



Westmount places
Bruce Avenue

Description

The history behind the familiar: Bruce Avenue is one of Westmount's best-kept secrets

By **Michael Walsh**

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Submitted and read a letter from Mr. G. A. Greene dated 1st April 1898, asking that Bruce Avenue be opened, graded, drained and macadamized, and water pipes laid, as soon as possible.

“On motion of Councillor Bulmer, seconded by Councillor Redfern, it was resolved that Mr. Greene’s request be granted and that the necessary instructions be given to the Road Dept.”

Town of Westmount, Council Proceedings, April 4, 1898



Bruce Avenue Tot Lot

Did you know that there is a children's playground on Bruce Avenue adjacent to the C.P. tracks? It's one of Westmount's best-kept secrets. (Another is Devon Park located near Upper Lansdowne). It is a community in itself – frequented by residents and their children living on nearby streets. The street is also a cul-de-sac, terminating at the railway tracks and bordered with nineteenth century houses.

The street's name 'Bruce' is intriguing – it's origin, however, is difficult to ascertain. After spending some time try to determine whom the street's name honours, I came across a very well researched article by Laureen Sweeney in *The Westmount Experience* (August 3, 1994). In her article, she outlines a compelling argument that the street could honour one of three different individuals.



Robert the Bruce
Image: public domain

The first candidate is the King of Scots, [Robert the Bruce](#), known for securing an independent Scottish monarch from England through the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

The street might honour Robert the Bruce, given the large Scottish population living on the island of Montreal. In fact, the area's nearby stream, that coursed through a valley, was named the 'Glen' by homesick Scottish residents because it reminded them of similar watercourses back home. The stream is long gone (channelled through buried



conduits) – the name Glen however, remains to this day.

The second candidate is **James Bruce**, 8th Earl of Elgin and 12th Earl of Kincardine, also Governor General of British North America (1847-1854). His father, Thomas Bruce, ‘acquired’ the “Elgin Marbles” currently housed in the British Museum.



James Bruce, Earl of Elgin –
Library and Archives Canada
/ C-000291

His political career in Canada included giving royal assent to the Rebellion Losses Bill that compensated those in Lower Canada for property damage during the Rebellions of 1837-38. What followed is known today as the Montréal Riots.

“... crowds of protesters opposed Governor General Lord Elgin’s sanction of this law; they threw stones and rotten eggs at his carriage. That evening, public protest turned into a riot: the mob invaded Parliament and set fire to the building. The riots involved thousands of people, lasted two days and included attacks on... private property... Less than a month after the riots, however, it was decided that the seat of government should no longer be Montréal, which was considered too susceptible to ethnic tensions.”

The Canadian Encyclopedia

Lord Elgin’s political career survived this crisis. During his tenure as Governor General his accomplishments included ratification of the Reciprocity Treaty (1854) that allowed American fishermen into British North America’s Atlantic fisheries and BNA’s into American coastal waters. In an effort to end political unrest, Lord Elgin supported the concept of “responsible government”: an elected assembly dependent on the support of the citizens rather than the monarch. This concept of governance would, in later years, be an important foundation for Canadian Confederation.



Robert Randolph Bruce
Image: public domain

The third candidate is [Robert Randolph Bruce](#) – the 13th Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia from 1926 to 1931.

“Born in Scotland and educated at the University of Glasgow where he studied engineering. He immigrated to the United States in 1887 before arriving shortly afterward in Canada to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway surveying various new railway lines across the country. In 1897 Bruce settled in British Columbia to become a land developer. He purchased land from the railway and promoted it in England for settlement.”

History of the Paradise Mine (Part 3)

“After the First World War, his career took a diplomatic turn: from 1926 to 1931, he was lieutenant governor of British Columbia, and from 1936 to 1938, he was Canada’s ambassador to Japan. Upon his return to Canada, he settled in Montreal, where he died in 1942.”

McCord Museum – Our People Our Stories



51 Bruce

In summary, those are the candidates: one with a Scottish connection, the second a governor general and the third associated with the Canadian Pacific Railway – each with an intriguing story. In the end, the residents have the distinction of residing on a street whose name has multiple origins.

Let's step back in time, when the street was first opened, and familiarize our selves with some of the original residents.

50 Bruce

Colin C. Drew, commercial traveller – 1899

51 Bruce

George Langley, foreman, Canadian Rubber Company – 1901

“Canadian Rubber Company of Montreal was the first company in North America to manufacture rubber. Plant (located at 1840 Notre Dame East) damaged by fire in 1916. Occupied by Uniroyal Tire factory until 1982. The oldest section was demolished in 1995.”

Industrial Architecture of Montreal



Manufactory of the Canadian Rubber Company.

