Westmount places:
Thornhill Avenue

Description

The history behind the familiar: the former residents that called Thornhill Avenue their home

By **Michael Walsh**

March 31, 2022

> Thornhill Avenue. For sale – Two exceptionally well-designed cottages… Commodious entrance hall, living and dining room, all finished in genuine mahogany and ivory trim, large coat-room with washbasin, serving pantry, bright kitchen, five bedrooms, three complete bathrooms, a heated sun porch, and a two-car heated garage. Price $18,000. J. B. Fellows, Contractor, 59 Thornhill Avenue.
>
> *– Montreal Gazette,* September 6, 1927

Does the name **Walter Wardle** come to mind when someone mentions **Thornhill Avenue**? Probably not – Wardle was the street's original owner and, more importantly, in 1859, he constructed Montreal's **Christ Church Cathedral** located on Saint Catherine Street.

Interestingly, he was never fully compensated for the construction costs – causing the street's owner to become entangled in a well-known legal case with the Principal of McGill University. The case is known as **Wardle vs. Bethune**, the latter Dean of Christ Church Cathedral and Principal of McGill University. The Dean refused to pay Wardle in full for his construction costs because the cathedral's 3.5-million-pound stone steeple began tilting from its base and, by 1927, needed to be removed. (It was replaced by an aluminum replica in 1940).

Wardle argued that he was not to blame but rather the architect's (**Frank Wills**) incorrect building foundation designs. The Courts disagreed with Wardle, who escalated his case to England's Privy Council. Their Lordships concluded that Wardle and the building's architect were jointly responsible. The former lacking due vigilance and the latter exhibiting a lack of skills. They concluded that Dean Bethune was within his rights to refuse further payments and charged Wardle over £500 in court costs. In the end, Wardle garnered considerable public sympathy for his case – some publicly stating that they would never set foot, ever again, into the cathedral.

Christ Church Cathedral – Image: Olivier Issaly, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

One must agree that is quite a back-story for a street whose location is a mystery for many Westmount residents. Its origins and development, however, are less uneventful. As we have seen, it was ceded by Walter Wardle et al to the Town on August 18, 1902.

"…That the Town of Westmount accepts an absolute cession of lots… forming Thornhill Avenue, for the purpose of forming a public street… containing a total superficies of 6020 square feet… with a right over the steps…"
– Town of Westmount Council Proceedings, August 18, 1902

Before that date, the area was known for a large property named "Thornyholme" that fronted Churchill Avenue (its original name) and Stanton Street. (Today's location would be 21 Church Hill Avenue). It contained over 75,000 feet of lawns and gardens. According to one description:

Colonel James David Crawford – Image: 5th
Regiment Royal Scots of Canada Highlanders
archives

"The house has a double wall of brick, with an air space, and (with the greenhouse) is heated by Spence's hot water apparatus. The gardener's cottage and the stabling are of solid stone and brick. 50,000 feet of land can be divided into building lots without interfering with present building…"
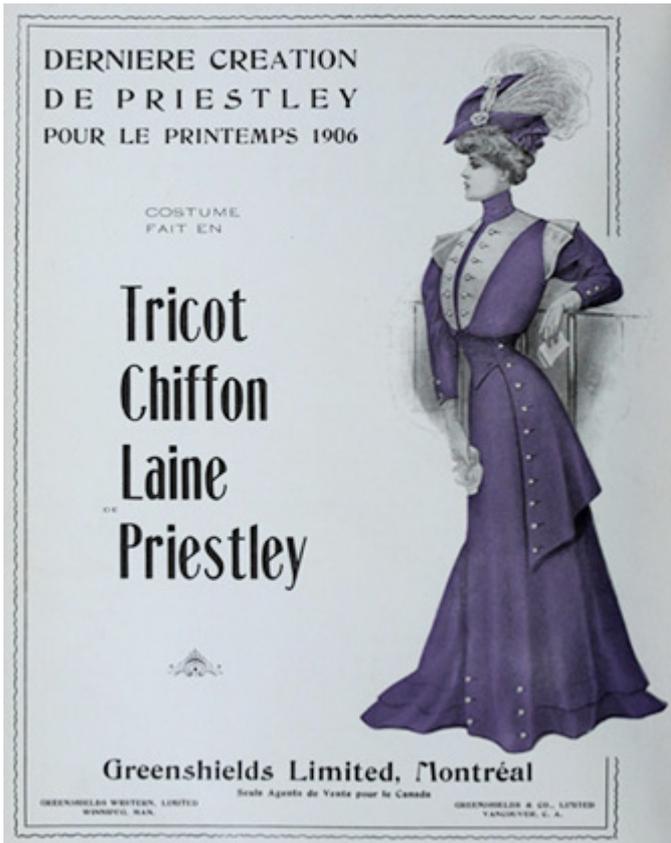– Montreal Gazette, April 7, 1893

