

Creation of an Early Victorian Suburb in Montreal

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

Montreal's "terrace townscape" emerged in the 1850s and 1860s and has since disappeared. It represented a conjuncture of forces peculiar to Montreal among British North American cities. The terrace — the uniting of a homogeneous group of attached houses behind a single monumental facade — concentrated on a plateau, between the older city to the south and the high-prestige homes on the slope to the north. Such housing flowed, in one sense, from the speculative development of wealthy landowners. The development was driven by the growth of the city and the concurrent housing boom of the 1850s and 1860s, coupled with the desire of the better classes to move from the noisome, dangerous and constricted older areas. Improvements in the urban infra-structure, especially the construction of water-works, made new development on higher lands feasible. The "terrace" form or fashion also derived from an architecturally and socially acceptable formula, rooted in British precedents, especially those of prestigious London. It was, finally, a form or fashion that was "indubitably linked with a strong upper middle class sector of the population" found only in administrative and commercial cities, and in British North America found only in sufficient strength in Montreal.

CREATION OF AN EARLY VICTORIAN SUBURB

IN MONTREAL

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David B. Hanna

Résumé/Abstract

A Montréal, le paysage urbain composé de maisons en bande (la "terrace"), surgi pendant les années 1850 et 1860, a maintenant disparu. Il incarnait la rencontre de forces que, seul parmi les grandes villes de l'Amérique du Nord britannique, Montréal renfermait. La "terrace", qui rassemblait derrière une même façade monumentale un groupe homogène de maisons en bande, se confinait à un plateau situé entre la vieille ville au sud et les prestigieuses maisons étagées sur la pente au nord. Ce type d'habitation s'est répandu en quelque sorte grâce aux opérations spéculatives de riches propriétaires fonciers, encouragées par le développement de la ville et le fort accroissement simultané du nombre des logements entre 1850 et 1869, ainsi que le désir, de la part des classes supérieures, de quitter les vieux quartiers repoussants, dangereux et exigus. Des améliorations de l'infrastructure urbaine et en particulier la construction d'installations hydrauliques ont rendu possible le lotissement des terres élevées. La formule ou la mode de la construction en bandes représentait en outre une forme acceptable d'un point de vue architectural et social, et qui trouvait ses racines dans des exemples britanniques, spécialement ceux de Londres la prestigieuse. Il s'agissait finalement d'une formule ou d'une mode, "incontestablement liée à une haute bourgeoisie puissante" qui ne se trouve que dans les grandes villes administratives et commerciales et qui, en Amérique du Nord britannique, ne s'est fortement manifestée qu'à Montréal.

Montreal's "terrace townscape" emerged in the 1850s and 1860s and has since disappeared. It represented a conjuncture of forces peculiar to Montreal among British North American cities. The terrace - the uniting of a homogeneous group of attached houses behind a single monumental facade - was concentrated on a plateau, between the older city to the south and the high-prestige homes on the slope to the north. Such housing flowed, in one sense, from the speculative development of wealthy landowners. The development was driven by the growth of the city and the concurrent housing boom of the 1850s and 1860s, coupled with the desire of the better classes to move from the noisome, dangerous and constricted older areas. Improvements in the urban infra-structure, especially the construction of water-works, made new development on higher lands feasible. The "terrace" form or fashion also derived from an architecturally and socially acceptable formula, rooted in British precedents, especially those of prestigious London. It was, finally, a form or fashion that was "indubitably linked with a strong upper middle class sector of the population" found only in administrative and commercial cities, and in British North America found only in sufficient strength in Montreal.

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Mount Royal stands out in singular splendour as a solid chunk of rock over the largely sedimentary and uniformly flat Saint Lawrence plain, rising 759 feet above the St. Lawrence River. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the southern slope of Mount Royal was a part of Montreal's agricultural hinterland. Little is known of the agricultural activity during this period except that the mountain slope formed a part of the cadastral block known as "la côte Saint-Antoine" with access provided by the road of the same name. By the beginning of the nineteenth century some elements of change were evident in the rural landscape. The staple fur trade of the previous century had done little to advance settlement or income distribution in the colony, but it had made a handful of men extremely rich and these fur traders became Montreal's first resident merchant elite. Fur barons such as James McGill, Joseph Frobisher, Simon McTavish and William McGillivray realized the status potential of large summer homes on the mountain slope. One by one they purchased a farm or two in "côte Saint-Antoine," transforming them into estates made up of a country house and ornamental gardens with the remainder of the lot continuing as farmland, probably by lease or by hire. House sites were invariably chosen to take full advantage of the sweeping view of Montreal, the St. Lawrence River and the plain beyond. A fundamental condition for creating a prestige neighbourhood had been acknowledged by these first 'urban' owners.

By 1825, the fur traders had for the most part either departed from Montreal or died and the bucolic scene they left behind would not remain intact much

longer. Beginning in 1839, Montreal's export trade, with Upper Canadian wheat in the lead, was booming and would continue to surge upwards throughout the early 1840s. The importing field, the real source of Montreal's wealth due to the high value of the merchandise, grew rapidly immediately after 1838, no doubt because of the period of privation during the Canadian rebellions and economic depression (Fig. 1). As always, inland farmers could only indulge in the wide range of imported goods offered by Montreal if staple exports, on which their income depended, were in demand. Consequently, the unprecedented boom in staple products in 1841 gave rise to the equally amazing leap in import sales the following year. This fact is reflected in Montreal's urban development, 1842 being the year the first major subdivision plans for the Mount Royal plateau were drawn up and presumably the year importers gained enough surplus cash to entertain the idea of speculative building. The year 1843 was a setback in both exporting and importing, but in 1844 the boom returned. The passage of the Canada Corn Act in 1843, granting Canadian wheat almost duty-free access to the British market, sent exports to new heights, in turn fostering further import sales. The renewed high import profits of 1844 coupled with the confidence gained from the Canada Corn Act appear to have provided the means as well as a psychological boost to importers interested in speculative building, as construction of the first terraces on the plateau was undertaken that year, almost all by major Montreal wholesalers and retailers.

