



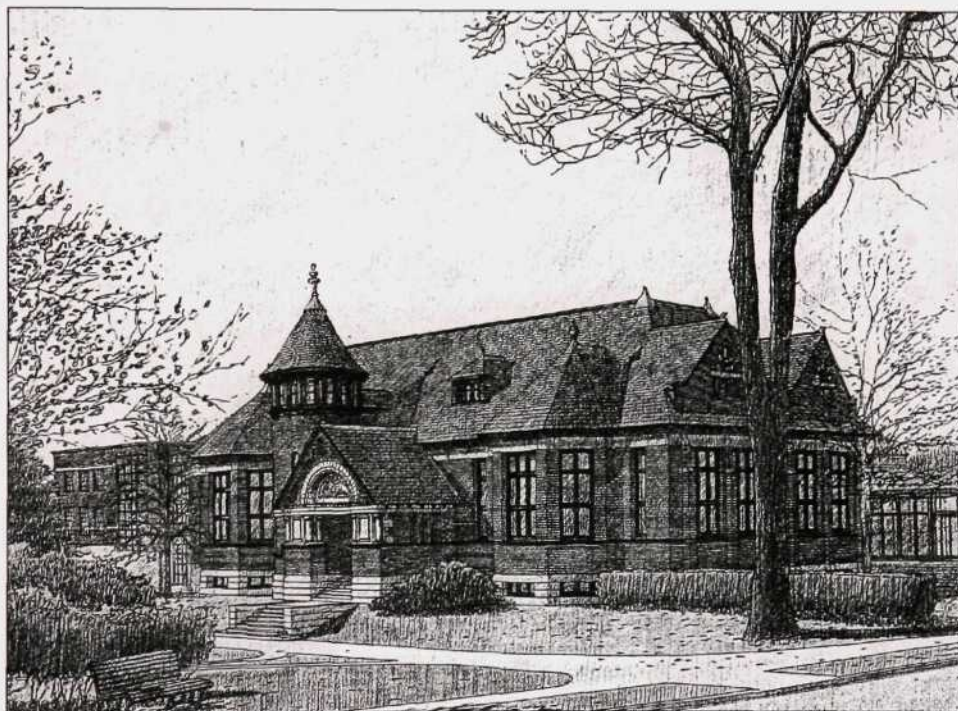
Polishing the Jewel

*A History of the Renewal Project:
Westmount Public Library*

LAUREEN SWEENEY

Polishing the Jewel

A History of the Renewal Project: Westmount Public Library



LAUREEN SWEENEY

Published by the City of Westmount
to commemorate the inauguration
of the refurbished library

November 1995

ISBN 2-9800495-6-5
© 1995 City of Westmount.
All rights reserved.

Legal deposits: 4th Quarter 1995
National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Polishing the Jewel:
A History of the Renewal Project
Westmount Public Library/Laureen Sweeney

Issued also in French under the title
Notre Joyau: l'Histoire du rajeunissement
de la Bibliothèque publique de Westmount
Translation by Michèle Boileau, le mot juste
ISBN 2-9800495-7-3

Designed by Laureen Sweeney

Composed and printed by Anlo Inc.
in Westmount, Quebec, Canada

Published and distributed
by the City of Westmount

Front cover: Sandstone relief to the left of the library's east entrance, George W. Hill, 1899.

Back cover: Sandstone relief at right of the east entrance, George W. Hill, 1899.

Page 1: Sketch of renewed Westmount Public Library from architect Peter Rose.

Page 3: Sandstone relief over front entrance of library, by George W. Hill 1899.

CREDITS FOR PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS:

City of Westmount archives: numbers 1-5, 9-16, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27, 29, 33, 34, 45, 50A, 59.

Frank Frenza: numbers 38, 40, 42-44, 49.

Laureen Sweeney: numbers 8, 28, 31, 32, 35-37, 39, 41, 46-48, 50B, 51-53, 58, 60-67, 69-75, 77, 78, 82, front and back covers and page 3.

Peter Rose/TPL: numbers 7, 30, 68, 76, 78 and title page.

Linda Rutenberg: numbers 17, 18, 21, 23, 26.

Valerie Tetley: number 24;

Helen Rainville Olders: number 79.

Don Sancton: number 80.

Courtesy Diana McMurray: number 6.

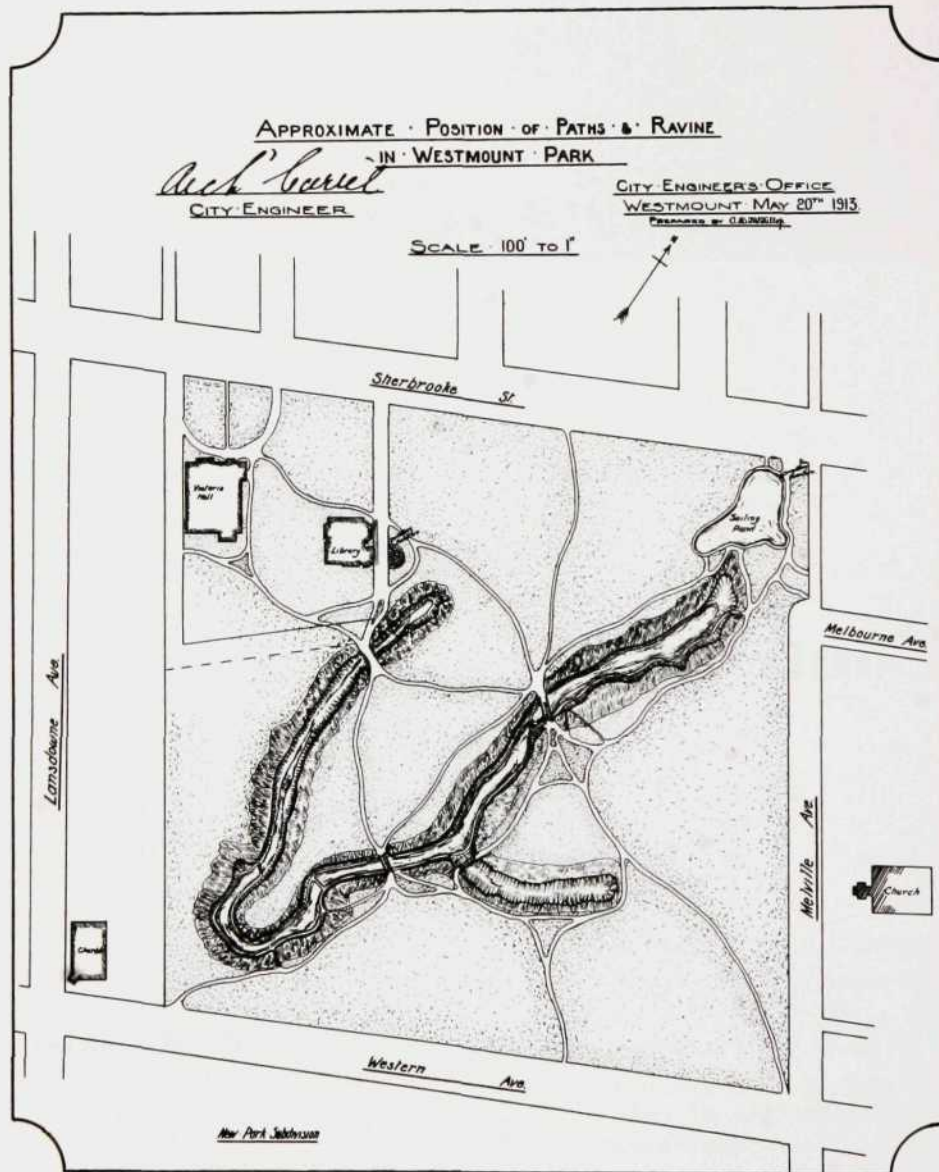
Rosanne Moss stencil designs, Gersovitz Moss: numbers 54, 56, 57.

Bradbury and Bradbury Wallpapers: number 55.



Contents

	FOREWORD (Peter F. Trent)	5
I	THE JUBILEE GEM OF 1899	7
II	FOUR ADDITIONS 1911, 1924, 1936, 1959	11
III	BRIDGING THE YEARS The need to rebuild	19
IV	A VISION TAKES SHAPE The Cutler Years 1987-1991	20
V	MAKING IT HAPPEN The Trent Council 1991-1995	23
VI	OF BRICKS AND MORTAR The Construction Period	29
VII	A WISE OLD OWL The first inhabitant	34
VIII	RESTORING 'FINDLAY'	35
IX	WELCOME TO THE LIBRARY The architectural concept	44
X	INSIDE THE FOOTPRINT Design and debate	46
XI	RETURN TO THE PARK The landscaping	50
XII	BUILDING FOR KNOWLEDGE The fundraising campaign	52
XIII	INAUGURAL EVENTS The opening	55
	CONCLUSION	56



1

Drawing of Westmount Park from the city engineer's office dated 1913 depicts the library without its 1911 addition, suggesting an earlier date. The street shown beside Victoria Hall was once Belmont Avenue.

Foreword

I like to think that, in a generation from now, Westmounters will regard the Library Renewal Project as today's unequivocal statement of our faith in the future – and as Westmount's most important building project of the latter half of this century.

Yet, while it almost “had to be written”, I was a bit chary at first in proposing we commission a history of this project, fearing it might look like an exercise in self-congratulation for this current Council. But all of us felt that it was important to set out just what happened – while our memories were still fresh.

Polishing this jewel in Westmount's crown has not been easy. You can't polish a jewel without friction, and you can't create a superb building such as this without conflict, as the following history shows.

Yet citizens got value for their money: I think we have delivered a \$10 million building for three-quarters of that cost. To use tax money wisely, you have to treat it as your own. Public money is squandered when no one is accountable, when buildings go up without passion and without confidence.

Even though I've referred to the refurbishment of the library as this Council's finest achievement, the concept was developed well before 1991. Without May Cutler's vision and determination, it would never have even got on the drawing board.

To single out anyone else for special mention is perhaps a little unfair, given the tremendous number of citizens and staff who contributed to the success of this project. But I highlight, nonetheless, the immeasurable contributions of Raymond Ulliyatt, John Bridgman, Caroline Thibodeau, David Culver, and Bruce St Louis. And, of course, Peter Rose – whose brilliant concept was vindicated in the end.

It was a task of perseverance, passion, and politics. All those who worked on the project gave a piece of themselves, and, in return, got enormous satisfaction from seeing a job well done.

PETER F. TRENT
OCTOBER 1995



2

(above) Ravine in Westmount Park, 1911

(opposite page) Westmount Public Library as it was in 1899



3

I The Jubilee Gem of 1899

Looking back a century to the days when farming was commonplace in Westmount, it seems quite remarkable that the Westmount Public Library could have been conceived and built in such enduring fashion in only two years.

For not only was it to be the first municipal library in Quebec, but also it was to be one of the few separate library buildings in Canada at the time, most libraries sharing space in other institutions.

What the city fathers, despite their pioneering vision, would not have foreseen was just how many parallels would emerge some 95 years later when new generations took up the task of renewing the library to "pass on the light".

There was a familiar ring in 1995 to a letter written in July 1898 by Mayor Fred W. Evans to McGill librarian Charles Gould explaining problems with the original architectural design:

"I am very much afraid that the plans as they will go through will not satisfy your ideas of what a

library should be," he wrote, "but we have to cut our coat according to our cloth, and it is the best we can do."

With few library models in Canada, it was to New England that the local municipality turned for inspiration once it decided to build a public library to mark the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign in 1897.

That the Diamond Jubilee monument should take the form of a library reflects the heritage and character of the citizens. Mainly of English and Scottish roots, they held education and reading in the highest esteem. (In the restoration of 1995, symbols of French heritage and culture were to be incorporated to reflect the changing population.)

Enjoying Town status, Westmount was mushrooming into a favourite residential suburb of Montreal. The population grew from 4,885 in 1896

to 7,716 in only three years. Housing expanded up the mountainside and there were great schemes for "street railway" service up the hill. Residents complained about reckless carriage drivers. They petitioned for water and drainage systems and continually sought to repair bridges that crossed the ravine running through wooded Westmount Park.

In this setting then, on June 7, 1897, Councillor William Douw Lighthall steered a motion through Council to build and stock "a free public library" as recommended by the permanent memorial subcommittee of the General Committee of Citizens. To be erected on a site of 10,000 square feet in the park, it would be financed by the \$13,000 windfall the Town had obtained two years earlier in a court case against the Coates Gas Company for failing to provide contracted services.

A library by-law adopted by council on October 4 was submitted to property owners at a special public meeting on October 18 at 10 o'clock in the morning. It was unanimously accepted, no one demanding a poll or vote as was customary for large expenditures.

In January 1898, a library committee of trustees was established composed of three elected members, three members of council and the mayor, James R. Walker, a member ex-officio.

With less than 18 months before the library would open, Robert Findlay was named architect. A native Scot and Westmount resident, Findlay had already designed the Sun Life Assurance Building at Dominion Square and would soon be called on to design Westmount Hall (the forerunner of Victoria Hall) and later, with his son Frank, Westmount City Hall.

Mr. Gould, of McGill University's Redpath Library, provided vital advice and offered designs of libraries in New England. There, the concept of small town libraries was already entrenched and about to be emulated throughout America by funding from the Carnegie Trust.

Councillor J.H. Redfern visited libraries in the Boston area and the Westmount planners embraced the ideas he brought back. Most bore the typical features of architect Henry Hobson Richardson: an arched entrance topped by a gabled roof and peaked tower. One of five Richardson designs contained in a report by the Connecticut Public



⁴ Robert Findlay

Library Committee of 1895 and 1896 was originally proposed for Westmount.

The final design would reflect the Richardson influence as well as Findlay's neoclassical background and the functional input of librarian Gould.

Interesting was a controversy surrounding the five Richardson designs. Librarians generally opposed his cozy reading rooms and alcoves, light chairs and small tables. Elizabeth Hanson, in *Libraries and Culture* (Spring 1988), says the dispute prompted renowned librarian Charles A. Cutter, of the Forbes Institute in Northampton, Mass., to declare: "I think from our experience of architects' plans that we can safely say the architect is the natural enemy of the librarian." History would seem to repeat itself during the design debate that would plague Westmount's Library Renewal Project decades later.

One of Findlay's first designs for the Westmount library, showing four wings and a rotunda, proved to be too grandiose a scheme for the library committee. Many designs later, the library committee approved a final set on June 1, 1898, only to have the tenders come in over budget at \$10,200. The plan featured three reading rooms: one each for men, "ladies" and children. It had to be revised leading to elimination of the children's library which, it was noted, could be added later.



Westmount Public Library.
General Reading Room.

5

Tenders for the amended plan were approved by the council on July 20, 1898, in the amount of \$10,056. The building would eventually cost \$11,500; books and fittings added another \$3,500. The final design had an area of 3,368 square feet with capacity for 3,000 books.

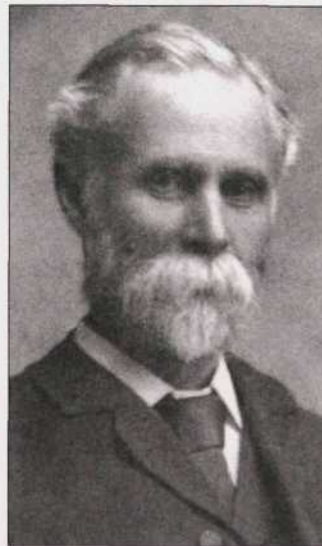
Construction of the library began in October 1898 and took eight months.

Among various purchases recorded in Council minutes were: "carpets, seats, desks, light fixtures, etc. required for the Library and Reading Room at an estimated cost of \$1,553.50." Leaded glass windows were listed at \$250 and another \$500 was placed at the disposal of the library committee for the purpose of "interior embellishment." These were authorized June 4, 1899, only 16 days before the library was to open.

A contract for electric lighting went to the Lachine Rapids Hydraulic and Land Company for "three quarters of a cent per 16 c.p. (candle power) lamp hour less 33 1/3 per cent and the usual discount of 5 per cent."

The opening of the new library on June 20, 1899, was a festive occasion of flags, flowers, caterers and an orchestra. The opening address by Mayor Walker described the picturesque location

surrounded by trees and flower beds, an atmosphere the renewal project in 1995 would try to recapture through landscaping. The guest speaker, librarian William Fletcher of Amherst College, Massachusetts, used the occasion to explain that an agreement had been reached in the librarian-architect controversy over the Richardson design.



⁶ James R. Walker

While the new library was entirely built during the mayoralty of Mr. Walker (1898-1899), his was one of the few mayoral portraits never painted for City Hall. When his great grand-daughter, Diana McMurray, discovered the discrepancy in 1994, the city commissioned painter John Barwick to create a portrait of Mr. Walker from photographs in time for the opening of the refurbished library in November 1995.

"It seemed an appropriate time," Mrs. McMurray said, noting that her own children, as descendants of Mr. Walker's father-in-law, Henry Earle, were the sixth generation of the family to live in Westmount. Mayor Walker, she says, was known as a "soft-spoken and modest man" who was very frugal and probably considered it a waste of money to have his portrait painted.