The property was purchased by **Colonel James David Crawford** (General Secretary of the British Association of Montreal) and placed back on the market in the early 1900s. It was described as:

"… beautifully situated on the slope of the mountain with magnificent trees, which have been so judiciously planted that in sub-dividing each lot would have its share of stately Norway pines and maples for which the place is famous…"
– *Montreal Gazette*, June 18, 1900

The street originally had a steep grade – evidenced by a petition from residents requesting the placement of wire netting along the southern portion to prevent children from falling down the slope. (Perhaps the street's name Thornhill alludes to this grade – and is a derivative of its Thornyholme origins.)

Greenshields Limited ad – Image: Tissus et Nouveautés, January 1906

A further cession, in 1922, by **Samuel Greenshields** allowed the street to be extended from Clarke to Argyle Avenues.

*"Greenshields was president of **Greenshields Limited**. He presided over the expansion of the business across Canada. By 1907, the company was the country's largest supplier of both imported and domestic dry goods. It handled cottons, woollens, carpets, household furnishings, dress goods, and notions such as gloves, hosiery and laces. In addition, it was the exclusive agent in Canada for several prestigious British and European manufacturers."*
– Dictionary of Canadian Biography

In 1925, the street was extended westerly to Church Hill Avenue using property ceded by **John Baker Fellowes**. Fellowes, originally from Torquay, Devonshire, was a prominent homebuilder. His construction projects spanned from Nelson Avenue, Outremont, to Westmount.

Finally, a retaining wall was constructed in 1936 at the rear of 488 Argyle Avenue. The wall was reconstructed by the City in 1992.

Public stairs connecting Thornhill Avenue and
Stanton Street

That brings us to the uneventful development of Thornhill Avenue. Its original owners, however, provided a rich background that was lost over the years. With their stories behind us, let us take a late summer walk along the street and discover other tales waiting to be told.

1 Thornhill (former civic number)
C. A. Thompson, broker (1898)

2 Thornhill (former civic number)
A. G. Suckling, Assistant Treasurer C.P.R. (1898)
Reverend Edward Bushell, Rector, **St. Matthias Church** (1910)

3 Thornhill (former civic number)
J. B. Bell, commercial merchant (1898)
W. L. Scott (1918)
Their son Tom Farrar Scott was killed in action while serving with the Royal Flying Corps (1918)

4 Thornhill (former civic number)
James Hutchison, stockbroker (1898)

St. Matthias Church

5 Thornhill (former civic number)
J. W. Smith, Montreal Ice Exchange (1898)
In the late 1800s, the company was the largest supplier of ice, storing on average 50,000 tons within their ice houses.

6 Thornhill (former civic number)
Walter Wardle, architect (1898)

7 Thornhill
Image: 7 Thornhill (Michael Walsh)
J. W. d'Arcy, H. Dinning & Company (1911)

"In 1858, Dinning formed a partnership with his father and the following year the firm of H. Dinning and Company, "shipbuilders, dock proprietors and repairers," constructed the 1,236-ton Prince Consort. Four years later, it produced the 1,236-ton Annie Frost and the 1,154-ton Etta. The shipyard reached a high level of activity in 1866 when it built two ships and a barque, and carried out major repairs on a fourth vessel. H. Dinning and Company was considered one of the busiest shipyards on the St Lawrence River that year and the credit agents of R. G. Dun and Company estimated its worth at between $25,000 and $50,000; it received a good credit rating."
– Dictionary of Canadian Biography

7 Thornhill

"Leaving an open letter in the house stating that he had broken into one of the rooms and stolen all the furs and silverware he could lay his hands on, Albert Valiquette, 22 years of age, a coachman in the employ of J. W. d'Arcy, 7 Thornhill Avenue, Westmount, has disappeared… So far, the police have not been able to locate Valiquette or any of the stolen goods. Chief Moffatt said… 'that about six months ago Valiquette was arrested for stealing silverware from a house on Elm Avenue… although found guilty he was allowed to go on suspended sentence.'"
– Montreal Gazette, June 10, 1911

16 Thornhill
John D. Fry, Engineer, McDougall and Friedman Consulting engineers (1943)
William S. Fry was killed in active service while serving in Hong Kong with the Royal Rifles of Canada (1943).