The opening of housing construction near Mount Royal was

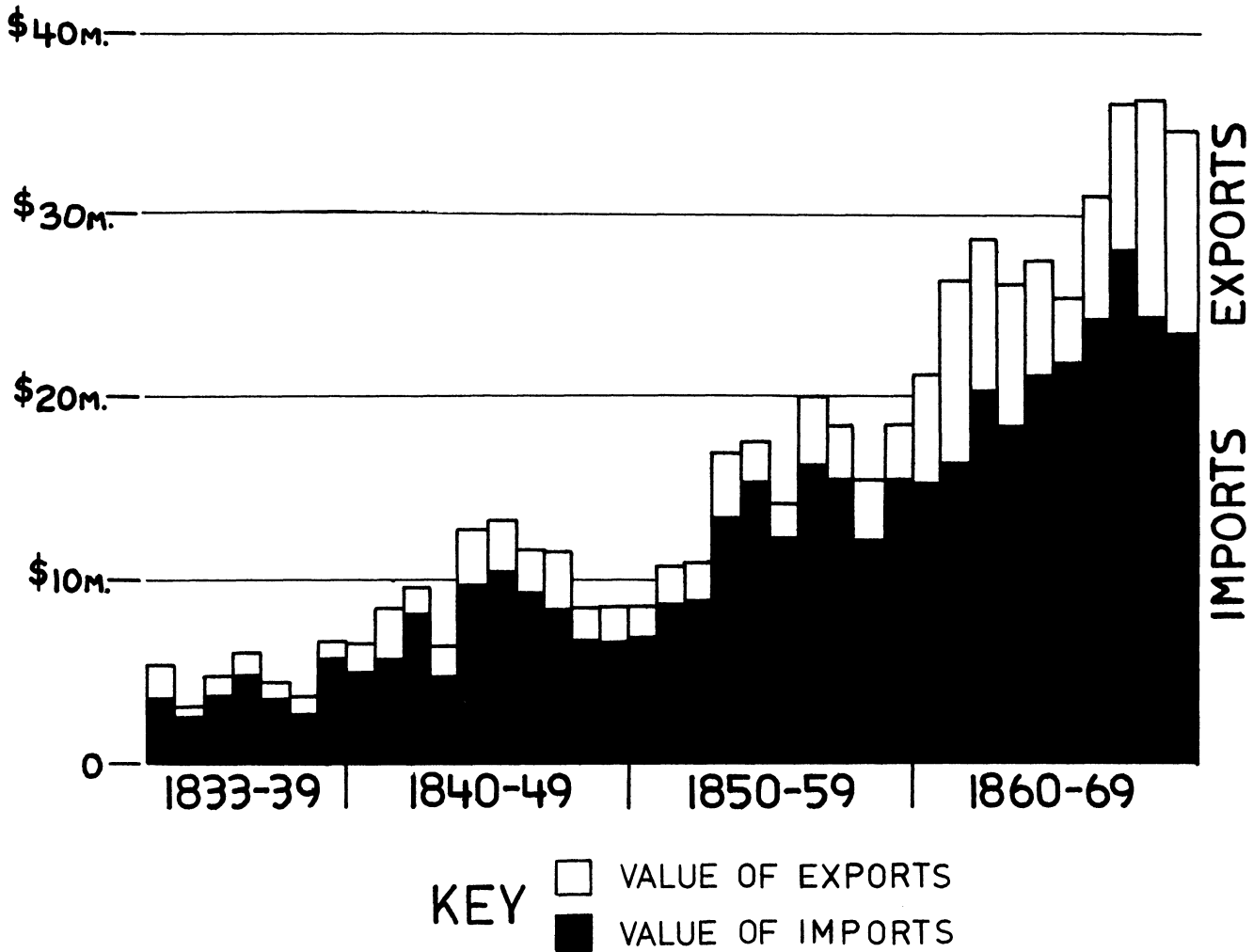
MONTREAL

IMPORT-EXPORT TRADE

IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

1833 - 1869

TOTAL
VALUE



SOURCE: SEMI-CENTENNIAL REPORT OF THE MONTREAL BOARD OF TRADE (1893)

D. Hanna

Fig. 1

only a fringe manifestation of a true building boom which evidenced itself throughout the city in the early 1840s. Although any formal census collection of housing stock is lacking for the years between 1831 and 1842, the overall pace of cumulative growth was obviously slow, a mere 600 units or so having been added during that period (Fig. 2). The addition of nearly 2,000 houses to the net stock within a short space of two years (1842-1844) shows clearly that a real estate boom of unprecedented proportions occurred, and it is in this light that rapid subdivision of the southern slope of Mount Royal should be viewed.

In the space of four years, a new generation of landowners on the southern slope of Mount Royal subdivided vast portions of their properties, effectively paving the way for large scale urban development on the plateau. The first of these was John Redpath, an extremely versatile and successful man in contemporary business terms. Long before establishing the important sugar company bearing his name, he was one of the most successful contractors in the country, having supervised the building of a vast array of Montréal mansions, commercial and institutional buildings during the 1820s and 1830s, including the Montreal Water Works, Montreal General Hospital, military barracks on St. Helen's Island, and Notre Dame Church.¹ He also participated in the Rideau Canal along with several partners. Having made his fortune by the age of forty, Redpath began to invest in real estate. For £10,000 Redpath purchased the huge 235-acre Desrivières estate from the owner's heirs in November 1836. He established a large mansion known as "Terrace Bank" much in the

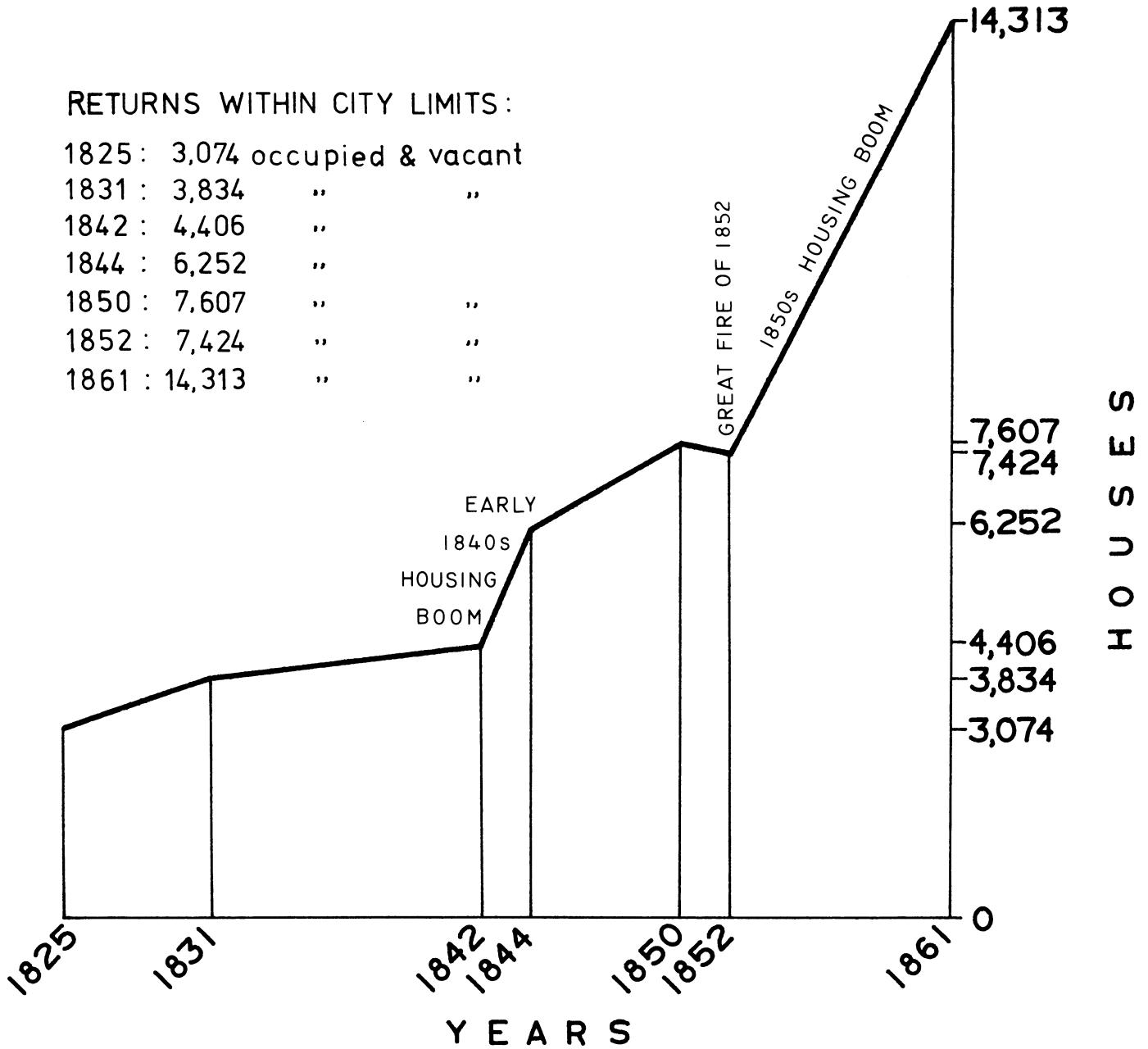
manner of the fur barons, high up the slope of the mountain at the foot of a cliff. Yet, unlike the fur barons, this new-generation Scotsman wasted little time in seeking a return on his land investment. In 1842 he opened Drummond Street, named after his wife Jane Drummond. Presumably at the same time he extended rue de la Montagne (by now referred to as Mountain Street by the Anglo-Saxon element) north of Dorchester Street and extended St. Catherine and Sherbrooke streets through his property. Significantly, anticipating a special class of clientele, he subdivided the land not into ordinary house lots but into much larger mansion lots or "villa lots" in Victorian parlance (Fig. 3). The principle at work here was the same that had brought Redpath to the mountain slope, and the fur barons before him - that a panoramic view was highly desirable and therefore would attract a special clientele.

