SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES
SEARCHING FOR AN EDITOR

The Westmount Historian is currently without an editor, and two of us, our president Caroline Breslaw and archivist Jane Martin, are acting as interim editors while searching for a replacement. The Westmount Historical Association is operated by a group of dedicated volunteers, who spend many hours actualising the lecture series, doing archival work, updating the website, and carrying out our other activities. The newsletter needs a volunteer editor with a commitment to Westmount’s heritage, excellent communication skills and facility in written English, and a strong visual sense. If you are interested, or know someone who could be a good fit, please let us know at www.westmounthistorical.org

WHA 2018 Winter Lecture Series

Shaping the Future: Westmount & Beyond

This series examines Westmount’s longstanding mission to preserve its unique character. It looks at issues such as zoning regulations, heritage conservation, church conversion and power sharing with the City of Montreal.

Thursday, January 18, 2018
Zoning Pioneers: Westmount & Manhattan
Speaker: Raphael Fischler, Assoc. Prof. Urban Planning, McGill University

Thursday, February 15, 2018
Repurposing Churches: Westmount & Montreal
Speaker: David Hanna, Assoc. Prof. Urban Studies, UQAM; member of Westmount Local Heritage Council

Thursday, March 15, 2018
Protecting Our Heritage: Setting Up Westmount’s System
Speaker: Mark London, PAC chair 1987-93 & 1998-2001; past Executive Director, Martha’s Vineyard Commission

Thursday, April 19, 2018
In the Dark Shadow of Montreal: Westmount and the Metropolitan Challenge (1880-1939)
Speaker: Harold Bérubé, Prof. Univ. de Sherbrooke; author: Des sociétés distinctes: Gouverner les banlieues bourgeois de Montréal, 1880-1939

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/514-989-5510

Series prepared by Caroline Breslaw, Louise Carpentier & Lorne Huston
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

This edition of The Westmount Historian concludes one of the busiest periods the Westmount Historical Association has experienced. In the summer of 2017, we embarked on the lengthy process of digitizing our photo archives, ensuring the conservation of our images and better access to them. This could not have happened without a grant from the City of Westmount and donations made to the Aline Gubbay Photo Fund. Jane Martin, the WHA archivist, provides more details further on in this issue. At our December Social, we celebrated this major achievement at the Gallery at Victoria Hall.

I continue to serve on the Local Heritage Council of the City as representative of the WHA. The LHC is currently studying all the places of worship in our municipality. Thus far, we have visited and discussed Mountainside, St. Stephen’s, Westmount Park, and St. Matthias churches. Their histories, architecture and stained-glass all have heritage significance.

The WHA website has been regularly updated to keep you informed about upcoming events. Past issues of The Westmount Historian are available in pdf format, with an index to help in searches. The Westmount: Then & Now articles, which appear in our greatly-appreciated local newspaper, The Westmount Independent, are included on our website’s Local History page. The ‘Indie’ has covered many of our lectures. Photographer Ralph Thompson has generously allowed us to use several of his images. WHA member Patrick Martin has kindly taken specific images for our articles.

The fall 2017 lecture series focused on special anniversaries. The 50 years of Westmount Square, 125 years of the Montreal Camera Club, and 360 years of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame are all covered in this issue. Three members of the MCC (Diana Bruno, Ann Pearson, and Michelle Echenberg) have taken photos of these evenings for the WHA. The MCC held an exhibition called ‘Westmount in Images’ in the Gallery at Victoria Hall the same month as Ann Pearson’s talk.

The upcoming Winter 2018 lecture series ‘Shaping the Future: Westmount & Beyond’ will provide an in-depth look at some urban topics that continue to resonate. Westmount of the past and present will be seen in the context of other municipalities. This promises to be an important and stimulating series.

CAROLINE BRESLAW
The modernist towers of Westmount Square, an ensemble of the tallest buildings in Westmount, are located in the southeast sector of the City close to the border with Montreal. Westmount Square occupies most of one city block, bounded by de Maisonneuve Boulevard and St. Catherine Street to the north and south, and by Wood and Greene avenues to the east and west. The complex comprises one commercial and two tall residential towers, constructed of black anodized aluminum and featuring walls of windows and black vertical columns.

