springs.

ideal growing conditions. The melons became a popular delicacy, appearing on fine hotel menus throughout the northeast, including New York City.

20th century renovations

In 1925, the Hon. Brooke Claxton, a distinguished federal cabinet minister in the 1940s, purchased the property at 5138 Côte-saint-Antoine Road for his family. He renovated the kitchen and added a porch, and sometime before 1942, had the brick façade painted pink. It has been called the “pink house” ever since. His son, John Brooke Claxton, who obtained the property in 1960, added a rear extension and dormer windows front and back in 1963. The current owner Patricia Claxton installed a new copper roof in 1988.

Doreen Lindsay

Information for this article was obtained from Janet MacKinnon’s thesis, “The Settlement and Rural Domestic Architecture of Côte Saint-Antoine, 1675-1874 (Université de Montréal, Faculté de l’aménagement, 2004), and from a talk given by Patricia Claxton to the WHA on May 17, 2012.

Brickfields operated by the Décarie family in the Glen.
The Village is Saint-Henri-des-Tanneries.
(H.S. Sitwell Fortification Survey, 1871, National Archives of Canada NMC 004083)
“Glen” is a Gaelic word that refers to a narrow, secluded mountain-valley following the path of a stream. To understand the origins of the Glen site in Westmount, we need to realize that for many hundreds of years, the seasonal run-off from melting snow, combined with water from springs originating on the hillside, formed streams that ran through what is today Westmount Park, gradually cutting a ravine through the escarpment that forms the southern boundary of Westmount.

The early Scottish settlers who built homes here during the 1800s referred to this cut through the escarpment as the Glen. They admired its beauty (see photo) and had to walk along a footpath beside the stream when they wanted to access the Grand Trunk Railway station in the Town of St. Henri below the escarpment. As the population increased and train travel became more sought after, the Canadian Pacific Railway constructed a rail line to connect Montreal West through Westmount to their new Windsor Street Station in central Montreal.

The Glen stone arch was constructed in 1892 by the Town of Côte Saint-Antoine (Westmount today) using Trenton limestone from Pointe-Claire to replace a wooden trestle. After many negotiations between the Town council of Côte Saint-Antoine and CPR during 1890 and 1892, the railway allowed Côte Saint-Antoine to put the stream underground and construct a paved roadway linking Westmount to St. Henri. In his 2003 report to WHA, engineer David Hammonds explained the agreement:

“Côte Saint-Antoine would build the arch and sewers and assume all related costs and upon completion would give it to CPR which would own the arch and in return CPR would “maintain the arch forever” and in return would grant Côte Saint-Antoine the right of way for the drainage system and road the maintenance of which would be for Côte Saint-Antoine’s account.”

Completed in one year, the Glen Arch was Westmount’s first public work paid for by the Town. It was supervised by Mr. Massy, the town engineer. It continues to be owned and
maintained by CPR.

**Glen Yard was opened in 1906 to provide servicing for passenger cars.**

In 1903, Sir Thomas Shaughnessy, president of CPR, announced that the railway would expand by constructing a new yard with car servicing facilities and a locomotive turntable on land that it had acquired between the City and Montreal West. Of interest is the huge amount of landfill that CPR needed to create the artificial plateau. Michael Leduc in his book THE GLEN writes that it was

“... mostly dry landfill used to build up the property that consisted of gravel, sand, coal, clay, ashes, demolition debris and foundry slag ... The depth of the fill ranged from 2 meters up to 15 meters in the area of the ravine.”

This landfill has been removed for the construction of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) being built on the site of the Glen Yards. Government support for the MUHC project was given in 2003, and in October 2004 the Glen Yards closed after providing service for 98 years.

**Doreen Lindsay**

Woman in Glen posing in front of the original wooden trestle bridge. Photo is from the James Kewley Ward family album in the WHA Archives. The woman may have been Lily Reekie Ward, the first wife of Kewley Ward’s son J.J.C. Ward. Photographer unknown.

Original wooden trestle was constructed in the Glen in 1889. Photo is from the original glass plate negative exposed by Westmount photographer Robert Harvie.
New Acquisitions

BOOKS


The Last Forty Years: Canada since the Union of 1841 (published ca. 1881).


Put Up and Shut Up! The 90’s so far in cartoons, by AISLIN and Hubie Bauch, 1994. Donated by D. Lindsay.

A Retrospect: Miss Edgar’s and Miss Cramp’s School 1909-1984. Donated by D. Lindsay.


ART CATALOGUES


EPHEMERA: two note cards with pen sketches of Greene Avenue. Donated by the artist Joan Edward.


PHOTO: former WHA vice-president Patricia Harris. Donated by Flora-Lee Wagner.

Jane Martin, WHA Archivist