



The Goode House: A tale full of twists and turns

Description

Ministry of Culture and Communications to decide whether alterations can proceed

By Irwin Rapoport

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The saga of **Westmount's Goode House**, and whether its new owners shall be permitted to alter the exterior of the Greek Revival historic home and remove an interior staircase, is ongoing with the Quebec government's Ministry of Culture and Communications expected to respond by October 4 on whether the city's approval to alter the house built in 1840 can proceed. The house and its large garden are located on Côte-St-Antoine Road, just west of Forden Avenue.

Built in 1840, the Goode House is one of the oldest in the City and a rare example of Greek Revival architecture in Quebec... Since 1884, three generations of the Goode family have preserved the architectural integrity of this exceptional house.

– [Westmount.org](https://www.westmount.org)

The Goode House is listed in the province's [Cultural Heritage Register](#), which includes Westmount's description of the home. A [link](#) from the City of Westmount regarding the Goode House states: "On November 2, 2020, Westmount City Council designated the Goode property as a heritage immovable. The interior of the private residence, located at 178 Côte-Saint-Antoine Road, is now protected by a municipality, a first in Quebec. This regulatory measure will allow the Goode house to continue to exist in the community's shared memory – without freezing it in time – all while allowing the building to fulfil its foremost role as a space for living."



“Built in 1840, the Goode House is one of the oldest in the City and a rare example of Greek Revival architecture in Quebec. It was originally one of a group of four identical houses, of which two remain. Since 1884, three generations of the Goode family have preserved the architectural integrity of this exceptional house.”

The **Westmount Historical Association** also noted the [Goode House’s status](#).

The new owners purchased the Goode House in 2019, which had already received some heritage status and protection. On June 1 of this year, Westmount resident **David Nercessian** wrote a piece for Westmount Magazine on the heritage building entitled [Will the Goode house stay good or is it about to go bad?](#)

Later in June, City Council’s demolition committee gave its approval for the alterations of the home, which included changes to the exterior of the facade in the front, an extension of the house in the back, and the removal of an interior staircase.

This [report](#) by **Global News** on the Goode House from July 16, 2020, addresses some of the issues in terms of protecting the heritage status of the house.

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On September 2 of this year, **Le Devoir** weighed in on this issue with this article entitled [Aucun intérieur historique n’est protégé par les municipalités](#). The article provided an update on the Goode House’s situation, including a link for Westmount Magazine’s [article](#).

A few days later, on September 6, the City of Westmount replied to *Le Devoir’s* article with a [statement](#) on its web site, defending and justifying its approval for changes to the house.

On September 14, the debate heated up with a **Gazette** article entitled [Heritage Montreal wants work stopped on historic Westmount home](#). The article sums up the situation and contains quotes from [Heritage Montreal](#), Westmount Mayor **Christina Smith** and co-owner **Rob Sibthorpe**, as well as various links to provide insight on the situation and information on the home and its long history.

No doubt, when the provincial ministry makes public its decision on whether the alterations can proceed or are nixed, the debate will resume and where it ends up, nobody knows.



Goode house proposed renovations, front and back – Image: City of Westmount

To learn more about the Goode House and the threats to Montreal’s unique architectural history, Heritage Montreal policy director **Dinu Bumbaru** responded to some questions posed by Westmount Magazine.

WM: Could you provide a short history of the Goode House and how rare are such examples of this style of architecture?

Bumbaru: The Goode House was built in 1840 – over 180 years ago – as part of a group of four called the **Metcalf Terrace**, named after the then Governor General of Canada. Montreal was then the capital of Canada and the Governor General resided at Monklands, now Villa Maria High School. Along with the other houses of the Terrace, the Goode House accommodated officers on the Governor General’s staff. Originally offered for rent, the four houses were individually sold in 1852. The Goode House is one of the two remaining components of the Terrace and the most intact in its architecture, interiors and garden setting. Although there are examples of [Greek Revival architecture](#) in Quebec, Ontario or the Maritimes, the Goode House is a rather exceptional case. Even in Westmount, which is graced with a remarkable collection of architecture from various times, this is a very unique landmark, recalling the early days of the Côte Saint-Antoine Road and the beginning of transforming this rural area into a place of “country residences.”

Research has not yet identified the actual architect of the four houses. It could be the builder himself, **Moses Judah Hayes**, who was a Royal Engineer and, as such, trained in architecture. It could also be British-born architect **John Wells**, whose most famous work is the Bank of Montreal on Place d’Armes, opened in 1847, with whom Hayes worked on various projects. Either way, both were talented.

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– Dinu Bumbaru, policy director, Heritage Montreal



WM: *From what we are told, the Goode House has essentially remained intact – exteriors and interiors, as well as the garden, with some of the original plants. How would you describe the architectural style of the Goode House and its garden?*

Bumbaru: The four houses were designed in the Greek Revival style, which was very popular at the time in Europe and North America. It is characterized by its serene simplicity and elegant proportions in the openings, the plinths and mouldings inside, the mantelpiece and woodwork, etc. As an example, the front elevation of the Goode House is crowned by a four-slope roof with a lofty overhang and graced with the original woodwork of the entrance and windows. The architecture here is very much connecting the interior spaces and the gardens, if not the greater landscape, with commanding views, which the Governor General's officers would have appreciated.

