

WESTMOUNT HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION Newsletter

Volume 3, No. 1

Fall 1999

WHA prepares for busy year

The past year for the Westmount Historical Association was one of the most exciting in the Association's 55-year history. The coming year will be crucial to its long-term future.

The Association is much closer to two of its long-sought goals: first, to restore the historic Westmount train station which has been neglected for the past 15 years, and second, to make it into a Westmount Heritage Centre, where our historical legacy will be collected, preserved, and made accessible to the public.

"The public will be able to see and take part in what we do, learning about our little city, its families, streets and buildings, the individuals who helped create Westmount, making it a special place, an example of the best in city living," explained Aline Gubbay, WHA president. "But first we must raise the money to restore and renovate the station building," she went on. "For this we need the help of everyone in the community. We need volunteers who will help us organize events, big and small, volunteers to help in the office, streamline the membership rolls, help with the fund-raising."

Even without the promise of the Heritage Centre, the year was active and interesting. The annual lecture series drew numerous members and interested citizens to the Westmount Room in the new Westmount Public Library. The Archives grew and were methodically catalogued on computer, and the Association developed its own website. The WHA reached out to other historical associations to find out what they did and how they did it.



Initial funds: David Lank, honorary chairman of the WHA's Heritage Centre fund-raising campaign, and WHA President Aline Gubbay receive a \$25,000 cheque from Westmount Mayor Peter Trent (centre), on behalf of the City.

Station to become Heritage Centre

The City of Westmount has mandated the Westmount Historical Association to restore the former Westmount Railroad Station for use as a heritage centre, and the board of directors has been working hard to (a) establish the activities which could go on in the centre; (b) determine the renovations which would be necessary and make plans to carry them out; and (c) raise money – and develop projects to raise money – to restore and operate the building.

Preliminary plans include using the station to house the growing archives which are now stored in a small basement room of the Westmount Public Library, and to allow improved public access to them.

There would also be space for various exhibits and a reception room with multimedia facilities for the annual lecture series and other special public meetings,

as well as an information centre and museum shop. The WHA has already received the original station heater which will be displayed at the Centre.

The Association will engage the architectural firm of Fournier, Gersovitz, Moss which has an excellent reputation in the area of heritage restoration, and local architect Chris Blood has agreed to be project manager.

The WHA has set the fund-raising goal at \$850,000. Part of this will come from community programmes including the Historic House Tour on Sept. 17, the Heirloom Discovery Day on Oct. 23, and other activities including a garage sale in the spring and information tables at Family Day and the Victoria Street Festival.

The City of Westmount has promised \$125,000 in matching grants, including a \$25,000 start-up donation.

WESTMOUNT
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Newsletter
Vol. 3, No. 1 • Fall 1999



Editor:
Andy Dodge

Layout and Design:
Philip Dombowsky

Contributors:
Andy Dodge, Philip Dombowsky,
Aline Gubbay, Doreen Lindsay,
Jacques Pharand

Translation:
Westmount City Hall

The Westmount Historical Association was founded in 1944 to encourage public awareness of Westmount's history and heritage and to promote research into its social and cultural development.

Board of Directors:
Aline Gubbay, President
Flora-Lee Wagner, Vice-President
Lee Taylor, Secretary
David Freeman, Treasurer
Joan Clark, Membership Secretary
Craig Davies
Andy Dodge
Philip Dombowsky
Michelle Ferst
Peter Ferst
Doreen Lindsay
Brian Puddington

Westmount Historical Association
c/o Westmount Public Library
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec H3Z 1G1
Tel: (514) 925-1404
E-mail: info@westmounthistorical.org

Westmount's Character Areas discussed

Our series of eight Thursday night lectures last year was designed to explain the development of our City based on the Character Area Studies of heritage and preservation within the City of Westmount. Maps of each area were displayed at each talk and an introduction of each area was given by our programme coordinator Doreen Lindsay. The first talk on September 17, by Mark London, architect and city planner with the City of Montreal as well as the City of Westmount, was a general view of our city entitled *Westmount's Heritage and Its Preservation*. Mr. London explained how residents can use the Character Area Studies to understand the character and history of their own street and home today.

