

WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION Newsletter

Vol. 3, No. 2

January 2000

Spring 2000 Lecture Series

This year's spring/summer lecture series will provide WHA members with interesting historical information about communities on the island of Montreal that are close to Westmount. We have invited representatives of four historical societies from neighboring communities to talk to us about their history and activities. Mme Hélène-Louise Dupont Élie, President of the *Société historique de Montréal* and M. Leo Scharry, Secretary of the same organization, will describe the founding and the development of their society, the first historical society in Canada (March 16). Dr. Jean Belisle, Professor of Art History, Concordia University, and past President of the *Société historique de Saint Henri*, will tell us about his community, which is linked to Westmount on the south (April 20). Dr. Ludger Beauregard, President of the *Société d'histoire d'Outremont*, will speak in French about the main events in the development of Côte St. Catherine Road and Outremont to the North (May 18). Finally, Mr. David Watson of The Old Montreal West Historical Society will talk about the history of Montreal West and the development of the railway (June 15). Each person was very pleased to be able to share their information with the Association and asked if we could reciprocate by talking to their societies about Westmount. Our local history is not well known to them. This past fall and winter we concentrated on inviting speakers to talk to us about families within our city, now we will have speakers who will bring information about areas outside Westmount.

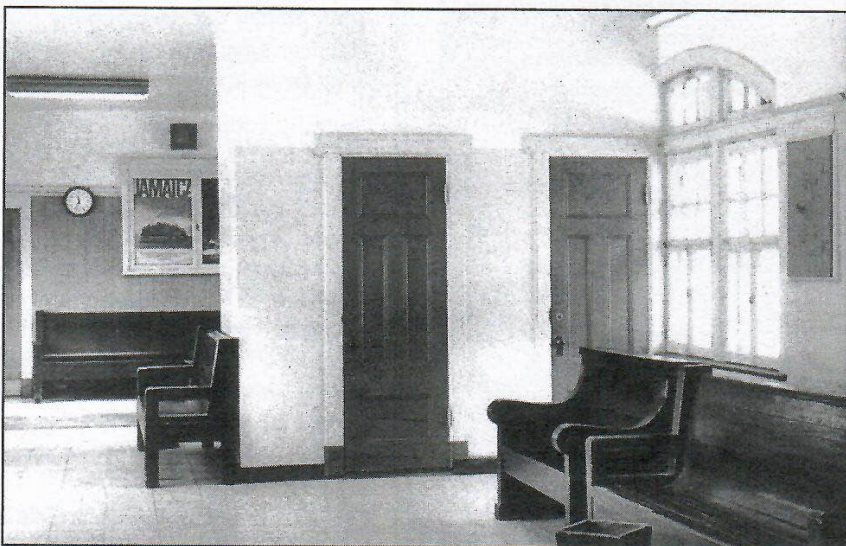


Photo: Doreen Lindsay

STATION FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGN IS UNDERWAY

The \$850,000 fund-raising campaign to restore Westmount's train station and transform it into the Westmount Heritage Centre has established deep roots and is now well under way. The latest step is the launching of the "Family" fund-raising program which will target Association members. John W. Sancton, former publisher of the *Westmount Examiner*, and David Freeman, longtime treasurer of the Westmount Historical Association, have agreed to co-chair this part of the campaign. Association members will be approached individually to lend their support.

The Board of Directors, meanwhile, has hired J. R. Nolet & Assoc., a consulting firm which is best-known locally for assisting the City raise private money for the renovation of the Westmount Library, to participate in recruiting major gifts. Lynn Perkins, a local

Westmounter who works in the Nolet organization, is responsible for directing the campaign.

While the main money will be raised during the coming year, various community projects and initiatives have already raised more than \$30,000, added to a \$25,000 start-up grant from the City of Westmount which is part of its \$125,000 anniversary pledge. Much of the money already collected has come from unsolicited pledges, but includes the Heirloom Discovery Day, Historic House Tour and sale of Montreal Melons (see separate articles). The Association has been the sponsor and benefactor of two garage sales, a "pot luck" dinner on Grosvenor Avenue, hat sale, orange juice sales, and special tables at Westmount Family Day and the Westmount Dog Owners' Association "Dog Day Afternoon" in November.

