

From milestones to melons and monuments

Presentation for WEHS

April 15, 2026

The oldest stone in Canada is a milestone located at the corner of the Cote St. Antoine Road and Forden St. It measures the distance from the Old Fort (Grand Seminaire on Sherbrooke St.) and was erected by early farmers such as the Des Carres and the Prud'hommes in 1684. This stone is a single piece of Montreal limestone implanted against the bedding planes.

The stone was restored in 2001 with stainless steel threading and a barrier epoxy paint.

The Cote Ste. Antoine road was an Indian trail that grew to be the transportation spine of Westmount taking grain, vegetables, apples and melons from the farmers on this little mountain to the market located at the Old Fort. The Cote Road, as it was known at the time of confederation, was still one of only two roads west from Montreal. It was the only macadamized street in the community and tolls remained until the 1880s. The fieldstone house located across the street from the milestone was built in 1840 by Moses Judah Hayes. This is the second oldest building in Westmount, the oldest one being the Hurtubise House, located on the same road at the corner of Victoria Avenue. The row of houses here were known as 'Metcalf Terrace', in honour of the Governor-General of the time, whose residence was at Monklands (today's Villa Maria). On route from the parliament in Old Montreal to Monklands, the Governor-General's residence (today's Villa Maria), the horses were watered and changed at this house.



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Hurtubise House and farming

The oldest building in Westmount is called the Hurtubise House, located at the corner of Victoria and Cote St. Antoine Roads.

The land was purchased in 1699 by Jean Hurtubise. The land around the house included an orchard and market garden and extended from Sunnyside avenue down to the St. Lawrence. It was farmed by 15 generations of the Hurtubise family until it was purchased by the Canadian Heritage of Quebec Foundation in 1955.

Walls were first build of wood and then replaced with field stones around 1739. These stones are placed haphazardly and filled with grout. Most of these field stones were dragged from southern localities by the retreat of the last glacier to move north about 10,000 years ago.

The stone walls that are 60 cm (2 ft) thick. Around the windows are flat stones which is rare for this period. The S-shaped holders and hinges around the windows are designed to hold the shutters open. There is a flat limestone slab under the kitchen window that served as a kitchen sink.

The first floor is supported by 3 trees, one of which still has bark. The attic is constructed with wooden posts and beams. There are ventilation holes in the basement walls to allow the storage of vegetables during the winter and prevent them from rotting. In the 1870s, an annex constructed of brick was added.



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Hurtubise house

West of the house stands a great barn, larger in area space than the original farmhouse, and the stone remains of one of 4 wells. The Hurtubise House has two fireplaces which are located respectively to the west, in the living room, and to the east, in the kitchen, which is used for both heating and cooking purposes. When the Hurtubise family decided to extend the original version of the house and add an annex at the end of the XIXth century, the discovery of stones in the form of an arch revealed the presence of vestiges of what had originally been a bread oven in the kitchen's fireplace (Stewart et Robichaud, 2001, page 45).

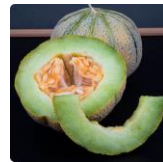


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Montreal Melon

The Décarie and Gorman family farms were known to be the primary source of the Montreal melon in the markets around Montreal and in Westmount. Isaïe Hurtubise moved from growing cereal crops to focusing on vegetable and fruit crops in the 1870s.

In NDG the land around the Upper Lachine Road and the Décarie boulevard was home to fields of Montreal melon until the 1930s. Rapid urbanization and the conversion of farmland to roads and residential areas after WWII saw the end of the Montreal melon. However, *Montreal Market Melon* seeds were found in a seed bank in 1996, and they've been grown back to life ever since! They have netted skin, green flesh and a sweet, yet slightly spicy flavour. Seed packets available [here](#).



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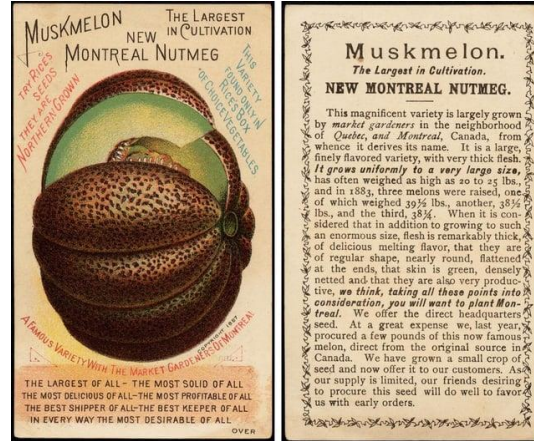
Montreal Melon

According to historical records, the Montreal melon was already renowned in the 1870s. But it was in 1881 that its popularity truly exploded. That year, the American seed company Burpee added the variety to its catalogue, extolling its virtues.

Until around the late 1910s, the Montreal melon enjoyed its heyday. The finest restaurants and hotels in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia clamored to serve slices of this delicious fruit to their clientele. Demand was so high that it was impossible to supply everyone, which drove up the price of the melon. It was considered a luxury item found only on the best tables.

