



Westmount places:  
York Avenue

## Description

# The history behind the familiar: the former residents that called York Avenue their home

By **Michael Walsh**

January 20, 2022

Oh, the grand old Duke of York,  
He had ten thousand men,  
He marched them up to the top of the hill,  
And he marched them down again.

– Author unknown

How can one start to describe **York Avenue**? The expression “despite all odds” comes to mind. For a short, largely overlooked street, its continued existence is quite remarkable. It has gone through three name changes (one was a typographical error), a protracted lawsuit regarding ownership, residential fires and expropriations. Its neighbour, **Albert Place**, was not so fortunate – it was erased from the municipal map in 1957 during the widening of **Claremont Avenue**.

‘The street is described as quite idyllic being traversed by a natural watercourse.’

Let us trace these forgotten stories from the beginning. Council Minutes first mentions York Avenue in June 1894 with reference to its name change from **Dorchester**. The street is described as quite idyllic being traversed by a natural watercourse. In 1895, it was recorded and described in the street record book as Yorke Avenue. There was, however, one item Council overlooked: ownership. It did not take long before several individuals claimed ownership of Yorke Avenue and requested monetary compensation.

One such individual was **Alex Lapalme** who, in 1896, requested an indemnity from the Town for several lots



that comprise the street. The Town's Solicitor replied by stating:

*"... by law the land in question has become a public street of the Town, duly recorded, and that no indemnity is due to any private persons, therefore."*

– Council Minutes, May 1896

At that point, it appears Alex Lapalme did not pursue any further legal action.

That outcome did not deter a second individual, **Richard Warmington** (a former councillor), to launch a legal challenge against the Town for several lots he claimed were "illegally obtained".

Warmington (the plaintiff) alleged that he was the proprietor of certain subdivisions of lots 208 and 214 until September 1892 when the Town of Westmount illegally took possession and converted them to streets, specifically, Windsor, Chesterfield, Somerville, Claremont, Dorchester and York Avenue. He was asking the Court of Queen's bench for \$112,350 plus interest based on a value of forty cents per foot.

'For a short, largely overlooked street, its continued existence is quite remarkable. It has gone through three name changes, a protracted lawsuit regarding ownership, residential fires and expropriations.'

The Town, in their defence, stated that Warmington (and Bryson), in 1873, acquired a large tract of land, including the lots in question, which they subdivided into building lots.

In addition, the Town argued that the plaintiff was attempting to claim a right of ownership rather than being in possession of the property in question. Specifically, all rights were transferred to the **Banque du Peuple** in 1883. In addition, all the lots were opened as public streets and homologated by the Superior Court. On June 1897, judgement was made against the Town awarding the plaintiff \$98,306 plus interest. The Town appealed this decision – however, the issue remained where this sum of money would be obtained.

