



Westmount's Police Department /2

## Description

# The saga of Westmount's police and fire departments from 1929 to 1972

By Michael Walsh

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September 21, 2021



Police uniform button

Chief of Police William Wren was elected **President of the Police and Fire Chiefs Club of the Island of Montreal** in 1929. The formation of this club had already led to better co-operation between the Police and Fire

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Chiefs on the Island and, as time passed, would prove to be productive of the greater good towards a better Police and Fire protection on the Island. In 1936, he was elected **President, Chief Constables' Association of Canada**.

By 1929, the police force comprised 43 members. The City was very well served as their functions included: Chief of Police and Fire Inspector of Police, Captain of Police, Lieutenant of Police, Sergeants, Parks Constables, Motor Cycle Constables, Traffic Constables, Sanitary and Milk Inspectors, Captain of Detectives and Plain Clothes Constables.

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*“There’s a cop in Westmount who doesn’t believe in Santa Claus. And when he saw a portly figure in red, long white whiskers, and a sack on his back, walking along Sherbrooke Street Wednesday, the arm of the law had his suspicious especially about the sack. So he towed Santa off to the clink. But the sergeant on duty at the station knew better, and sent the jolly saint on his way to keep a very pressing engagement with a lot of children...”*

– Montreal Gazette, December 27, 1935

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Improved radio communications occurred in 1935 with the installation of **police shortwave call system** (call sign CY2J). Previously, radio transmissions were received by the Montreal police department and dispatched to Westmount police through a series of 29 telephone boxes throughout the municipality.



Westmount Fire Department badge

After many years of service, William Wren retired in 1938 as was replaced by **Walter Gough** as Chief of Police.

Labour organization by members of the police and fire department occurred in 1943. Members formed **The Canadian Association of Police and Firefighters of Westmount**, which was affiliated with the **Canadian Congress of Labour**. This move caught the City by surprise, stating they always had a cordial relationship with these municipal departments. Following lengthy negotiations into the following year, an agreement was reached between the City of Westmount and the **Canadian Brotherhood of Policemen**.



Further changes occurred in the police department, in 1946, following the death of Chief William Gough at the age of 47. Following his death, Council separated the police and fire departments and appointed **R. Byford** as Chief of Police and **W. Cobb**, Fire Chief. Interestingly, the Police Commissioner was an appointed member of Council.

Labour organization by members of the police and fire department occurred in 1943. Members formed The Canadian Association of Police and Firefighters of Westmount, which was affiliated with the Canadian Congress of Labour.

*“Found: Crate of Poultry. Same can be had by applying at the Westmount Police Station.”*

– Montreal Gazette, January 7, 1947

This new organizational structure led to further labour negotiations in the early 1950s – resulting in the formation of the **Westmount Police Association and Westmount Firefighters Association (A.F.L. Local 981)**.

*“Westmount Police are looking for the person who abandoned a three-week-old baby in the vestibule of an apartment house at 225 Melville Avenue about 12:30 a.m. yesterday...”*

– Montreal Gazette, September 29, 1951





Stanton Street police and fire headquarters – Image: Michael Walsh

The police and fire department's headquarters at 21 Stanton Street were remodelled in 1952 and accommodated 48 police officers and 52 members of the fire brigade. Further changes in leadership occurred with the appointment of **R. J. Edmonstone** as Chief of Police, followed by **Edward Christopher Harper**.

'The police and fire department's headquarters at 21 Stanton Street were remodelled in 1952 and accommodated 48 police officers and 52 members of the fire brigade.'

The 1960s saw the creation of a **Municipal Emergency Measures Committee** with the Mayor as Chairman, the Commissioner of Police and Fire as Vice-Chairman. In 1962, the **Department of Public Safety** was formed comprising Public Safety Officers, the Police and Fire Departments with Edward Harper, Chief of Police and Fire appointed director.

Further construction occurred at the Fire and Police Station on Stanton Street. In 1963, an extension and a new building were erected. Designed by **Perry and Patch** in association with **Durnford, Bolton, Chadwick and Ellwood**, a portion of the existing structure was utilized.

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*"Opened in November 1964, at a cost of \$900,000 replacing its predecessor opened in 1895 as the Westmount Academy. The building contains: a bomb-proof shooting range which can house 100 people in times of disaster, the second floor can be used as a civil defence command centre containing a scale model of the city showing every building, a municipal courtroom with teak wood furnishings and a radio communications room."*

– Montreal Gazette, November 1964

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In 1963, the City of Westmount was shocked by the placing of **dynamite sticks in residential mailboxes**. The Westmount Police force played a vital role in protecting citizens during this difficult period. They had no idea that, in three years time, the provincial government would pass legislation that would result in the disbanding of the 95 members of their municipal police department.