The story of the complex’s construction began in 1959 when the City of Westmount commissioned a study by the architectural firm of Bland, LeMoyne and Edwards regarding the re-development of its territory, particularly in the southeast sector. At that time this area of Westmount was occupied primarily by residences and shops built during the Victorian era. Towards the end of 1962, developer Irving R. Ransen met City officials with a proposal for the construction of a multifunctional, high-rise complex to be opened in time for Expo 67 on property he had acquired in the sector.

In December 1963 Westmount passed a zoning bylaw increasing the height limit for the site from six to 20 storeys or more. Despite local citizen opposition to this decision and legal delays, an amended zoning bylaw was passed in December 1964, allowing for higher density in the area. The initial architectural firm withdrew from the project and world-renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe became involved.

The completed Westmount Square, which was inaugurated in December 1967, was linked by underground passageways to the Atwater terminus of Montreal’s newly-built Metro system. It was considered a modern and sophisticated addition to the urban landscape. The three rectangular residential and commercial towers were interconnected by an indoor mall below street level. The complex offered a new life style where one could reside, swim, go to the cinema, and frequent luxury shops. Ample indoor parking for the complex was also provided. A sunlit pedestrian plaza surrounding the towers was a further distinguishing element of van der Rohe’s architectural vision.

In 1988 a renovation of the underground shopping concourse generated a public controversy regarding changes to the project’s architecture, which many felt merited heritage protection. (The complex has since been classified as Category 1*, the highest heritage designation by Westmount.) During the renovation skylights were installed in the shopping concourse and the travertine surface covering the outdoor plaza was replaced by granite pavers that could better withstand Montreal winters. The travertine inside the ground-floor lobbies of the buildings was retained and can still be seen through the exterior glass walls.

The Westmount Square of today continues to consolidate the commercial and residential character of Westmount as a multi-use complex of residential, office and commercial activity. This year Westmount Square celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Information from lecture on Westmount Square and its architect, Mies van der Rohe, by Professor Francine Vanlaethem on September 21, 2017.
The International Style

Caroline Breslaw

The International Style (or International Modern Style) is an architectural movement which began around the First World War in Europe and spread to North America as the Second World War approached. It is characterized by severe lines and smooth, flat, undecorated surfaces. Mass-produced industrial building materials, such as steel, reinforced concrete, and large plates of glass, are used extensively. The style is best known through the works of such architectural giants as Walter Gropius with the Bauhaus in Germany, Le Corbusier in France, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Germany and the United States. Architects and designers of this period created furniture that was appropriate to this new built environment, using smooth materials such as steel and leather with little decoration. Mies’ MR side chair, his Barcelona chair and couch and Le Corbusier’s chaise longue remain icons of 20th century furniture design.
The Westmount Square complex was designed by Mies van der Rohe and completed in 1967; however its design reflected a brilliant idea of Mies from decades earlier.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, born in Germany in 1886, broke new ground with his architectural designs. He started out as a draftsman before serving in the German army during World War I. He then became a well-known architect in Germany, creating such structures as the German Pavilion for the 1929 Barcelona Exposition. In the late 1930s, Mies emigrated to the United States. There he created such well-known Modernist works as the Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago, Westmount Square in Montreal, and the Seagram Building in New York City. He died in 1969.

Although it was never built, Mies’ design for the Friedrichstrasse Office Building remains one of the most important structures in 20th century architecture. The challenge of the competition was to build a high-rise office building for the main street of Berlin, the German capital. Mies ignored several rules dictated in the guidelines and presented a radical concept to the committee: a skyscraper made entirely of glass and steel.

His project gave free form to the tall building, a style known in North America, but a departure from the classical tripartite concept of architecture of Europe. He used new materials and an internal skeleton structure within the building which was then wrapped by a curtain of glass. This design was very innovative and highly practical. It meant the floors now became open spaces bathed in natural light. The design received an official mention. Decades later, this style has come to dominate corporate architecture and became the prototype for Westmount Square.

However, Mies could not put his ideas into practice until he moved to Chicago, where he was hired as the director of the School of Architecture of the Armour Institute of Technology. Mies designed an Esso gas station on Nun’s Island, which has since become a Verdun community centre.

The German Pavilion, designed by Mies van der Rohe for the 1929 Barcelona Exhibition, remains a symbol of Modernist architecture.  
Photo: Hans Peter, 2002, Wikimedia

Mies designed an Esso gas station on Nun’s Island, which has since become a Verdun community centre.