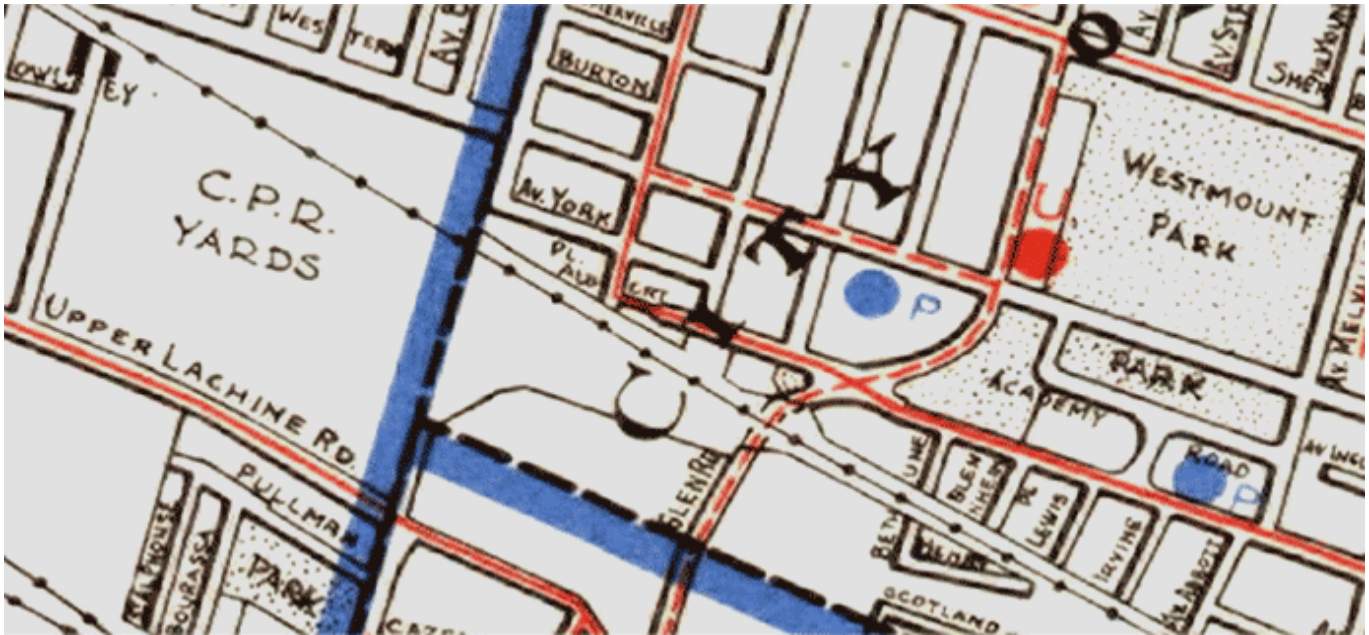
To put it into perspective, that sum would be worth approximately three million dollars in today's currency. As such, the Town borrowed \$120,000 from the **Montreal City and District Savings Bank**, payable in six months at a rate of four percent per annum. (The loan's repayment terms were extended on the due date.) (As an aside, to compound Council's problems, that same month the **Annexation Committee of the Montreal City Council** requested information regarding the Town's population and valuations – Council replied "that the letter will receive consideration in due course".)

In terms of appealing the case, on November 1897, the Town's Solicitors stated "... that the Town was not competent to take up the cases and that no gain could be seen that would justify the Town in incurring the expenditure". Council accepted the report, however, collectively decided to appeal the court's judgement. Their appeal was heard by the Supreme Court of Ottawa in May 1898. Once again, the Court ruled in favour of the plaintiff. In response, the Town asked the **Imperial Privy Council** for permission to appeal:

*"... that the Town's Solicitors be are hereby instructed and authorized to request their agents in London to enter an appearance on behalf of the Town and take any other steps necessary to protect its interests."*

– Council Minutes, July 1898

At this point, the historical trail "turns cold" – with no written record of the Imperial Privy Council's response. As such, one can assume that the Town's appeal was not entertained – thereby ending a protracted (and expensive) legal battle.



1945 map of Westmount showing York Avenue and Albert Place – Image: BAnQ

Having compensated the former owners and gaining full legal rights to the street, Council noticed one issue: a typographical error in the name. In fact, it had been recorded as “**Yorke**” and should have been named “York”. In addition, it was not a street but an avenue.

*“That the street between Victoria Ave. and the westerly limits of the Town entered on the Town plans in error as “Yorke Avenue” be henceforth shown on said plans as “York Street”.*

– Council Minutes, 12 June 1901

(Old habits die hard – newspapers until the mid-1930s still referred to the street as “Yorke Avenue”.)

‘Interestingly, the Duke of York (Prince George) visited the City of Westmount in 1901. The Duke and Duchess were invited by the Major and the Sons of England upon learning they were in Ottawa. One can only speculate if they strolled along York Avenue.’

At this point, York Avenue ceased to be at the top of Council’s agenda for several decades. In 1946, during a tax sale, the City purchased several lots with the intent of creating a public park. For some reason, this plan was never fulfilled, and the lots were sold to **Lennox Realties**, in 1957, for \$96,775.

That same year, the abandoned beautification efforts were coupled with expropriations and demolitions during the westerly extension of Saint Catherine Street from Victoria to Claremont Avenues. In addition, Claremont Avenue was widened between Western (de Maisonneuve) Avenue and Saint Catherine Street. Luckily, York Avenue, although scarred, was not obliterated. Its neighbour Albert Place was not so fortunate and was erased from the municipality during this construction period.

York Avenue was also a target, in 1973, during the construction of the **Vendôme Metro Station**. The **Montreal Urban Community Council** homologated property on Saint Catherine Street and York Avenue and requested additional expropriation powers adjacent to metro stations and terminals. Such powers would affect land on both York and Claremont Avenues within the City of Westmount. The City of Westmount objected and argued that expropriations should be based on merit and not given as a blanket power to the Montreal Urban Community Council.

