



Westmount places
Kensington Avenue

Description

The history behind the familiar: Kensington, a multifaceted avenue best described as eclectic

By Michael Walsh

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The more you spend your time in the ordinary streets, the more extraordinary things you will learn!

– *Mehmet Murat Idan*

Kensington Avenue is best described as “eclectic”. Stretching from Côte St. Antoine southwards to St. Catherine Street, containing apartment buildings, a Synagogue, a Jewish elementary school, a former rectory, a former Mayor’s residence, a lawn bowling club and large houses, many of which were converted into two-story dwellings. In addition, several former residents were decorated or paid the supreme sacrifice during both world wars.



King William III – Image: Public Domain

To begin, whom (or what) does the street's name commemorate? The answer is an area in London that borders Hyde Park, Holland Park, Kensington High Street and Kensington Church Street. Its royal connection began in 1689 when [King William III](#) (William of Orange) constructed Kensington Palace. Today the area also includes the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science and Natural History Museums.

The origin of the name Kensington is worthy of a separate article. Theories abound including Kings-town and Cheneesi who owned a manor in Somersetshire. What is known, however, is that the Domesday Book records the area as Chenesitum. In terms of theories, the most plausible is that the name is a derivation from the Saxon tribe of Kensings (sometimes called Kemsings). In fact, in Kent, a small village still retains the name Kemsing, birthplace of Saint Edith of Wilton, the daughter of the Anglo-Saxon [King Edgar I](#), also known as Edgar the Peaceful or the Peaceable.

We begin our journey along Kensington Avenue with a historical timeline perspective.



Order of Leopold II (Belgium) Image:
Wikimedia

In the 1800s Kensington Avenue stretched from Western Avenue northwards to Côte Saint-Antoine Road with a single footpath. A stream, diverted through a culvert, traversed the road near 337 Kensington Avenue. Heavy rains and spring thaws caused the culvert to overflow and cause basement flooding in nearby homes.

The street was first surveyed on September 1887 for the purpose of acquisition within the municipality of the Village of Cote St. Antoine.

The Town macadamized the street in 1894, payable by the property proprietors in fourteen annual instalments.

The Citizens Light and Power Company installed the street's first electric arc lamp in 1886, at the corner of Sherbrooke Street.

A proposal, in May 1910, was put before Council to extend Kensington Avenue from Western Avenue to Sherbrooke Street. The Town's Secretary-Treasurer was instructed to interview proprietors to determine if they were willing to cede land required for this extension.

By September 1901 the Town had finalized arrangements and acquired sufficient land to extend Kensington Avenue and open a second street (today Redfern Avenue).

“The report shows the Town would by this arrangement purchase from the Estate MacKay 9,000 feet of land at 55 cents per square foot amounting in all to \$4,950... the interested proprietors mutually agreeing to cede the lands necessary for said streets... amounting in all to 65,100 square feet.”

Council Minutes, September 10, 1901



Royal Victoria Hospital Nurse's
Graduation Pin (1941)

The proprietors ceding their land to the town were Robert MacKay, Alexander C. Hutchinson, James J. Jackson, John R. Coward and the reverend sisters of the Grey Nuns. Drainage pipes were installed and the road macadamized in 1904, with a portion paid by the fronting proprietors. Two years later, the town constructed temporary sidewalks on both sides of the street.

The watercourse, still flowing near 337 Kensington Avenue, caused property damage, in 1908, when it became blocked with the construction of street improvements.

That same year the Town acquired a large tract of land, including parts of Kensington Avenue for public park purposes:

“... acquisition of the property bounded by Cote St. Antoine Road, Argyle Avenue, Sherbrooke Street and Kensington Avenue for the purpose of a public place or park.” (today's City Hall Park and the Westmount Lawn Bowling Club)

Council Minutes, October 5, 1908

In 1909 permanent curb and channel sidewalks were constructed on both sides of the street.



239 Kensington, former Heather Curling Club site

In 1920, the lane situated between Western, Redfern, Kensington and St. Catherine Streets was ceded to the City by the Grey Nuns.

That same year, a parcel of land was purchased on the corner of Kensington Avenue and Cote St. Antoine Road by the Congregation Shaar Hashomayim of Montreal. The City issued a permit for the construction of a Synagogue, in 1921, on that property.

In 1920, the City purchased the immovable property bounded by Sherbrooke Street, Kensington Avenue and Cote St. Antoine at a cost of \$24,740.50. The east side of Kensington Avenue was widened in 1950, from Sherbrooke Street to Cote St. Antoine Road. Nine years later, the first apartment building was constructed.

Up to this point the development of Kensington Avenue is quite unremarkable. However, every street has a long-forgotten back-story – this street is no exception. Specifically, Kensington Avenue received national attention in a rather macabre fashion. On October 1910, the skeletal remains of a young woman were found (by a child) on a vacant lot used as a playground. The story unfolds as follows:



245 Kensington

“It had evidently been there for months... There was nothing about the remains to indicate violence, nor was there a single trinket or anything to furnish a clue to its identity. Inquiry by the police failed to give evidence of

any missing girl. Their theory is that she was a woman of the streets, and had either been made drunk, decoyed there and abandoned, or that, feeling ill, she had crawled under the bushes and died there.”
Globe and Mail, October 24, 1910

With that unsettling story behind us, let's take a stroll along Kensington Avenue and discover the stories behind the street's extant and former homes and buildings.