'In 1963, the City of Westmount was shocked by the placing of dynamite sticks in residential mailboxes. The Westmount Police force played a vital role in protecting citizens during this difficult period.'

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*"... In addition to the bomb sites mentioned... the following additional locations were shown on the city plan prepared by the Westmount police: Sunnyside and Lansdowne Aves.; Upper Belmont and Devon Aves.; Westmount Blvd. and Lansdowne Ave.; St. Catherine St. and Hallowell Ave.; Dorchester St. and Gladstone Ave.; St. Catherine St. and Lewis Ave.; and Sherbrooke St. and Claremont Ave..."*

– Montreal Gazette, July 4, 1963

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Westmount Fire Department badge

The “beginning of the end” occurred when the **Montreal Metropolitan Corporation** was created by the Provincial Parliament’s **Bill 75**. This Bill was created to “control, guide, direct or coordinate the various matters or problems that are common in all the Municipalities in the Metropolitan area of Montreal”.

Not surprisingly, City’s response to the Bill’s passage was that “The present Council has no intention of entering into any agreement with the Metropolitan Corporation pertaining to control of the fire and police departments... debts of constituent Municipalities should be their responsibilities...”

Nevertheless, in 1971, the **Public Security Council of the Montreal Urban Community** recommended the integration of the police forces throughout the Island. By January 1972, police forces, island-wide, were forced to integrate. Municipal police force members were transferred to the **Montreal Urban Community Police Force**.

‘... in 1971, the Public Security Council of the Montreal Urban Community recommended the integration of the police forces throughout the Island. By January 1972, police forces, island-wide, were forced to integrate.’

In addition, René Daigneault’s report, known as the **Daigneault Report**, recommended that the Director of the Montreal Urban Community Police Department reports to the Public Security Council of the Montreal Urban Community, as required by **Article 53 of Bill 281** (1972), and that he be responsible for the integration of the police departments:

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*“... d’informer toutes les municipalités, qu’en vertu de l’article 72-3 44 de la loi constituant le Service de Police de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal et modifiant la loi de ladite Communauté, celles-ci doivent, jusqu’à ce que le Conseil de sécurité les avise du contraire, continuer de fournir au Service de Police de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal les services de conseillers juridiques, dans la même mesure qu’elles les fournissaient à leur propre service de police jusqu’au 31 décembre 1971.”*

COPIE CONFORME



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(Signed) Jacques Coderre  
Juge Jacques Coderre,  
président, Conseil de sécurité publique,  
Communauté urbaine de Montréal.

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A short time later, the City received a bill from the Montreal Urban Community amounting to \$622,691 for their share of police department expenses from September 1970 to December 1971. On their part, the Montreal Urban Community acquired a loan of \$16,750,000 to cover police costs.

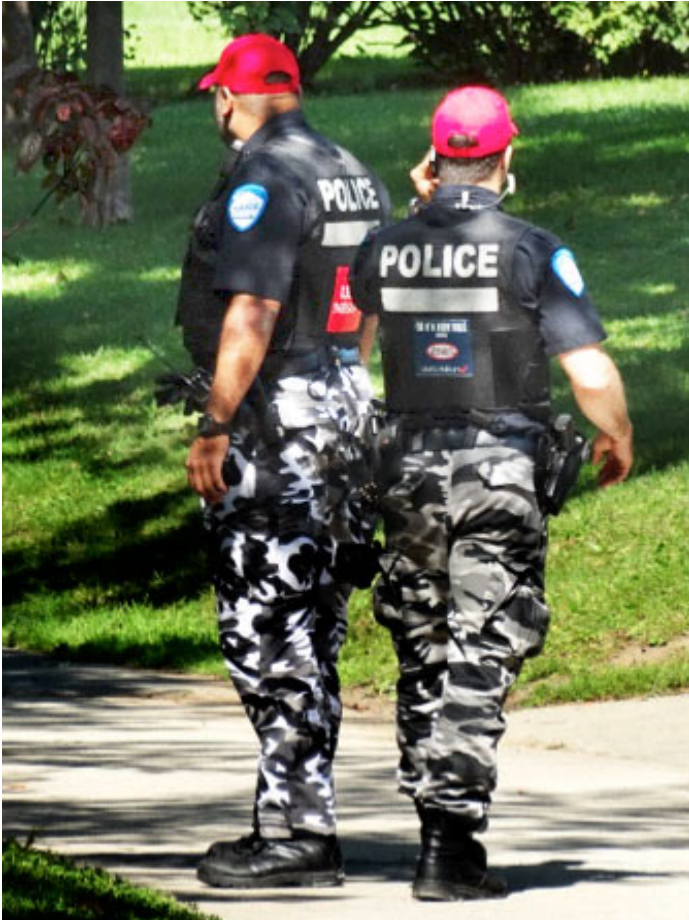
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*“BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT the Council of the City of Westmount hereby requests the Public Security Council of the Montreal Urban Community to ensure that the services identified and described in the attached lists continue to be provided by the same police personnel and that provision to this effect be included in the overall plan of the Police integration.”*