The Findlay building, as the original library came to be known, was a compact rectangular structure of red brick. It had an imposing arched entrance with a porch under a peaked gabled roof. To the left was a large tower. Above the doorway and on either side, were three reliefs in yellow sandstone executed by sculptor George W. Hill from Findlay

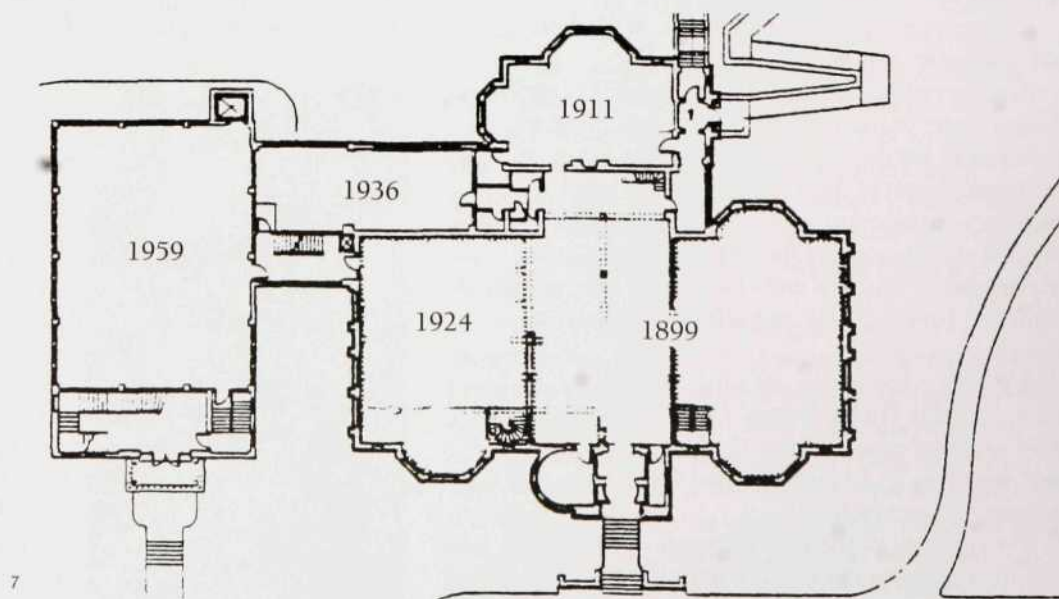
sketches (Hill also sculpted Westmount's cenotaph monument in 1920).

Inside, the new library had a central delivery room with the circulation desk directly across from the entrance, catalogue section along the left side and a closed stack room at the rear. Stretching all along the north side, through heavy Romanesque arches, was the large reading room, bisected into the men's and ladies' reading rooms by more arches. A two-sided fireplace made it cozy and provided "gracious comfort".

Pendant light fixtures hung from coffered ceilings above the arches. Stencilled friezes adorned the walls. There were oak chairs, lighter wooden chairs with wicker seats, oak tables and double lamps with coloured glass shades.

The first collection offered current newspapers, periodicals and 2,000 books catalogued by the McGill University Library at a cost of 10 cents per book. The stacks were closed to general access and users had to request the desired book. The library was open for general reading on the premises but borrowing privileges were extended only to Westmount residents registered as members.

Within three months, the fledgling library boasted 700 members. In a year, it would have 600 more books. Soon it would be ready for expansion.



Evolution of the library's footprint by 1990

III

Four Additions

1911, 1924, 1936 and 1959

Stripped of its intended children's room, the library of 1899 was, in a sense, incomplete before it even opened. And stubborn librarian Mary Solace Saxe refused to let anyone forget it.

She wrote in one report that it took her 10 years to persuade the Library Committee to build a children's room "not in the basement, nor in the attic but a wing with a separate entrance, separate hours and (its) own separate librarian."

The building of the Children's Library pavilion in 1911 marked the first of four significant additions that took place before the renewal project of the 1990s. It was followed by a south reading room in 1924, new work space and extensive interior work in 1936 and a three-storey annex in 1959 for stacks and the children's department.

THE 1911 CHILDREN'S PAVILION

The original Children's Library was financed by a special fundraising campaign. Also designed by Robert Findlay, it had its own entrance facing Sherbrooke Street, an open fireplace and a distinct



8 Restored 1911 pavilion

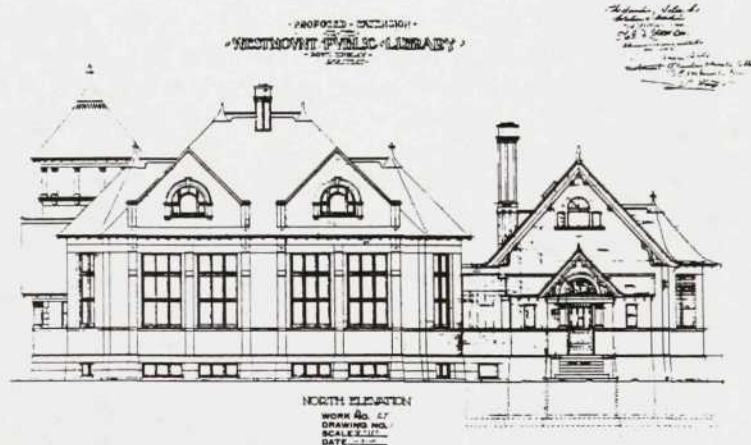
residential charm. At the same time, a second storey was added to the stack room at the rear of the main library, but there was no connection between the children's room and the main building.

"Apparently children were not to be seen as well as not heard," says Raymond Ulyatt who chaired the library renewal project's steering committee in the 1990s.

Miss Saxe, who had succeeded original librarian Beatrice Moore in 1901, considered the children's pavilion to be the most important achievement of her 30-year career. Her retirement came only two years before the Canadian Committee of Enquiry, in a national survey, would report Westmount to be "a pioneer in introducing the children's room and the trained children's librarian."

THE SOUTH ADDITION OF 1924

Her tenure saw another important addition in 1924: the building of a south section to the main building, a reference room to commemorate the library's 25th anniversary. Designed by Robert Findlay and his son Frank, it created a balanced tripartite plan featuring two reading rooms, one either side of a central lobby. A mezzanine stretched



9

North elevation of library showing addition of Children's Pavilion of 1911, architect Robert Findlay



Interior of the Children's Pavilion in the 1920s shows wall stencilling, coffered ceiling and fireplace before the room was divided into offices in 1959.

No. 11. Children's Room, Civic Library, Westmount, Canada.

10

across the east wall of the new room. Changes also were made in cataloguing and staff rooms at the rear as well as to the roof line.

Three years later, a flower conservatory called the Palm Court, or Palm Room, was built and linked by a narrow passage to the entrance foyer of the children's pavilion.

MODERNIZING IN 1936

In 1936 an addition to the work room at the rear of the library was designed by Philip J. Turner, McGill professor of architecture. The library's interior also underwent a dramatic modernizing. The dark-coloured walls were covered by several coats of cream-coloured paint. A revolving door was placed at the main entrance. Sometime later, fluorescent lights would be hung from the ceiling coffers, all but obscuring them.

THE 1959 ANNEX

An entirely new building of contemporary style was erected to the south of the Findlay building. Designed by the firm of Durnford, Bolton, Chadwick and Ellwood in 1958, construction began and finished the next year forcing complete closure of the library between June and October of 1959. The new three-storey brick annex was linked to the

main library but had a separate entrance leading directly to the children's department on the entire top floor. The first and second floors housed stacks.

At the same time, interior changes at Findlay resulted in demolition of two of the original columns in the lobby that have now been restored in the latest project. The original children's pavilion was divided into three offices and a corridor.

MORE CHANGES

It was not until 1967, when the firm of Aspler and Kula Architects was hired to make more interior changes, that the original double-sided fireplace and colonnade bisecting the north room were demolished. In 1975, two sandstone plaques from the dismantled fireplace were placed either side of the main entrance only to be quickly eaten away by the elements.

While many of the changes reflected the mood and necessity of the day, some were to be viewed in retrospect as destroying irreplaceable interior charm.

By the time Westmount Public Library was ready to celebrate its 85th anniversary in 1984, it had a membership of 9,542, a book stock of almost 123,000 and a new microcomputer. It was entering the electronic age.



11

1924

(above) South addition in 1924 gives library a more balanced look, interior tripartite plan.

(below) Reading room for reference collection has mezzanine across the bay window on the east wall.



12



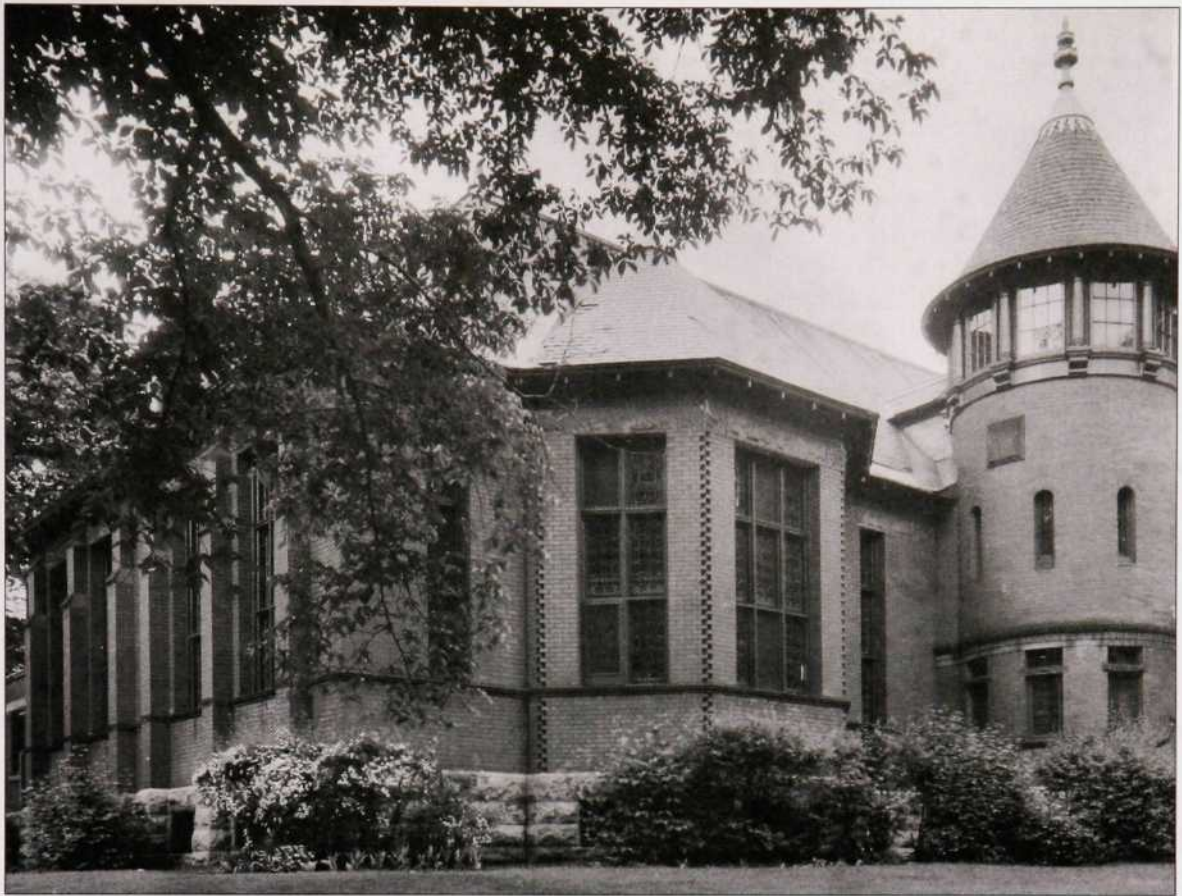
13

1936

(above) Arches and walls are now covered over in cream-coloured paint; librarian's office is put under mezzanine in the south reading room. This photo shows another mezzanine to the left.



14



15

1958

(above) The south face of the Findlay building in 1958 before the annex was erected in 1959.

(below) The library with new 1959 annex as seen from parking lot.



16



17

1990s before
restoration:

Above, main lobby
viewed from east
entrance has circulation
desk at left, two Adam
Sheriff Scott paintings in
the arches where a pillar
was removed in 1959.
Two companion
paintings are hidden by
the desk area. Large
supporting pole is
prominent in centre
photo. Below, the card
catalogue in the foyer
covers the colonnade
to the north reading
(reference) room.



18



19

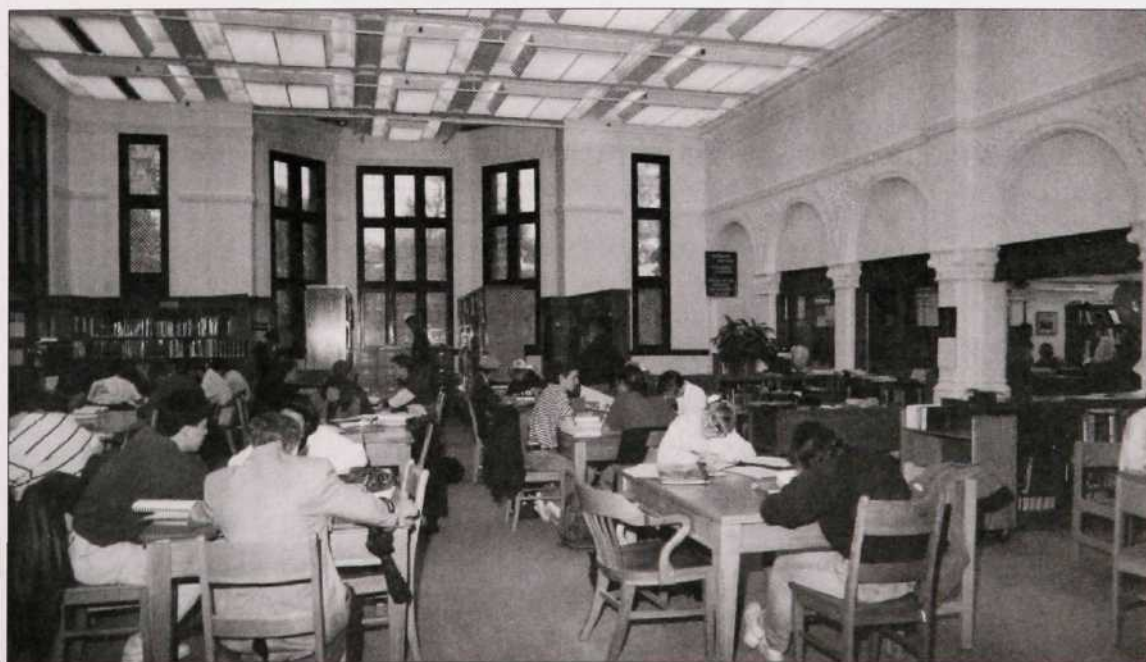


20

Fluorescent lights cover the coffered ceilings of south and north reading rooms (top and bottom photo). Centre photo shows limited reading space.



21



22



23

III



24



25

1980s
(top) Lack of space crams cataloguing room into part of the 1911 children's library. *(centre)* Little shelf space in the reference room means much of the reference material has to be kept in the basement. *(below)* The audio-visual collection is jammed into a corner of the lobby while the narrowing of aisles in the 1959 annex prevents wheelchair access.



26

Bridging the Years

The need to rebuild

While the library world was racing onto the information highway, little had been done to make Westmount's library even road worthy. By 1982, when the library acquired its first personal computer, neglect over the past decade had left it barely able to handle such up-to-date equipment.

"Every time someone plugged in the electric kettle the PC went out," recalls Rosemary Lydon, later to become chief librarian. "It was impossible to modernize with the facilities we had."

The building was bursting at the seams. Rain leaked through the roof into buckets and oozed through the foundation to soak material stored in the basement. Every nook and cranny was crammed. More work space and even washrooms were needed. Where would one put the new audio cassettes? The large-print books? And the expanding French collection? What about space for audio-visual material, computers or other needs of the 21st century?

Urgent repairs, update and expansion — not to mention political will in an era of financial constraint — proved even more challenging than building a library from scratch. What had taken two years to conceive and build in 1899, would take eight to renew a century later.

The first efforts to expand the library and renovate existing facilities began at the level of library workers and the Public Library Committee (trustees) in the mid 1980s. How and when it would be undertaken lay in the hands of three city councils under mayors Brian Gallery (1983-1987), May Cutler (1987-1991) and Peter Trent (1991-1995).

When the subject of library expansion was broached at the council level during the Gallery years, recalls former councillor Sally Aitken, it was quickly dismissed in the face of soaring contributions to the Montreal Urban Community and other priorities. Mrs. Aitken, who also sat on the Library Committee from 1983-1991, was privy to discussions by both groups.

Says John Shingler, who also served on both the city council and library committee: "I think it was

clear there was a need for refurbishing the library in terms of acquisitions, numbers of newspapers and magazines and the way they could be displayed and read. It was clear our facilities and security needed upgrading but it seemed evident there were not the resources and that the city council did not have the political will."

With the acquisition of audio and video cassettes, space limitations became a pressing concern and a public meeting was held by the library November 7, 1985, to discuss its changing role in meeting the increasing demands for electronic and research materials. To prepare for the meeting, a group of concerned citizens and representatives of the Library Committee toured other municipal libraries in sister suburbs.

Examination of the library's evolving role came on the heels of efforts by the chief librarian to obtain plans for building a small addition. The somewhat daring move went nowhere, Mrs. Aitken says. The preliminary plans, submitted to her by the city's architect September 12, 1985, proposed pushing out the back wall of the library to create desperately-needed work space. The change would free-up the original 1911 children's library that was divided into offices in 1959.

While Rosemary Lydon's plan "dissolved in politics," Mrs. Aitken says, "we (the library trustees) were pleased she had taken the initiative."