Several families and producers participated in the large-scale cultivation of the Montreal melon. The Aubin, Benoit, Brodie, Des Rosiers, Hall, Latour, Legal, Power, Prudhomme, Roy, and Viau farms were involved. The two families that contributed the most to its production were the Décarie family and the Gorman family. The Gormans maintained their own closely guarded variety of the melon, which was famously more oblong or oval in shape compared to the rounder Décarie variety.

The growers cultivated it in hotbeds. This is an old farming method where small greenhouses are built in the fields, filled with manure (in this case, horse manure) and covered with a layer of soil. The heat from the manure below, combined with the heat from the sun's rays above, creates a warm climate inside the greenhouse. Farmers could then plant the melons in the fields as early as March. These temporary structures were kept in place until around June, when the weather was milder and the melon plants began to outgrow the structure.



Left: Burpee's Farm Annual Catalogue 1882.

Right: Article on Montreal melons in *The Montreal Weekly Witness*, 1908.

Below: Cultivation of Montreal melons in hotbeds. *The Journal of Agriculture and Horticulture*, 1912. Sources: [The Urban Nutritionist, 2024](#).

Photo bottom right from [Reddit Montreal](#) shows planting of Montreal Melon in field behind St. Raymond's Centre in 2024.

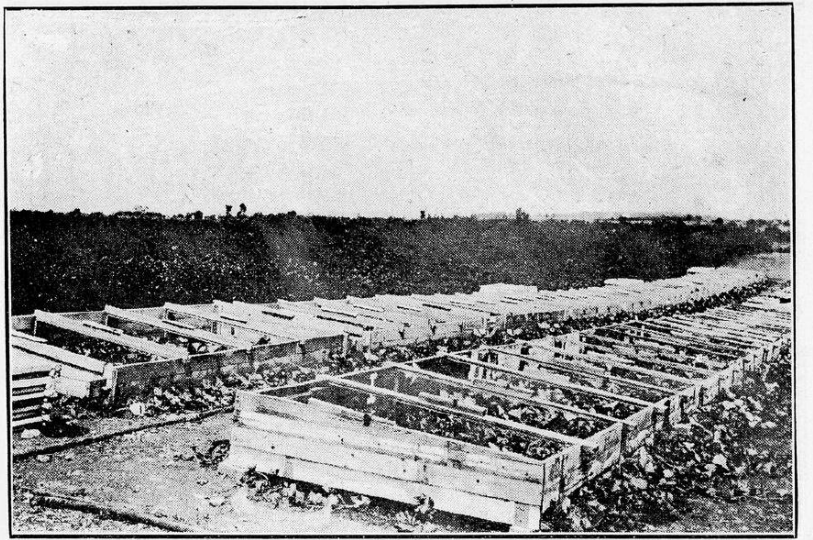


Fig. 6.—HOTBEDS SHOWING THE SASH REMOVED.



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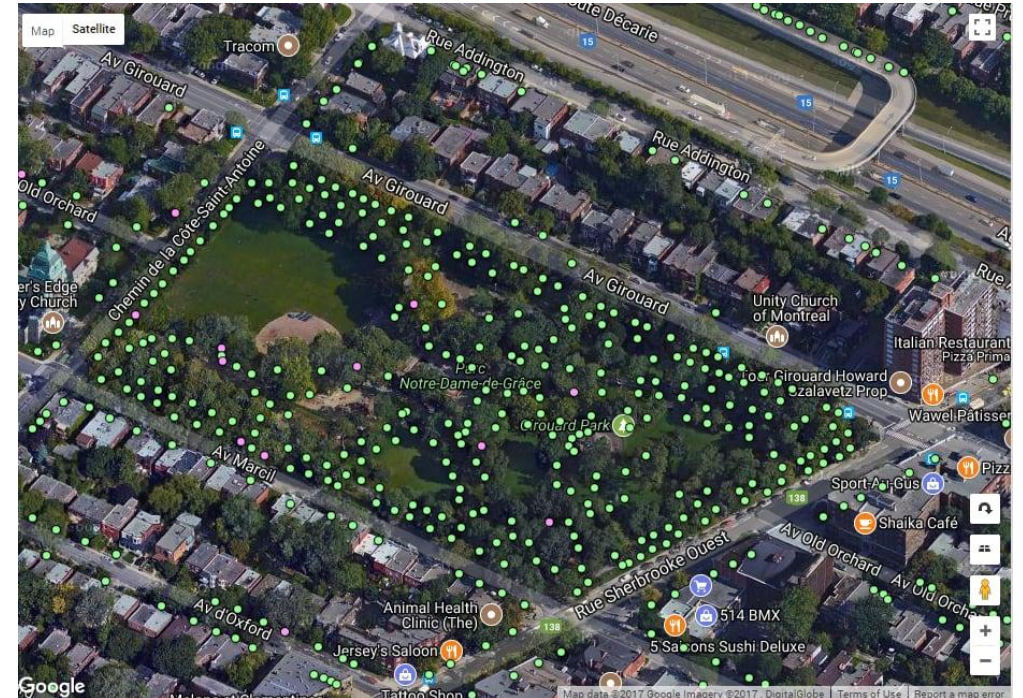
NDG gardens, farms and monuments