**Westmount
Historical Association**

Newsletter

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Westmount City Hall



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WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE STATION?

Most of the WHA's efforts these days are directed toward renovating the Westmount Train Station and transforming it into the Westmount Heritage Centre. WHA President Aline Gubbay was recently asked what activities the Association had in mind for the centre. Here is her reply:

The Centre will be open to all, with the Westmount Historical Association as the major tenant. The centre will be a place where people from outside Westmount can come and learn about us, and we in turn can learn more about them.

The heart of this new community facility will be the Archives, a collection of private and public documents, memorabilia, photographs, letters, Council minutes, maps, books, etc. This is the first time the public will have access to this collection, and everyone is invited to become familiar with this material and to explore its potential for helping us to understand who we are and where we come from.

Examples of possible projects include:

- Histories of individual homes and properties (the WHA will be organizing a seminar to aid interested researchers);
- Municipal development and decision-making;
- The uniqueness of Westmount's late Victorian and Edwardian architecture;
- Remembrance Day-related research by students (we envision students, from elementary school to university level, as active users of the Archives);
- Training of volunteers to conduct walking tours of Westmount. The station will become the starting-point for some of those tours.

Utilizing the Archives, the WHA will participate in publishing a series of brochures with topics to encompass such subjects as Westmount's mayors, architects and architecture, sports, street names and houses of worship. The Association also plans continued community outreach to develop pamphlets on memoirs of life in Westmount. An added resource is the Association's website, www.westmounthistorical.org/

These are but some of the possibilities that the Westmount Heritage Centre opens up. The WHA welcomes your suggestions. Please send your ideas and questions to: The Westmount Historical Association, P.O. Box 198, Victoria Station, Westmount, Que. H3Z 2Y6.

ALINE GUBBAY

Half a league, half a league onwards!

While convenience has altered our modern life to include kilometres, kilos, and the dreaded Y2K, our language clings to some of the measures of our past. We can still talk of others who speak "a mile a minute," of inching toward success, or of a dreamy teenager as being "miles and miles away." And in Montreal, we have a district named Mile End.

Best of all, in Westmount, we have an extremely rare Canadian measurement artifact: a milestone. It is some two years since WHA Vice-President Flora-Lee Wagner drew the attention of the City of Westmount to the deteriorating condition of the milestone which is tucked rather ignominiously into the wall on the north-west corner of Côte St. Antoine Road and Forden Avenue, just one mile from the Sulpician Seminary (now Collège de Montréal) near Fort Street in Montreal. Subsequently, the City commissioned a report on the condition and preservation of the milestone, and announced at the Council meeting on January 10th of this year, that \$15,000 was budgeted for its repair and conservation, a fitting millennium project.

Côte St Antoine was the main east-west thoroughfare in this area, first used by indigenous peoples, and then by settlers. The earliest mention of the milestone occurs in 1690. The date is significant, in that the milestone is thus recognized as one of the earliest erected masonry remains in Canada. For the eastbound traveler, or pilgrim, this standing stone announced that the welcoming hospitality of the Sulpicians lay only one mile away. About three vertical feet of the milestone are currently visible, and it is about one foot in width. It is of local limestone, and has been

THE RETURN OF THE MONTREAL MELON

Lee Taylor's rediscovery of the Montreal Melon, once grown abundantly in Westmount gardens and orchards, is an exciting project for the Westmount Historical Association. The melons, richer and juicier than most of the common melons sold today, disappeared around the turn of the last century, but seeds were found at a seed bank in Ohio. Lee and her volunteers have been packaging and distributing them in Westmount and the surrounding area. Here is her latest report:

Over 1,500 Montreal Millennium Seed packs have been enthusiastically purchased in the last two months. I am delighted to find that the seeds are as well received as I had hoped they would be. I thank all of you for your support and encouragement. The remaining seed packs will be put on sale around Easter, just before spring planting. The number crunching couldn't be better!