227 Kensington (Apt 14) (Former civic number)
Brigadier Ralph Holley Keebler C.B.E., E.D. (1945)
Awarded the Order of the British Empire & Distinguished Service Order



314 Kensington

229 Kensington (Former civic number)
Captain Noel George Asby
Awarded Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II with Palm and Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm.

239 Kensington (Former civic number)
Former site of the Heather Curling Club (1905)

“... a club having for its objective the promotion of games, sports and athletic exercises...”



321 Kensington

240 Kensington (Former civic number)
A. C. Hutchison, Hutchinson and Wood (1905)

“Alexander Cowper Hutchison, architect (b at Montréal 2 Apr 1838; d there 1 Jan 1922). One of Victorian Montréal's most prolific and prestigious architects, he epitomized the generation of native-born, self-taught men

who shaped the city during the second half of the 19th century. Trained as a stonemason, he supervised the cut-stone work on Montréal's Christ Church Cathedral and the East Block of the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, before establishing a private practice in Montréal shortly after 1865. The firm was known until 1890 as Hutchison and Steele, thereafter as Hutchison and Wood."



333 Kensington

"Hutchison deserves credit for the careful detailing that characterizes all of the firm's output, including the Redpath Museum, testimony no doubt to his apprentice years as a craftsman-builder. Hutchison and Steele gained an international reputation as ice-palace designers."

The Canadian Encyclopedia

245 Kensington

Property owned by the Royal Victoria Hospital (1941)

250 Kensington (Former civic number)

The house was altered, in 1942, into a two-family dwelling.



337 Kensington

314 Kensington

Mr. & Mrs. Henri Merrill (1941)

Their son, Sergeant Air Gunner Henri Merrill, reported missing in action during World War Two. In 1943 the house was converted into a two-family dwelling.

316 Kensington

In 1943 the house was converted into a two-family dwelling.

320 Kensington

(The original house was either rebuilt or extensively renovated)
Wilfred Marsan, Grain Merchant (1899)

William Fullerton, James A. Ogilvie and Sons (1905)



338 Kensington

“The rise of the Ogilvie “empire” mirrored (and of course, to some extent caused) the growth of the Canadian national trade. This success is indicated by the growth in the company’s early milling capacity. In 1890 the capacity of the Winnipeg mill was 1,800 barrels (bbls) per day, and in 1900 it was 2,500 bbls, but in 1909 Ogilvie Milling built the “biggest mill in the British Empire” and “probably the biggest in the world” at its Point Douglas (Winnipeg) site, increasing production from 4,000 to 8,000 barrels per day. [26] A 2,300 bbls plant in Medicine Hat was built in 1913, and a mill in Edmonton was purchased in 1923. With its successful responses to the various challenges the Ogilvie Flour Mills Company (it had been renamed in 1902) grew nationally large enough to be able to compete with the largest American concerns and to hold a “towering position among its rivals” in Canada by 1918 at the latest.”



343 Kensington

“In the 1920s, the Ogilvies, along with the other large milling companies in Canada expanded into the bakery trade, and other flour-related businesses, in order to help guarantee an outlet for their flour. The company also expanded its operations in Alberta, and by the mid-1940s had more capacity in this province than in Manitoba. Today the flour mill in Medicine Hat is the only one owned by Ogilvie Milling that is still operating in the Prairie Provinces; the Winnipeg mill was closed in 1989.”

Manitoba History, Manitoba Historical Society

321 Kensington

R. C. Holden, The Ames-Holden Company Limited (1899)



344 Kensington

“In 1895, James McCready & Company was considered one of Montreal's major factories, producing 12 000 to 15 000 pairs of boots and shoes for men, women and children per week, which was considerable at the time. In 1906, Arthur Congdon, a wholesale boot and shoe merchant from Winnipeg amalgamated with the James McCready Company. He became Vice-President and General Manager of Ames, Holden, McCready Limited in 1911, and organized Congdon, Marsh Limited (wholesale boots and shoes) in 1914.”

“In 1915, Ames, Holden, McCready Ltd., then being Canada's largest shoe manufacturers, received an order from the Government for footwear for officers and soldiers here in Canada and in England. Within thirty-three days they supplied 32,217 pairs of leather ankle boots and 30,000 pairs of canvas shoes, the largest quantity of footwear supplied by any manufacturer.”