18 Thornhill
Major G. D. A. Bieler O.B.E., died overseas as a prisoner of war (1945)

16 Thornhill

20 Thornhill
Arthur Edward Laverty, Advocate, Office of Recorder, City of Westmount (1951)

22 Thornhill
James D. M. Brierley, poet (1952)
Works included *The First Creek* and *The Old Lumber Camps*.

27 Thornhill
Dr. David J. Berwick (1938)
A founder of the Department (today Faculty) of Dentistry at McGill University and former president of the College of Dental Surgeons, Province of Quebec.

28 Thornhill
George Pemberton Walker, J. R. Walker and Company, paper manufacturers (1933)

20 Thornhill

34 Thornhill
Mr. Justice Russell T. Stackhouse, King's Council and a charter member of the Reform Club (1952)

"The Reform Club, formerly located at 82 Sherbrooke Street West. The association purchased it in 1913 for $55,000. Established on June 17, 1898, the Reform Club was the social wing of the Liberal Party of Canada and its provincial wing here in Quebec that, until July of 1964, was part of the same federal apparatus. By 1947, the club counted a remarkable 850 members, 670 French-speaking and 180 English-speaking. Since April of 1973, the building has belonged to the nationalist and pro-independence Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal. On May 17, 1976, the SSJB renamed the property La Maison Ludger Duvernay in honour of the founder of the Society."
– Robert N. Wilkins, *Life's Little Ironies, Quebec Heritage News*, Vol 13, No 2, Spring 2019

39 Thornhill

35 Thornhill (altered 1959)
A. M. Creighton, Franklin Hall Chapter, I.O.D.E. (1935)

39 Thornhill
Gordon Sproule (1943)
Their son, David Leigh Sproule, was killed in active service while serving with the R.C.A.F.

Dr. W. Feindel (1964)

"Dr. Feindel, along with **Drs. Joseph Stratford,** Donald Baxter and Jerzy Olszewski, left the MNI for Saskatoon in 1955 where he became the first Director of the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Saskatchewan. While there, Dr. Feindel was instrumental in developing **Canada's first radioisotope contour brain scanner** for the detection of intracranial lesions. His interest in brain scanning would eventually lead to the acquisition of the **first positron emission tomography scanner** for clinical use in Canada at the MNI in 1975. While still in Saskatoon, Feindel and Stratford described the clinically relevant anatomy of the cubital tunnel and developed the technique of decompression without transposition of the nerve at the cubital tunnel for the treatment of tardy ulnar palsy."

"Dr. Feindel returned to the MNI following William Cone's sad and untimely death in 1959 to become the first William Vernon Cone Professor of Neurosurgery at McGill University, a position that he held until 1988. He also founded and directed the **Cone Laboratory for Neurosurgical Research**. Dr. Feindel was Neurosurgeon-in-Chief at the **Montreal Neurological Hospital** from 1963 to 1972 and he was Neurosurgeon-in-Chief at the Royal Victoria Hospital."

"From 1972 to 1984, Dr. Feindel was at one time and most often concurrently, the Director of the MNI, the Director-General of the Montreal Neurological Hospital, and the Chairman of the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery of McGill's Faculty of Medicine. During his tenure as director, the MNI experienced an unprecedented expansion of its clinical and scientific facilities and its faculty: the construction of the Penfield Pavilion, the Webster Pavilion, and the **McConnell Brain Imaging Centre** more than doubled the clinical, research, and teaching resources. Under his leadership, the MNI was designated a World Health Organization medical facility. The MNI maintained its preeminence as one of the original neurosurgical training programs in North America and as a world leader in neurological sciences."

Early CT scanner – Image: Philipcosson, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

"Early on, Dr. Feindel recognized the potential importance of CT scanning, which resulted in the MNI's purchase in 1973 of one of the first CT scanners in North America, the EMI Mark I. Similarly, he was responsible for the acquisition in 1984 of the first MRI scanner in Canada. This was followed by the purchase of one of the first MRI systems capable of clinical MR spectroscopy, which was used by one of us (M.C.P.), along with Dr. Feindel, to demonstrate that common types of brain tumours could be diagnosed on the basis of their in vivo chemical spectral pattern."