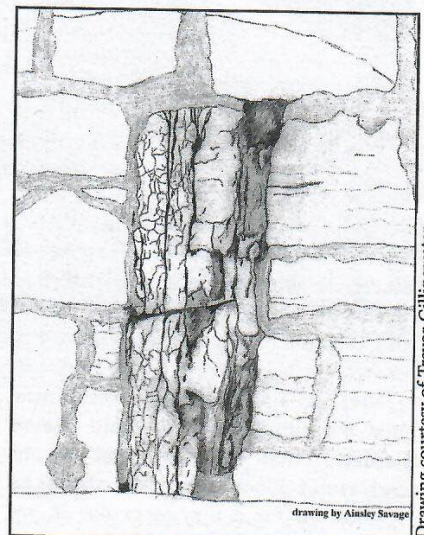
Please watch the *Westmount Examiner* for notice of a special lecture on a full history of the Montreal Melon in March, in time to get everyone primed and ready for planting season! At this event we hope to meet people who remember the melon, and can contribute to the evening.

At this point I need YOUR help! September is the month for the Montreal Millennium Melon Competition. We have brainstormed for ideas for categories. We know there will be categories for the largest melon, the most photogenic melon, the furthest flung melon, an ode to a melon, a limerick, and categories for chutneys and marmalades. Please send suggestions to the WHA at 925-1404. We want the competition to be enormously enjoyable and great fun. Get on your thinking caps!

shaped by a mason into a regular, squared shape. Although it is in an unfortunate location for today's traffic, conservers hope to improve the relationship of the milestone with the wall which hugs it, and to improve its general appearance and condition, now and for the future.

In terms of cultural one-upmanship, the rarity of this historic artifact is difficult to rival. In a casually competitive cocktail party conversation with any neighbouring cities' dignitaries, our illustrious city leaders are assured that, once again, Westmount has it! We are miles ahead!

LEE TAYLOR

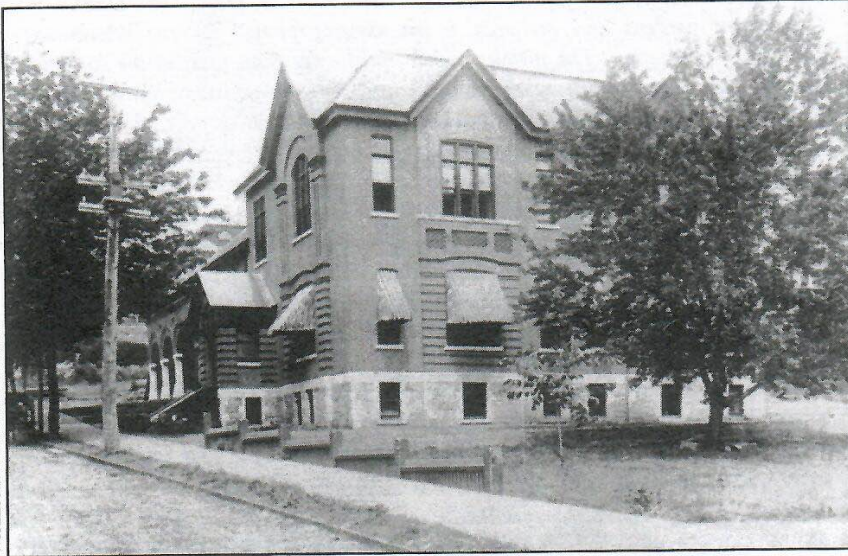


The milestone, above, is one of the earliest erected masonry remains in Canada.

Drawing courtesy of Trevor Gillingwater

WESTMOUNT IN 1895

Westmount Historical Association



The former Stanton School, on Stanton Street and Côte St. Antoine Road, became the Town Hall in 1895.

Westmount has just finished celebrating 125 years of incorporation, but in fact the real growth of the city began in 1895, when it moved from being a small town on the Island of Montreal to a true suburb of Montreal. Most of Westmount was developed between 1895 and 1925, though numerous stately mansions were constructed in the 1930s when labour costs were low. With the growth of the small community came the first town newspaper, the Westmount Weekly News and West End Advertiser which began its tenure on November 16th, 1895 with a brief description of the town. Below are excerpts from the original issue:

The assessed value of property in Westmount, for the year 1895 is \$7,128,430 and the population 3,953. Of these 3,662 are Protestant, 285 Roman Catholic, and 6 of all other denominations. There are, in all, 875 buildings in the town, including 40 stores, 12 workshops and 6 churches. The Roman Catholics have neither a church nor a school in the town.