The Redpath subdivision had a profound influence on the shape of things to come. Boldly established in relative isolation on the plateau area, its design was also visionary. Planting the firm imprint of a grid pattern on the mountain slope, its scale set new standards for Montreal's urban development. The streets imparted a sense of grandeur because of their greater width, while the huge blocks provided ample space for long street vistas, generous backyards and housing setbacks. The element of spaciousness in John Redpath's plan is perhaps best explained by concurrent events at City Hall and Redpath's involvement in them. During 1840 and 1841, John Ostell, the City Surveyor (between 1840 and 1845) and coincidentally an architect by profession, was busily engaged in

MONTREAL HOUSING STOCK 1825-1861

RETURNS WITHIN CITY LIMITS :

1825 :	3,074	occupied & vacant	
1831 :	3,834	"	"
1842 :	4,406	"	"
1844 :	6,252	"	"
1850 :	7,607	"	"
1852 :	7,424	"	"
1861 :	14,313	"	"

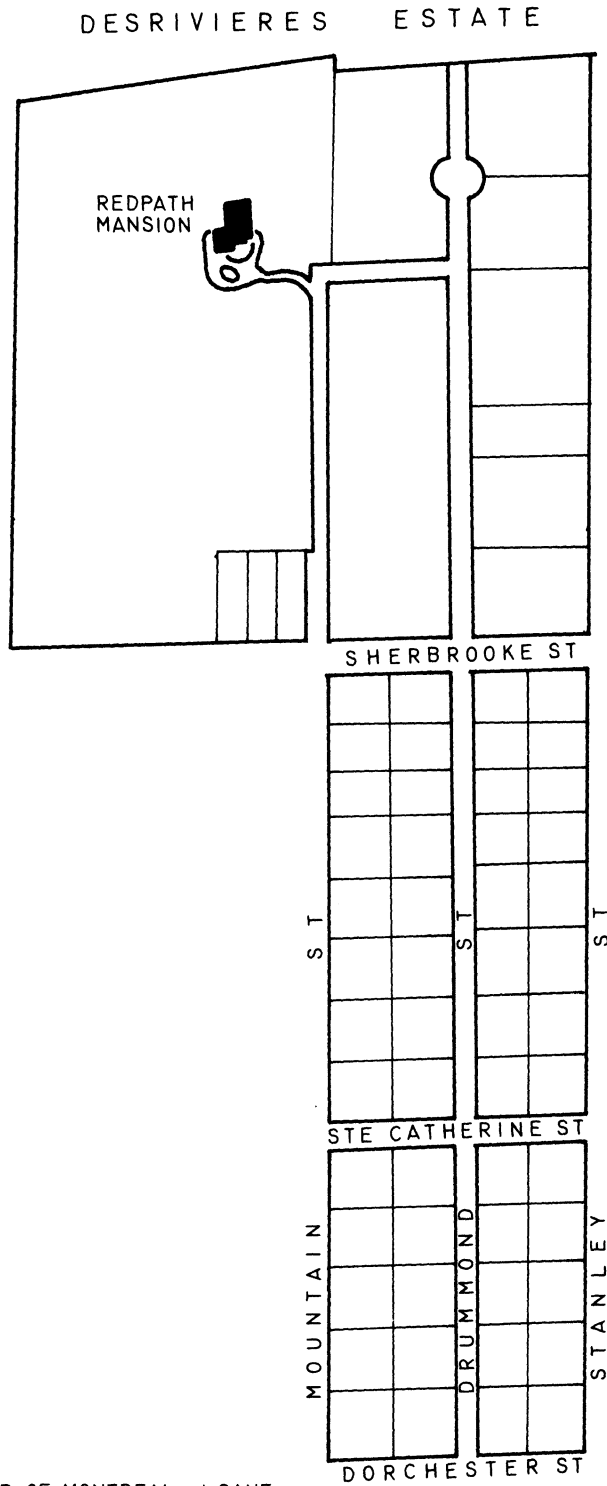


SOURCE: PUBLISHED SUMMARIES OF CENSUS RETURNS

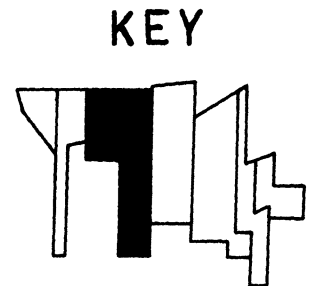
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Fig. 2

REDPATH SUBDIVISION PLAN



SOURCE: 1846 MAP OF MONTREAL, J. CANE



D. Hanna

Fig. 3

the preparation of Montreal's first comprehensive city plan. The city's Committee on Roads and Improvements continually deferred road work during those two years unless absolutely necessary, as the plan in preparation was to establish "a general system of improvements," dealing primarily with street widths, extensions and paving, and the laying of sewer lines.

The resultant City Plan apparently recommended the adoption of a new standard of street dimensions, generally doubling the customary breadth of 30 feet to 60 feet and establishing widths of 50 feet for minor side streets and 80 feet for outstanding arteries.² The new plan also served notice that the City was determined to push through long straight transverse arteries unimpeded by the constant bends and right-angle turns so characteristic of Montreal's older East-West main streets (Lagauchetière, St. Antoine, St. Paul, etc.). This resulted in the inclusion of Sherbrooke, St. Catherine and Dorchester streets in Redpath's and all subsequent subdivision plans.

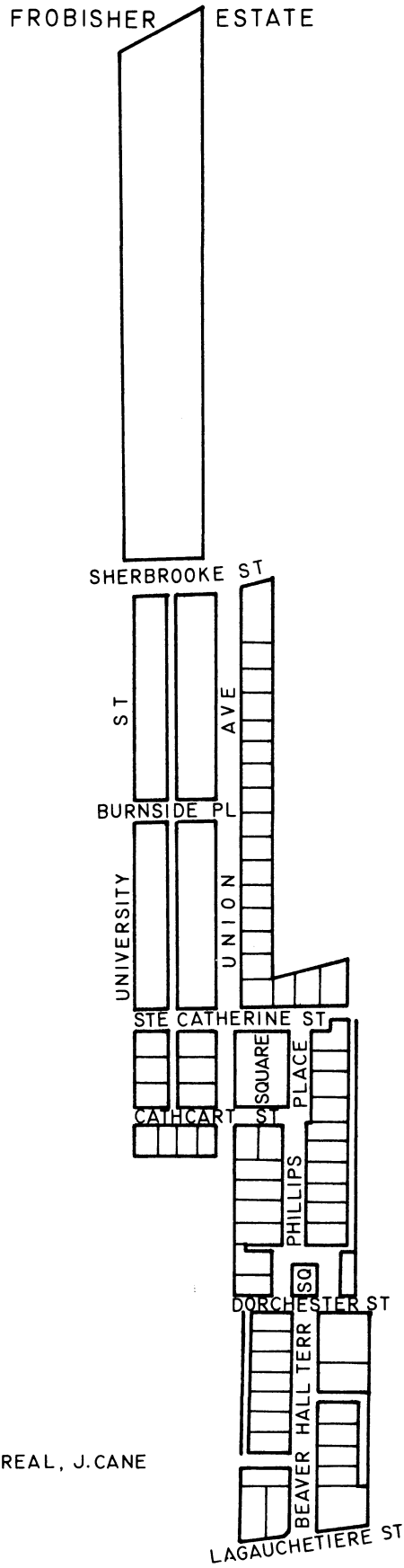
John Redpath's subdivision plan was early evidence of the impact of the new street standards on private urban development. And yet Redpath was more than a mere recipient of city ordinances; between 1840 and 1843, he himself served on the Common Council as an alderman for the downtown Centre Ward, and most significantly as chairman of the Committee on Roads and Improvements. It was perhaps only natural that he should prepare a subdivision plan on his own property, translating them into reality as soon as possible. Finally, the interlinkage of people and events is made complete by the

fact that Redpath hired John Ostell, the very man who was responsible for drawing up the master city plan, to survey his property and design its subdivision.³ John Ostell, born in London, would have been quite familiar with the urban planning principles he was formulating, for the English capital had been in the throes of estate subdivision into broad streets, lanes and squares at the time of the young man's apprenticeship around 1830.