"Dr. Feindel's major contribution to neurological imaging, however, was perhaps the development, with Dr. Lucas Yamamoto, Dr. Christopher Thompson, and others at the McConnell Brain Imaging Centre of the MNI, of the first medically dedicated positron emission tomography scanner supplied with nitrogen, oxygen, carbon, and fluoride produced by its own, on-site cyclotron. This proved essential to the development of functional brain imaging and led to the first-ever demonstration, by one of us (R.L.), of the reliability of functional neuroimaging in identifying eloquent areas even in the presence of a structural brain lesion."

"Dr. Feindel was a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and governor and chancellor of Acadia University. The World Health Organization, the Medical Research Council of Canada, and the National Institutes of Health sought his advice. He was a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and a member of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons. Dr. Feindel was also a diplomat of the American Board of Neurosurgery, the American College of Surgeons, and the American Academy of Neurological Surgery, of which

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he was vice president. He was also vice president of the Society of Neurological Surgeons and the American Neurological Association; and he was president of the Canadian Neurosurgical Society, the Montreal Neurological Society, and the Association des Neurochirurgiens du Québec."

Dr. William Feindel – Image: Canadian Medical Hall of Fame

"Dr. Feindel was awarded the **Order of Canada**, and he was made a **Grand Officier de l'Ordre National du Québec**. He was inducted into the **Canadian Medical Hall of Fame** and he was honoured with the J. Kiffin Penry Award for Excellence in Epilepsy Care by the American Epilepsy Society. The William Feindel Chair of Neuro-Oncology at McGill University was created in his honour. He published more than 500 articles, 300 in peer-reviewed scientific and medical journals, and authored or edited 6 books."

"He had a passion for medical history – one of Dr. Feindel's favourite subjects was the work of Thomas Willis. He was Honorary Osler Librarian, Curator of the Wilder Penfield Archives, member of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library at McGill University, and he received the John Neilson Award from the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine."

"Dr. Feindel was a true gentleman and a caring mentor to those of us who were fortunate enough to have come under his influence. His professional life began with the pioneers of our profession and continued with the eminent neurosurgeons of our age, most of whom he knew on a first-name basis. Paraphrasing him, one of us (R.L.) recalls Dr. Feindel saying 'You young neurosurgeons are lucky; you have a scan that shows you where the tumour is located. We had to figure it out by our clinical acumen and shadows on a pneumogram.'"
– Richard Leblanc MSc, MD, FRCSC and Mark C. Preul MD, *Journal of Neurosurgery*, Volume 122, Feb. 2015

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41 Thornhill

41 Thornhill (altered 1933)
Major Mitchell Hartt Doig, Ontario Paper Company Ltd. (1945)

"In 1912, the **Ontario Paper Company** was incorporated as a subsidiary of the **Chicago Tribune** newspaper under the direction of publisher Robert McCormick. A paper mill was constructed south of here on the banks of the Welland Canal. On September 5, 1913, its No.1 Paper Machine began producing newsprint for the Tribune. Without sufficient timber in southern Ontario, pulpwood was shipped here by water from Lake Superior and Quebec's North Shore. The mill, designed and managed by engineer Warren Curtis Jr., was an innovative combined pulp and paper operation that used hydroelectricity from Niagara Falls. Some early mill employees formed Local 101, International Brotherhood of Paper Makers, the first papermakers' union in Canada. In 1980, the company built a new mill at Thorold and the company was sold in 1996. The Ontario Paper Company Ltd. was committed to its employees and community, and was a technological leader."
– Ontario Heritage Trust

60 Thornhill

60 Thornhill
Dr. R.M.H. Powers (1929)

61 Thornhill
R. D. Gilpin, copywriter, McConnell Eastman advertising company (1943)

Feature image: Thornhill Avenue, by Michael Walsh
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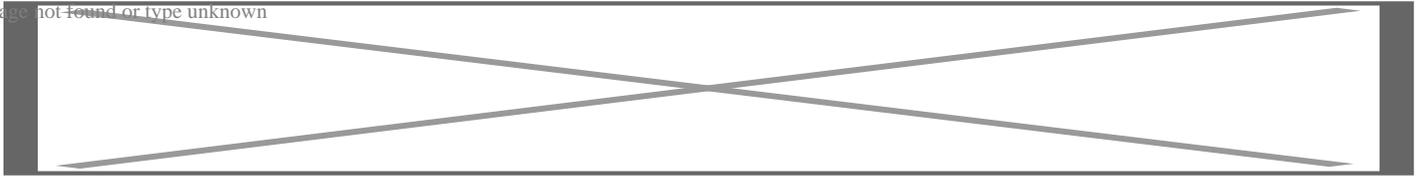
*Read also **other articles by Michael Walsh***

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*

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2. Thornhill Avenue

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