

Westmount places:  
Surrey Gardens

## Description

# The history behind the familiar: the former residents that called Surrey Gardens their home

By Michael Walsh

March 2, 2022

It doesn't have to be the Grand Canyon, it could be a city street, it could be the face of another human being – Everything is full of wonder.

– A. C. Grayling

Do you have a list of city streets that you plan to explore at some point in time? I certainly do, however many of them are on the “upper level,” posing a bit of a challenge without a car.

High on my list is **Surrey Gardens** – for several reasons. The street has a delightful name, it contains a beautiful wide grass median (tree boulevard), an eclectic array of homes dating between the 1930s to the 1960s and boasts a stunning backdrop comprising the [Basilica of Saint Joseph's Oratory](#) of Mount Royal. In addition, although it is a relatively new street (by Westmount standards), it does possess a wealth of stories that range from housing a military hospital to the home of Canada's most successful car rental companies.



Surrey Gardens with the imposing Saint Joseph's Oratory in the background

Intrigued by these stories and coupled with an exceptionally warm May weekend, I finally managed to visit the street named after one of my many childhood homes.

Surrey Gardens honours a county in southeast England that borders Greater London, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire as well as Berkshire. Surrey derives its name from the Saxon term “Suthrige” meaning “southern Kingdom.” Interestingly, for a small county, the area attracted many well-known individuals that included [Lewis Carroll](#), [H.G. Wells](#) and [Aldous Huxley](#).

‘The original residents were hardworking honest business people, many of whom immigrated to Canada. Their homes can be viewed as a testament to the limitless opportunities afforded to them in their new country.’

The first striking aspect of the upper-level streets is the size of the residences. They are large, however, their size is not related to rank and wealth – a sustained misconception surrounding the City of Westmount. Several reasons dispel this common belief. Firstly, when these homes were constructed the lower portion of the city was saturated with parks and old homes. Secondly, the large homes were built as life-long residences for many family members – and in several cases, with the intention of generations of family occupancy.

The original residents were hardworking honest business people, many of whom immigrated to Canada. Their homes can be viewed as a testament to the limitless opportunities afforded to them in their new country. In addition, their attention to a myriad of architectural details not only enhanced the residences but added collectively to the city's overall beauty.





Surrey Gardens is known for its beautiful tree-lined grass median

At this point, let us take a leisurely walk along Surrey Gardens and discover some of the street's forgotten stories while gaining an appreciation of one of the many elements that add to the city's uniqueness.

**1 Surrey Gardens** (renumbered as 90 Summit Circle in 1954)

Gerald W. Birks, Birks Jewellers (1940)

J. B. Torphy, Torphy & Miquelon Lumber Ltd. (1955)

**4 Surrey Gardens**

Louis H. Timmins, **Hollinger Consolidated Gold Mines** (1930)



Hollinger mine, Timmins, Ontario, early 1900s –  
Image: [Photogelatine Engraving Company, Ottawa, Ont.](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

*“His father, the late Noah Timmons, was one of the early settlers and best-known men in the Upper Ottawa Valley. He was a lumberman and merchant and, on his death, the business for many years was carried on by the two sons, Henry and Noah Timmons. During their career as merchants, the two brothers were keenly interested in mining and when cobalt was discovered in 1903, they lost no time in purchasing the Lorose Mine... After the Lorose Mine was sold in 1908, Mr. Timmons, who had been residing in Haileybury, moved to Montreal with his family. In 1910, with his brothers, he became interested in the Porcupine District and with their Lorose Partners, purchased properties which became the Hollinger Consolidated Gold Mines.”*

– Montreal Gazette, June 2, 1930



4 Surrey Gardens

***“Luxurious Westmount Home No. 4 Surrey Gardens”***

*“... extensive groups comprising over 78,000 square feet of land, facing four streets, beautifully landscaped with well-developed shrubbery and many fine old shade trees.*

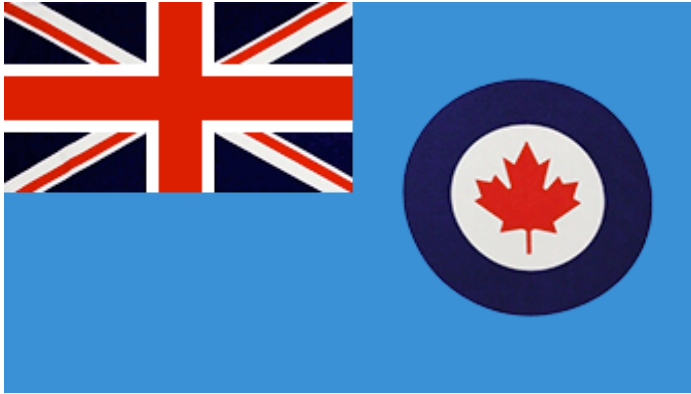
*Ground floor: ... large manor hall with open fireplace... reception room finished in ivory with tapestry walls and marble fireplace... door to large conservatory... library with open fireplace... servants’ dining room.”*

*“First floor: large hall with open fireplace. Master suite consisting of a large bedroom with open fireplace... dressing room... three other bedrooms... large heated sunroom... family sitting room... linen room... housemaids’ cupboards.”*

*“Second floor: Servants quarters consisting of six bedrooms...”*



*“Basement: Large recreation room with regulation bowling alley... Bedroom for a gardener or handyman...”*  
*“Garage: Large private garage is separate from house property and includes chauffeur’s living quarters.”*  
*“Price – a fraction of actual cost. Exclusive Agents – Ernest Pitt & Co. 660 St. Catherine St. West”*  
– Montreal Gazette, November 7, 1941