There is no saloon in Westmount, "for the simple reason," said Mayor Redfern, "that we don't want saloons and won't have them. Whenever an application for a license comes in we just throw it under the table."

There are, either built or in course of

erection in the town, this year 117 new buildings. In fact there is more building going on in Westmount, in proportion to its size and population, than in Montreal.

The town limits enclose 905 acres. The assessment is 6 mills on the dollar of valuation, and, for school purposes, the tax is 2+1/4 mills on the dollar. A special tax for drainage has also been levied, but its payment has been spread over a term of 40 years.

FIRE, WATER AND LIGHT

The town is supplied with water by the Montreal Water and Power Co., a

private corporation, and is thus absolutely independent of the city of Montreal for its supply. The water is pumped directly from the River St. Lawrence, near the Nun's Island, and is supplied to residents of Westmount at about half the rates charged in Montreal.

The town is lighted by electricity, supplied by the Citizen's Light and Power Co., and the service consists of 75 arc and 16 incandescent lamps.

The Fire Department is composed of a Chief and 6 men, who are also policemen. The appliances for fighting fire consist of a hose reel, hook and ladder outfit, 2 horses and a patrol wagon, besides every other form of equipment necessary to secure the efficiency required by the underwriters. The cost of insurance is no higher than in Montreal.

NEW ROADS AND DRIVES

The new roads on the Mountain have been laid out with both skill and taste, and are proving a great attraction both to residents of the town and to visitors. One of these, a boulevard, 66 feet wide, and constructed around property belonging to McGill College, merits special notice both from the excellence of its construction as a road and the beautiful scenery which can be seen to advantage from it. It is reached by a road leading westward from the head of Mount Pleasant Avenue to College Road.

Another excellent road, now rapidly nearing completion, leads from the head of Mount Pleasant Avenue to the corporation quarry, on the Cote des Neiges Road, and connecting by a side road with the College Road

Western Avenue was purchased from the Western Avenue Road Company and is now being graded, macadamized and drained, but, as the work has not

yet been completed, any accurate details of the total cost cannot, of course, be given. The avenue, however, will unquestionably be a very great addition to the attractions of the town.

It may be noted, as an example of judicious municipal management and thrift that the stone which was taken out in making the roads has been used in macadamizing the streets on the lower level, such as St. Catherine Street, Western Avenue and several other streets, and thus the expense of construction has been kept down to an exceedingly low figure. The rapidity, too, with which the work has been carried on is remarkable, for it was commenced barely three months ago. Thus both economy and skill have been shown by those who had the management and direction of the work.

Indeed these characteristics have marked the administration of civic affairs in Westmount with notable uniformity throughout its history as a municipality (when it was known as Cote St. Antoine) and as a town, under its present name. This is something on which the residents are to be highly congratulated, and is entirely due to the fact that they have always made a point of selecting, to fill the honorable and very responsible positions of Mayor and Councillors their best, most enlightened and most public-spirited citizens.

LOCATION OF THE TOWN

Westmount occupies an ideal site. In fact, there is no exaggeration whatever in saying that nowhere, around Montreal, is there to be found one nearly as perfectly situated for residential purposes. The town stands partly on the side of the Mountain and partly on a plateau, overlooking the adjoining town of St. Henri, and thus commands the most charming outlook to be had anywhere in the neighborhood. It is literally embowered in trees, each home