As you can see, that is quite a story for a street that one can only be described as “resilient”.



Frederick, Duke of York and Albany – Image: Public Domain

Now that street’s name has been correctly recorded as York – who or what does it commemorate? It’s named in honour of [Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany](#), second son of [King George III](#).

Most historical accounts focus on the Duke’s scandals. Specifically, as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, he was accused of having his former mistress (Mary Ann Clarke) receive money in return for military promotions, causing him to resign his office. This was followed by Mrs. Clarke’s attempt to publish the details of their affair. She was eventually paid an undisclosed sum to maintain the Duke’s privacy.

His major accomplishment, which is not widely known, was the reorganization of the British Army, which, at the time, was demoralized and “fettered by antiquated notions and customs”. His reforms included:

*“...young men were pushed forward to take the place of aged staff officers in the field; generals were selected for command by merit, instead of seniority; colonels of regiments were obliged to show on parade...; and the soldier was treated as a human being rather than a convicted ruffian...”*

– Living Age, Volume 194, 1892





1 and 5 York

By the 1800s, the British Army was transformed from one demoralized by the American War of Independence to the modernized and disciplined fighting force that still exists to this day.

Scandals, however, are still in the forefront with the current Duke of York – **Prince Andrew**, second son of Queen Elisabeth II.

Interestingly, the Duke of York (**Prince George**) visited the City of Westmount in 1901. The Duke and Duchess were invited by the Major and the Sons of England upon learning they were in Ottawa. One can only speculate if they strolled along York Avenue.

You must agree, it has taken quite a long story to describe such a small street. Armed with these facts, let us take a winter walk along York Avenue and discover more long-forgotten stories waiting to be told.



Canadian Express Company postcard – Image: courtesy of Longley Auctions

## 1 York



J. Hunter, telephone operator (1897)

**5 York**

A. Doty, **Canadian Express Company** (1899)

**17 York**

P. Fitzsimmons, clerk, Grand Trunk Railway (1899)

**19 York**

Trooper Robert F. Allingham

Died of wounds during the Sicily Campaign (1943)



17 York

**23 York**

Rented as a rooming house in 1925.

**27 York**

Ralph Locke, Pellerin & Dufresne (1899)

**29 York**

Lynn T. Leet, Lynn T. Leet & Company (1899)

Pilot Officer Edwin S. C. Clark,

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Died during air operations over Osnabruck Germany, 1945.

### 30 York

Thomas Campbell Bulmer, Bulmer & Bulmer, builders (1902)  
McParland Refrigeration Registered (1942)  
Lagendyk Stack & Company Registered (1942)  
Cushing Ross Limited (1952)

### 35 York

J. Cosgrove, Engineer, Cosgrove, Lanctot & Finch, consulting engineers (1969)  
Boys Club of Canada, today renamed the “Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada” (1970)

*“A group of concerned local citizens in Saint John, New Brunswick, set up a “public playground movement” to provide a safe place for children to play, in particular, boys from disadvantaged circumstances who had no place to go after school. Originally established as the “Every Day Club,” it was later named The East End Boys Club of Saint John, the first Boys Club in Canada.”*

– Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada



Evolution of Boys and Girls Clubs Canada

### 36 York

**Horatio Ernest Phillips Bulmer**, son of **Thomas C. Bulmer**, at the time, regarded as one of Westmount’s oldest families (1945)

### 38 York

John Bauden (1920)

*“Mr. Bauden was born in Cornwall, England and came to Canada in 1830. He entered into the meat and cattle business... It was reported that he was the first to ship a boatload of cattle to England from Montreal. He later became associated with the Alan Steamship Line ... in this connection, Mr. Bauden often mentioned that he was the first one to send a telegram from Montreal to Quebec... He was a member of the reception committee on the occasion of the opening of the Victoria Bridge by the late King Edward VII, who was then the Prince of Wales. He later served as an artillery officer in Canada during the Fenian raid...”*

– Montreal Gazette, November 30, 1920



29 York

James Gill, baggage agent, Canadian Pacific Railway, Windsor Station (1952)

**39 York**

T. Gilmour, Gilmour & Kearns (1899)

**42 York**

Joseph K. Dissett, Secretary-Treasurer, Scotch Anthracite Coal Company Limited (1928)

**43 York**

Samuel Batten

The residence was damaged by a fire in 1925.

**51 York**

William Meldrum, William Meldrum & Company (1899)

Andrew W. Robertson, employed at Canadian Vickers Limited (1923)

At that time, the building was a rooming house.