When the city's three-year capital works budget for 1986-1988 was adopted at the end of 1985, it contained a \$300,000 provision earmarked for "expansion of the library" in 1987. It was short-lived hope. Extracts from the Library Committee minutes of October 16, 1986, read: "The Members of the Committee were of the opinion that an extension had become necessary and that a proposal for its construction should be made by the Library Committee to the Council."

It never came to pass as recorded in the minutes only a month later: "An extension to the Library would not be carried out in 1987, but an

assessment of the current space and the Library's requirements, and a feasibility study had been suggested by the (city) Director General."

So the door was not closed. The Library Committee proceeded on the suggested course by launching the first of two user surveys to assess library needs and collect the facts to prove the case for expansion. "The idea was to get statistics for a skeptical council that felt the library was already taking up enough of the city's budget," Mrs. Aitken says.

"You needed a vision and you needed a May Cutler to drive it."

"I remember May Cutler coming to a Library Committee meeting in September or October (1987) quite upset because the library didn't have a certain magazine and a specific tour book," Mr. Shingler says. "I told her if she wanted improvements then she should exercise her democratic right and run for office. She said: 'Well, I will'".

Ironically, the first user survey undertaken in-house in November not only identified increased space as the greatest need but also coincided with the surprise victory of the visionary mayor.

IV

And so the first faltering steps toward eventual expansion of Westmount Public Library had already been taken when book publisher May Cutler was skyrocketed into the mayor's office in November 1987 to spark a grandiose renewal of the city's best-used facility.

At first, she recalls, "I sat in on every meeting of the Library Committee and I was horrified by what the library looked like. It was disintegrating. There was no security in the stacks and the librarians had to work in cubbyholes."

But just as the previous council had been "skeptical" about making even a small addition to the library, so was her own council (comprising most of the same councillors) when faced by her flamboyant vision to create a cultural complex in the heart of Westmount. For the Cutler dream was not only to restore and enlarge the library, but it was also to integrate the library with the greenhouses and with Victoria Hall. The hall would be completely refurbished to provide theatrical and musical performances.

Discouraged but undaunted, "I kept the thing going," she says.

She visited other libraries including New York's public library as well as the new \$40 million library in Dallas. "I knew how libraries were supposed to operate." She toured and videotaped neighbouring local libraries and brought in a number of speakers to the Westmount Advisory Committee on Culture (WACC), one of the citizen committees which she initiated.

While political progress remained slow in the face of fiscal constraints, the Library Committee continued on its own previously-charted course to collect the facts needed to prove the cause for expansion. It launched the second user survey. A Sorécom poll of 609 residents in 1988 found two-thirds used the library and were pleased with its services and ambiance. Results complemented findings of the less scientific in-house survey of the previous year.

About the same time, library staff carried out an estimate of space required to provide existing

The Vision Takes Shape

The Cutler Years 1987-1991

services in the future. Needed were 15,000 "extra" square feet, almost double the floor space, for a total of 33,000. The completed project would actually provide 29,600 square feet.

In a written plea to the Library Committee accompanying these findings, chief librarian Rosemary Lydon said, "I strongly recommend that the services of a library building consultant be retained to give guidance on the use of available space and the design of additional space."

Based on the two user polls, the survey of space and continued pressures from the mayor, city council agreed late that fall of 1988 to hire Toronto library planner Albert Bowron to conduct a feasibility study on the future of Westmount's library services and facilities.

"The package is the problem," he stated in presenting a 72-page report that followed. His numerous recommendations for updating operations were presented July 6, 1989, to a joint meeting of the Library Committee and the Westmount Advisory Committee on Culture. Most interesting, in retrospect, was his option for expansion which called for demolishing the 1959 annex and constructing a new three-storey wing to wrap around

the back of the Findlay building. Estimated cost of new construction was \$2 million.

"The goal is to simplify the library," he explained. "Additions have tended to complicate the structure", confusing and even turning off library users. He envisioned a historical room with crystal chandelier and Persian rugs suitable for displaying the library's historical collection. It should be situated in the 1911 children's library that since had been sub-divided into offices. He also suggested an art gallery and meeting rooms.

"Whether or not you agreed with Bowron's recommendations, the library project was on the move," says Sally Aitken. "And with May as mayor, fortunately, there was no turning back."

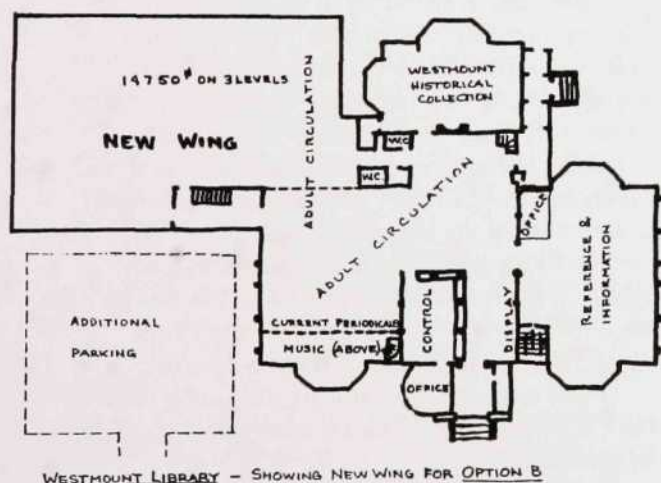
Armed with the Bowron report, Mayor Cutler called a town meeting on "culture and leisure" for November 13, 1989. It was exactly half way through her mandate. Chaired by Library Committee chairman Michèle Dutrisac-Kilburn, the meeting heard little opposition to the plan to upgrade the library. Citizens, at least, seemed on side.

It was about this time that political help came from unexpected quarters. A council seat opened up when new business commitments forced finance commissioner Phillip Aspinall to resign. Astutely, Mrs. Cutler persuaded entrepreneur and former city councillor Peter Trent to return and fill the vacancy.

"That was the turning point," she recalls. She knew that Mr. Trent supported renewal of the library. If he would run as mayor in the next election, she would not. "At least, I thought, I had started something that somebody else knew how to finish."

And so it was January 16, 1990, that Mr. Trent joined the councillors with whom he had once worked under Mayor Gallery.

Another important step in moving the project along, according to Mrs. Cutler, was the appointment January 1, of a new library trustee, retired businessman and veteran library user Raymond Ulyatt. Ultimately, he would come to chair both the Library Committee and the Library Project Steering Committee.



27 Expansion layout proposed by Bowron in 1989



28

May Cutler and Peter Trent celebrate his election as mayor.

Losing little time, Mr. Trent convinced Mayor Cutler to postpone the renovation of Victoria Hall and the greenhouse to a later phase. He then began manoeuvring the project forward. Within two months he submitted an action plan to council and proposed the name of internationally-acclaimed architect Peter Rose. "I was so impressed with the Canadian Centre for Architecture (a Rose design) that I was delighted with the suggestion," Mayor Cutler says.

On July 9, 1990, council approved \$40,000 for a feasibility study by Rose, a Westmount resident. Submitting the study January 14, 1991, Rose was commissioned March 4 to produce schematics for design development at a cost of \$201,850. Three days later a building committee was struck of Ulyatt, Lydon, Trent and city official Edwin McCavour.

"All this time we were including (library planner) Bowron in the design discussions," Mr. Trent recalls. But a difference of opinion between Bowron and Rose was erupting. "Bowron wanted one large building. Rose wanted two buildings

architecturally linked." Finally, the library planner wrote to the chief librarian that, "the scheme presented by the architect is little improvement on the present arrangement... it would be better to keep what you have."

Rose won out and his schematics were presented at a public meeting in Victoria Hall on May 29, 1991. They called for demolishing the 1959 annex and building a larger wing linked to the Findlay structure by a long passageway and new glazed entrance off Sherbrooke Street. Plans also suggested elaborate landscaping and a reflecting pool.

While costs were kept vague during the meeting, they were rumoured to be \$6 million to \$7 million, even reaching as much as \$10 million.

Rose was quickly commissioned to prepare detailed designs and engineering studies for an expenditure of \$330,000 adopted over the summer with little protest.

Westmounter Jonathan Deitcher was initially appointed to chair a fundraising campaign. In October, he addressed the Rotary Club of Westmount saying his efforts were based on cost estimates of \$9 million (excluding landscaping) of which \$3 million would come from private donations.

While Mayor Cutler fought to cut waste and spending from the operating budgets of Westmount as well as the Montreal Urban Community, she also felt strongly that it was time Westmounters renewed long-neglected facilities such as the library. "You have been using it for 90 years," she said. "Don't you think you owe it something?"

Opposition to spending so much was already under way from the Westmount Finance Action Committee when the 1991 municipal election campaign swung into high gear. Financial constraint was on everyone's election platform. Councillor Peter Trent, the lone mayoralty candidate, promised to poll citizens before any decision would be taken on the extent of the library renewal.

True to her word, the mayor stepped down entrusting the future of the project to Mr. Trent. One of her last acts was to endorse candidates sympathetic to his policies. All were elected.

"I was content to get at least this much done," May Cutler says. "And to leave something gracefully but profitably."



Making it Happen

The Trent Council 1991-1995

The fate of the library project lay more precariously in the hands of the neophyte council than many people realized.

Only a month after the mayor and eight councillors were sworn into office came very bad news from quantity surveyors Both Belle Robb. Detailed estimates of the basic plans put costs at \$10.5 million, almost \$3 million more than calculated the year before. Taxes, parking, landscaping and furnishings would push the project to \$13 million. On top of this, the project had already racked up \$292,000 in fees to architect Peter Rose and \$128,000 to others.

"My feeling was that the project was totally out of scale," says Councillor John Lehnert. "I was dubious about tearing down the existing annex." He was also against the massive new entrance, the amount of office space for librarians and the area allocated to children in an aging community. While the new councillor was the only elected candidate of the Westmount Finance Action Committee which had opposed the scheme, he found other colleagues shared some of his views.

Clearly, without a major revamp or a very slick exercise in damage control, library renewal was seriously threatened. Soliciting input from councillors John Bridgman and John Lehnert in preparing a status report, the mayor summoned council members to a meeting at his home January 9, 1992, later to be dubbed the Basement Summit or the Chinese Dinner Meeting. The session thrashed out the future of the project. Would council forge ahead with it, down size or even scrap the whole idea? Change management or architects? And with what budget, schedule and cost control?

"We started off around the table in the dining room eating take-out Chinese food, then we went down to the basement to continue our discussion," the mayor recalls. "The library project was not something all saw as a priority."

As Councillor Lehnert says: "We were trying to work out something we could all live with. I was interested in the library project and I fought very hard to get it down to what I thought was a defensible cost."

Obtaining no consensus at the Basement Summit and working on concerns expressed, Mr. Trent prepared a plan to scale down the project so its design and costs would be acceptable not only to council but also to taxpayers whom he had promised to poll. His proposal for New Design and Cost Parameters was ready for presentation to council on January 20, 1992.

It proposed to pare down the project to a cost of \$7.5 million, the amount originally discussed in late 1990. Total floor area would be cut back from 33,000 square feet to 27,500. The proposed multi-purpose room was quashed along with extra frills such as the reflecting pool. Repairs and restoration work for the original Findlay building remained unchanged and the concept of retaining separate buildings joined by a link (or spine) was kept. But the Trent proposal skirted the contentious issue of outright demolition of the 1959 Annex. Instead it "allowed" demolition of the east (front) wall, maintained the same basic boundaries as the existing annex while permitting expansion to the west (into the greenhouse area behind). Though council would later adopt the position that it made economic sense to demolish the entire building, the compromise at this stage was enough for the councillors to approve the new proposal and establish the basic footprint.

"This was the watershed," the mayor recalls. But only the beginning. "I spent nine months trying to get them to buy into the project and make it their own."

There was little time to lose. A new Library Project Steering Committee was formed January 29, 1992, headed by Raymond Ulliyatt and comprising Mayor Trent and councillors John Bridgman, John Lehnert and James Wright. While chief librarian Rosemary Lydon had been a member of the earlier building committee before the election, there now was no representation from the library staff, a point



1959 Annex:
To stay or not to stay?

29

that would later become a significant issue. Instead, the city hired well-known library consultant, Margaret Beckman, to act as liaison.

Efforts now focussed on integrating the reduced project into the architectural designs prepared to date so it could be presented to a city-wide poll of citizens in the fall.

Over the spring and summer, as final designs were being completed, the many and varied players involved in the project became a dimension in itself. Two distinct camps were emerging and becoming increasingly entrenched in their respective, and sometimes polarized, views. The library staff and independent library consultants (first Bowron and then Beckman) fought for design and layout principles generally held for modern libraries. The architect and the Library Project Steering Committee based design decisions on principles of architectural and heritage preservation that had been adopted earlier.

Council members sometimes provided a third dimension, still questioning both the demolition of the 1959 annex and the proposed contemporary glass north entrance which they found overpowering. Even the architect himself, the mayor says, complained about "unqualified members" of the steering committee over-ruling him, about involvement of the city's Architectural and Planning Commission and about the difficulties of working with the different positions taken by the two city councils.

"There was a terrible problem of doctrinaire attitudes with some of these experts," says Councillor Lehnert. "It made a very difficult and complex project even more complex."

While design details continued to be debated behind closed doors, plans were far enough along to be submitted to residents for their approval in the promised poll. A 12-page information booklet explaining the project's rationale and cost was sent to 9,949 addresses on November 12, 1992. The \$7.5 million project, as presented, would include a new \$3 million wing to replace the smaller 1959 annex. The remaining \$4.5 million would be spent on the original Findlay building: \$2.2 million to restore its Victorian splendour and \$2.3 million to repair and save it "from irreversible damage".

The project would be financed through a loan by-law of \$7.5 million though the city hoped to offset \$1.5 million of this through a fundraising campaign. The brochure said financing could be expected to add about \$120 per year for 10 years to the tax bill of the average single-family dwelling.

"Do you support the Library Renewal Project as described in this Information Package?" residents were asked. Yes, replied 77.4 percent. With approval from 1,411 of the 1,822 who returned their ballot, the project was a "go", the mayor announced exuberantly at the city council meeting December 7, 1992.

Comments and suggestions from the poll were reviewed. Some said: put the project on hold for improved economic conditions, make only essential repairs, increase parking and charge non-residents a user fee.

Sketch of Rose pavilion to the left of the Findlay, presented in 1993.

30



Despite a last-minute campaign against the project by the Westmount Finance Action Committee only 118 citizens registered against the loan by-law January 20, 1993. Since 500 were required to force a referendum, the by-law was approved. It specified \$1.04 million for professional fees, \$5.28 million for construction and \$1.20 million for contingencies and the cost of issuing the loan.

Just as the last hurdle seemed to have been cleared, a controversy erupted that would stall the project for six months.

The design dispute that had been brewing between librarians and architects/steering committee came to a head. The city's own library staff had already written to chief librarian Lydon on December 2, 1992, voicing concern over a number of functional points in the layout and in other areas such as a need for more parking. "The staff are constantly being asked if this is a plan of which we approve," the letter said, "and we find it difficult to give it our whole-hearted support." Their concerns went public and Rosemary Lydon backed her staff: "All the professional librarians who've seen the plan can identify with the issues," she said.

Not all was cast in concrete, declared steering committee chairman Ulyatt. "There is much work to be done on the layout. The footprint is essentially determined... but where all the individual elements will go is still being worked out."

And city director general Manley Schultz explained that some of the points the professional librarians might deem impractical resulted from efforts not to destroy any of the building's heritage value nor encroach on the park's green space.

Then on March 1, 1993, in the name of management restructuring, the position of chief librarian was abolished by council forcing the departure of Miss Lydon and generating an outcry from citizens and professional librarians alike. The issue of a new management structure became entangled with the design complaints. To try and resolve some of the concerns, the city invited some 50 professional librarians living in Westmount to a "focus group"

meeting March 24. It ended with Mayor Trent promising to put design work on hold until after a new library director was hired.

During this interim period, city projects manager Edwin McCavour supervised library operations, helped prepare for automation and gathered input from library workers on interior layout.

When Caroline Thibodeau took over the new position of director of library and culture on August 23, 1993, some of the changes called for by the librarians' focus group were put into force by the mayor. The project was back on track. Paramount was the librarians' concern that the library director have greater decision-making input in the project. As a result, the new librarian was added to the steering committee and a Trent and Thibodeau Design Team was set up to expedite the numerous decisions required: the mayor handling architectural design; the librarian, functional layout.

By December 22, 1993, the design layout was complete and other key decisions were in place. Though not immediately announced, retired Alcan chairman and chief executive officer David Culver had agreed to chair the \$1.5 million campaign assisted by the professional fundraising firm of Navion. Gespro SST Inc. was hired as project manager at a cost of \$127,400. A countdown schedule was being finalized for the move of the library to temporary quarters and for the approaching period of demolition and construction.

"On time and on budget" became a buzzword. "That was the condition under which David Culver agreed to chair the fundraising campaign," the mayor says. "I assured him I would bring the project in on time and on budget if he would bring in the money."

There were some key points, the mayor says. "Construction costs were going down, so it was important to move quickly. And I insisted on having a project manager. The old (Findlay) building was fraught with the possibility of extra costs from the



31

contractor. "It was also essential to bring together disparate groups: citizens, librarians, architects and the WMA (Westmount Municipal Association)."