As John Redpath was creating a suburban townscape of new dimensions, a man who had much in common with him was also busy performing a similar task in a nearby estate of the plateau area. Thomas Phillips, a former contractor like Redpath, also served as a city councillor and member of the Committee on Roads and Improvements alongside his neighbour with the exception that death prematurely concluded his term of office in June, 1842. His was the old Frobisher estate and at his death he had left a complete subdivision plan of the property (Fig. 4).

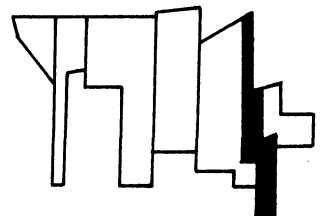
Thomas Phillips was unquestionably the landowner with the greatest knowledge and understanding in Montreal of contemporary English planning, for in spite of the comparatively narrow dimensions of his property, his plan followed the true spirit of Georgian urban planning still at the height of fashion in early Victorian Great Britain. He understood the importance of stimulating a more grandiose manner in architecture through the opportunities created by a broader street vista. Phillips also espoused the English concept of the square, a large plot of greenery interrupting the normal course of a

PHILLIPS SUBDIVISION PLAN



SOURCE: 1846 MAP OF MONTREAL, J. CANE

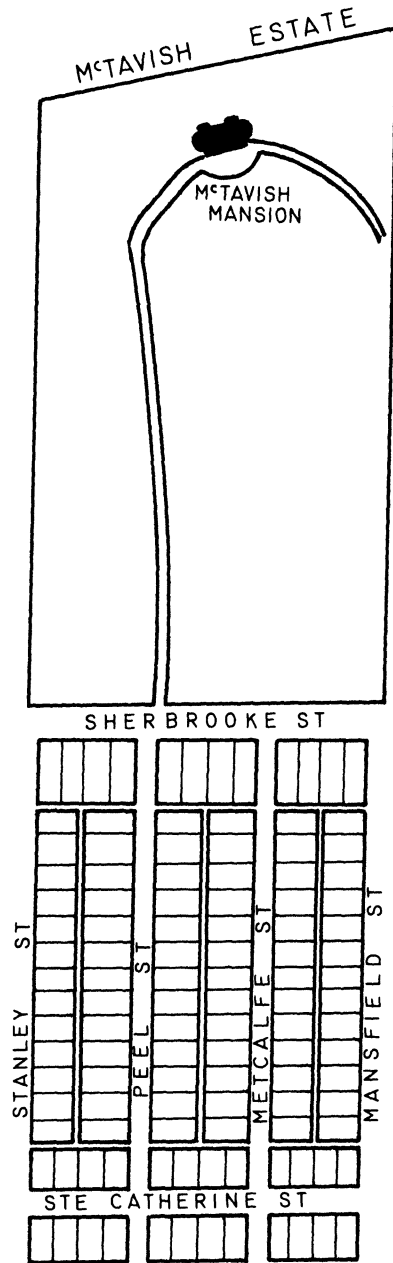
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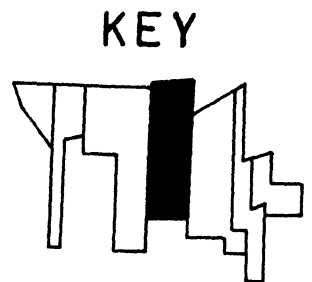
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Fig. 4

FISHER & SMITH SUBDIVISION PLAN



SOURCE: 1846 MAP OF MONTREAL, J. CANE



D. Hanna

Fig. 5

street, by laying out two in his plan: Beaver Hall Square along Dorchester Street (since obliterated by the widening of the latter in 1955) and Phillips Square along St. Catherine Street. Phillips even favoured the fashionable Georgian trend of substituting more elegant designations for the term "street." The roads he planned were named "Beaver Hall Terrace" (since renamed Beaver Hall Hill), "Phillips Place" and "Union Avenue" (in commemoration of the 1840 Act of Union between Upper and Lower Canada). He also planned a road at the edge of his property in conjunction with the authorities of McGill College, naming it University Street.

While the Phillips subdivision was an interesting case of cultural transfer to a new land, it was the two remaining subdivision plans on the plateau area that established what was to become the norm in street planning in Montreal. Duncan Fisher and James Smith, partners in the firm "Fisher & Smith, Advocates" on Little St. James Street, purchased the Old McTavish estate from its uninterested heirs. Canadians by birth, but of Scottish parentage, they too belonged to the new order of businessmen which viewed land as a profitable investment. Their land, located between the McGill and Redpath estates, was duly subdivided in 1845, extending Sherbrooke and St. Catherine Streets and creating four new cross-streets linking those two main arteries (Fig. 5). The streets conformed to the new breadth and outlined huge blocks containing 36 building lots each. Furthermore, the lots were deep, with the added feature of rear lane servicing for stables (the "mews" of English planning) instead of the

heretofore standard custom of providing rear stable access through a "porte-cochère" in the building. This was the first such comprehensive plan in Montreal for what would become the standard method of subdividing for virtually a whole century. Such a significant subdivision, fortunately, elicited a remarkably informative newspaper advertisement:

FOR SALE

*VALUABLE BUILDING LOTS ON
SHERBROOKE, METCALFE AND
ST. CATHERINE STREETS.*

THE PROPRIETORS of that PROPERTY known as "MCTAVISH ESTATE" are prepared to dispose of that portion of it, on the South-East side of Sherbrooke Street. The whole of this portion has been divided into Lots 72 x 150, 60 x 118, and 60 x 100. The Lots on Sherbrooke Street have a depth of 150 feet.

These LOTS, situated on the most elevated and salubrious part of the City of Montreal, offer to Capitalists, rare opportunities of advantageous, and surely profitable, investment; and to those seeking a permanent residence, an agreeable and healthful place of abode. Having directly behind - the Mountain of Montreal, and forming the very back, of the gentle declivity towards the Town, they must ever command delightful views, and the purest air.

It will be observed, on inspection of the Plan, lying at the office of Mr. J. WELLS,

Architect, 17, Little St. James' Street, that each of the Lots, has a *back entrance* by means of a Lane, and is sufficiently large for two commodious Dwelling Houses; for the convenience, therefore, of purchasers, Half Lots may be acquired.

This PROPERTY is *commuted*, and for ever *exempt* from all Seigniorial and other charges, of any nature, whatsoever, and will be sold on liberal and easy terms.

Titles, of validity indubitable, will be given.

A few of these Lots will be exposed for Sale, from time to time, at PUBLIC AUCTION, of which disposal due notice will be given in the City Newspapers. The first of these Sales, will take place on some early day in May.