*“The friendly atmosphere which now exists between the Police and the public is based on the close contact which results from the willingness of Police Personnel to provide services to individuals – services which the Police are uniquely qualified to supply. Returning a lost child or senile person to his home, helping someone to put an aged person or invalid back in bed, providing an escort for a theatre manager or other business person with late closing hours – these are examples of services provided by the Police in minor emergency situations or crime prone situations which convince the individual citizen that the Policeman is, indeed, his friend. For the maintenance of this excellent relationship between the Police and the citizens, it is essential that the individual policeman possess a detailed knowledge of the area in which he works and of its citizens.”*

– Council Proceedings, April 1972

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Police on park patrol – Image: Michael Walsh

Surprisingly, Westmount was the only municipality to submit suggestions to the Public Security Council. In fact, the City did not oppose the integration plan provided the same services and personnel were retained.

Westmount was also the only municipality to point out that no island-wide police communications system was in place. Taking the lead, Westmount engaged the services of **Eltech Corporation** (communications consulting engineers) to address this issue. They presented a final report to the **Sub-Committee on Police Communications** established by the **Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors** based on the **911 police communications system** used in New York City's five boroughs and the **U.K.'s 999 system** that coordinates the 47 Police Forces in England and Wales.

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*“In order to maintain understanding and cooperation between the citizens of Westmount and the Police, it is essential that the citizens know their Policemen. It is therefore strongly urged that the plan for the implementation of Police Integration include a statement of policy limiting transfer of Policemen from district to district having the principle of neighbourhood identification and knowledge in mind.”*

*“WHEREAS by resolution passed on the 18th April, 1972, the Council of the City of Westmount requested the Public Security Council of the Montreal Urban Community to ensure that the services identified and described in the lists attached thereto continue to be provided by the same police personnel and that provision to this effect be included in the overall plan of the Police integration; WHEREAS the City of Westmount is in favour of establishing island wide police operations relating to regional police functions and considers that any plan of integration for this purpose should be made only after consultation with area municipalities and outside expert.”*

*“WHEREAS a proposal for the integration of police radio communication systems on the territory of the Montreal Urban Community has now been submitted by the Director of the Montreal Urban Community Police*

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Department, WHEREAS this proposal included a report on an experiment with a centralized system in the municipality of Montreal North over a period of 14 days.”

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Westmount Fire Department badge

It is difficult to understand how any of the parties involved in this forced integration did not predict the spiralling costs. At the provincial level, Mr. **Jérôme Choquette**, Minister of Justice, raised concerns about rising police costs that started with a \$10,000,000 deficit. This had grown \$156,000,000 in 1976 to \$275,000,000 in 1980. In fact, this was the second largest item in the MUC's budget. This resulted in the Conference of Suburban Mayors urged the Provincial Government for a loan of \$30,000,000 to cover police costs.

The Daigneault Report, released in 1974, took financial control of the police department away from the Public Security Council. Westmount contested the report resulting in the City retaining its police station.

To control rising police costs, services were curtailed, station hours reduced, the number of personnel at each “poste”, staffing levels kept to a minimum and the abandoning by police of ambulance services and its takeover by the C.S.S.R.M.M. (One artefact of these austere measures are the City's current “silent policemen” – also known as “speed bumps”).

‘By 1978, a new emergency police telephone number was initiated (934-2121) for the entire Montreal Urban Community region. In 1981, the number was changed to 911 – nine years after Westmount first proposed its usage.’

Further changes involved the transfer of long-serving members away from Westmount. In addition, the police communications system prevented Westmount residents from contacting their police station directly. Those officers that did accept direct calls at the station were reprimanded by their supervisors.