Contractor Sam Aberman was one of several experts pulled into the project when particular expertise was required. He joined the steering committee for the period when important contracts were being negotiated "so we wouldn't overpay," Mayor Trent says. Later, library consultant Aaron Cohen, of New York, would be hired for advice on functional layout and shelving while architect Julia Gersovitz would be brought into the restoration phase for urgent assistance with decor and interior design.

At this time, architect Michel Languedoc was hired to form a consortium with original architect Peter Rose. His firm of Tétreault, Parent, Languedoc et Associés had a reputation for completing projects on budget and on schedule. "We couldn't have done it without TPL," says Councillor Bridgman. "This was a big, big project and the last thing we wanted was for it not to get done."

At the city council meeting of November 1, 1993, a contract was approved retaining the professional services of Rose and TPL for \$440,000. The contract featured a cap on fees including re-design work as well as liaison between the consortium and the city's Architectural and Planning Commission.

With the closing of the year, major components of the project were in place. The lease for temporary quarters of the adult collection was concluded and plans to relocate the children's department to Victoria Hall were underway. The big move lay ahead.

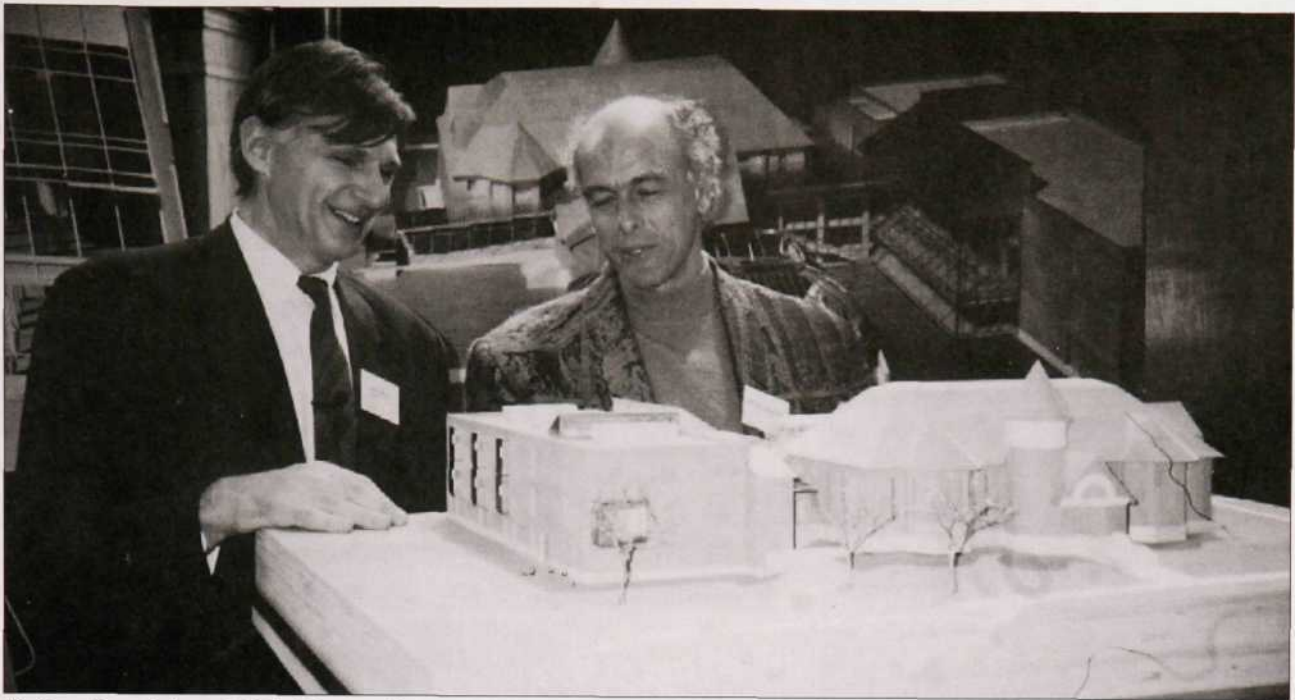
COUNTDOWN TO CONSTRUCTION

"It's a very tight schedule, with only 13 months for construction and renovation," said library director Caroline Thibodeau during an interview in March 1994. Layout had just been finalized the week before and there was an atmosphere of apprehension in the library. It was only one month until moving day for the adult and reference collections. She spoke calmly but it was clear that no one could imagine exactly how the thousands of books could possibly be packed, relocated, shelved and ready for business again a week later.

As she spoke, modifications were under way at the new quarters, 4221-4225 St. Catherine Street at the corner of Olivier Avenue. Public works crews used 32 gallons of recycled paint. Previously housing the Westmount Post Office, it was one of few vacant sites that could support the weight of the books. The area, some 9,765 square feet at ground level, was leased by the city from May 1, 1994, to September 30, 1995, with right to occupy February 1, and an option to extend (which ultimately was used). The rent of \$13.95 per square foot, a total of \$192,980, would be paid from the city's operating budget.

Soon a long banner appeared along Sherbrooke Street in front of the library. The slogan said it all: *On bouge! We're on the move!* As soon as the library closed April 18 for book-packing time, the large moving trucks from Baillargeon, Breton & Associés became a familiar sight in Library Drive throughout the next few days. It took 80 truck loads to transport an estimated 3,500 cartons of books loaded and unloaded by a crew of 25.

"We did a lot of laughing," the library director recalls. "But it was more rueful than hysterical."



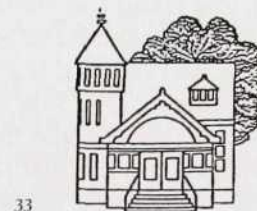
³² Peter Rose, left, and Michel Languedoc.

The move itself went smoothly and the new premises were more popular than expected. Users found the new bright quarters pleasant and cheery. Shelving was arranged in orderly fashion making it user-friendly for even the occasional browser.

It was Councillor Bridgman who ceremoniously signed out the first book when the library re-opened in the new quarters Monday, April 25. A two-volume work, *The Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* by John Fiske, it had been the first book entered in the collection of the Westmount Public Library 95 years earlier. "Storrs McCall, my old philosophy professor, would be very pleased," Mr. Bridgman said. But he never read it, he admits. "It was a terrible book!" The historic tome had not been checked out since 1970.

Developments took place thick and fast in the next few months. A scale model of the library project was unveiled May 2 in the empty north reading room of the library, known to most of the invited guests as the reference room. "Isn't it wonderful," exclaimed former mayor May Cutler as architects Rose and Languedoc slowly turned the model to reveal the new complex. Consisting of the original Findlay building, the separate 1911 children's pavilion and the new Rose building to the south, all were linked by a long spine or passageway with its controversial new entrance, now stepped down and modified.

The library's new logo also was displayed replacing the original line drawing of a library building. "It's intended to incorporate the old and new," explained the designer, Westmount graphic artist Susan Scott. A stylized apple branch superimposed on an open book represents the library's location in the park; its flow is styled after the decorative designs of William Morris, the British Romantic artist and poet, and the chief influence



33



34



35



36

West face of 1959 Annex falls in August 1994 to make way for larger building and new courtyard.

behind the Arts and Crafts Movement of Victorian England which inspired library architect Robert Findlay.

"Hopefully an apple tree will be planted in the new courtyard," she said. A crabapple was.

Meanwhile renovations were under way next door by Cromwell Construction Inc. to prepare Victoria Hall as temporary quarters for the children's and audio-visual departments. A large crane hoisted steel beams to the top of the stone tower to support a new and lower roof. This conceals the heavy condensing unit for air conditioning equipment. The \$850,000 work also included installation of a sprinkler system and electrical rewiring. The work would last from April 11 to July 13 so the library departments could move into the transformed Concert Hall the week of July 11. The stage area was sectioned off for limited accessibility to little-used reference material not accommodated at the St. Catherine Street branch.

A sod-turning ceremony took place June 22 and safety fencing, 1,000 linear feet of it, was put up around the site between July 25 and August 5.

And so, by the last week of July 1994, heavy equipment from Panzini Construction began moving in to start demolition. For the next three weeks, the

1959 annex fell slowly and carefully. Cost of the demolition was \$55,837, well below the \$200,000 budgeted. Dismantling of two greenhouses at the rear and the enlarging of others was entrusted to L & B Greenhouses at a further \$46,081.

Photographed alone in the rubble on August 22, was a haggard-looking and expendable banana tree. The construction period had begun.



37

VI

Of Bricks and Mortar

The Construction Period 1994-1995

It was now time to select the general contractor. This contract was considered so key to the success of the project that the opening of tenders was postponed two weeks. "Several contractors have asked us to give them more time and details so they can come in with a good price," explained city public works director Fred Caluori. And it worked.

The lowest bid was \$600,000 below budget, a windfall that would be used for furnishings. Hervé Pomerleau Inc. got the job for \$4.88 million taxes included. Highest of the 10 conforming bids was \$6.28 million.

"We had our fingers crossed," Mayor Trent told a special public council meeting held September 19, 1994, to seal the deal.

Pomerleau took over the site September 29 and sub-contractors then were chosen. The task ahead was two-fold: to build a new three-storey pavilion, a fairly straight-forward job; and to renovate the original library, restoring its Victorian sparkle, a far more challenging job.

As city director general Bruce St. Louis says: "Everybody understands new construction. Restoration captivates you but is the most critical. Take out a piece of wall and you may find an unpleasant surprise behind it."

Other important players on the work site would be: project manager Jack Shenker, of Gespro; the city's liaison technician Frank Frenza, superintendent of building operations; architects Rose and Languedoc, of course; and the Design Team of Trent and Thibodeau, mayor and library director respectively, who took over the role of the steering committee.

"The council trusted the mayor's judgment and good taste. We left it to him," says Councillor John Bridgman who devoted most of his efforts to the fundraising campaign.

"I went to the site sometimes twice a week," says the mayor whose business career had centred around building materials. "I know the tricks of the trade. I'm very hands-on."

Stage set and cast chosen, construction was poised to begin.

Of red brick and limestone to blend with the original library, the new building would be raised according to the architectural design of Peter Rose and the working drawings of Michel Languedoc.

It was during this period that Mr. Rose, chosen in part for his Westmount residency, departed for Boston, Massachusetts, where he was teaching at Harvard University. Meetings between client and architects were becoming increasingly difficult to schedule, Mayor Trent reports, leaving a number of design details unsettled.

There were citizen requests. Westmount's Healthy City Project called for the library to be "the ultimate in environmental conservation" and submitted a list of suggestions highlighting energy efficiency. The Westmount Municipal Association hammered away for increased parking at the new site. The Seniors of Westmount Action Group (SWAG) asked for bookcases to have top and bottom shelves that would be easily accessible to seniors.

The role of the city's director general was becoming more strategic every day in co-ordinating the various elements. "I'm spending at least 50 per cent of my time on the library," Mr. St. Louis said. "Eighty per cent of the decisions are being made in 20 per cent of the time that remains."

Viewing his role as facilitator, he says: "In a project of this magnitude, there are different ways of doing things and so many different players. I have to keep everyone up to speed and make sure there's consensus so the project can move ahead. We've had 'umpteens' different ideas about how something should look but finally we have to have a decision because it affects the suppliers. That's where I come in."

Says Mayor Trent: "Whenever someone said something couldn't be done, Bruce St. Louis would say, 'I'll find a way.'"



38



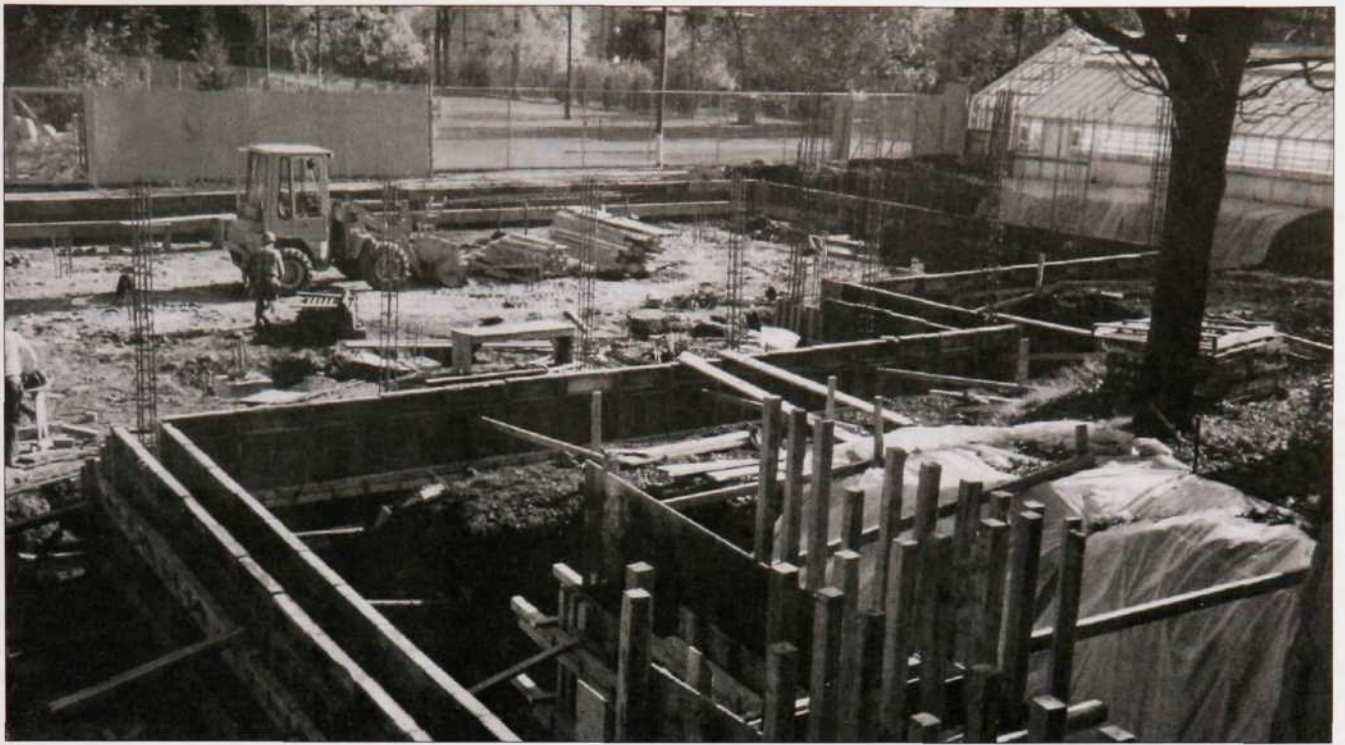
39 Looking out the new glazed reading alcove.

ROSE BUILDING

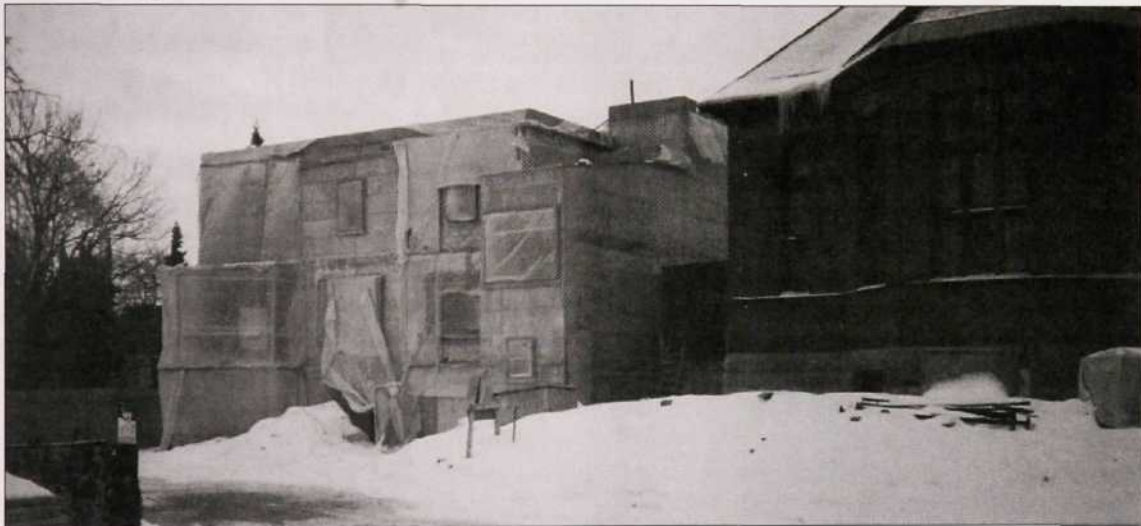
Throughout October, the building site was excavated and piles installed. Footings and foundation walls were poured. Mechanical and electrical installations were carried out prior to pouring the ground floor slab on November 10 and the elevator shaft on November 24. Form work for columns and first floor slab started soon after. Drainage of the courtyard site also was completed. The first floor slab was poured December 2, the second floor December 14 and the roof slab December 21.

According to schedule, the building was up, covered and shrouded in protective plastic in time for the first snowfall.

Here on the site of the 1959 Annex, where generations of Westmount children journeyed with Tintin or listened to story hour, a new pavilion was taking shape for new generations to share in the same adventures.