For further particulars, apply to

JOHN WELLS, ARCHITECT

47, Little St. James' Street⁴

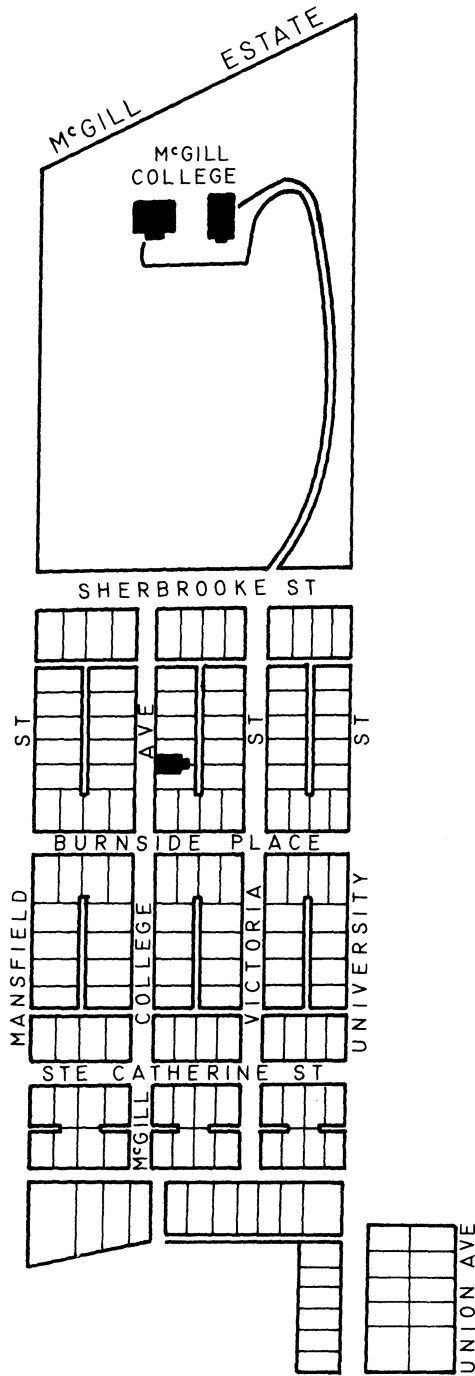
Adjacent to the Phillip's subdivision was the McGill estate, owned by the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, responsible for setting up a university known as the University of McGill College under the terms of James McGill's will. The Institution had been caught up in a long protracted legal battle with McGill's heirs straining the financial resources provided by his will. The refusal of the Government to support the university once it was set up further plunged the institution

into financial destitution. In 1845 the southern portion of the estate below Sherbrooke Street was subdivided in order to raise revenue to pay off debts. This plan, drawn up by H.M. Perrault, John Ostell's associate, was almost identical to the adjacent subdivision of the McTavish estate and completed the bulk of the subdividing on the southern slope of Mount Royal (Fig. 6).

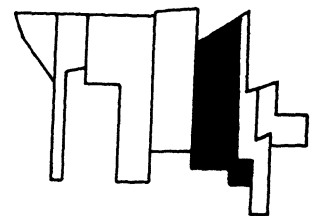
The new landowners of the 1840s were generally businessmen whose wealth was derived from the economic opportunities available within the city. These men were the new elite of Montreal and like the fur traders wished to enjoy their wealth and display their status through the medium of prestigious estates located on the slope of Mount Royal. These same men, however, were not insensitive to the money-making opportunities of real estate dealings in a rapidly expanding local economy. Hence the estates became just one more link in their chains of lucrative investments in the city. They subdivided their properties, each implementing a conscious distinction between that part of the estate south of Sherbrooke Street where the flat land was divided into small housing lots and that portion on the steep slope north of Sherbrooke street where the land was retained for personal use or else divided into huge lots. This clear-cut differentiation set the stage for a high-density residential townscape on the plateau, and a low-density mansion townscape on the slope, the two basic components of the future neighbourhood.

It is noteworthy that the mountainside subdividers chose the quadrilateral grid pattern on laying out their estates in lots

McGILL SUBDIVISION PLAN



KEY



SOURCE: 1846 MAP OF MONTREAL, J. CANE

Fig. 6

D. Hanna

and streets. Particularly popular in North America, the preponderance of the quadrilateral street plan has been explained by its ease of surveying and standardization of lot size and shape. Both features contained considerable appeal to the merchant mentality of a rapidly expanding new land. But perhaps more important was the desire for system and order in the townscape, a goal to which the grid pattern contributed substantially.⁵ For all the seeming simplicity of the new subdivisions, there was clearly a higher objective in the imaginations of contemporaries. The essence of that image is best expressed in this excerpt from *The Gazette*, May 8, 1844:

*FOR SALE
BY NORMAN BETHUNE
BEAVER HALL PROPERTY*

A number of Valuable BUILDING LOTS, situated between Lagouchetiere and Sherbrooke Streets; upon that beautiful inclined plane to be designated the 'NEW TOWN OF MONTREAL,' and which will, in all probability, be a rival in splendour of the New Town of Edinburgh.

The enthusiastic comparison was not ludicrous, for Edinburgh's famous New Town plan of 1767 was an equally simple quadrilateral network of broad streets with rear lanes and two squares. Montreal's "New Town" hardly offered anything less, except that its conception had not emerged from the pen of one solitary designer. Nevertheless, the close interlinkages between estate owners, architects and the City Surveyor provided the basis for the next best thing - a neatly meshed plan born of the mutual interests of all those concerned,

under the guidelines of a new civic master plan. The fulfillment of the "New Town" ideal could ultimately only be consummated by carrying out the type of development characteristic of Edinburgh's New Town. That development in the early nineteenth century consisted of dignified streetscapes of uniform terraces punctuated by churches. Whether the new mountainside subdivisions deserved the title so magnanimously alluded to by Norman Bethune, could only be borne out by the structures which would grace its streets and squares.

Montreal underwent a sharp commercial crisis towards the end of the decade. The rapid dismemberment of the old mercantilist system by Great Britain was felt most acutely among Montreal merchants. The stiff competition from New York merchants for the inland trade through the implementation of duty-free bonded shipments over the Erie Canal in 1845-46 also had its effect on the city's commercial position. Both factors froze population growth and real estate development for the time being (see Figs. 1, 2). The early 1850s brought only the addition of local disasters to further depress the situation. Fires ravaged the city repeatedly during 1850 and 1852 culminating in the Great Fire of 1852 which destroyed 1,100 houses and the entire east end with it. Cholera plagues added to the misery during this period.

The commercial crisis lifted, however, as free trade brought its benefits to Montreal. The dredging of the river channel below the city brought trans-oceanic steamship service to the port for the first time in 1853, and simultaneously construction of the huge Grand

Trunk Railway project centred on Montreal was begun. With these improvements in the city's competitive position, the import-export trade began to climb rapidly (see Fig. 1). The forces that transformed Montreal's commercial system in the 1850s also found their parallel in the city's housing. Montreal witnessed both a population and a housing boom during the decade on a scale never before experienced except during those brief years of optimism between 1842 and 1844. During the 1850s, Montreal's population soared, effectively doubling between 1850 and 1861. The city's housing stock had climbed from 4,406 units in 1842 to 7,424 in 1852. It would leap to 14,313 units by 1861, and this figure did not take into account the substantial suburban growth occurring outside the city limits (see Fig. 2).

Montreal in the 1850s was quite clearly in the throes of a real estate development boom. The urban disasters of fire and plague probably heightened the boom given the new influx of population and the shortage of housing. The most interesting observation to be made, however, is the fact that Old Montreal in 1850 was still the focal point for the homes of wealthy Montrealers. The merchants' homes were to be found in the western portion of the old city, along Great Saint James, Notre-Dame and St. François-Xavier streets. These are not to be construed as merely business addresses as the 1850 directory clearly indicates that they were indeed domiciles. The simple fact that this area would witness a massive exodus of residents to the "New Town" by 1860, brings to light the most important catalyst in the suburban migration. Fires and

disease had provided the psychological push for a suburban movement amongst the rich,⁶ but the need for commercial expansion would furnish the ultimate rationale for the residential evacuation of the central area.