Royal Canadian Air Force Flag (1940-1965)

#### **No. 4 Convalescent Hospital (1944)**

*“A second division of No. 4 Convalescent Hospital, to accommodate about 45 members of the **R.C.A.F.** convalescing from wounds, sickness or injuries resulting from duty overseas, will be located in the Westmount Mountain home of the late L. H. Timmins... The three-story home... has been loaned to the air force for the duration of the war. It is located at 4 Surrey Gardens. The property comprises about 78,000 square feet and includes a tennis court and a bowling alley in the basement of the house.”*

– Montreal Gazette, March 14, 1944



21 Surrey Gardens

#### **21 Surrey Gardens**

Emil Nenniger, consulting engineer (1952)

“A Montreal engineering consulting company, formed in 1911, grew in the following decade in SNC (today’s SNC-Lavalin). The company’s founders were Arthur Surveyer, Emil Nenniger and Georges Chenevert (whose last initials form “SNC”). Their engineering projects included the building of the [Daniel-Johnson Dam](#) on the Manicouagan River, earning the company global recognition. In 1991, the company merged with Lammarre Valois International (Lavalin) forming SNC-Lavalin, one of the world’s largest engineering companies.”



The Daniel-Johnson Dam – Image: [Bouchecl](#), via Wikimedia Commons

“Today, in honour of Emil Nenniger’s outstanding contribution to engineering, McGill University offers annual memorial fellowships to outstanding engineering students.”

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31 Surrey Gardens

### 31 Surrey Gardens

Sam F. Tilden, president and manager, Stanley Garage & Tilden Drive Yourself (1955)

Sam Tilden founded **Tilden-Rent-a-Car**, which grew into a worldwide franchise. The company partnered with National Car Rental in the United States, Europcar in Europe and Nippon Rent-a-Car in Asia.

By the early 1990s, the company, now known as Tilden InterRent, had a rental vehicle involved in an accident in New York City that caused several deaths and extensive property damage. Facing the prospect of multiple lawsuits (later dismissed) in 1996, the company sold its entire operations to National Car Rental (today known

as National).



Tilden Rent-A-Car ad

### 36 Surrey Gardens

Bernard Ziff, president, Union Pipe Machinery Limited & Steel Factories Limited (1955)

### 43 Surrey Gardens

Norman Pitt, managing director, Canadian Refractories Limited (1945)

Founded in 1932, Canadian Refractories Limited used locally sourced alumina and silica clays for the manufacturing of refractory cements and plastic firebricks suited for high industrial temperatures. They were the first Canadian company to end the country's dependence on imports of refractories from the United States.

### 46 Surrey Gardens

W. R. Miller, R. Meat and Company (1920)

Ste. Croix Peres, Emile Deguire C.S.C. (1945)

Provincial House Fathers of the Holy Cross (1950)

Reverend Laurent Lapalme, elected in Rome superior of the Canadian province of the Fathers of the Holy Cross (1950)

Maison des Predicateurs (1952)





46 Surrey Gardens

*“MUC police are... investigating the murder Tuesday night of Jeannette Vachon, 44, found in a rooming house at 46 Surrey Gardens in Westmount.”*

– June 12, 1975

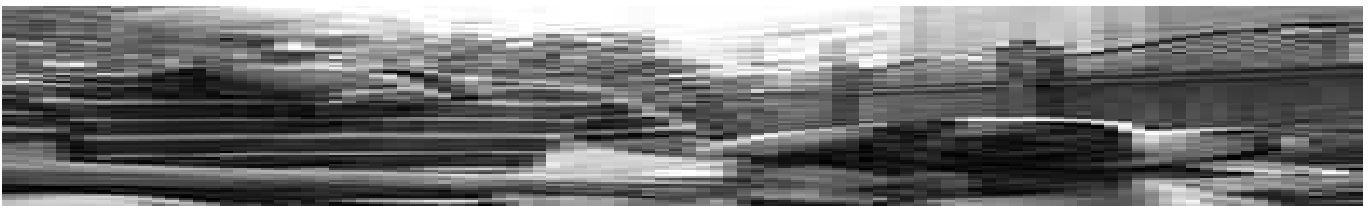
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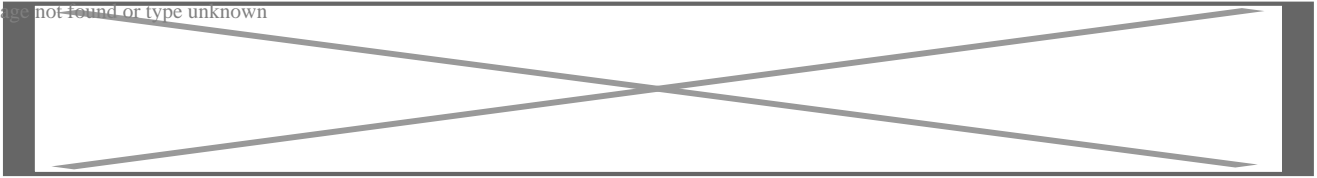


**Michael Walsh** is a long-time Westmount resident. He is happily retired from nearly four decades in the field of higher education technology. A “professional student” by nature, his academic training, and publishing, include statistical methodology, mycology and animal psychology. During this period, 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 [michaelld2003@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelld2003@hotmail.com) or through his blog [Westmount Overlooked](#)





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