Illustration from *The Book of Montreal: a Souvenir of Canada's Commercial Metropolis* by Ernest J. Chambers

52 Bruce

F. A. Loudon, commercial traveller and manufacturers' agent – 1899

George A. Barrat, photographer – 1901



Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, QC, about 1900, George Barrat & Son, McCord Museum MP-0000.1912



54 Bruce

53 Bruce

C. G. Ross, cashier – 1901

54 Bruce

W. B. Shaw, electrician, Montreal Electric Company (Today, known as Hydro-Québec.) – 1899

W. B. Shaw, electrician (1901)

56 Bruce

J. Nelson Whitehead, commercial traveller – 1899

58 Bruce

Albert F. Winn, clerk – 1901

60 Bruce

John Henry Shaw, agent, Joseph Brooks & Company – 1899

John Henry Shaw, woollen manufacturers' agent – 1901

62 Bruce



56 Bruce

Archibald Nicoll, underwriter – 1899

J. Nicoll – C.P.R. customs agent – 1899

64 Bruce

Frank Lotty, superintendent, Peck, Benny and Company's Factory – 1899

"Manufactures of railroad spikes, ship spikes, and all descriptions of cut nails, pressed clinch and slate nails. Office 391 St. Paul Street. Works 61 Mill Street."

Railways of Canada 1870-1

"A by-product of the reconstruction of the Lachine Canal across the Island of Montreal in the 1840s was the provision of water power for manufacturing purposes at three sites. Two of them, Canal Basin No. 2 and the Saint-Gabriel Locks, were actually within the limits of the City of Montreal. This was enough to attract nail manufacturers back to the city from the fringes of the island. In 1847, Thomas Peck (1808-1874) opened a nail mill on Canal Basin No. 2.



60 Bruce

Also probably in 1859, a second rolling mill was constructed at a cost of \$30 000 by Thomas Peck, who had been making nails on the basin since 1847. An 1864 description says that a turbine wheel drove an immense 22-ton balance wheel that transmitted power to the rolling mill itself. Another turbine drove 38 nail machines while a third turbine drove two large spike machines. Alone in the middle was Thomas Peck & Co. (which became Peck, Benny & Co. in 1870), which had a rolling mill but was water-powered. When a Royal Commission looked into the leasing of waterpower on the Lachine Canal in 1887, the company claimed to be the last water-powered rolling mill in North America. Steam power could easily have been produced by putting boilers on top of their heating furnaces as Pillow Hersey had done, but the company only paid \$1750 a year for water power. Converting to steam would have meant boilers, additional coal, engineers, firemen and annual repairs. It is possible that a steam-powered rolling mill was added when the company was restructured as the Peck Rolling Mills Ltd in 1903. Peck Rolling Mills Ltd. took over the assets of Peck, Benny & Co. in 1903. Both Stelco and Peck Rolling Mills continued to produce cut and horse nails well into the twentieth century.”

Technical Advance and Stagnation: The Case of Nail Production in Nineteenth-Century Montreal, Larry McNally, National Archives of Canada



64 Bruce

66 Bruce

Philip Thomas Le Maistre, sea captain – 1899

Phillip M. Le Maistre, manufacturer gentlemen's furnishings – 1899

Fred J. Le Maistre, druggist – 1899

68 Bruce

David Gilbert, superintendant, Montreal Pipe Foundry Company – 1901

E. Goodacre, Watt, Scott & Goodacre – 1902

“Ox tongues, corned beef, lunch tongues, potted meats, luncheon beef, devilled meats roast beef brawn, etc. White Label Soups Agents: J. L. Watt & Scott, Toronto. Watt, Scott & Goodacre, Montreal. George De Forest & Sons, St. John, N.B. or Armour Packing Co., Kansas City U.S.A. Delicate appetites are stimulated.”

Canadian grocer January-June 1898

70 Bruce



70 Bruce

Gardiner Gilday, contractor – 1901

“On Tuesday evening last a quiet wedding took place at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Duncan MacNee, North Street, the bride being their youngest daughter Maggie, and the groom Gardiner Gilday, a prosperous contractor of Westmount, Montreal. The ceremony was performed by Rev. A.H. Scott, pastor of St. Andrew’s Church, in the presence of the members of the family of the bride and groom. The presents were numerous and valuable but the one that was prized, perhaps, as highly as any one was a mat made of native ox-eye daisies in the centre and white daisies surrounding them with a border of ferns. This was intended to use for the bride to stand upon during the marriage ceremony and was the gift of the pupils of her Sunday School class at St. Andrews. Her scholars presented her, besides, with a pic-splice (?) with the words on an enclosed card “just from your girls”. The bridal couple set out early the next morning for Oliver’s Ferry, there to take the boat to Kingston for an extended wedding tour to various parts of Canada and the U.S.”

Perth Courier, June 30, 1899

72 Bruce

Thomas W. Matthews, engraver and illuminator – 1901

74 Bruce

John M. Campbell, cement roofer – 1901

Images (unless specified): Michael Walsh – Feature image: Andrew Burlone



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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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