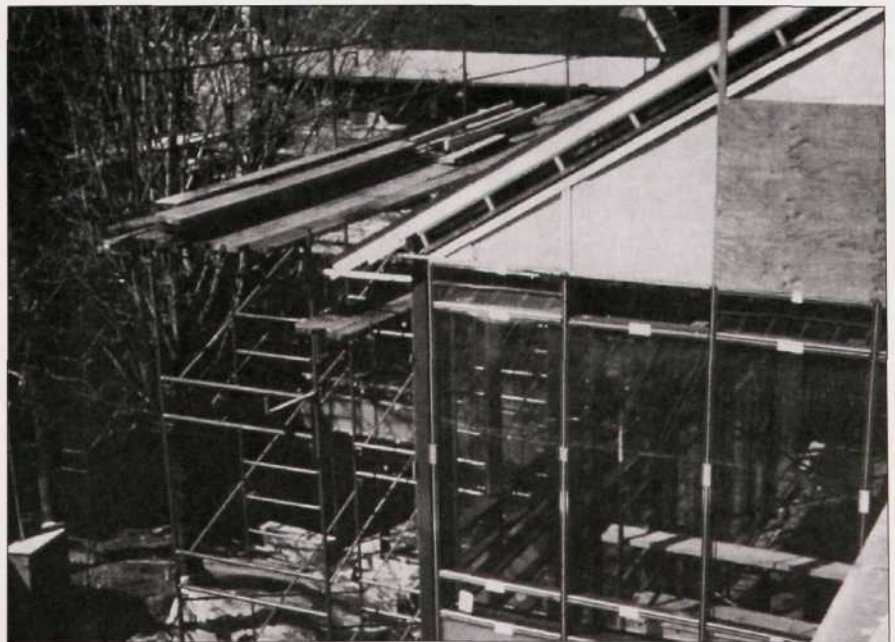


40



41

Foundations for the new building are poured in October 1994 and by January it is up. The three-storey glazed reading area is one of its more distinctive architectural features.



42



43

CONSTRUCTION AT FINDLAY

Next door to the rising Rose pavilion, basic renovation work to repair the Findlay building was under way: drainage, basement excavation, electrical re-wiring, a new roof, thermal windows, seismic reinforcement and addition of a special climate control system to preserve the \$4 million book collection.

By the start of the new year in 1995, counters, walls, mechanical components and other unwanted items were removed to begin the restoration work. As well, the basement was dug out under the south reading room to provide two more feet in ceiling height so the cellar room could be used as a cataloguing room. "Excavation allowed us to increase the total usable area of the project to 29,600 square feet," Mayor Trent explains. "But it was too costly and risky to dig out under the new staff room. "We would be below the footings of the building."

Perimeter drainage was installed, new wall openings made and underpinning of various foundation walls carried out. Work on floor drains

and sanitary drainage also took place. Mechanical ductwork and a subfloor were installed and the water entrance re-routed.

Then came the date Frank Frenza will never forget.

"It was Friday, January 13, when the ceiling fell," he says. Two carpenters were working on a scaffold in the south Findlay room replacing decorative wooden moldings on the coffered ceiling when, very slowly from the southwest end, it began to collapse. "They were still white in the face by the time I got there," he says. Two electricians had just started working in the attic upstairs when the ceiling collapsed. They heard a big crash and looked down to see daylight shining through the floor joists. "One guy told me he was so scared he just kept holding on to something."

Pieces of the 1924 ceiling, a series of wooden coffers, kept falling for the next hour or so. When the dust finally settled, 80 percent of the 1,600 square-foot ceiling lay heaped on the floor. "Thank God it fell when it did," he says. Half an hour earlier and the place would have been flooded. The sprinkler system had been shut off and drained only that morning for the duration of renovations.

After the accident, work was stopped in the Findlay building until an engineering report was obtained to determine its cause and evaluate the stability of the ceiling in the north reading room. While the report of Nicolet Chartrand Knoll Limitée, dated February 2, 1995, drew no conclusions, it suggested that the continuous pounding of pile driving for the new building may have magnified inherent weaknesses in the old ceiling causing its nails to gradually loosen from the attic joists, its only means of support. It further noted that the ceiling bore the weight of four inches of insulating material. As well, screws attaching electrical wires to the ceiling had been removed prior to the pile driving.

As a result of the report and as a precaution, the ceiling of the north reading room was reinforced at an unexpected cost of \$21,800 which the city's insurance did not cover. Damages, as well as the cost of replicating the collapsed ceiling, a total of \$63,000, were covered by the general contractor's insurance. The new decorative coffers were crafted off-site and put up separately.

Fortunately no one was hurt in the incident and only one other mishap was reported during construction. According to Mr. Frenza, a brick fell on a worker gutting the tower but he was not reported injured.

Later, as part of the general renovations, work was carried out to bring the old building up to provincial earthquake standards as far as budget and architectural strengths allowed. Costing \$125,000, the seismic reinforcement involved construction of massive concrete shear walls in two locations from the basement to the attic floor as well as installation of three-quarter inch metal plates at one corner. In the attic, metal grids were placed between joists and girders that were tied in to the lower support system. A new east-west beam between the lobby and south reading room provided another brace. Below this beam, a new colonnade of arches would later be built.

In April, the tall chimney was rebuilt and the new roof installed. Double-glazed thermal windows were added in June.

Despite a two-week work stoppage from July 17 to July 28 for the annual Quebec construction holiday, most of the construction work was completed on time by August, leaving interior finishing and decorating to be carried out in the next three months.

At the historic Findlay building, the final stage of restoration would prove to be the most interesting.

Work begins at the Findlay building with foundations for the new entrance facing Sherbrooke Street.



44

VII

A Wise Old Owl

The first inhabitant

It was early on in construction, when the blustery winds of January whipped around the building site, that The Owl appeared.

He was perched under the eaves of the attic roof on the west side of the Findlay building when Councillor Gail Johnson spotted him during a city council tour. How long he had lived at the site is uncertain though officers patrolling the park at night a decade before used to talk about owls that lived in a tree behind the library and greenhouses.

It didn't take long for The Owl to become the mascot of the Library Renewal Project. No one ever named him or even knew that *he* might not be *she*. Usually referred to in the masculine, however, he quickly became one of the main topics of conversation.

"We could have sold him many times over," says library director Caroline Thibodeau. "We'd take people through the building hoping they'd give us half a million dollars and all they wanted to see was The Owl."

A screech owl, "he was very, very cute," she says. "He was here every day perched by the dormer window." When the attic area was opened up for renovations, he moved inside where he seemed oblivious to the construction workers.

Ventilation workers were especially intrigued by The Owl, perhaps because he usually perched high up in the rafters where they were working. Owl stories spread quickly, about how he used to fly around the attic and inspect the work. In reality, says the city's superintendent of building operations Frank Frenza, The Owl was always asleep while the work went on around him. Once, trying to get some reaction, a worker pounded the rafter under The Owl with a hammer, but it never budged.

Another story has it that an electrician took The Owl home with him one day, Mr. Frenza says. It disappeared from the home. "Three days later, it was back at the site."

But when spring arrived, steering committee chairman Raymond Ulyatt began to worry about The Owl's future. "Once we build over him, he'll have to move." So he contacted David Bird at the Macdonald College raptor centre. Mr. Ulyatt asked what could be done to make The Owl's move as easy as possible. Dr. Bird donated a nesting box for kestrels (hawk-like falcons) which Mr. Ulyatt drove out to Ste. Anne de Bellevue to pick up. It was hung in a tree as close as possible to the face of the building in the new courtyard. "No one ever saw the owl go into the box, so we don't know if he uses it," Mr. Ulyatt says.

Though The Owl's habits remain a mystery, his presence lives on. Librarians have named the library's automated system for the feathered mascot: Online Westmount en Ligne (OWL).

And in the courtyard beneath the nesting box, outside the new children's department, sits a life-size sculpture of an owl on a rock. Created of stone by Val David sculptor J.-P. Bisson, it was commissioned by city council as a tribute to library fundraising chairman David Culver to be unveiled at inaugural ceremonies.

A symbol of wisdom and the mascot of renewal, The Owl is legend for the future.

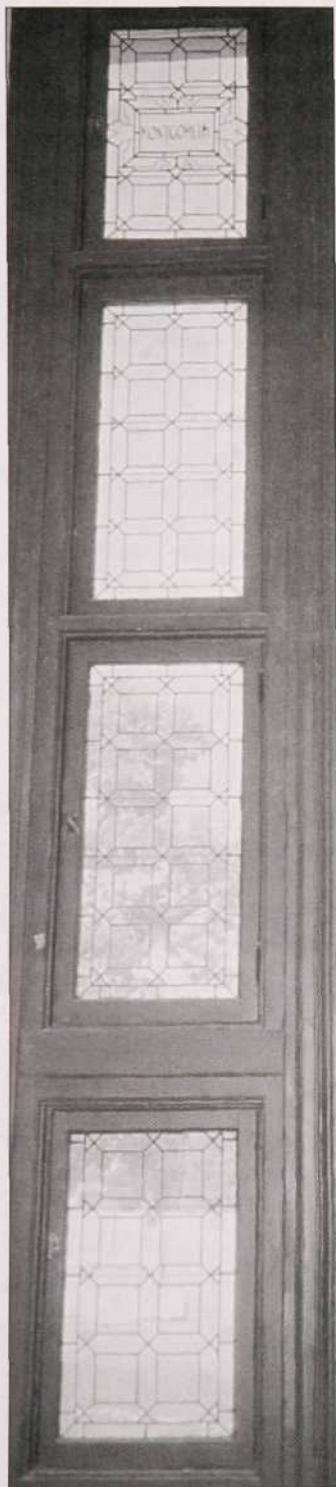


45

The Owl helps library users find their way through the automated cataloguing system with this drawing.

VIII

Restoring 'Findlay'



46

In restoring the Victorian building, one could almost say it had been modernized.

For what has been created by knocking down decades of dividers and partitions is a sense of space, openness and light that so characterizes contemporary architecture. A visual sweep of the three Findlay rooms is now broken only by restored arches, columns and a new colonnade that helps recreate the tripartite concept held by the original architect.



47



48



49

"We're trying to be as honest as possible to the original but we're dealing with a functional library, not a historic monument," says steering committee chairman Raymond Ulyatt. Some license has been taken in order to improve and update.

Sunlight streams through the newly-uncovered leaded windows that, until now, were partially covered by a mezzanine in the south reading room. In being exposed, one was found to reach from the floor to the 18-foot ceiling. In the lobby, a large supporting pole has disappeared from the centre.

"It was ugly as sin," says Mayor Peter Trent who spearheaded much of the restoration work.

His attention to detail and quest for "permanence, solidity and sobriety" sometimes clashed with the views of the architects, he admits, but were usually supported by council. He personally chose the more than 50 tulip-shaded chandeliers, found the leather reading chairs in Ogilvy's and "agonized" over numerous other details.

"There's a history behind every decision," he says.

While a large part of the restoration work involved interior design and decor, several exterior modifications make fundamental changes to the entrance and roofline.

A 1924 connection between the roof of the main 1899 building and the 1911 children's pavilion has been stripped to restore the appearance of two separate pavilions. Now the tall Queen Anne-like chimney has been exposed as well as five large windows in the west side of the roof above the central lobby. Demolition of the connector yielded another bonus: a portion of the original roof slates

still intact, evidently untouched when the rest of the roof was resingled in asphalt. "This enabled us to match the new ones," he explains. "Probably they came from the same Vermont quarry."

THE SLATE ROOF

"I insisted on a slate roof," Mr. Trent says. "It's the tiara of the library. Though some people asked if we really needed slate, my point is this: asphalt shingles last one quarter as long, are one-tenth the price, and look it. To restore the most important building in the city and not use slate, is like crowning a queen in costume jewelry."

Pausing a moment, he grins, "I would have resigned over it."

As the slates went up, the building took on a new visibility from Sherbrooke Street. The thin slabs of stone measure 8 x 16 inches and can be used only on buildings able to withstand their weight. Each is fastened in overlapping fashion by two large-headed copper nails that can be removed to replace a damaged slate.

Lead-coated copper flashing, the colour of stainless steel, replaces the original copper. It dulls



50A

with age rather than eroding to green. Considered more aesthetically appropriate, says the mayor, it is also used for the Rose building.

New finials (roof ornaments) appear even more prominent in replica than before.

A NEW GREEN

"A big departure from the original," says Mayor Trent, is the change in colour painted on the wooden window frames and trim. Gone is the bright paddy-green used for 95 years. It's replaced by a softer, greyer green verging on olive that also was thought to be more appropriate. It was chosen over "an almost black" tone called African Night also suggested by architect Rose, he says.

THE PARK ENTRANCE

Elimination of Library Drive and its replacement with grass puts the original east entrance back in the park. New steps of granite and limestone lead up to what is being called the Park Entrance.

"We've recessed the doors into the portico and rebuilt the stairway to permit gentler-sloping steps, the way they used to be," Mr. Trent says. It was 1936 when the door was pushed out to the edge of the portico and the original mosaic floor torn up to install a revolving inner door. The portico brick has now been stripped and the travertine floor tiles replaced with slate slabs matching those used in the new north entrance.

RECLAIMING THE LOBBY

Inside the Park Entrance, the central lobby is now spacious and bright. Removed are the partitions in the arches that border the north reading room on the right. The central arch and one to the left are restored by installing replicas of two missing columns that had been removed during previous rearrangements of floor space. The new columns are indistinguishable from the originals as are the arches of the new colonnade.



50B



51

"I'm very proud of this," Mayor Trent says, tapping one of the replica columns. It rings with a hollow resonance that betrays its origin. The new ones were cast in two pieces from the originals and plastered together down the middle.

In its restoration, the lobby has gained a coffered ceiling it never had as well as a small reading room, east of the new circulation desk. Called the Cube Room for its equal dimensions, its closed arches now hold the four paintings by Adam Sheriff Scott that depict printing techniques entitled: Printing Press, Manuscript, Papyrus and Cave Drawing. Restored by Robin Ashton, these used to decorate the arches opposite the east entrance, two being hidden by the circulation desk.

Over the new circulation desk is a canopy, both of oak, designed by Peter Rose and the subjects of great debate. Would the desk be free-standing? What about its lighting? "The canopy was Rose's idea to conceal the lights," says library director Caroline Thibodeau. It hangs from four metal rods that resemble those used for the canopy outside Windsor Station which dates from the same era as the library.

"We've tried to keep the computer equipment as discreet as possible," she says. The terminals are lowered out of sight under the counter top of the circulation desk so that operators can view the screens through glass.

Roofline before removal of connection (50A) and after (50B).
Photo 51: restoring the Park Entrance.

THE WINDOWS

In the south reading room, the decision to get rid of the mezzanine was another of the "agonizing experiences," according to Mayor Trent. "It was not one of Findlay's best ideas. It looked like a last minute addition."

Removing it revealed, for the first time, the full extent of the windows, uncovered intact and comprising a vital part of the restoration. Like others in the library's collection of 65 historic windows, each incorporates the name of an important writer or historical figure in the arts or sciences.



52

Afternoon sun streams through these newly-uncovered windows at the top of the lobby. (below) Removing the mezzanine from the south reading room exposes the full extent of the leaded glass windows which it hid.

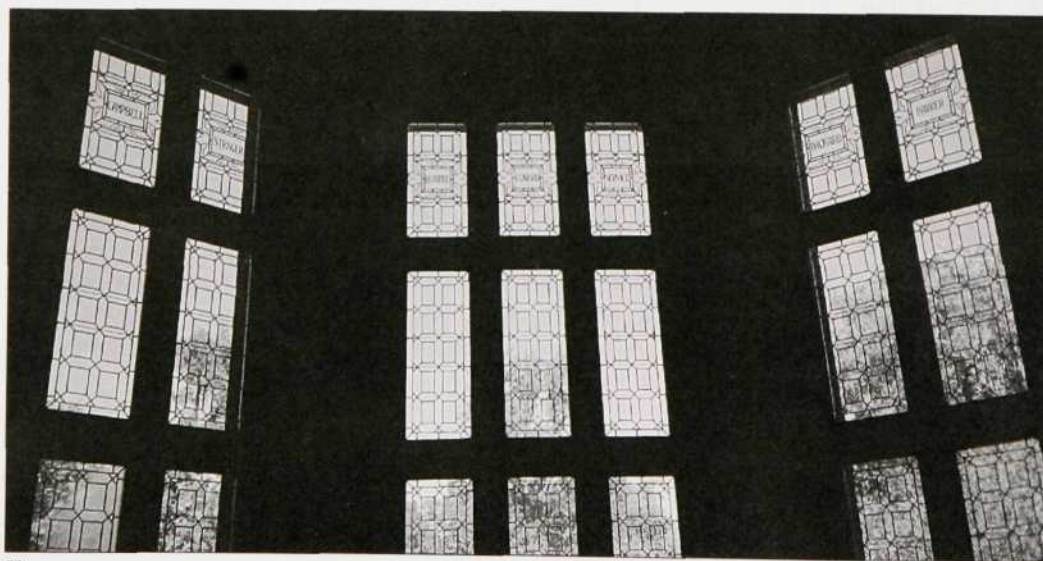
Eight new leaded windows, however, had to be made for window openings that had been covered over by building additions and now reclaimed. These were crafted by Clifford Oswald at the Lubbers Studio which created the stained glass windows for the council chamber in 1991, a parting gesture by retiring mayor May Cutler.

The five larger windows, costing \$10,000 in total, are now installed in the west wall of the library lobby where the roof connector was removed. They honour modern authors: Bill Reid, Roch Carrier, Gabrielle Roy, Michael Ondaatje and Frank R. Scott, names chosen by the library staff. City council donated the Reid window to recognize the role played in the library renewal by steering committee chairman Raymond Ullyatt. Reid, a Haida sculptor, was selected because of Mr. Ullyatt's interest in native literature and art.