From milestones to melons and monuments Girouard park

The park, located at the intersection of Girouard Avenue and Sherbrooke Street West, was closed after dozens of trees and branches were downed by strong winds reaching up to 110 km/hour during a microburst storm in the summer of 2017. The microburst damaged hundreds of homes, cars, hydro lines in that part of NDG, making it one of the hardest hit areas. The map from Ville Montreal shows green spots where trees were damaged in one single day in 2017.

PHOTOS by Gabriel Jakob from [Montreal Then and Now](#)



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Girouard park

There are 3 red oak trees planted around Place Vimy. Every year in April the Vimy Foundation hosts a wreath laying ceremony around the monument.

These oak trees are the descendants of trees that once grew around Vimy Ridge in France before it was completely battered in the Great War. A Canadian soldier named Leslie Miller survived the battle at this site and returned with a handful of acorns from a half-buried oak tree. When he returned to Canada after the war, he planted them on his farm in Scarborough.

Several of these oaks survive, though none remain at the Vimy Ridge site. In 2015, arborists began using cuttings from the original oak trees and grafting them to base root stock to create saplings. These root stalks were bought by the federal government and distributed to memorial sites around the country.



From milestones to melons and monuments Girouard park

The oldest trees in the Girouard park are mainly silver maple and oak. They form the pathways that were created when the park was established in 1910.

A total of 81 baby trees were planted in 2018 to replace the damage from the 2017 microburst storm. Most of them are lining the walkways from Sherbrooke Street to the Place Vimy and are native species such as Redbud and Serviceberry.

The Empress Theatre built in 1927 with poured concrete exterior, will undergo deconstruction this summer while preserving its emblematic Egyptian Revival façade. The goal is to return the space to residents as a vibrant, four-season cultural hub—a transitional open-air community space. Plans envision a dynamic program rolling out as early as fall 2027, with outdoor film screenings, participatory art activities, theatre performances, and a range of live events bringing new energy to the site.



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Falaise Saint Jacques

The Falaise St. Jacques is a succession forest tucked into a 4.5 kilometre portion of cliff positioned on the western edge of Montreal, and adjacent to a major highway. The photo shows major clearcutting in the Falaise in 2015 in preparation of the government’s plan to “green” the site.

The map shows where this site is located in terms of the nearby Montreal urban landscape and the two artists illustrations show the projected green overpass that will be built from the Falaise across the major highway.

This [2 minute Youtube](#) video of the Falaise posted in 2021 gives you a sense of what Sauvons la Falaises founder Lisa Mintz is working for.



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Falaise Saint Jacques

When you walk in the Falaise you will hear the cicadas rubbing their legs on a hot summer day. You will see Mourning Cloak butterfly drying its wings in early spring. You will hear migratory birds such as Indigo Bunting, Redstarts and Chimney swifts in the late summer. You will hear the resident Crows, Ravens, Cardinals and Woodpeckers sending out warning calls as you wander under the canopy in the summer. The flora on this site includes Oak, Maple, Cottonwood, American Hackberry and the endangered Ostrich Fern. As the seasons change you will see trails of mammals like Red fox, Cottontail rabbit and White-tailed mouse in the snow. In the spring you can find the lacy marks of snails feeding on bark and fungi like Turkey tail and Ganoderma sprouting on dead wood. You will see dog walkers, skaters, bird feeders and forest school classes.



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Water in Falaise Saint Jacques

The St. Pierre River is one of more than 30 rivers and streams that once traversed the Island of Montreal. Originating in streams on Mount Royal, the St. Pierre River flowed via several tributaries through Côte Saint Luc, Ville Saint-Pierre, Saint-Henri and Verdun. It flowed over the Falaise St. Jacques, draining the higher ground and widening into a lake below that was called Lac Saint Pierre or Otter Lake, now the site of the Turcot interchange. The river finally flowed into the St. Lawrence River, across from Nun's Island.

The 1834 map shows the course of this river from Mont Royal. Source: Carte de l'île de Montréal, 1834, by A. Jobin, BANQ. Below is [Beaugrand-Champagne's map](#) illustrating the island's topography and hydrology between 1542 and 1642. Wikimedia Commons.

The bottom right map from 1949 shows the St. Pierre river running from the west. The falaise used to stretch from Pointe à Callière to what is now Pointe-Claire. Today it is divided up by train lines and highways. SOURCE: Ville de Montréal, (détail), 1949, planche 44-68. Ville de Montréal

Sources: <https://www.westmountmag.ca/environmental-degradationatfalaise-st-jacques/>

Downloadable [history and educational resources](#) from UrbaNature