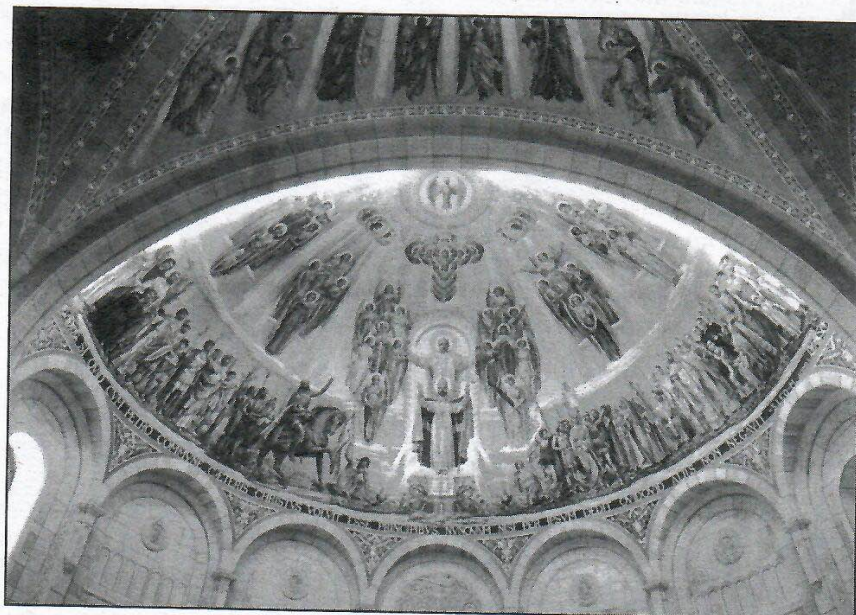
CHURCH OF ST-LÉON IS RECOGNIZED

A plaque honoring the work of Italian-born artist Guido Nincheri (1885-1973) was unveiled at St. Léon-de-Westmount Church on Sept. 26, 1999. The Church was designated a national historic site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1997.

The town's first Catholic parish, Saint-Léon, was created in 1901 following a rapid increase of Westmount's Catholic population during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Within two years a church was built at the corner of Western and Clarke Avenues. This original structure, designed by Georges Alphonse Monette, remained intact until 1920, when, in response to the demands of the growing parish,

Father Oscar Gauthier initiated a series of architectural changes which resulted in the present church, including the distinctive Italianate stone facade and semi-detached campanile (bell tower).

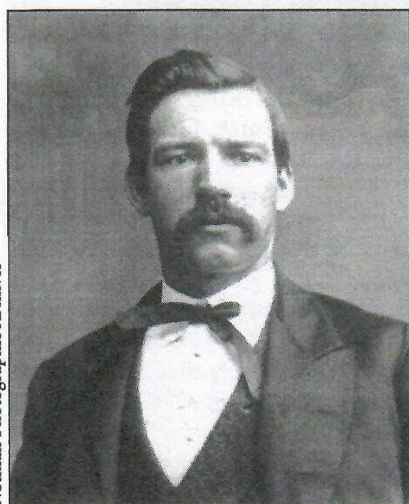
In 1928, the interior of Saint-Léon was completely remodelled under the supervision of Montreal's foremost religious painter, Guido Nincheri. Nincheri was responsible for designing all the interior features seen today, an exceptional example of integrated decor combining painting, wood carving and sculpture, marble and ceramic inlay and stained glass. The murals painted by Nincheri are of particular interest, having been executed in true fresco, a method of painting directly onto fresh plaster rarely used in Canada.



The magnificent mural in the dome above the altar at St. Leon (above) was painted by Guido Nincheri in 1928.

nestling in its own grove, on each side of the wide, well-laid out, and shaded streets. So much, indeed, is this the case that it is next to impossible to get a photograph of the town that would convey to the onlooker the impression that he

was gazing on a town and not a rural grove. Even the spires of the churches and the roofs of the loftiest buildings simply appear as if peeping shyly through the mass of foliage in the sunshine of summer.



FALL / WINTER LECTURE SERIES IN REVIEW

DOREEN LINDSAY

The Murray Family, September 16th, 1999

Victor Isganaitis, an appraiser-consultant for the Murray family spoke about William Murray who was born in Scotland in 1798 and died here in 1875. He bought the Leduc farm on the slopes of the mountain in 1849 and built a large house calling it "West Mount". In 1895, its name was chosen to replace "Town of Côte St. Antoine" as the name of our area. His son Alexander Murray was an alderman on the Council from 1875 to 78 and 1881 to 83. Though the house was demolished in 1936, part of his land became Murray Park (King George Park). William Murray was head of the Beaver Steamship Lines and active in the business and social life of early Montreal.