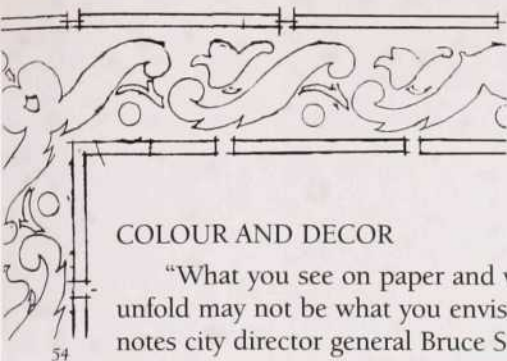
A trio of smaller windows at the southwest corner of the south reading room honours authors Emily Carr, Leonard Cohen and Gertrude Laurence.

"We tried to get writers' names that represent different aspects of Canadian literature," librarian Thibodeau says. "We went on the Internet to track down Frank Scott's son, Peter Dale Scott, in California, to inform him about the window. I thought it was rather interesting to have used a new tool in naming a historical window."

While many original windows were opened up, a row of nine had to be covered over in the north reading room where they were blocked by the new north entrance. Comprising the middle row in the large west bay, none bore historical names.



53



54

COLOUR AND DECOR

"What you see on paper and what you see unfold may not be what you envisage it to be," notes city director general Bruce St. Louis. "With the restoration of the Findlay building there were some very critical elements such as colour."

Here, the architectural firm of Gersovitz Moss was brought in to help with the decorating and furnishing.

"Findlay did a very interesting thing when he built the library," Julia Gersovitz says. "He very skilfully blended the Romanesque style, which we see in the arches and free-standing columns, with the new wave of the neoclassic influence which is apparent in the sense of order he gave to the building."

"The way we proceeded with the interior design was to select a colour palette that is quite accurate to the period, but the colour scheme is lighter and softer in tone. The original would have been quite dark. We used a lot of reds and greens, harmony through contrast, that was quite typical." Deep forest greens and deep wines predominate along with creams, yellows and taupes.

Bands of colour on the walls of the north and south reading rooms, always darker at the bottom, are reversed between the two rooms: wine in the north room and green in the south. It's a subtle, yet interesting, way of unifying the two rooms as one catches a glimpse of one from the other through the arches and colonnade.

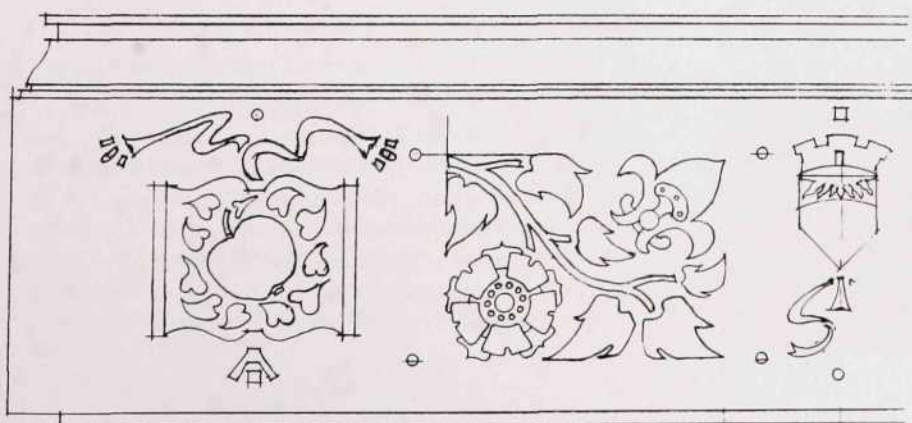
"I'm quite happy with how the colours work in reality," she says.



55

Around both rooms, a double band of stencilling by decorative artist Jean Laurin captures the spirit of the original designs that had been covered over by many layers of paint. The lower band depicting columns and panels is quite accurate, she says. The upper band is an interpretation of the Arts and Crafts movement of the period that incorporates the apple and book of the library's new logo along with the rose of England and the fleur-de-lys of France. Achieving a pleasing colouring proved to be one of the more tricky aspects, architect Gersovitz says. "A stencil in its repetition seems to change." Starting out in several colours, the lower one ended up as an ochre band, "toned down to one tone on another."

Decorative artist Irene Marconi marbled the columns, retaining their original colours: a red on the base with a warm gold above. From the gold, came the choice of yellow for the walls of the lobby and the two shades of yellow (harmony by resemblance) in the Cube Room.



56

(left top and bottom)
Stencilling designs.
(above) Wallpaper
pattern in
Westmount Room.



BOOKS GIVE NOT WISDOM
WHERE NONE WAS BEFORE

57 Wall stencil in the Westmount Room incorporates sayings.

The columns were originally decorated using scagliola, a synthetic marble mixture of plaster of Paris, glue and various fillers, now a lost art locally. The marbleshooting creates a virtually identical effect using paint.

The atmosphere in both the north and south reading rooms results in part from the furnishings. Leather club chairs, some in oxblood (deep red), others in dark green, fit into the bay windows with lamp tables. Larger oak reading tables designed by Peter Rose have bronze lamps with double shades of green glass. They are also outfitted with plugs for laptop computers. The same original-style oak chairs, called Bank of England or Courthouse chairs, come from Krug, of Waterloo, Ontario. All 96 have leather seats in either deep red or green.

The old radiators, restored and bronzed, are back in place while oak bookcases at right angles to the walls provide little reading nooks. Bronze chandeliers hang from the ceiling coffers. Each has four lights covered by glass, tulip-shaped shades.

"I think they're very delicate," the mayor says. "We agonized over the chandeliers for a year." How low would they hang? How many lights would they have? And would they have bare bulbs or shades? They were selected with input from lighting consultant George Sexton.

The mood becomes more residential as one passes through double glass doors into the Westmount Room, the separate children's pavilion of 1911. "This room is more domestic in scale following its original use," Julia Gersovitz says. Here are the built-in window seats, cushions and the crackling sounds from a woodburning fireplace. An Arts and Crafts style of wallpaper in a grey green and ochre is reminiscent of the bygone era. Called Sweet

Briar, "the wallpaper is actually a reproduction of a C.F.A. Voysey floral pattern." Voysey was a British architect and contemporary of Findlay.

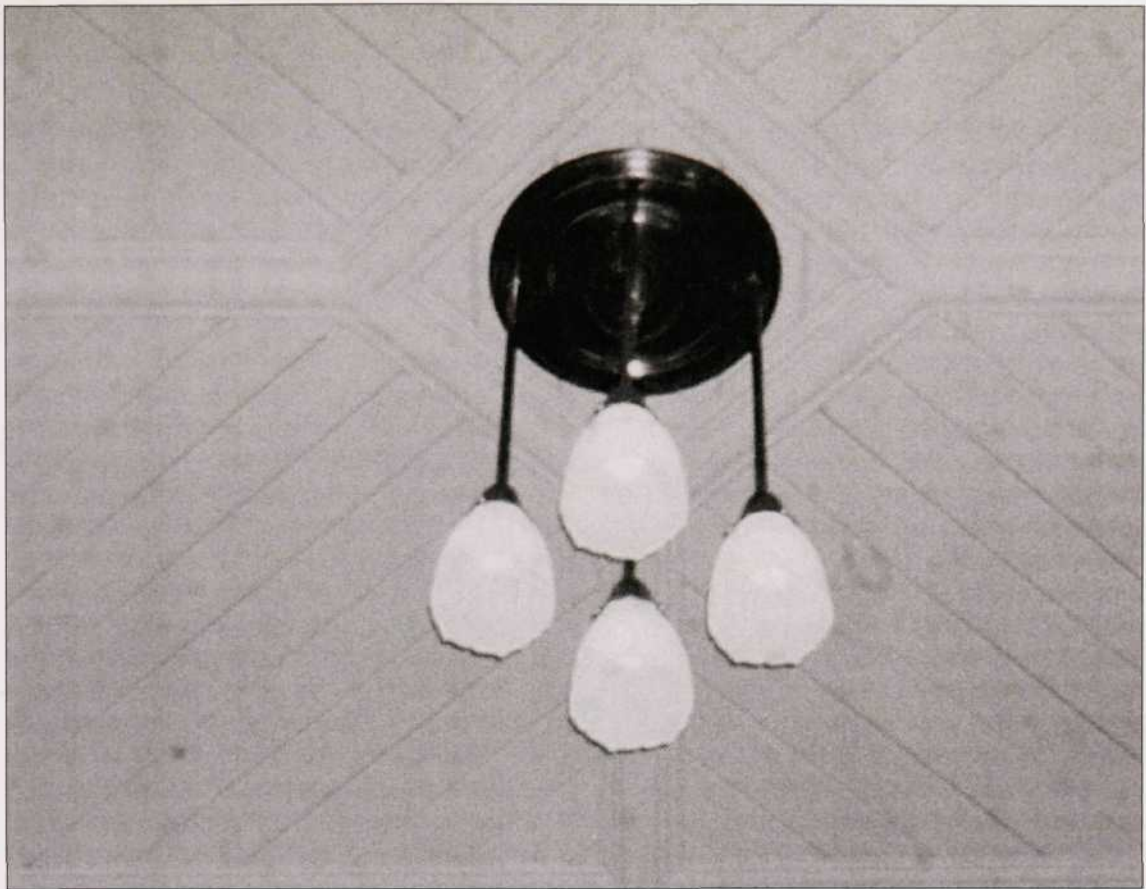
A band of English and French sayings is painted in gold around the room in late Victorian fashion. It's an innovation to reflect the bilingual nature of today's library collection. Inspiration for the border comes from the quotation over the fireplace.

Three larger chandeliers of similar style to those in the reading rooms now hang from the coffered ceiling that was previously covered by acoustic tile after the room's subdivision into office space and a corridor during the modifications of 1959.

A central oak table for use at meetings is composed of various sections totalling 16 feet in length. The sections form separate reading tables for daily use. Another Gersovitz Moss design is a large buffet-like cupboard on the north wall for storage of projector equipment as well as cups and saucers and other meeting materials.

Central to the restoration is the fireplace, painted over and hidden in a hallway when the room was divided up. Restored to its original bare brick, it has been fitted with a prefabricated wood-burning unit and can now be used. Paint-stripping efforts, however, damaged some of the brick, prompting further restoration work. A sandstone plaque above painted tiles on the front carries the inscription: "There's no frigate like a book to bear us leagues away." It's based on an Emily Dickinson poem, number 1263: "There is no frigate like a book to take us lands away."

"I literally remember looking at the little tiles with the bunnykins over the fireplace," recalls Councillor Karin Marks of her childhood. "The restoration is definitely the highlight of the renewal project."



58



59

58. Bronze chandeliers now hang from original coffered ceilings exposed when fluorescent lighting was removed throughout the Findlay building.

59. When the 1911 children's library was divided into offices in 1959, its charming fireplace, painted over, ended up in a hallway used as a staff work area.

60. Stripped and restored, it once again dominates the 1911 pavilion renamed the Westmount Room. Tiles depict scenes from *Alice in Wonderland*.



60



61



62

61. Restoration work proceeds under close attention of TPL architect Eugenie March, standing at the oak circulation desk. Behind stretches the new colonnade.
62. Steering committee chairman Raymond Ulyatt tours the restoration site.
63. Irene Marconi, left, recreates the original look of the pillars using a marbleizing technique.



63



64

64. Patterns in the north and south reading rooms recaptured the original spirit.

65. Stencilling took much longer than expected but added a finishing touch to the Victorian decor.

66. Replica columns replace those removed long ago in the lobby area facing the original entrance.



65



66

IX

Welcome to the Library

The architectural concept

“One of the important considerations was to re-establish the library in the park in a way that was appropriate to its position as the primary cornerstone of Westmount culture,” says architect Peter Rose as the project neared completion.

“The setting would be a welcome and congenial one and very dignified.”

It's September 1995, nearly five years after the initial designs were conceived. Speaking from his office in Boston where he is now a professor in design at the Harvard Graduate School of Architecture, Mr. Rose describes the architectural rationale behind the design.

How the library was viewed from the street and from the park was an important perception at the beginning, he says. “It was our observation that the building had been encroached upon by the automobile and lost its place of privilege... so our scheme was a lot about how it would sit in the park.”

“The third consideration was the relationship of the new parts of the library to the Findlay parts. We made an effort to have the new pieces not only defer to the old but also to engage in dialogue (with it) across space and time.”

In organizing and planning the project, the architect uses the term choreography to describe how the north-south passageway is designed to move “comfortably and gracefully” through the various parts. This was the purpose of the “spine” which he views as a street running through the complex. “The key element that makes the scheme move is the street that allows disparate parts to come together into an ensemble,” he says.

The spine visually connects two new gardens, one at the new north entrance, which he calls the forecourt, and the courtyard between the three-storey glazed wall and the rear of the Westmount Room.

“Our new entrance,” he says, “is not meant to overshadow, but be juxtaposed with, the old one to give convenience and choice. The old one is “gracious and glorious from the park” and intersects with the new spine.

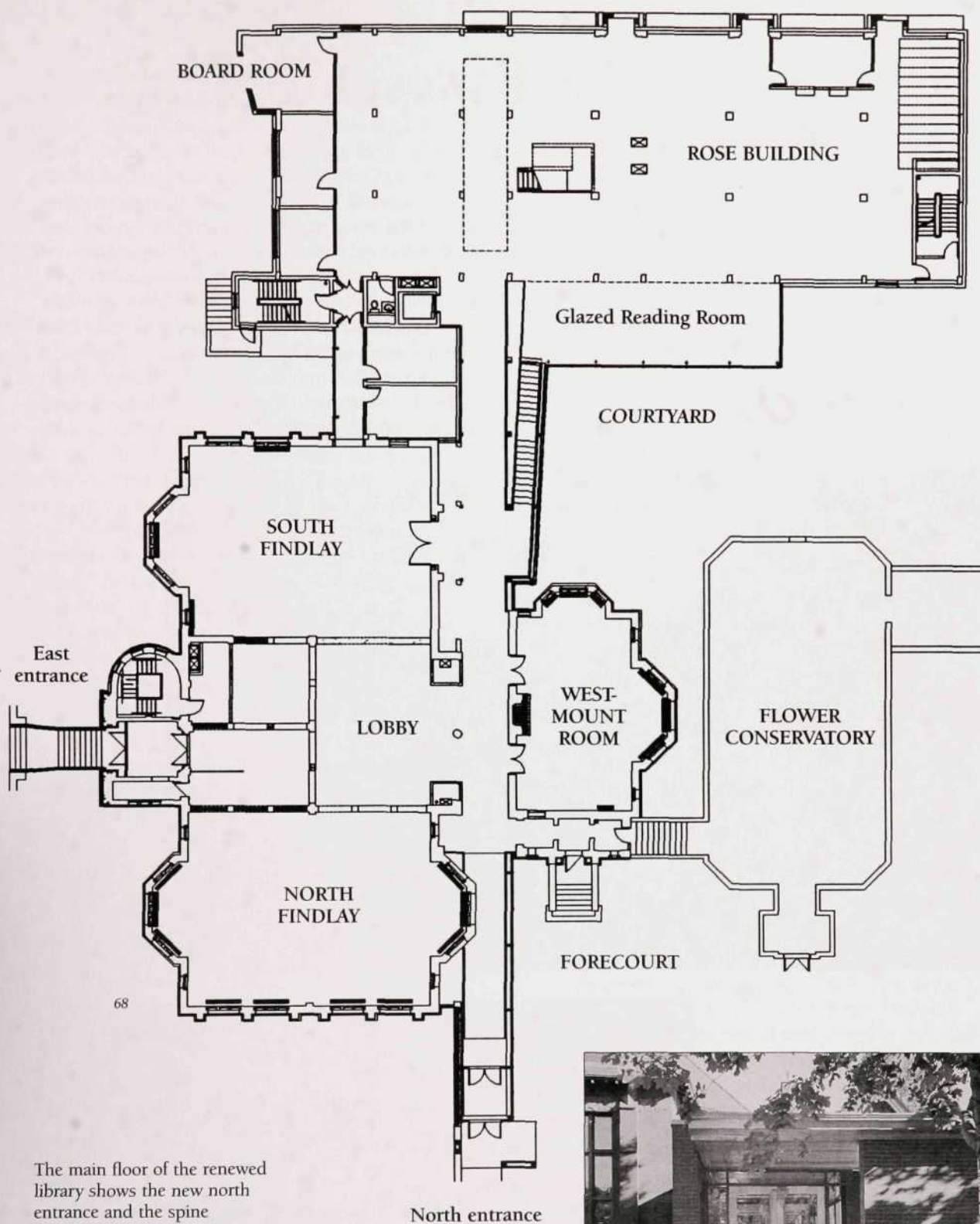
“One of the things this building has as a great resource is the site and we're trying to take advantage of it. A room is as much about the space you look out on as the space you inhabit.” That is why the forecourt and the courtyard are important to the interior, Mr. Rose says. “The spine without those would be much diminished.” The reading room also is designed in tandem with the courtyard.

While the design has been “modified in a thousand ways,” since it was first presented, he notes, “it remains basically the same.”

Multiple architectural models of the project and its various aspects are being given to the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) for study use, Mr. Rose says.



67



The main floor of the renewed library shows the new north entrance and the spine looking south to the new building, plan prepared by the architectural office of TPL.