Police bicycle patrol – Image: Michael Walsh

By 1978, a new emergency police telephone number was initiated (934-2121) for the entire Montreal Urban Community region. In 1981, the number was changed to 911 – nine years after Westmount first proposed its usage.

In 1982, police costs, although high, were somewhat stable. However, it became apparent that cities would have to rely on public security forces instead of the police for crime prevention. More concerning was proposed closure of **Westmount's police station 23**. The City's station was granted a last-minute reprieve by the chairman of the MUC public security committee **Michel Hamelin** in 1986. However, the same issue reappeared, in 1992, with the MUC's proposal to recast the police division map.

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*“Indeed, as the MUC power continues to build, we have to defend Westmount against the homogenizing and centralizing forces across the Island of Montreal. Having 27 messy little cities in the MUC probably offends Quebec City's sense of neatness. Yesterday, we lost our police force. Today, our police station is in peril. Tomorrow, will we have to fight for our Fire Brigade?”*

– Mayor Peter F. Trent, November 12, 1991

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In July 1992, copies of a petition signed by (152) residents of the City of Westmount requesting **Mayor Trent** to transmit their concern to keep the Westmount Police Station (Station 23) in the City of Westmount and not a mere storefront substation. By 1995, the Police division map was finalized and Westmount retained its police station.

By 1986, following 14 years of a turbulent integration, there was a proposal to give Westmount's Public Safety Unit additional powers:

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*This force consists of individually selected, rigorously trained and closely supervised patrolmen with a strong sense of dedication to the community they serve. In keeping with the high expectations of the citizens, these departments, in order to enhance their services, should have greater powers within the municipal limits. This should include the powers to enforce parking and traffic by-laws, to make arrests and lay charges under the Highway Safety Code (R.S.Q., chapter C-24.1) and all municipal by-laws. This authority would make a major contribution to the effectiveness of the forces such as Westmount's P.S.U. in applying municipal by-laws and ensuring a greater degree of peace, order and security on streets and in parks in the municipality.*



Modern-day Montreal police cruiser with red and blue lights – Image: Michael Walsh

Despite their strong argument, the Montreal Police Brotherhood would not grant powers of arrest, nor enforcement of the Highway Safety Code to PSU officers. In addition, their emergency lights could not be the same red and blue colours used by police vehicles.

In terms of monetary costs, in 1966, Westmount's budget (including salaries and benefits) for policing its municipality was \$455,268. By 1999, the City of Westmount's police budget was \$11,102,836.

'Despite their strong argument, the Montreal Police Brotherhood would not grant powers of arrest, nor enforcement of the Highway Safety Code to PSU officers.'

One must agree, this story has been quite a saga. In fact, to date, it is still ongoing. Lessons learned? Aside from the massive financial costs, integration (of municipal services, municipalities and even airlines) is without exception at the cost of the "personal touch". For that, one cannot place a cost.

Further to the point, ask yourself the following questions: How many Public Security officers (current or former) can you name? Then ask yourself to name Westmount's local police station. (**Ville-Marie Ouest, PDQ 12**). Who is the current Director of PDQ 12? (**François Labonté**). Finally, how many local SPVM officers (from a **current total of 56**



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) do you know by name or even recognize by sight? If you are like myself, I would fail in answering the last four questions. In the end, it is all about personal human interactions – nothing else matters.

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## Footnotes

*Following the Island-wide police integration, many of the City's police department's archival records were moved (by the SPVM) from Westmount to an undisclosed location.*

*I would like to thank Peter F. Trent for taking the time to ensure the accuracy of the financial costs cited during the police integration period.*

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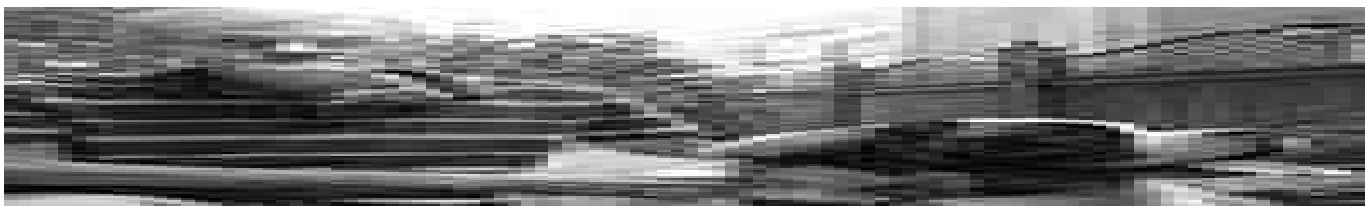
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