William Murray (1798-1875)

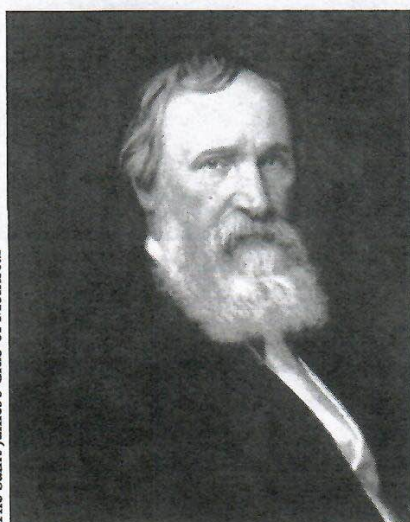
The Molson Family, October 21st, 1999

Karen Molson, who has been researching her family through their letters, diaries and photographs, showed slides as she talked about her family. John Molson was 18 when he arrived in Canada in 1782 from Lincolnshire, England. Two years later he was the owner of a brewery built at the foot of St. Mary's Current. John Molson also built Canada's first steamship and established the St. Lawrence Steamboat Company. In 1825 he constructed Montreal's first permanent theatre and the same year bought a home called Belmont Hall for himself and his wife. The Molson family also founded and operated the Molson Bank from 1854 until 1925 when it merged with the Bank of Montreal. William, the youngest son, was the president from 1854 until his death in 1875. A family home at 55 Belvedere Circle, Westmount, was built for Jack Molson, a great, great grandson of John Senior. Colin Molson, along with his sister Mable and James Beatty bought the Hurtubise farmhouse on Côte St. Antoine Road in 1955 and established The Canadian Heritage of Quebec.



Molson Breweries, Montreal

John Molson (1763-1836)



The John Young Family, November 18th, 1999

Kenneth Hague, the great grandson of John Young, recounted the family history from 1830, when his great grandfather moved to Montreal, learned the import and export business, and became fascinated by transportation ventures. The Honourable John Young was a member of the Montreal Board of Trade from 1842 to 1878, president in 1855, 1860, 1870 and 1871. He was a strong promoter of the construction of the channel works between Montreal and Quebec City. Mr Hague give detailed accounts of John Young's wife and family of thirteen children as well as their home, "Rosemount," which still stands at 16 and 18 Severn Avenue in Westmount. Brian Young, professor of Canadian History at McGill University, also talked about the Young family, recounting the religious affiliations, political tendencies and numerous accomplishments of John Young.

John Young (1811-1878)

The Decarie Family

December 16th, 1999

Graeme Decarie, a direct descendant of the first Décarie to come to Canada, spoke about his historic family. Jean Décarie came here from France in 1643 when he was 22 years old. He gave land on Côte Saint Antoine Road to his two sons Michel and Louis, stone masons, who built the first of many Décarie houses in 1700. It was covered in brick in 1870 and still stands today near the corner of Vendôme Avenue in Notre Dame de Grâce. As the Decarie family expanded and prospered they had a family tree drawn up with a crest. It was carried in the St. Jean Baptiste Parade of 1880. Several members of the family distinguished themselves in various ways. Télesphore Décarie first cultivated the famous Décarie melons. Hector Décarie (1880-1954) won the world weight lifting championship in 1915 by beating the world famous strong man Louis Cyr. Daniel Jeremy Décarie was mayor of Notre Dame de Grâce and won 27 reelections. Both Guy Décarie and Joseph Adelard Décarie were mayors of Lachine.



Collection: Yves Décarie

Télesphore Décarie, the first to cultivate the famous Décarie melons.

HISTORIC HOUSE TOUR DRAWS A CROWD

The Westmount Historical Association's walking tours have guided hundreds of people around the city streets and showed them some of the best houses in the city but seldom has the general public had the opportunity to view the insides of these homes, to see either how they were constructed or how they have been renovated.

