

NEWSLETTER

Westmount Historical Association

Volume 1, Number 1 (Fall 1995)



Year end review

One year ago, in response to a surge of public interest in Westmount's history and heritage, the Westmount Historical Association (WHA) was reactivated after an eight year lapse.

Before beginning an account of the Association's activities these past few months perhaps a brief background history is called for.

Alice Lighthall founded the WHA in 1944. Miss Lighthall had been steeped in a love of history since childhood through the wide-ranging interests of her father, W. D. Lighthall, and his pioneering work in the field of Canadian heritage.

As soon as the Association had been launched it began an active programme, arranging exhibitions, holding meetings and planning contests in the local schools. Archives were set up which could house material donated by the public and also act as a resource for further historical research.

Miss Lighthall also began writing a column in the *Westmount Examiner* headed 'Know your Westmount'. By the mid-1980's, however, with Miss Lighthall taking a less active role and public support fading, most of the Association's activities ceased.

Only the Archives continued to be available, on request, to research scholars, through the care of Helene Saly, French specialist teacher at Westmount High School. An ardent history enthusiast, it was on Dr. Saly's initiative that the High School students produced, in 1967, an excellently researched book on Westmount's early history, 'Old Westmount'. In recognition of her work, one of the earliest moves after the WHA was^{ye} established in 1994 was to name the Archives the 'Saly Heritage Collection'.

Last July, we began planning our first lecture series. We gave it the overall title, 'Living with History' and set about finding a suitable meeting place. Originally, the WHA's meetings had been held in a section of the Library but with the current extension being carried out there, this space was to be unavailable for at least a year.

This negative proved to have a positive side as it encouraged us to look at buildings with a history of their own which might provide an interesting setting. For example, our first meeting, on September 22, 1994, was held at Dawson College, former Mother House of the Congregation de Notre Dame (CND).

Mayor Trent opened the proceedings with a welcome to the WHA. Aline Gubbay followed with a brief background history of the CND. Then came the two principal speakers of the evening. First was Patrick Woodsworth, Director General of Dawson, who spoke very movingly of the influence of the building on the student population. Without insistence on the part of the faculty, he said, the students had proved respectful and proud of their great building.

Finally, David Wigglesworth, architect in charge of the conversion from Mother House to College, described the process of adapting Omer Marchand's magnificent structure to new uses, while respecting the original design as far as possible.

Several members of the CND had been invited to attend and they, along with most of the audience, were deeply touched by the evening's presentation.

Later meetings were held in various locations. These included the Royal Montreal Armory for a talk on wartime Westmount given by Miss Barbara Whitley; the Montreal Racket Club where Christopher Marks, President of the Club, gave a fascinating account of the sport and the Club, the only one of its kind in Canada; the Kastel Gallery, background for a talk by Doreen Lindsay on Westmount artists and the McCord Museum where Nora Hague, curatorial assistant of the William Notman Photographic Archives, told of some of the many treasures in the collection.

Two lectures were held in the Atwater Library. Historian Aline Gubbay gave a talk on 'Westmount - the making of a community', and Susan Wagg, architectural historian, spoke of the work of Percy Nobbs. The year's series ended with a talk by Phyllis Lambert on 'Individually Founded Museums', given in the Council Chamber at Westmount City Hall.

Other activities

We have begun a systematic card cataloguing of the Archives. This will make it easier to absorb and file new donations and make the collection more accessible for study. In June we began a column in the *Westmount Examiner* under the title 'Know your Westmount'. Editor Bernie O'Neill reproduced the heading, lettering and spacing from its original appearance in the 1940's, providing a happy sense of continuity.

Future plans

When the library reopens in the Fall we have been promised an adequate work space as well as storage facilities. This will be very welcome after months of working in an airless cubbyhole in Victoria Hall.

Several suggestions for fund-raising projects are being considered. Any ideas on the subject would be welcome.

We hope to mount an exhibition on Westmount history for display in the Spring of 1996. Planning and research for this will begin soon.

We are actively soliciting material for the archives. Please don't throw out those old family photos, letters, postcards, etc. Bring them to us and let us evaluate them together to see if they belong in our collection.

The Archives includes a small number of taped interviews including one, now so precious, of Alice Lighthall. If you know someone whose memories you would like to record, please do so and bring us the recorded interview. (We have a tape recorder available if needed.)

Acknowledgements

For helping plan and carry through our first year programme we are indebted to the following volunteers: Patricia Harris, Vice-President, for sharing all responsibilities; Janet MacKinnon and Philip Dombowsky for all graphic design which helped establish the look of our brochure and programmes; Joan Clarke, membership; David Freeman, Treasurer; Michael Lally, publicity; Doreen Lindsay and Marcia Goldberg, research; Arlene Scandrett and Marilyn Lally, programme and hospitality.

Call for volunteers

We have been functioning for this first year with very limited help and would welcome additional assistance in the following areas:

Cataloguing and Archive collection.

Secretarial assistance.

Help with organizing the Spring exhibition.

Investigating possible fund-raising projects.

Recording oral family histories.

Upcoming schedule

The first talk of our Fall lecture series will be given by noted heritage preservationist, Dinu Bumbaru. Mr. Bumbaru will speak on 'International Dimensions of Heritage' at Selwyn House School (95 Cote St. Antoine Road) on September 21st, starting at 7:30 p.m. Other talks in the series will be given on October 19th, November 16th and December 7th. A full schedule will be sent to members in the near future.

Thank you for your support this past year. Please continue to join us in making the WHA a lively and relevant community organization.

Aline Gubbay, President

Any material for the WHA may be left, in the name of the Association, at the Westmount Public Library. You may contact us by telephone at 488-4677.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone _____

☐ \$ 10 Annual Membership fee

☐ Donations are welcome \$ _____

Please return this form and your cheque payable to the **Westmount Historical Association** at the Westmount Public Library, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec, H3Z 1G1.