During the late 1850s and 1860s, Great St. James and Notre-Dame streets were to be virtually transformed into the commercial core of Montreal. Since the 1820s, buildings intended solely for commercial purposes had spread out from the traditional waterfront/rue St. Paul location to infiltrate the mixed residential-institutional zone along those two streets. The commercial boom which began during the 1850s stimulated the expansion and multiplication of businesses while furnishing Montreal merchants with the necessary wealth to take up residence in the suburbs. As large prestigious commercial buildings superseded the small house-over-shop combination, an outward extension of the commercial district took place, swallowing up old houses and churches. The result was that Notre-Dame Street during the 1860s became a corridor of tall arcaded façades housing the best of the city's retail and wholesale firms. Similar transformations altered the side streets as well, effectively producing a large exclusively commercial "downtown" by the 1870s where there had been a mixture of all possible urban land-uses only a few decades before. As such, the 1860s must be marked in the annals of Montreal's development as a decade of profound transformation. Up to 1850 it could be said there was an "old" Montreal. After 1850 a "new" Montreal emerged, mirrored in the dawn of a central business district and a new upper-middle-class suburb, the "New

Town."

The factor which proved to be one of the best enticements, judging by the frequent mention in real-estate advertisements, for the higher-income residents of the city to move out of the central area was water servicing, a remarkable luxury in 1850s Montreal. The municipal government, horrified by the unchecked devastation wrought upon the city by the fires of 1850 and 1852 and dismayed by the ease with which disease was able to spread through the polluted urban drinking water, launched the great civic project known as the "Montreal Aqueduct" in 1852. The cost and scale of the Montreal Aqueduct project were enormous for a Municipal Government of twenty years' existence whose ventures into the realm of municipal services were still in the embryonic stage. But its effect on expansion of the city towards Mount Royal was profound if not decisive. The location of the reservoir high up the slope of Mount Royal suddenly gave the entire mountainside up to the level of the reservoir the potential of water servicing. As soon as construction on the aqueduct was assured in 1853, house-building activity began to surge forward on the mountainside after the eight year slump since the subdivision of all the mountainside estates. By 1856, when the first water was pumped into the reservoir, housing construction was literally booming. House builders could offer the convenience of flush-activated water closets as a standard feature, once the laying of pipe and sewer lines was completed. The years 1853-54 marked the beginning of a housing construction boom which would result in the creation of a unique townscape on the southern slope of Mount Royal.

The steeper portion of the mountainside estates above Sherbrooke Street attracted individuals who could afford the high cost of land - the obvious result of the high desirability of the location - and occupy large lots themselves. Land on the flatter plateau area south of Sherbrooke Street was also expensive but attracted instead speculators who could pay the high price and make a profit by building high-density prestige dwellings. The accepted formula in the 1850s for the type of housing contemplated was the terrace. Although the terrace was relatively new to the Montreal urban scene, having first made its appearance in the 1840s along major arteries in the older suburbs, St. Antoine, de Bleury, and St. Denis streets, the idea was over a century old in British urban planning and by the 1850s was just beginning to wane. The terrace, quite simply, was the uniting of a homogeneous group of attached houses behind a single monumental façade. It was a conception of high taste and because of its grand design was viewed as a distinct improvement over the prevailing individually-conceived attached houses of the urban wealthy. Montreal's early terraces, however, were actually little more than uniformly designed row houses dignified with a name, such as "Tecumseh Terrace," "St. Antoine Place" or "Cornwall Terrace."

British "New Town" development and upper-class suburban development in general had occurred almost exclusively in the form of elegant terraces and mansions gracing broad streetscapes, tangential crescents and terminal vistas. Such was the development of Edinburgh's New Town, as it was of new suburban areas in Glasgow,

Liverpool or London. The architectural profession had grown considerably in Montreal during the 1840s with the arrival of trained young men from the British Isles (George Browne, George Dickinson, William Footner, James McFarlane, John Ostell, James Springle and John Wells). These men filled a professional void in the colonial city and brought to a newly affluent merchant population the expertise with which wealth might be translated into physical expressions of British middle-class values. The question of whether or not the area on the southern slope of Mount Royal would live up to the label of "New Town" ascribed during the 1840s depended therefore on what type of development graced its streets.

Of four terraces undertaken in 1855, one is noteworthy. Representing the first tangible evidence of the lot sales by McGill College, "Wellington Terrace" (1855-56) was erected along the entire block face of the south side of St. Catherine Street between McGill College Avenue and Mansfield Street. For a city that had heretofore only known a very "provincial" version of the English terrace, this new building clearly established a whole new standard. "Wellington Terrace" was the conception of George Browne, probably Canada's greatest architect at the time. Born into an architectural family in Belfast, Browne was trained for the profession in that terrace-rich city. Emigrating to Canada in 1831, he distinguished himself early by founding the first known school of architecture in the country in Quebec City. Appointed Government Architect in 1841, Browne proceeded to endow Kingston with the most sophisticated public and commercial buildings the nation

had ever seen, when that city was selected as capital for the united provinces. He moved with the Government to Montreal in 1843 where he remained to work in private practice.⁷

Finally in 1855, George Browne made the bold move of involving himself in the housing boom, not simply as an architect, but as a speculative builder himself. He purchased land and took the financial risk. What he conceived was extraordinary for a city used to squat gable-roofed houses. "Wellington Terrace" was a magnificent two-storey stone structure executed in a very refined Classical Revival manner. In fact his style had evolved into the more exuberant Baroque Revival mode of the 1850s, also known as "Louis XIV." His building introduced many new features to middle-class housing in Montreal. Among these were the large stone porticos over each doorway, a dignified cornice and window trim, with the whole topped by a flat roof surmounted by statuary. Except for its modest height, it was the equal of anything available in the upper class districts of London's west end.

The financial panic of 1857, being short in duration, seems not to have had any damaging psychological impact on speculative builders. In fact it had quite the reverse effect as 1858-59 was the first of two peaks in terrace building. St. Catherine Street was rapidly being built up as a terrace corridor, but now McGill College Avenue was similarly establishing itself. It was quite natural for these two arteries to become the focal points of terrace expansion for they were the first two streets to be serviced with water from the new reservoir. Terrace developers

were taking up the challenge put forth by George Browne, as almost all adopted the flat-roof configuration with elaborate cornice decoration. Moreover, terraces were now being built to a height of three full storeys exclusive of the basement, instead of two. In style, the terraces had finally cast off the dour Classical Revival mode which had held sway over Montreal at least since the 1830s. Instead the newer Italianate form was adopted as architectural decoration became highlighted with bracketing and segmental arch windows. "Mount Royal Terrace" (1858-59) was the leading confection of the day and its constantly receding and projecting twelve unit mass sitting haughtily above a raised basement produced a formidable looking streetscape along McGill College Avenue.

A new phenomenon in middle class housing was becoming evident by 1858. That year saw the construction of a myriad of extremely elegant semi-detached houses with such pedantic names as "Southwell Place," "Greenfield Place," or "Leicester Place." The houses were not unlike a pair of terrace units detached from the main body and placed amidst a generous lawn. The idea of semi-detached housing had been conceived in the Georgian era. Like the terrace, it was merely taken over and expanded in the early Victorian period, by becoming a fashionable sort of residence for upper-class aspirants.⁸ Curiously however, the semi-detached house in Montreal enjoyed only a brief and intermittent vogue, unlike the younger Toronto which forsook the terrace very early for a wholehearted subscription to the semi-detached house.