That opportunity came last September, when Lillian Léonard, chairing the WHA's community fund-raising program, and numerous WHA and community volunteers showed off six of Westmount's most famous houses, including "Braemar" at 3219 The Boulevard (1836), 474 Mount Pleasant Avenue (ca. 1880), "Hazelbrae" at 85 Church Hill (1878), "Rosebank" at 39 Côte St. Antoine Road (mid-18th century), the Wardleworth house at 168 Côte St. Antoine (1840s), and of course the Hurtubise house at 563 Côte St. Antoine (before 1700).

Despite the pouring rain, almost 100 people wended their way through the six houses and marvelled at the mouldings, cornices and structural designs of these early houses. The Wardleworth and Hurtubise houses have recently been emptied in preparation for renovation, but the others are beautifully restored.



Westmount Historical Association

Metcalf Terrace, 168 Côte St. Antoine Road.

Miss Westmount Diner & Murray's Restaurant

The Miss Westmount Diner, which had been a fixture on Victoria Avenue since the 1950s, closed in April. This was followed by the closing in November of Murray's Restaurant,

founded in 1918, which had hosted the old and young at the corner of Sherbrooke Street and Claremont Avenue. Westmounters will miss both establishments.

Experts Examine Westmount Keepsakes

Friends and lovers of art and antiques brought paintings, vases, old letters and other keepsakes to Victoria Hall on Saturday, October 23rd, for Heirloom Discovery Day, an "Antique Road Show" type of appraisal clinic. Some 370 Westmounters braved the rainstorm to find out what their treasures were and how much they were worth.

From Toronto came the Waddington's Auction House team, including Valerie Brown (European art & sculpture), Adam Livingstone (militaria, toys, stamps and coins), Donald McLean (jewelry and watches) and Duncan McLean (Inuit and ethnographic art and artifacts); from the National Gallery in Ottawa came René Villeneuve (early Canadian art); from Montreal, Kevin Colgan of the Art & Antique Co. (antique pottery and porcelain), Silvia Kindl (conservation of works of art on paper), Patrick Legris of Legris Conservation Inc. (restoration and conservation of works of art on canvas and wood); and our truly local experts from Westmount, Dr. Clarence Epstein (old masters and ecclesiastical art), Victor Isganaitis of V. I. Antiques & Fine Art (silver and objects, historical Canadiana and decorative works of art), and Eric Klinkhoff of Galerie Walter Klinkhoff (Canadian art). Over \$5,500 was taken in at the door. After expenses were deducted, the event brought some \$3,600 to the Train Station Restoration Fund.

The photograph to the right, showing the Westmount Baseball Team in 1908, is one of several recent donations to the Westmount Historical Association Archives. Team members are identified on the support as follows: Back row (left to right): Eaves; Cleghorn; W. Smith; Groves; Stuart; Ross. Front row: Rennick; Weller; Smeaton (Mgr. and Capt.); Doty; Reid.

RECENT ARCHIVE ACQUISITIONS

Sweeny family photograph album (187 photos), mounted photograph depicting the Westmount Baseball Team (1908), and miscellaneous ephemera.

GIFT OF VICTOR ISGANAITIS

Books including *The Romance of the Canadian Pacific Railway* by R. G. MacBeth, *City Unique* by William Weintraub, *A Sporting Evolution: The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, 1881-1981* by Don Morrow, and *Ice Palaces* by Fred Anderes and Ann Agranoff.

GIFT OF DOREEN LINDSAY

Thirty-four photographs, circa 1970, showing people and events surrounding the building of the Ville Marie Expressway in the area of Selby Street and Greene Avenue.

GIFT OF BRIAN MERRETT

Papers, maps, and photographs belonging to the William Murray family.

GIFT OF JOAN MURRAY

Deed of sale of the Mother House of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame to Dawson College. (Registered 19 August 1982).

GIFT OF SARAH PALTIEL

Ration cards issued during World War II.

GIFT OF FRAN SENDBUCHLER

Deeds, wills and other Whitley family papers relating to land transactions in Upper Westmount, circa 1875-1950.

GIFT OF BARBARA WHITLEY



Westmount Historical Association