(opposite) The spine, courtyard and crab-apple tree have a west exposure.



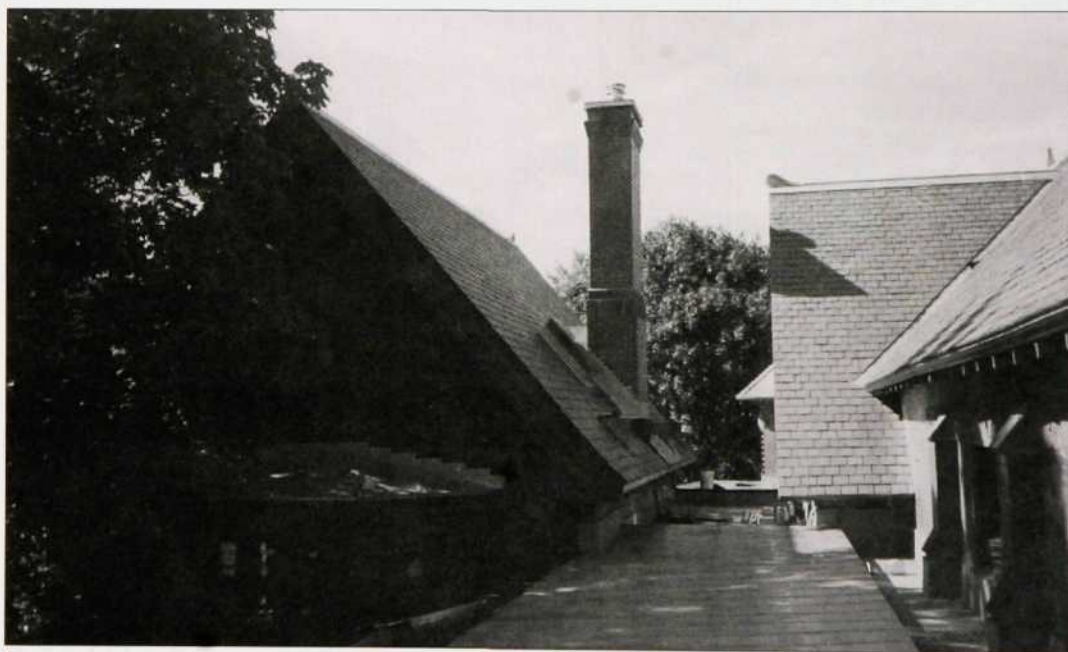
X

Inside the Footprint

Design and debate

Looking north across the gables of the old Findlay roofline from the top floor of the new Rose addition, one can almost visualize Mary Poppins soaring over the tall brick chimney.

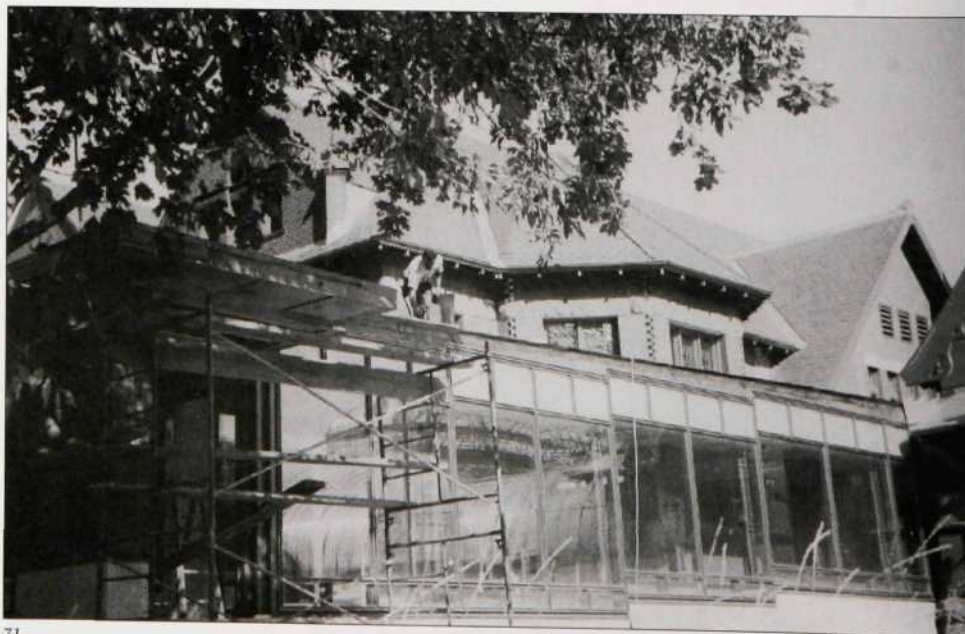
Glancing down, one can see the glazed "spine" that fits like a street between the main Findlay building of 1899 and the original children's pavilion of 1911, linking both to the new building designed for the 21st century. The view says it all.



70

The new spine rises across the west face of the north reading room, leading like a street past the new courtyard and into the new building.

(opposite) Inside the spine looking south.



71

From the new, one sees the old; from the old, the new. And the architectural design, the famous footprint that was so hotly debated from the time of the first schematics in 1991, suddenly comes alive.

Controversial brain child of architect Peter Rose, the spine brings together a century of Westmount history through a myriad of views into the courtyard, over the greenhouses, across the tennis courts and into Westmount Park.

"Peter's concept of the spine was a piece of genius," says Mayor Peter Trent. "But we worried about it and fought for ages over the point. It was the big debate."

It aroused heritage concerns from Mark London, who chaired the city's Architectural and Planning Commission, and eventually disassociated himself with that aspect of the project. "I never agreed with the way the spine cut through the historic building and projected so far toward Sherbrooke Street obscuring part of the Findlay building," he says. "It changed the choreography of the old building designed to let people move through a series of rectangular spaces."

The two original Findlay entrances were "perfectly adequate" to handle the number of library users as was the handicap ramp, he says. Mr.

London successfully fought the original Rose plan to close the Park Entrance and was not alone in his protest against the size of the new entrance.

"It was massive," says Councillor John Lehnert, who eventually decided he could "live" with modifications. Contrary to popular perception, according to Mr. Trent, the length of the projection from the face of the building has remained the same as originally proposed, but stepping it down to a canopy and turning the porch west has reduced the appearance of size.

The basic footprint and the interior layout of the complex also were bitterly opposed by some library workers, some professional librarians living in Westmount and even library consultants Bowron and Beckman who had been hired by the city. They called for the modern library concept with one entry and check-out point, a square open floor plan that is easier to staff than a sprawling complex and that has its children's collection in a central location. With the old east entrance, the spine made a second.

"We held firm on the two entrances and I think it's worked out very well," Mayor Trent says.

The original entrance off Library Drive was designed to serve users of a library containing 3,000 books not handle the traffic generated by a collection of 130,000. But it remains vital to the heritage value of the building, he argues. "Can you imagine closing off the park entrance to a library-in-the-park? People would be very upset and we'd be creating another Montreal Museum of Fine Arts situation where you went up to the grand doorway to find it locked." Most users are expected to choose the new north entrance, however, since it opens off the new driveway and parking lot.

To appreciate the architectural design of the new library complex, one should enter from the new forecourt at the new north entrance and look straight down the spine to the new building and then on to the park beyond. It's one of the many views on this new journey through bookland.

"Peter Rose calls it his street," says the mayor. "His street leads to his building."

A rhythm of lamp light leads the way along *la Grande Allée*, as it might be named. On the right are the flowers in the conservatory. Ahead, on the left, the spine opens into the central lobby of the original library with its glittering chandeliers, the central circulation desk and the original Park



Entrance. On the right, to the west, is the Westmount Room. And at the end, the new building.

"It gives you an episodic experience of the old building," says library director Caroline Thibodeau.

She says the wide-open library concept advocated by some might have destroyed the ambiance and coziness of the old building as well as the heritage value that users have come to associate with their library. "What a lot of people didn't understand was the character of our library and our clientele and how they use the library."

The spine continues south to a view, on the right, of the new courtyard and of the three-storey glazed wall of the new building itself. And suddenly one has arrived at the new Rose pavilion.

"It's a warehouse of books," says Mayor Trent. "We were worried it might be too industrial looking, but the books are the main focus. And it's chock-full of books."

Here, the darker colours, leaded windows and oak furnishings of the Findlay pavilions give way to maple, metal and glazing as well as polished limestone window sills. Here, reading lamps have white shades to match the white metal shelving that is lined up between the concrete columns. The columns set up the building's "streets".

Details of the pavilion's design created their own debate within council as well as between council and the architect. Ceiling height, exposed ceilings, treatment of concrete, the size of windows, rooftop mechanicals and even the very contemporary flavour itself consumed hours of time in discussion and compromise.

Height of the new building was limited by the basic concept that it should not dwarf the Findlay building. This ruled out consideration of a pitched roof, greater ceiling height and, finally, hung ceilings. Exposed ductwork has been sheathed and masked by low-hanging lighting; mechanicals on the roof are painted the same colour as the coated-copper trim to minimize their impact.

While the basic exterior design ended up being more "modern" than initial sketches indicated, Mr. Trent says, the use of matching building materials has helped it blend with the Findlay building.

"In December 1992, Rose was sketching a rather classical brick facade. In December 1993, when we were presented with the final plan at the end of the design development phase, the design

had radically changed." It revealed a more modern treatment of the window on the east face and the three metal-clad window protrusions up the south wall. "They looked pretty severe and Bauhausian in the blueprints. The A & P (Architectural and Planning Commission) had a fit." But "the model looked much nicer and Council was finally won over to the new design. The result is perfectly complementary to Findlay," Mr. Trent says.

The main floor of the Rose building is devoted to the reference collection with a reading area in the glazed three-storey alcove on the north face. Library offices and a board room on the east side look out on the park.

A central stairway takes one up to the top level (what is being called the second storey) with its clerestory window in the roof, the general adult collection and the view over the Findlay rooftop.

Two flights down, on the bottom level (ground floor), lies the expansive children's department with a large story room containing a sink and cupboards for craft work or snacks. Large windows make this the brightest of the floors. "The kids can look out and see the tennis," the mayor says.

Though librarians wanted a more central location upstairs, "Rose felt children should be close to ground so they can look out easily and be able to play in the courtyard," the library director says. Setting them beside the audio-visual department also makes sense, she adds. Both tend to be noisier sections of the library and parents may be more likely to browse in the audio-visual department at the same time.

Washrooms are on this level as are two circulation desks: one for the A/V collection, another for the children's department. Various self checkout units to desensitize books are located upstairs. Also on the ground floor are staff areas including a lounge, cataloguing room and storage areas. A stairway leads up to the tower and into the attic.

The stairway between the ground and main floors was specially designed for little legs and baby carriages. "We had mockups of the steps and walked up and down them to make sure they were comfortable," Miss Thibodeau says. "They're gentle enough to bump a stroller down."

"Subtle and simple," architect Rose describes his design. The real challenge, he said during unveiling of the model in May 1994, was to overcome the fears of change in something such as the library "that's so deeply embedded in everyone's lives."

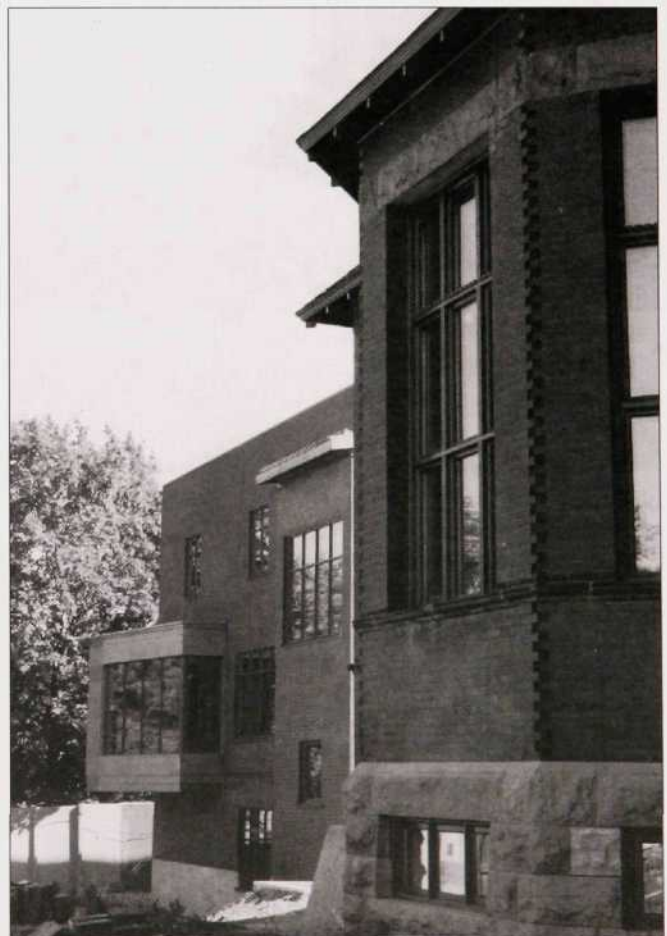


73

(above) The new Rose building has this large board room window on the east face tying in with the Findlay bays, below right. (below left) Three metal-clad window projections on the south face rise from the metal sun screen over the windows of the children's quarters.



74



75

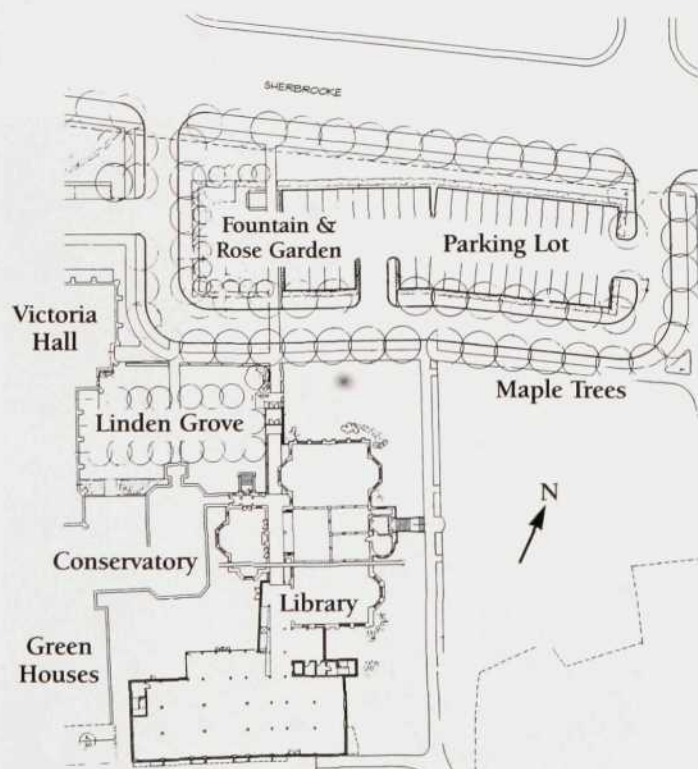
XI

Return to the Park

The landscaping

There were two schools of thought when it came to landscaping the library site and restoring it to more of a park-like setting. One was to provide a heavy screen of trees between the complex and Sherbrooke Street that would set the library away from the madding crowd. The other was to use thinner plantings to maintain its visibility from the street.

It was a choice between making the library a pleasant site for passersby looking in or a quiet spot for users looking out. The Design Team and city council chose the latter.



The result is a complete reconfiguration of a large section of park land using landscaping to tie together the library, greenhouses and Victoria Hall. It places three rows of maple trees between Sherbrooke and the library and moves the several previous parking areas into one central section immediately south of Sherbrooke. The entire area is now shrouded by 49 new maple trees, hedging, crabapple trees, flowering bushes, a linden grove, a fountain of falling water and a rose garden. The new driveway stretches from a southern extension of Arlington Avenue east to an extension of Strathcona Avenue.

"If you go to a library-in-the-park you will have to drive through a small lane under a canopy of trees to get there," says city director general Bruce St. Louis. In time, as the maples attain their full height, the library will become more visible through the tree trunks, he says.

"The concept is to restore the land for a library in the park. Over time it evolved into a library in a parking lot."

Indeed, Library Drive, with parking on both sides, ran south off Sherbrooke Street to form a circular driveway in front of the library's east entrance with additional parking. The parking lot for Victoria Hall was in front of the library's north face and bordering Sherbrooke. More parking was provided in front of the flower conservatory along the north-south arm of the lane that ran behind Victoria Hall and west to Lansdowne Avenue. In all, 67 cars could be accommodated.

In designing the new scheme, world-renowned landscape architect Dan Kiley, of Charlotte, Vermont, lined either side of the driveway with Deborah maples (*acer plantanoides Deborah*). Another thick row of trees has been planted on Sherbrooke. A hedge of Peking cotoneaster surrounds the lot. Architect Peter Rose designed and determined the location of the parking lot between Sherbrooke and the new driveway.

The north-south arm of the Lansdowne lane gives way to a grove of 22 small leaved lindens (*tilia condata*) between the library's new north entrance

and Victoria Hall. Across from the grove, on the north side of the driveway, another small park has been created fronting on Sherbrooke. Bounded by 15 crabapple trees (*malus dolgo*), it contains a rose garden and a fountain of falling water, all designed to provide "a sense of privacy," Mr. St. Louis says.

The \$600,000 project includes installation of a new sewer and water main as well as the \$50,000 restoration of the library's Park Entrance. Clustered around the buildings are lilacs (*syringa vulgaris*),

red-flowered rose hedges (*rosa explorer John Cabot*) and spiraea (*S. vanhouttei*), a shrub that produces small white flowers in May and June.