39 York

**61 York**

Henry Hamilton Jr., Henry & N. E. Hamilton (1899)

**64 York**

Expropriated by the City of Westmount, in 1957, for the extension of Saint Catherine Street.

**66 York**

William H. Hope, picture framer and member of the Ancient Order of United Workmen (1899)

The rear of this property was purchased by the City of Westmount, in 1957, for the extension of Saint Catherine Street.

**72 York**

John A. Peterson, John A. Peterson & Company, tea merchants (1899)

*“Extensive damage was caused yesterday afternoon by a stubborn two-alarm blaze which gutted a series of eight L-shaped two-story brick structures at the rear of an apartment house at 72 York Avenue...”*

– Montreal Gazette, February 28, 1950



51 York

The rear of the property was purchased by the City of Westmount, in 1957, for the extension of Saint Catherine Street.

**73 York**

Major John F. Sumption, Sumption & Hughes manufacturers' agents (1916)  
Died of wounds in 1916.

**75 York**

Joseph Pellam, hotel businessman (1930)

**76 York**

John Wingham, electrician (1899)

**84 York**

Charles Ledoux, carriagemaker (1899)



66 York

*“Chief Moffatt and the men of the Westmount brigade were called out... for a fire in the residence of George Parker, 84 York Avenue... two bedrooms and a sitting room... were badly damaged...”*

– Montreal Gazette, April 29, 1912

Expropriated by the City of Westmount, in 1957, for \$17,600, for the extension of Saint Catherine Street. (Luckily, this residence was spared demolition.)

### **86 York**

Purchased by the City of Westmount, in 1957, for the extension of Saint Catherine Street.

### **94 York**

Thomas H. Cox, Montreal Lithographing Company (1899)



72 York

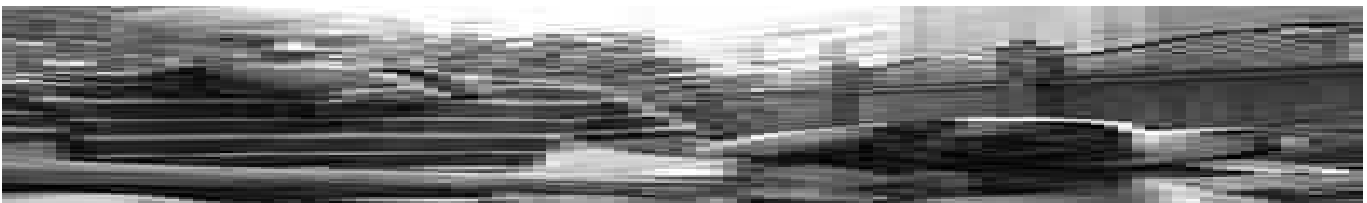
In 1935, the house and property were purchased by the City of Westmount at a cost of \$4400 for the extension of Saint Catherine Street.

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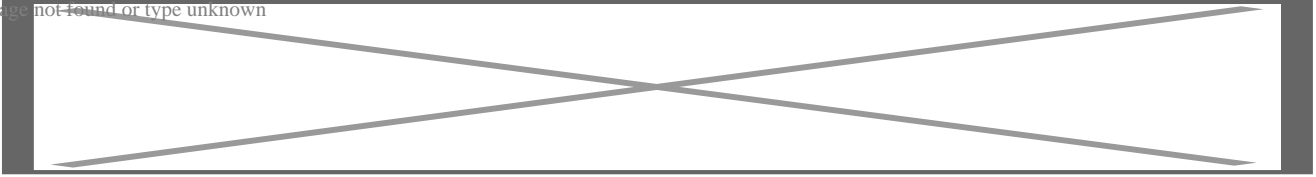
**Michael Walsh** is a long-time Westmount resident. He is happily retired from nearly four decades in the field of higher education technology. A “professional student” by nature, his academic training, and publishing, include statistical methodology, mycology and animal psychology. During this period, he was also an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces. Prior to moving to Montreal, he was contracted by the Ontario Ministry of Education evaluating bilingual primary and secondary school programs. Today, he enjoys spending time with his (huge) Saint Bernard while discovering the city’s past and sharing stories of the majestic trees that grace the parks and





streets. He can be contacted at [michaeld2003@hotmail.com](mailto:michaeld2003@hotmail.com) or through his blog [Westmount Overlooked](#)

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