The new decade brought at first a remarkable vitality to housing construction in the "New Town." The visit by the Prince of Wales to Montreal in 1860 re-cemented the psychological break that had occurred with Great Britain in the 1840s. The warm feelings for the Imperial connection reached a new peak amongst the Anglo-Saxon element of the population, and those feelings were effectively mirrored in the appearance of the "Prince of Wales Terrace" in 1860. Closer to the English model than ever before, this terrace was to be the most palatial ever erected in Montreal. Set at the head of a block on Sherbrooke Street, it foretold great things for the largely undeveloped artery. "Prince of Wales Terrace" was the work of George Browne. The masterful Classical Revival edifice touched with the exuberance of the contemporary Baroque Revival was the mark of his style. Hardly stopping there, he added the equally magnificent "Holyrood Place" (1861) to the already distinguished streetscape on McGill College Avenue. Another beautiful "Louis XIV" confection, the sweeping fourteen-unit terrace looked directly across the street at the slightly earlier "Mount Royal Terrace."

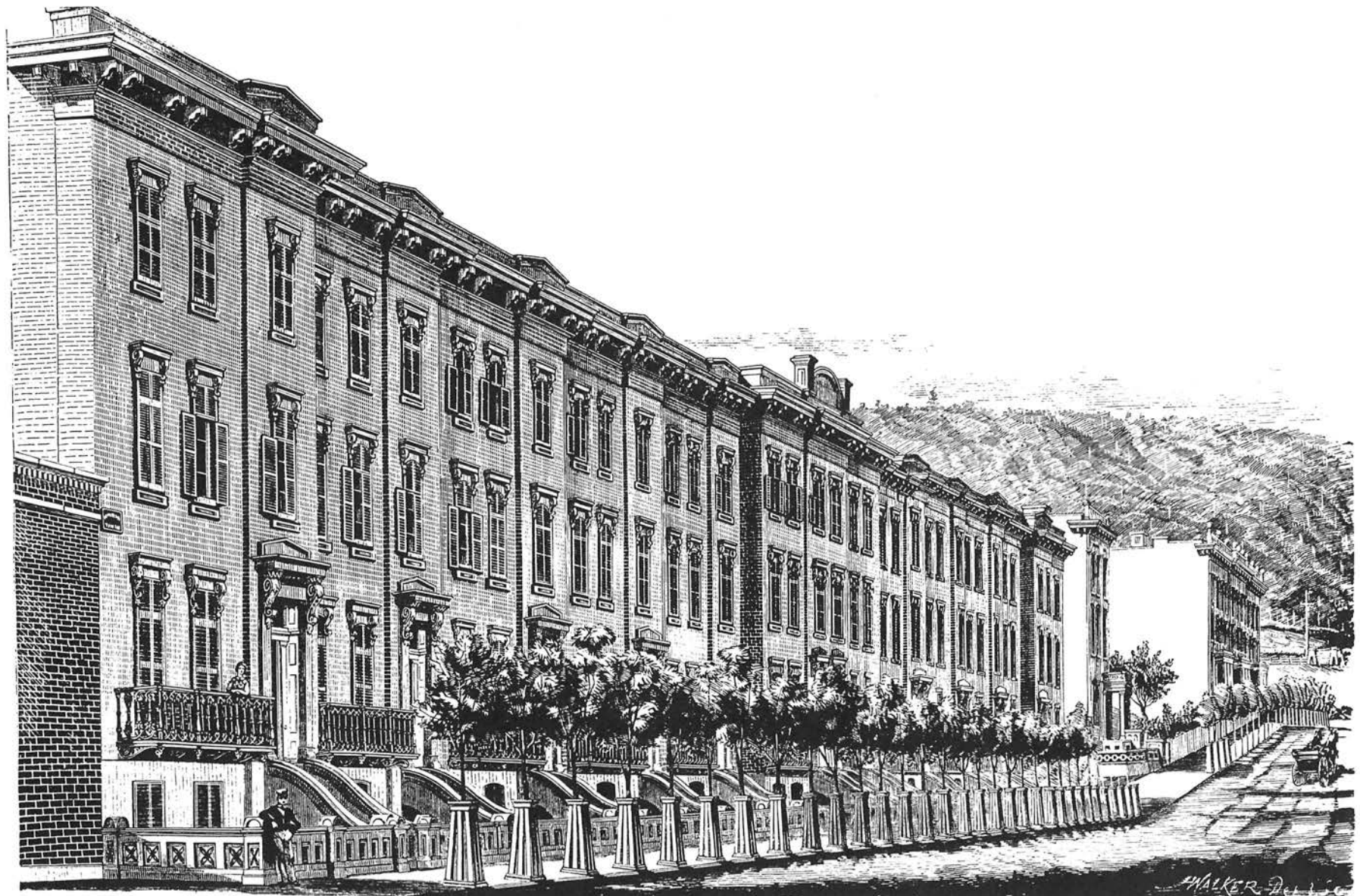
The construction of 1860-61 marked the apex of terrace development and design in Montreal, but it hardly marked the end. The second boom of terrace building came in 1863. Great Terraces lined nearly all street faces of the old McGill and McTavish estates. The 1854 bylaw prohibiting further burials in the huge Roman Catholic cemetery on the plateau brought terraces sweeping around its perimeter in 1863, once the transfer of graves to the new



McGill College Avenue looking north from St. Catherine Street at "Mount Royal Terrace," built in 1858-59, and "St. Sophie Place," built in 1858. Photo: Walker, c.1865. (Source: McCord Museum, Montreal)



"Prince of Whales Terrace" at the corner of Sherbrooke and McTavish streets as it appeared c.1865.
(Source: McCord Museum, Montreal)



*"Princess Royal Terrace" on Upper University Street built in 1862-63; from a Kilburn photo, c.1865.
(Source: Archives of Ontario)*