On October 15, 1998 Jacques Pharand, an expert on the Montreal Tramway System, explained 87 years of travel by tram in Westmount, 1872-1959. According to Pharand, the extension of the Montreal Tram lines led to the development of Greene Avenue and St. Catherine Street, the first area of Westmount to be urbanized (Character area 24). A summary of Pharand's talk is reprinted on page four of this newsletter.

On November 19, 1998, Dinu Bumbaru, program director of Heritage Montreal, discussed the style and quality of row housing. Westmount examples include Blenheim Place, and Lewis, Irvine and Abbott avenues (Character Area 32).

On December 17, Claudine Déon, from the Université de Québec, showed slides and talked about the interior and exterior of St. Léon de Westmount, the first French Catholic church in Westmount, built in 1903 (Character Area 23). We marveled at the images of wonderful stone and wood carvings as well as the ceiling fresco paintings all designed by artist Guido Nincheri. The slides have been donated to our Archives.

After a winter pause our series resumed in the spring with a talk about one of the earliest settlers of the 1700s, Pierre

Hurtubise. On March 25, Peter Lankin, Montreal architect, who is working on plans for the restoration of the Hurtubise farmhouse by The Landmark Trust, presented his findings on the stonework, floors, ceilings, windows and doors as well as the originality of the porch. His talk was followed on April 15 by Ken Hampson, architect, discussing his views on the renovation and repair of older homes that exist today on the old Hurtubise property. Our seventh lecture, May 20, was an interesting presentation by Eric Richard, environmental educator with *Le Centre de la Montagne*, on the geological evolution of Westmount's Summit Park. He showed a model of the Mountain and explained its geological formation.

In our last lecture on June 17, Jeanne Wolff, head of Urban Studies at McGill University, traced the development of some of our streets: Holton, de Casson Road, Barat and the Douglas-Grenville area as well as Cité Jardin and Town of Mount Royal back to the English Garden City Movement (Character Area 5).

All lectures were well attended and we are looking forward to this year's new lecture series with details about four Westmount families.

Fall 1999 dates to remember:

- Sept. 16: Lecture Series: West Mount, The Murray Family Home
- Sept. 17: Historic House Tour
- Oct. 21: Lecture Series: Brewing to Banking: The Molson Family
- Oct. 23: Heirloom Discovery Day
- Nov. 18: Lecture Series: The John Young Family
- Dec. 16: Lecture Series: The Décarie Family

WHA is now on the Internet

Due to the fine work of Archivist Philip Dombowsky, the WHA is now on-line! The site is located at www.westmounthis-torical.org and includes six very colourful pages. First is the home page with a late 19th-century watercolour of Westmount Mountain from Greene Avenue. Other pages, all with various amounts of illustration, include "about us," "archives" (along with four articles from Montreal newspapers of the era 1897-1924), "lecture series," "the heritage centre" and links to other websites. No doubt this site will grow in the coming months and become an important part of the WHA information program.

Even while organizing all this, Philip has been cataloguing the WHA collection – mainly photographs but also other valuable historical documents and ephemera – to the point that it is about 90% digitized. At the same time, each of the photos in the collection have been enclosed in mylar sleeves and stored in acid-free boxes for long-term protection.

WHA joins in City Celebration

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the founding of the City of Notre Dame de Grâce, which eventually became the Town of Côte St. Antoine and the Town of Westmount, as well as the 100th anniversary of the Westmount Public Library. The City launched the double-anniversary with an elegant calendar showing 12 postcards from the library's collection, giving citizens a taste for Westmount's history. In February, the WHA helped Mayor Peter Trent write a tongue-in-cheek rendition of the City's first city council meeting, which was then presented publicly at a raucous and yet fashionable gala in the refurbished Victoria Hall. In June, the City held an open house at City Hall and a formal tea at the library. Westmount sponsored formal celebrations on St. Jean Baptiste Day for the first time in its history. A 125th Celebration Ball is planned for December.