Photo: Steve Montpetit, WikiArquitectura

Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space –
Mies van der Rohe
Technology, later known as the Illinois Institute of Technology. Thirty years later in 1951, the design principles first expressed in the Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper competition in Berlin were used in the design and construction of the Lake Shore Drive Apartments. This design, copied extensively from his original plan, is now considered characteristic of the modern International Style, as well as essential for the development of modern high-tech architecture.

The materials were common: steel, aluminum, glass. Yet these buildings are renowned for their structural clarity and composition. Using steel straight from the mill, Mies built with the eye and intent of an artist, striking the perfect balance between rational structure and irrational spirit. The vertical windows and columns emphasize height. He relied not on applied ornamentation, but rather on clarity of form achieved through elegant proportions. At the pedestrian level, the open plan creates a flow of natural green space amid the plaza, unprecedented at that time in a city.

His design for the Lake Shore Drive Apartments became important in the evolution of architecture as it set the standard for tall building design, as seen later, with Mies’ Seagram building and Westmount Square.
Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700) founded the teaching order of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame (CND) in 1659. She had arrived in New France in 1653 to teach French and native girls in the settlement of Ville Marie and in missions outside its walls. Although non-cloistered, she dedicated herself to a life of chastity and poverty. The sisters of her order prepared girls for family life and the Church, and taught them social skills. Marguerite Bourgeoys died in 1700. In 1982 she was declared a saint by the Catholic Church.

The Mother House on Sherbrooke St. West was purchased from the CND in 1982 to serve as the new home of Dawson College.

A group of nuns from the CND gathered on the grounds of the mother house in Old Montreal (date unknown).

Photo: CND Archives

The second Westmount building for St. Paul’s Academy, established by the CND and now occupied by the École Internationale

CAROLINE BRESLAW
Over the centuries, the Congrégation has had seven Montreal mother houses. Three of the mother houses have been in Westmount, where the order has played an important role in educating Catholic girls in a number of different institutions. After 1837, the CND began teaching in English as well as French. It acquired the Monklands estate in 1854 and renamed it Villa Maria. The property, straddling the western border of Westmount/NDG, became a boarding and day school for girls that has survived under various forms up to the present.

The fifth Mother House, a large structure built on the Villa Maria grounds in 1880, burned down in 1893. St. Paul’s Academy, the Catholic girls’ school operated by the CND, was opened at 4193 Sherbrooke St. West in 1898, but a few years later moved to Cote St. Antoine Road in Westmount. It remained at that location, offering both English and French education up through high school, until ceasing operation in recent decades. The premises, which underwent several architectural modifications over the years, have been occupied by the École Internationale since 1988.

The sixth Mother House, designed by architects J. Omer Marchand and Samuel Stevens Haskell, opened in 1908 on land purchased from the Sulpicians at Atwater Avenue and Sherbrooke Street. The yellow brick and buff limestone building had a copper dome above the chapel, topped by a statue of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde. Designed to be self-sufficient, it held a hospital wing, bakery, kitchen, print shop, photography studio, meeting rooms, educational areas, laundry rooms, and small rooms for each nun. The huge structure was also occupied by other schools run by the CND, including the bilingual Notre-Dame Ladies’ College/École de l’enseignement supérieure Notre-Dame (the first independent college for girls in Quebec), as well as by Notre-Dame Secretarial College.

In 1926, Marchand designed a second building for the order on the grounds of Villa Maria, the Institut Pédagogique de Montréal. Notre-Dame Ladies’ College moved to the new premises and changed its name to Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys. This building at the eastern end of Westmount Avenue housed the seventh mother house from 1985-2005. Since 2007, Marianopolis College has leased the property from the CND. The mother house on Sherbrooke Street was classified as a heritage site in 1977 by the Ministère des affaires culturelles du Québec. In 2005, the Congrégation moved its mother house to the east side of Atwater, the location of Notre-Dame Secretarial College since 1972. Dawson College, under its director general Sarah Paltiel, purchased the original Atwater Avenue property for conversion into Dawson College CEGEP in 1982. This former CND mother house remains a landmark of learning, a legacy of Marguerite Bourgeois and her teaching order.

More information about the CND appeared in the February 2009 issue of our newsletter, which can be found on our website at www.wha.org.

Based in part on the talk given by Prof. Gary Evans to the WHA on Oct. 19, 2017.