349 Kensington

“An article in the Montreal Gazette, Saturday, May 15, 1915 stated that ”these boots were worn by our soldiers on active service, and that they were subjected to the most severe usage. They travelled over rough roads, they waded through mud and slush, they were soaked by the never-ceasing rains of an abnormally wet Englishwinter and, yet, THEY STOOD THE TEST”

mtltimes.ca

Captain Rufus Clement Holden (Canadian Army Service Corps)
Awarded the Military Cross (1918)

333 Kensington

Mr. & Mrs. Charles A. Workman (1915)

Their son, Lieutenant Marvin J. Workman (Army Dental Corps) was killed in action during World War One. Charles A. Workman was a prominent merchant tailor and a pioneer in the Reform Judaism movement.



350 Kensington

Baron Marcellus von Redlich and Baroness von Redlich – Consulate General of Albania (1936)

337 Kensington

Former site of Colonel James F. Sweeny’s residence (1899)

“Colonel Sweeny, who was born at Alleford Barracks, Brandon, County Cork, in 1833, was appointed ensign of the 12th East Suffolk regiment in 1849 and was stationed in Mauritius from 1850 to 1851 when he sailed for the Cape of Good Hope and served in the Kafir War, for which he received decorations. Returning to England, he was appointed to take charge of a recruiting district until it was discontinued at the close of the Crimean War.”

“He was then ordered to Hythe, and after receiving a first-class certificate for musketry was sent to the headquarters of the 12th Regiment in Australia as instructor of musketry; also as instructor to the New South Wales Volunteers.”

“He remained in Australia until 1861, when he was promoted to the 83rd (Dublin) Regiment, with which he served until appointed staff officer of pensions of the Quebec district in 1867, remaining in that office until 1884, when he retired.”

Westmount News, October 16, 1914



357 Kensington

338 Kensington

Mrs. Fanny Cookson – celebrated her 100th birthday on March 6, 1956.

“... Mrs. Cookson, born at Epsom Surrey, England, and married there, also recalls Winnipeg, one of the first places she visited after coming to Canada in 1895. “There wasn’t much of anything to Winnipeg” she said, “One dirt road and a howling wind.” One of Montreal’s first woman buyers for a department store, Mrs. Cookson started in the 1900s with Carsley’s dry goods in the millinery department...”

The Globe and Mail, March 5, 1955



John Monk © McCord Museum I-20201.1

343 Kensington

Former home of John McKergow, Mayor of Westmount 1913-1918 and Library Trustee (1943)

344 Kensington

Albert Devereux Thornton (1921)

Manufacturer and Library Trustee for 12 years. He was also an active member of the Westmount Municipal

Association.

349 Kensington

In 1943 the house was converted into a two-family dwelling.

350 Kensington

Mrs. R. Grant Reid, Library Trustee (1948-1950)

352 Kensington (Former civic number)

Michael Lovett Tucker, Mayor of Westmount (1965-1968)



400 Kensington

357 Kensington

Mr. & Mrs. Hugh Quinlan (1917)

Their son, Lieutenant Frank T. Quinlan (5th Pioneers) was killed in action during World War One.

361 Kensington (Former civic number)

Estate of J. P. Cleghorn (1930)

370 Kensington

Former site of the Cote St. Antoine Lawn Tennis Club (1899)

The Club relocated to Grey Avenue in 1906.

Purchased by the Incumbent and Church Wardens of St. Matthias Church of the Parish of St. Matthias as a rectory (1945).

393 Kensington (Former civic number)

James G. Ross, Accountant, P. S. Ross and Son (1899)



Mr. and Mrs. J P Cleghorn

Image: © McCord Museum I-6630.1

395 Kensington (Former civic number)

Mrs. E C. Monk, Widow John Monk (1899)

T. A. Crane, Cain and Baird (1905)

400 Kensington

(The apartment house was partially destroyed by a fire in July 1962)

Mr. & Mrs. William M. Campbell (1944)

Their son, Lieutenant William Angus Campbell was killed in action during World War Two.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles U. Letourneau.

Awarded Officer, Order of the British Empire (1945).

Flight Lieutenant Paul A. Shaughnessy.

Awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (1945)

401 Kensington

Westmount Bowling Club (1905)



401 Kensington

“That the city of Westmount purchase all buildings and structures belonging to Westmount Bowling Club, erected on land belonging to the said city of Westmount... the building bearing civic number 401 Kensington... for the sum of one dollar (\$1.00) Canadian currency...”

“That the City of Westmount enter into an agreement with Westmount Bowling Club Inc. / Club de Boulingrin de Westmount Inc., relating to the use and operation of the city’s recreational facilities situated at 401 Kensington, Westmount...”

Council Minutes, June 7, 1982



450 Kensington

432 Kensington (former civic number)
Former site of the Heather Curling Rink (1899)

450 Kensington
Community Hall, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim

In 1920, the Congregation purchased land on Kensington Avenue in Westmount. The cornerstone was laid by President Lyon Cohen in 1921, and the synagogue was consecrated on September 17, 1923. Herman Abramowitz served the congregation as rabbi from 1902 to 1947 and Wilfred Shuchat from 1948 to 1993.



Images: Michael Walsh unless indicated otherwise

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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 or through his blog [Westmount Overlooked](#)



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