Photo: Doreen Lindsay

Original stove from Westmount train station donated to WHA

The WHA is delighted to have received its first piece of 'furniture' for the Westmount train station. The piece donated is the beautiful wood-burning stove pictured to the left, which stood in the waiting room until the station was closed in 1984. Since that time Mr. Roger Labastero had it stored at his home on Ile Bizard but when he read of the project to restore the station he kindly offered to return it to its original home. Mr. Fred Caluori, Director of Public Works for the City of Westmount, arranged for its pick-up and it is now stored in the City's warehouse until the station is ready to receive it.

RECENT ARCHIVE ACQUISITIONS

Set of nine photographs of the Westmount train station taken by Nina Bruch during the early 1980s.
Gift of Nina Bruch

Old Montreal, With Pen and Pencil, written by Victor Morin, illustrated by Charles W. Simpson, and published by Canadian Pacific Railway in 1929.
Gift of Lonnie Echenberg

Westmount High School Annuals 1931 - 1935. Gift of Henry Findlay

Two albums of photographs taken by Robert Harvie during the 1890s.
Gift of Donald and Henrietta Harvie

Limited edition copy of *Old Quebec: In the Days before Our Day* by Alexander D. Angus, 1949; City of Westmount silver bookmark issued during the visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth to Westmount in May 1939.
Gift of Sally Hooff

Cast iron stove originally located in the Westmount Train Station
Gift of Roger Labastero

Programmes including: 'Westmount Thespians present *The Dover Road* by A. A. Milne', Nov. 21, 1930, Victoria Hall; and 'The Guild of Players of St. Matthias present G. B. Shaw's 'Saint Joan,' Parish Hall, St. Matthias' Church, n.d.
Gift of Peter Outerbridge from the estate of Mike Lanahan

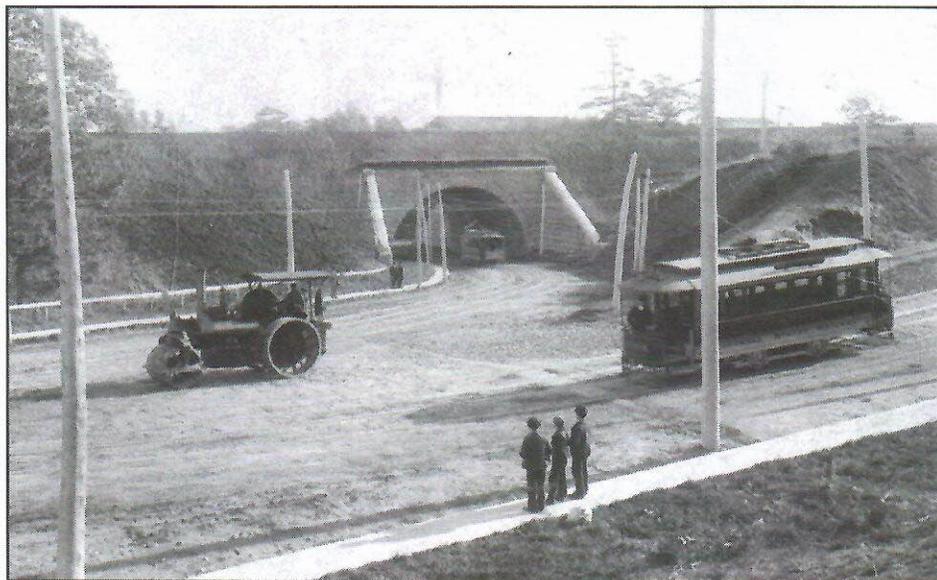
Watercolor view of Westmount Train Station painted by Andrew LeMaitre in May 1978. Gift of Mary LeMaitre