When landscaping began in September with an armada of workers and machines, it signalled the end of the renewal project. "We're nearly there," said Councillor John Bridgman at the September council session. "It's been a long, arduous task."

(right)
Digging up
Library Drive.

(below)
Photomontage
from TPL
shows the
library at the
edge of the
parking lot
before
landscaping.



77



78

XII

Building for Knowledge The fundraising campaign

It was a warm night in June when tennis players in Westmount Park left their game to join a party in the lane where Brian Puddington was warbling for a worthy cause: "Do I hear fifty-one dollars? Going, going, gone!"

He had just auctioned off Roch Carrier's book *The Sweater*. Donated and signed, it was author's way of helping his block on Lansdowne Avenue, south of Sherbrooke, raise funds for the Library Renewal Project. A photograph of Nepal taken by world traveller Richard Locke brought in \$42 while a tennis lesson from Robert Lefrancois was snapped up for \$32. Another resident donated his football helmet from college. Mayor Peter Trent and Karin Marks teamed up to sing from their repertoire of folk music and rock'n'roll bringing in the princely sums of \$14 and \$12.

"We had such a good time," Councillor Marks says. "The kids organized games and a couple of them made a piñata filled with candies which they hung in a tree in the park for other children to smash. People brought food and we had all kinds of things donated for the auction."

Organized by Dr. Henry Olders, the event gleaned \$1,100 for the fundraising campaign. It was one of 53 "community awareness" events held to

bring attention to the library and earn the various streets, or in some cases a group or school, its name on one of the new library chairs.

Ten members of the Contactivity seniors' centre donated \$180 they raised in a Read-a-thon. Says programme co-ordinator Sandra Valdmanis: "One of the ladies, Betty Schwarzmann, had written a book called *Memoirs of a Social Worker*, and some of her friends read her book. That was kind of fun."

On Murray Hill, Yvonne Mass invited residents of that street as well as those on Grenville, Renfrew and Douglas to a get-together and a book exchange. About 50 attended, everyone bringing a book and taking away another. No money was exchanged, "but as people left I gave them a pledge card so they could give at their own discretion," she says. And the occasion shaped her own summer. She discovered author Beverley Nichols. "I've absolutely gone crazy over his books: commentaries on British social life in the 1920s and '30s. He was quite a man about town. It started me on a whole research project to find his works."

"I think the fundraising has been the most exciting part of the library project," Councillor Marks says. It's rallied the community and brought people together in a common interest.

With a theme of *Building for Knowledge*, the drive for \$1.5 million had been quietly underway for some time when it was launched publicly November 21, 1994, with the news that \$827,651 had already been raised through foundation and family gifts. The community phase began April 19, 1995, at Ecole St. Léon with a *Tree of Knowledge* program organized by Hélène Quintal and Colette Benoit.

By the end of September 1995, the target was within sight. The campaign had reached more than \$1.3 million and was expected to bring in the remainder by the time the library opened.

Success was attributed largely to the credibility and leadership brought to the campaign by its chairman David A. Culver, retired chairman and chief executive officer of Alcan and a longtime Westmount resident. For Mr. Culver, the project had two important aspects which whetted his enthusiasm: he viewed it as a pathfinder for the way public



79

Among those participating in the chair challenge for the Lansdowne lane were, from left: Victoria Pelletier, Elisabeth and Rebecca Evans-Olders, Rebecca Chant, Claire and Sarah Carsley, Jennifer Chant and Vicki Braide.



Peter Trent,
Caroline Thibodeau
and David Culver
launch the drive.

80

projects would be financed in the future; and it was to be a community venture building for tomorrow.

"In the past, elected representatives decided on their own how to spend a bunch of money," he says. "In this case, Westmount told the citizens about the problems (the library faced) and what the results would be on their tax bills and then asked them, do you want it or not. Given our dismal experience in Canada in living within our means, I think the Westmount Public Library (project) was a pathfinder and others will follow." He predicts that public money spent on schools and hospitals will be handled the same way in the future.

"There was another aspect, too. We were in a period of low tide, politically and economically. Here's the little City of Westmount facing up to its responsibilities to do for future generations what the previous generations did for us. And doing it without seeking help from outside the community. That's also a sign of things to come."

These aspects also piqued the interests of others from corporate, financial or fundraising backgrounds who became involved: John Bridgman, Gail Johnson, James Wright, Victor Drury and Peter Duffield. The efforts of Mr. Duffield began back in 1991 before the election of the Trent council when, as a councillor, Mr. Duffield laid some of the groundwork for obtaining major gifts.

With Marjorie Bronfman as honorary chairman, the campaign committee included: David L. Johnston and David M. Lank for major gifts; and Joan Winser and J. Brian Aune, special gifts. The community phase was chaired by Julia Reitman, Cynthia Cundill and Paule Gautier. Robert Vezina, Jay Gould and David Rolph headed public awareness and Victor Drury served as special advisor.

"This was a grassroots campaign," says Belinda Pyle, of Navion, the professional fundraising firm

hired to assist Mr. Culver. "It's what made it so different from other campaigns that are broken down into corporate donations. These were all private gifts from people who have a history in Westmount."

Starting off with a gift of \$250,000 from an anonymous donor, the lead gifts division of the campaign, headed by Mr. Culver himself, generated \$819,000 by September 1995. This represented 17 donations from requests for \$100,000 or more.

In the same time period, \$196,900 was collected from 34 major gifts (requests from \$10,000-\$100,000) and \$199,600 from 91 special gifts (requests of \$1,000 or more).

Another \$50,021 was raised from the community awareness phase of the campaign from 261 groups or individuals, involving numerous participants. Council members, campaign workers, library trustees and city staff contributed \$80,676 in the name of the Library Family.

Rooms, windows and gardens have been dedicated to individuals who made special contribution to the effort while plaques on chairs recognize 21 community organizations and 77 streets which participated at the grassroots level.

A special interest was shown in the historical windows, according to Mr. Culver. Each of the 65 special windows was "sold" with donors' names to be marked by a plaque beneath.

The Burpee family, whose members extend to the Winns, Hingstons, Dingles, Lowes, Reeves and LoVecchios, collected \$2,975 in honour of Lawrence J. Burpee (1873-1946), whose name graced one of the windows as a Canadian author, geographer and historian. "Some of you have asked who he is," wrote organizer Thomas Burpee, so he sent them all a picture and biography of the writer.

Chair Challenge Events 1995

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--|---|
| — École St. Léon: | Tree of Knowledge; | — Clandeboye, Prospect,
Greene, Stayner, Bruce,
Dorchester, Hallowell: | Book exchange and sale; |
| — Arlington Lane: | Doggie Social; | — Lewis and Irvine: | Lane party and mini-auction; |
| — Arlington Avenue: | Auction within street sale; | — Windsor Avenue: | Ball hockey game; |
| — Lansdowne Avenue: | Giant garage and bake sale; | — Oakland Avenue: | The Trading Post, comic book exchange; |
| — Terre des Enfants: | Mothers' Day bookmarks; | — Lansdowne Lane: | Street Fair and auction; |
| — 225 Olivier Avenue: | Collection from apartments; | — Blenheim Place: | Coffee and dessert; |
| — Contactivity Centre: | Read-a-thon; | — Hillside Avenue: | Barbecue; |
| — The Study school: | Silent reading; | — Murray Hill, Renfrew,
Grenville, Douglas: | Book exchange; |
| — St. Matthias' Church: | Spring plant sale; | — Roslyn Avenue: | Wash and shop – garage sale, car wash; |
| — ECS school: | Rummage sale; | — Roslyn Avenue: | Voluntary toll booth; |
| — Ingleside Avenue: | Bottle drive; | — Mount Stephen: | Garage sale, lemonade; |
| — Strathcona Avenue: | Street Chair Party; | — Mount Stephen: | Garage sale; |
| — Montrose, Murray: | Coffee Party; | — Belvedere Place: | Lemonade stand; |
| — The Study: | Free-dress day; | — Clarke Circle: | Street party/ Pot a plant for a senior; |
| — St. Andrew's School: | Book Awareness Week; | — Garderie K.I.D.S.: | Sun hat and sunglasses sale; |
| — Westmount Preschool: | Mural/bookmarks/story telling; | — Miss Vicky's centre: | School collection; |
| — The Met teen centre: | Family Day booth; | — Gordon Crescent: | Plant sale and raffle; |
| — Chesterfield Avenue: | Garaage sale; | — Hudson Avenue: | Street party; |
| — Boy Scouts: | Candy Cotton Sale; | — Aberdeen, Thornhill: | T-shirt sale; |
| — Kensington Avenue: | Book exchange, sale; | — Mountain, Severn,
Rosemount Cr.: | Co-operative cocktail hour; |
| — Upper Bellevue and
Summit Circle: | Bake, lemonade sale; | — Argyle and Thornhill: | Street party; |
| — YMCA - Daycare: | Awareness drawings and essays; | — Wood and Elm: | Lane party; |
| — Lansdowne Avenue: | House and Garden Tour; | — Holton,
Mount Pleasant: | Street party; |
| — Dominion-Douglas
Nursery School: | Snacks/Meals on Wheels; | — Place Kensington: | Book exchange and tea; |
| — Columbia, Hallowell,
Bruce, Dorchester: | Barbecue; | — Ladies of the
Book Club: | Donation; |
| — Grosvenor Avenue: | Street party and barbecue; | — 250 Clarke: | Collection from apartments. |
| | | — Manoir Westmount: | Walk-a-thon |

XIII

Inaugural Events

The opening

"It's palatial. You feel like you're entering some place important," says May Cutler, elated with what she had started eight years before. The vision was built. "I wanted my mayoralty to count," she says.

Originally scheduled for mid-October, inauguration of the refurbished library was postponed until immediately after the municipal election November 5, 1995, to prevent conflict with the official election period. While invitations were being prepared for three days of festivities, members of council were also gearing up for the political event: Peter Trent, Herbert Bercovitz, John Bridgman, Gail Johnson, David Laidley, John Lehnert, Karin Marks, Nicolas Matossian and James Wright.

More than 500 benefactors and community leaders were on the invitation list for the gala opening Thursday evening, November 9. Mayor Trent and fundraising chairman David Culver were preparing short addresses to keep the emphasis on touring the complex. Also on the programme were

the unveiling of the owl statue and dedication of the courtyard to Mr. Culver, unveiling of the portrait of 1899 mayor James Walker and the dedication of the window to Raymond Ulyatt.

School tours were scheduled for Friday, November 10, with more tours for librarians that evening. Saturday was reserved as Open House day for the public to return to their library after an absence of 18 months.

"It's dazzling, it's like finding a treasure," Mrs. Cutler says. Then she adds: "I would hope that in gratitude, users will remember the library in their wills."

*The Mayor and Members of Council
of the City of Westmount
request the pleasure of your company
at a reception to mark the official opening of*

*the renewed
Westmount Public Library*

*Thursday, November 9th, 1995
at 6:00 p.m.*

*R.S.V.P.
Marie José Aubertin (514) 989-5243
before October 27th, 1995*

*Business Attire
Coatcheck at Victoria Hall,
4626 Sherbrooke St. West*

Reception at 4574 Sherbrooke St. West



82

Conclusion

Someone asked me during the preparation of this book how a library "extension" could possibly have taken so long or consumed so many hours of time and resources.

Although I had sat through the eight years of council debate over the project as a Westmount journalist and written thousands of words about it, the only answer I could muster at the time was: "It's a long story."

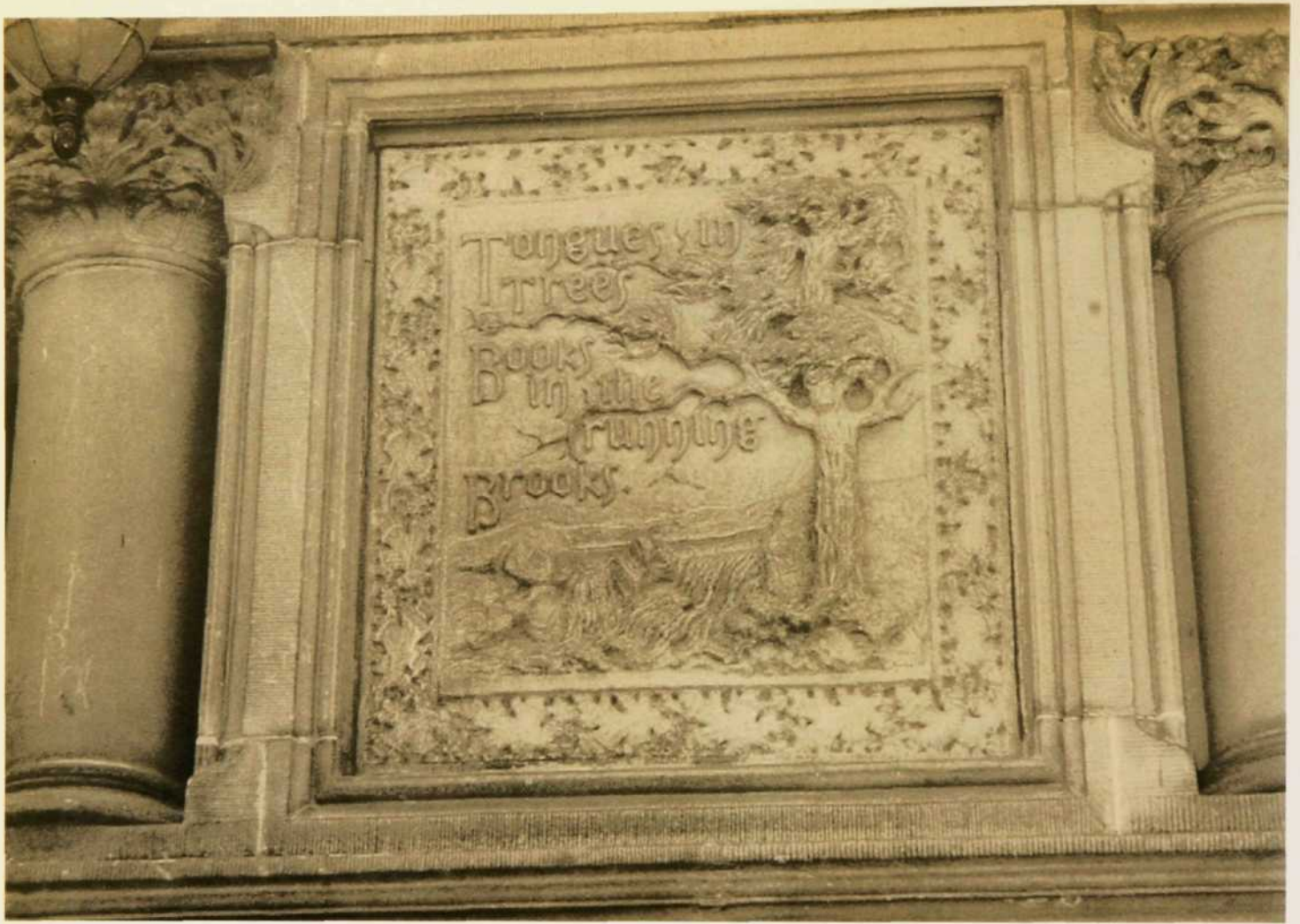
I'm still not certain there is any simple answer to the question. Maybe that's because Westmount is not a simple place. Maybe it's because the library has always held such a special place in the heart of the community that the easiest way not to make a mistake over it was to do nothing quickly. Or maybe it was simply that so many architects, financial people, professional librarians, builders and other highly qualified citizens make Westmount their home. When the design layout became a controversial issue, for instance, no fewer than 50 librarians, all of them ratepayers and most of them heading major Montreal-area libraries, turned out to contribute their "constructive" criticism.

The issue of spending money during a belt-tightening time also was a key factor because of the frugal and conservative mentality that historically has characterized successive city councils. When budget surpluses of nearly \$20 million were accumulated from 1986 to 1990, most of the windfall was used not to build new buildings but to write off loan by-laws to make the city effectively debt-free. No matter how prosperous the city's image, it's a municipality that pays off its credit cards at the end of the month, as it were, before buying more. The library project was put under a microscope from all angles. Then a new council came in with another microscope and even more angles. Just ask Peter Rose.

Two aspects fascinated me as a journalist. One was the relatively low return of ballots from the poll of all addresses in the city, roughly 18 per cent. Considering the potential tax load of the project, one had to assume that those who did not reply did not oppose. We usually hear from the malcontent. Of course, as it's been duly noted, the rate of return was actually 25 per cent of all property owners, since tenants are not as affected by the tax issue. The second point was the relatively little controversy that surrounded the \$4.5 million refurbishing of the library building. It was the new \$3 million building that created all the fuss. Is that because Westmounters are more accustomed to fixing up their older homes and more comfortable with the worn-look than with newer construction?

In any event, the gem has finally been polished. The torch has been passed to another generation. And the story has been told — thanks to the many people who were so candid in providing their recollections and, in some cases, even their personal notes to augment city documents and, of course, my own record and memories.

LAUREEN SWEENEY
OCTOBER 1995



In the heart of Westmount lies Quebec's oldest municipal library, built in 1899. One of the first library buildings in Canada, the Westmount Public Library is cherished for its heritage value. While it has been expanded and changed over the years, it was not until the refurbishment of 1994-1995 that this historic building was returned to its Victorian splendour. Here is the story of its renewal.