The Institut Pédagogique, located on Westmount Avenue at the top of Claremont Avenue, now houses Marianopolis College.
Camera enthusiasts have been active in Montreal since the 1850s, most notably our first widely acclaimed professional photographer, William Notman (1826-1891). From the outset, photography was associated with the Fine Arts. Notman, and Alexander Henderson, another early Montreal professional, were founding members of the Art Association of Montreal, which later led to the establishment of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. They were also the impetus for a group called the Montreal Amateur Photographic Club (1886-1889), later incorporated as the Montreal Camera Club in 1892 — thus justifying celebration of its 125th Anniversary in 2017. For the past 47 years, the club has been meeting in Westmount.

Foundations of the modern MCC

For a time the Montreal Camera Club lost its separate identity, when at the end of 1905 it merged with the Montreal Amateur Athletic Associations’s camera club. That lasted until 1927, when it disbanded for lack of interest. A core of its enthusiastic photographers continued under the name of the Photographic Circle of Montreal until 1932. A newly reconstituted Montreal Camera Club emerged in that same year with 29 members to grow into the club as we know it today.

The club soon began organizing regular exhibitions of its members’ works, a practice which has continued to this day. From 1933 until 1969, the MCC held important international exhibitions, mainly at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In 1967, two club members, Yseult Mounsey and Barbara Deans, (who still remains an active member) were involved in organizing the international exhibition of

A 1970s image from the MCC collection called “Abstract Geometry” reflects the wide range of members’ photography styles.

Photo: Harold Green

“Stage Girl”, a glamorous photograph from the 1950s, from the MCC collection

Photo: Yseult Mounsey

William Notman, patriarch of the Montreal family of photographers, and a founding member of the early Montreal Camera Club.

Photo: McCord Museum #1105
women photographers at Expo 67.

In 1970 the MCC moved to Westmount, holding its meetings in the auditorium on the top floor of the Atwater Library. In 1985, it moved to Westmount Park United Church hall where it still meets today.

**THE MCC Today**

The current version of the MCC continues with regular Monday night meetings where members attend lectures or listen to critiques of work in competition. In celebrating its 125th anniversary, the MCC has been particularly active. Two major exhibitions were held, at the McClure Gallery on Victoria Ave in June, and more recently at the Gallery of Victoria Hall in November.

Many members of the club volunteer time to photograph events and people for charitable causes: including the Brewery Mission, Hôpital Ste-Justine pour enfants, The Cummings Centre, and the YMCA in Saint-Henri.

With over 150 current members, all indications point to a vibrant future ahead.
A major project that will help ensure long-term conservation and accessibility of our archival photo collection (known as the Aline Gubbay Collection) has come a long way since its launch last April. To date, some 1,100 images, or roughly 80 per cent of the current collection, has been systematically “digitized”, i.e., scanned and entered into a specialized database. A sampling of the original photos that have undergone digitization are seen below and on the following page. It is the first time most of these fascinating images have appeared in our newsletter.

Our new photographic database is intended for in-house use by our archives volunteers and will greatly facilitate research and reproduction of images. Each photo is scanned in two formats and then entered into the database along with a range of “metadata” (key words and other information, such as subject, date taken, etc.). Searching the database using key words from a growing list will bring the relevant photos up on screen. The database can be added to indefinitely and will gradually be expanded to include images from our archival fonds, scrapbooks, slides, etc. The project also lends itself to potential future information sharing with other heritage networks.

Initialized by WHA archivist Jane Martin and Board member Anne Barkman, the project was developed with the invaluable, volunteer assistance of Westmount resident Morgannis Graham, a professional archivist who is currently pursuing her PhD at McGill in digital archives. Sonia Dhalival, a recent McGill master’s graduate in Information Studies, has worked many hours on a part-time basis to set up the database, do the work of scanning photos and inputting data, and provide ongoing technical support and training. Sonia’s meticulous efforts have provided the foundation for volunteer involvement in months to come, and she continues to be involved with the project.

The ambitious task of photographic digitization as described here could not have been undertaken without financial support from the City of Westmount and from the Aline Gubbay Memorial Fund, for which we are immensely grateful.
Looking south, ca. 1890

Maple syrup for the Queen ca. 1960

Scotch cart 1934

King’s School (demolished 1964)

First Nations lacrosse ca. 1876

Heather Curling Club ca. 1950s

Westward view above The Boulevard ca. 1915
In Edgar Allan Poe’s classic horror tale *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the author evokes fear in his description of the razor sharp pendulum swinging back and forth and slowly descending, each stroke getting closer and closer to a helpless, bound victim. Poe’s pendulum is no mantle clock variety. It has weight and body... a pendulum with gravitas.