Photograph showing Westmount High School Graduating Class of 1928. Gift of Elizabeth A. Murray and S. Frances MacGregor in memory of their uncle, George Sumner

Six silver plated spoons with inscription Westmount Lodge No. 76 GRQ; embroidered Westmount school badge; Westmount Public Library badge; Canada Engineers badge from Sept. 16, 1916.
Gift of Hélène Saly

Mounted photograph showing the Park Slide, Montreal.
Gift of Rosalyn Walker

87 YEARS OF STREETCARS IN WESTMOUNT



Westmount Historical Association Archives

The following is a summary of the WHA lecture presented by Mr. Jacques Pharand on October 15, 1998.

While public transportation was implemented in Montreal in 1861, horse-cars reached Greene Avenue in 1872, as an extension of the St. Catherine Street line. With the advent of the electric streetcar in 1892, service was improved in Westmount the very next year, in the form of a large loop along St. Catherine, Victoria, Sherbrooke and Greene.

In 1895, another private company, the Montreal Park & Island Railway, built a new tramway line, connecting to both ends of the Montreal Street Railway network, around the west and north slopes of the mountain, to the corner of Mount-Royal and Park Avenues, thus earning its nickname of 'Mountain Belt Line'. Oddly enough, its purpose was to allow riders to reach the entrance of the (then new) Côte-des-Neiges cemetery, from both eastern and western suburbs, and 'excursion' tickets were issued during the week-ends of October and November. This line was largely patronized in the summer months, as it featured open cars, allowing for a most enjoyable ride. A six-mile extension from Snowdon Junction (Queen Mary Road and Decarie Blvd.)

reached the village of Cartierville in 1896.

In 1905, the Montreal Street Railway introduced the 'Golden Chariot', a most elegant observation car, which provided a counter-clockwise ride of 'ten miles around the two mountains' for a mere 25 cents, a fare which would remain unchanged for the next 47 years. It grew so popular that another car was built the following year and two more in 1924. These cars ran through Westmount until 1957.

The year 1908 saw the extension of streetcar trackage along Sherbrooke Street to the outskirts of Montreal West, at Elmhurst Street. NDG was soon to develop on both sides of the line, which

was extended again to the north end of Montreal West a few years later, as the 'Windsor/Montreal West', Route 70. Meanwhile, the route along Côte-des-Neiges Road was pushed northward and a new link was built, between 1909 and 1912, connecting the latter to Sherbrooke Street, along The Boulevard, Lansdowne, Westmount and Claremont.

The steep slope of Lansdowne Avenue became the site of the first passenger fatality in 81 years of operation, when a car derailed, sliding out of control at Westmount Avenue, on the icy morning of December 28, 1942. The intersection of Sherbrooke and Claremont Streets was also a favorite location for winter derailments of cars on the 'Guy/Beaver Hall' Line 14, which could not stop, coming downhill.

Streetcars disappeared from Westmount in one swift sweep, on September 2, 1956, when all 14 lines running on various parts of St. Catherine Street were eliminated at the same time. Tracks remained in Westmount for three more years however, to allow cars used on other lines to reach their car barns, at the foot of Glen Road. And thus, in 1959, 87 years of streetcar operation in Westmount came to an end.

The author is currently gathering memorabilia such as tickets, transfers (sometimes wedged between pages of old books) and other transit mementos, to rebuild the MUCTC heritage fund, freely open to all. Any such items coming from readers will be much appreciated. Kindly phone Mr. Pharand at (514) 356-2680, for more information.

Aline Gubbay publishes Westmount book

WHA President Aline Gubbay launched her latest book about Westmount last November and soon found herself on the best-seller list at local bookstores. Titled *A View of Their Own: The Story of Westmount*, the book is the first comprehensive story of the development of our city. It is her fourth book and received rave reviews in both the *Westmount Examiner* and the *Montreal Gazette*.

A VIEW OF THEIR OWN The Story of Westmount Aline Gubbay