WM: *Why is it essential that we protect the Goode House, and if renovations are permitted, what would be acceptable to ensure that its historical legacy is retained?*

Bumbaru: Of course, in our days of virtual reality and numbers, we could ask a team and a computer to generate a high-precision digital model of the Goode House accompanied by a historical narrative, and then let all sorts of interventions happen to it. This is not heritage protection. The Goode House carries something data-driven concerns can't handle – authenticity and integrity. The fact that it's all there and has travelled decades in such a condition, still used as a house, is exceptional. We can't afford to let this go. Still, as the Goode House is not an artifact in a museum, its liveability will unsurprisingly call for some adaptation, which must be kept to a very minimum to not alter the unique authenticity and integrity of this heritage building.

Incidentally, the **Quebec Cultural Heritage Act** was amended in 2021 and now includes specific attention to the authenticity and integrity of protected heritage buildings and sites. And arguing, as the City does in its recent communiqué with data like "0.5% of the supporting masonry" would be affected, shows a profound misunderstanding of what caring for heritage and such values are.

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– Dinu Bumbaru, policy director, Heritage Montreal

WM: *For many, Westmount has been the paragon of how a municipality can protect crucial and historical architecture. In your opinion, how did we end up in this situation?*

Bumbaru: Indeed, Westmount has been setting the standard very high when it comes to heritage. It stands as a reference of the best, not only in regulating but also in researching and assisting. It has demonstrated how a municipality so often torn between tax revenues and protecting heritage or ecological lands, can care in words and actions. As a matter of fact, the Goode House is part of that tradition of service and excellence, being the first case in Quebec of a municipality using powers granted in 2012 to designate a heritage building and its interior. In that context, the current status of that case is quite disconcerting. Just like the fact that information and studies don't seem to be publicly accessible to help understand the house's heritage value and contribute to healthy and responsible decision-making. All this points to asking the Quebec Government to intervene and ensure the house's outstanding value is properly acknowledged and cared for.



WM: *Are other buildings in the Greater Montreal Area under threat, and what can be done to protect them?*

Bumbaru: Some years ago, Heritage Montreal created a web-based platform, now upgraded, called [Memento](#). It is essentially a radar screen for citizens to pinpoint heritage issues around Greater Montreal. Although it is a young tool and not exhaustive, it already illustrates the great diversity of heritage buildings at risk. And numbers too.

Talking of numbers, it's important to recall that we're not dealing with the occasional ancestral house as in the 1950s anymore. Under the 2021 amendment to the Cultural Heritage Act of Québec, an inventory of pre-1940 buildings is compulsory. In the case of Montreal, the work is coordinated by the City of Montreal for the agglomeration (island) and conservative estimates say there are about 90 000 such buildings around. That's a lot, but who's surprised when one goes around and looks?

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Among the key protection issues, there's the future use of heritage places of worship, public buildings and industrial structures but also the preventive maintenance of the heritage building stock to be consistent with its authenticity and integrity. Addressing those will require better-known tools like regulation, professional assistance, and education, but also new ones like incentive tax breaks, property stewardship organizations, and the value of craftspeople. Why not set up a Metro Montreal Heritage Trust?



Side of the Goode house as seen from Cote St. Antoine Road – Image: Google Maps



WM: *Since the beginning of the pandemic, many have noticed that several older buildings in downtown Montreal have been demolished. What have we lost recently, and why is it important that we protect our architectural heritage?*

Bumbaru: Protecting is a broad term. There's the protection granted by law and, as we see with the case of the Goode House, it comes with the limits politicians give it in the absence of an ombudsman of heritage. There's also protection by the owners. In any case, caring for our architectural heritage is crucial as it shapes the place where we live and turns it into a garden of playful shapes, details, and sculpted or more humble expressions of beauty, memory, and humanity. All these buildings are irreplaceable, a valuable non-renewable resource.

WM: *If the situation continues as is, is there a possibility that much of the architecture which makes Montreal unique will be lost and it becomes just another bland North American city?*

Bumbaru: What makes Montreal unique isn't only the existing older buildings and places. We can also make it or break it with the types of buildings we create nowadays. In that respect, we've seen many new buildings, which would be fit for any bland North American city – think of Griffintown. Often this results from a view of urban development whose success is measured in numbers, not qualities.

What are these qualities of Montreal, the “Montrealness of Montreal” as architect, artist and professor **Melvin Charney** wrote? Part of it has to do with the site of the city, the fundamental geography of an island with a three-peaked hill in the middle, and how old paths turned into country roads, like Côte Saint-Antoine, connecting farms drawn in typical long lot patterns. Part of it has to do with the materials we see, the local greystone or brick along with the woodwork, gardens, etc. Part of it has to do with the way architecture – outside and inside – supports the life of the community at all times and through the four seasons, and how we have successfully learned to adapt it, sometimes very discreetly, to make it meaningful.

Feature image: the existing Goode House, Google Maps

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