Westmount also has such a pendulum, as part of a clock in the tower of City Hall, which was designed by Robert Findlay in 1922. While lacking the razor sharpness of Poe’s variety, it still is substantial, as is the clock to which it belongs.

Our municipal clock, ordered from Gillett and Johnston of Croydon, England, was delivered and installed by Birks Jewellers in 1923, for a total price of between $1,200 and $1,300. That’s about $17,500 in today’s prices.

The inscription on the clock reads: 9228, Gillett & Johnston, Croydon, Clockmakers and Bellfounders to H.M. King George V.

For the last 17 years, City employee Patrick Reilly has climbed the tower’s spiral staircase on Tuesdays and Fridays and wound the clock using a winch mechanism, thus carrying on a tradition that now spans 94 years.
Ruth Allan-Rigby

Last fall, the Westmount Historical Association launched its oral history project with a lecture series. Since then, Board member Ruth Allan-Rigby has spoken with lifelong Westmount resident Miriam Tees, making digital recordings of these conversations. The Miriam Tees interviews are now conserved in our archives.

Miriam Tees’ ancestors were British. Her paternal family members were business people in Montreal. Her father, Dr. Frederick Tees, became a surgeon with a medical clinic in their home on Crescent Street. She has early memories of the large, happy home with her parents, brother, a cousin, nanny, and help. She walked over to the McGill grounds to play.

In 1927, Miriam’s father built a house at 33 Forden Avenue, near the Raynes family house ‘Forden’ and Murray Park (King George Park). The Tees’ large garden became a playground for the children, who led a free childhood, wandering the surrounding area, skiing, skating, and playing tennis. Dr. Tees drove seven local children to the Study and to Selwyn House on Redpath, on his way to his office in the Medical Arts building at Sherbooke and Guy. Beginning when Miriam was eight, summers and weekends were spent at the family cottage on Lac des Îles in the Laurentians.

Miriam graduated from The Study and attended McGill, a place changed by the war. Life was serious, with few social events, but plenty of knitting of bobby socks and sloppy joe sweaters. In 1944, Miriam graduated with a B.A. in Economics and Spanish and visited Mexico to practise the language. Over the next six years, she held positions at the Industrial Development Bank and the Allan Memorial Institute Hospital. Then she lived for 18 months in London. Inspired by visiting libraries there, she decided to become a professional librarian. She trained at McGill and eventually became head librarian at the Royal Bank of Canada, where she had a 27-year career. She was interested in the role of special librarians, wrote articles, and became an officer of local and international organizations. These involvements allowed her to travel the world and enhance her professional reputation. After retirement, a Miriam Tees Scholarship fund of the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies was established at McGill. Having always loved music, Miriam then did a Masters in Music at McGill.

Miriam has devoted much of her spare time to helping in the community. While volunteering for the McGill Music library, she was introduced to the McGill Community for Lifelong Learning, where she became a moderator of study groups on Renaissance and Medieval music. She has been active in the Mountainside Church as an elder, board chairman, and chorister. Recently she has volunteered weekly with Friends of the Library at Westmount Public Library.
NEW ACQUISITIONS

The WHA is proud of its growing archival collection, which is rich in photographs of our evolving cityscape, and also contains a range of documents, maps, and memorabilia relevant to the community’s long history. We sincerely thank all those who have donated original items to the archives, or published materials for our reference shelves.

To our readers: please contact us if items of local interest come to light as you downsize, or clear out attics or drawers. In particular, we seek good quality photographs that show identifiable aspects of life in Westmount over the years, but many other types of memorabilia are also welcomed.

Jane Martin, WHA Archivist

The WHA recognizes the members who have made personal donations of over $20. These contributions are greatly appreciated, as they help support our lecture series, newsletters, and other activities.

DONORS for 2017

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Two original prints (“Lewis Avenue” & “Abbott Avenue”) by Kathleen Earle, ca. 1970s.

Donated by Jennifer Forbes

New engraved WHA gavel

Donated by Jon Breslaw

The WHA will hold its Annual General Meeting on Thursday, May 17, 2018 at 7:00 p.m.

WHA members will receive advance notice of nominations for the coming year’s officers and directors and the agenda for the meeting.