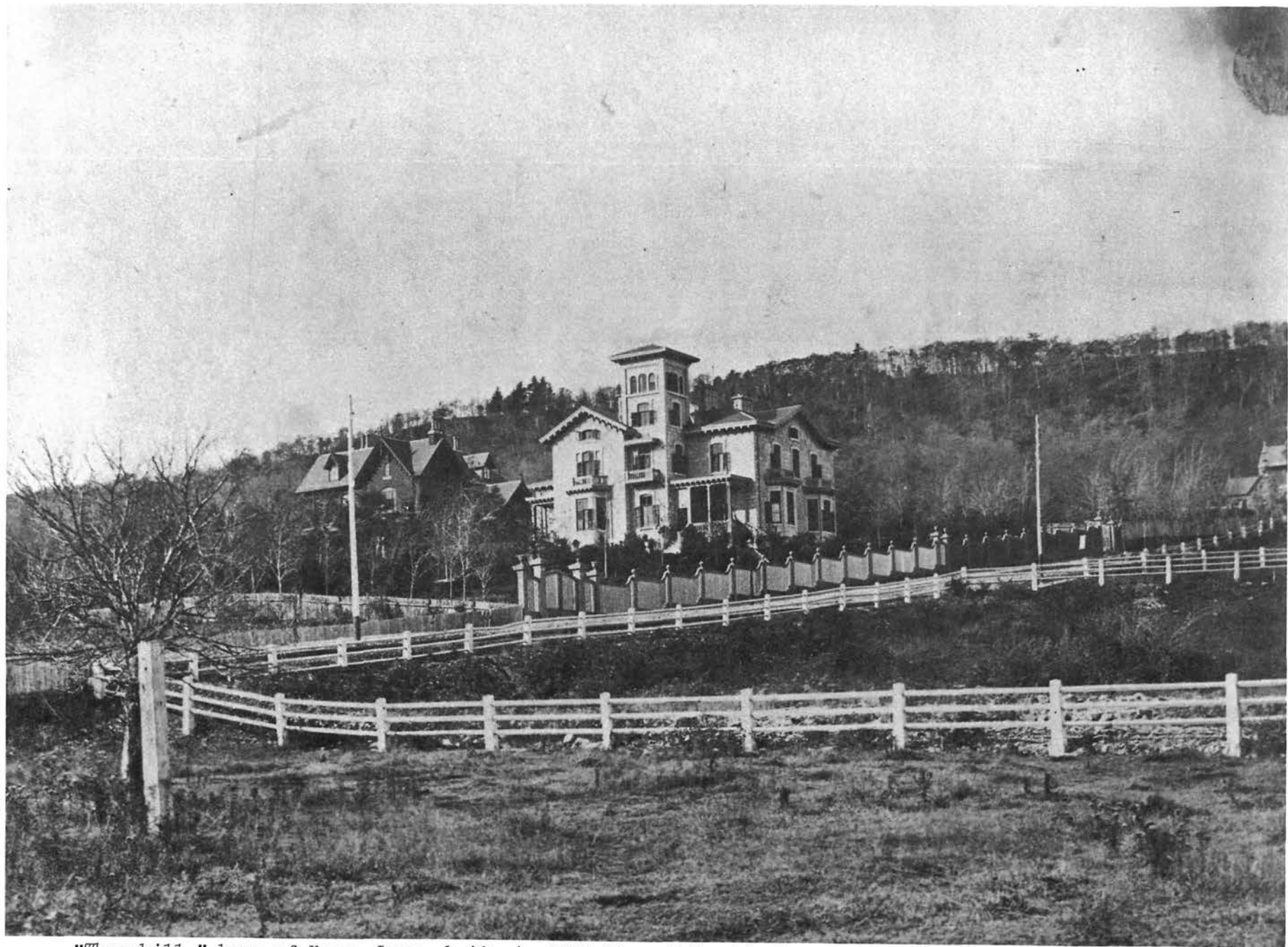
mountain-top was assured. The opening of new streets above Sherbrooke (Upper University and McTavish streets) attracted terrace builders to their steeply rising gradients. One such terrace, "Princess Royal Terrace" (1862-63), situated in the upper reaches of University Street also made evident a new trend in housing tastes which would ultimately close the lengthy chapter of the terrace. This new terrace style purposefully stressed the individuality of each unit of housing. Instead of a unified façade, here was a collection of individual units, each with a projecting bay window above the portico, a miniature peaked gable over the attic window breaking the cornice, and an octagonal cupola astride the ridgepole. It was a delightful and distinctive piece of work in the Italianate style then in vogue in Montreal.

While terraces were busily carving out a new townscape below Mount Royal, another type of housing gradually made its impression felt in the area. Mansions had traditionally been located far up the mountain towards Côte des Neiges Road. Under John Redpath's impetus, a line of mansions had formed along Drummond and Mountain streets on the plateau area in the 1840s. No new development occurred until 1854 when the large houses began appearing once again in the "New Town" coincident with the start of the terrace boom. The 1850s and 1860s marked the peak of popularity with the Italianate or "Bracketed Style" in architectural fashion. Popular especially with the merchant class in Great Britain, lofty stone villas were springing up in Victorian neighbourhoods from Bristol to Glasgow. In the United States, the style had fired the imagination even more as large

Cubic Italianate houses, or "Tuscan villas," swept across both the urban and rural landscapes in the northern states during the prosperous Civil War era. Montreal's architects were equally conversant with the style and dotted the "New Town" with large luxurious mansions of limestone.

Mansion construction began almost everywhere in the "New Town" at once. New houses filled in the remaining generous mansion lots on Mountain and Drummond streets which developed into extremely graceful arteries, given the ample setbacks provided for each house and the enthusiastic tree planting fortuitously undertaken in the 1840s, apparently by John Redpath himself. Of the merchants who came to inhabit this part of the "New Town" many were to become influential names in Canadian business. The inhabitants included Alexander Galt, George Stephen, John Ogilvie, and several others. The true direction of mansion building was established when a wave of stone "villa" building swept up the steeper slope of Mount Royal to capitalize on the view. Virtually all the planned streets leading up the mountain slope were opened in the 1850s and mansion lots sales were made at a constant and rapid rate. University Street was built up almost entirely with mansions and terraces in the early 1860s. McTavish and Peel streets up the slope saw some initial mansion building at this time also. As mansions dotted the hillside, Sherbrooke Street at its base gradually emerged as an impressive artery lined with large mansions along the north side which were usually set well back from the street.

Church development was the final large-scale factor in the



"Thornhill," home of Henry Lyman built in 1859-60 on McTavish Street and beside it on Peel Street, "The Elms" erected for Alfred Savage in 1860. The photo was taken c.1875. (Source: McCord Museum Montreal)

emergence of a mature townscape below Mount Royal. The Unitarians, Congregationalists, and Church of Scotland Presbyterians had been the first sects to express confidence in the shift of urban development towards Mount Royal by relocating their churches to the Beaver Hall Terrace vicinity by 1850. When the old Neo-Classical style Anglican cathedral was burned to the ground on Notre-Dame Street in 1856, a new site and style were chosen for the rebuilt church. Christ Church Cathedral rose amidst new terraces between 1857 and 1860 in the most splendid Gothic Revival style Montreal would ever witness. Following closely the architectural developments in Great Britain, this edifice was in the vanguard of contemporary taste and cast an undeniable Victorian stamp on the "New Town." Moreover, the choice of a "New Town" location for the cathedral as early as 1857 was a confident statement on the migration of its affluent parishioners.

The 1860s were a boom period for church building in Montreal, and the bulk of that growth was channelled directly to the "New Town." Mostly spaced out along St. Catherine and Dorchester streets, nine new churches were built in 1869, virtually all in the Gothic style. Besides two new churches added to the Beaver Hall Terrace cluster, these included two Anglican parish churches and a large Methodist church. The heaviest contribution, however, was made by four new Presbyterian churches. This gave the area a predominantly Presbyterian stamp and helps to confirm the ascendancy of native Scots or people of Scottish descent in the "New Town." Moreover, this meant that by 1869, exactly half the Presbyterian churches in Montreal were located

in the "New Town," Presbyterianism accounting for slightly over one sixth of all churches in the city.

It is instructive to note that church relocation and construction was generally a leading rather than a lagging element of urban development in the "New Town." This tendency is well illustrated in a Notman photograph taken from Mount Royal above "Ravenscrag" in 1866. The incentive to act fast in order to obtain a large plot of land for a new church building was no doubt a motive behind the anticipatory moves of several churches, but the desires of the members themselves to take up residence in the "New Town" must not be discounted in the relocation decisions.

The Notman photograph serves as an excellent overview of the "New Town" at a stage of its development when the terrace had almost run its course. The mansion district may be seen taking shape above Sherbrooke Street. Here the architecture of the Picturesque prevails, then at the height of its popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. Trees are preserved and integrated into the plan while houses are intended to capture the romantic sentiments toward the past, evident through the Italian Renaissance towers and cupolas, Mediaeval Gothic turrets and finials, Tudor chimneys and Grecian urns rising above the leafy crowns.

This almost chimerical townscape dissolves near Sherbrooke Street, however. From there the broad shelf of the plateau is evident in the photograph until it ends at a thin line of trees running through the middle of the print. Cleared of trees, this is the terrace townscape, the heart of the "New Town." The stiff



View of Montreal from Mount Royal with Sir Hugh Allan's house "Ravenscrag" (1860-62) in the foreground, the McTavish Reservoir (1852-56) and McGill College (1839-43 and 1861) beyond. The streets running up the mountain slope from right to left are Peel, McTavish, McGill College and Upper University. In the background is Victoria Bridge (1853-59) spanning the St. Lawrence River. (Source: Archives of Ontario)

formality of the orthogonal street pattern is mirrored in the long rows of houses. The work looks unfinished and indeed there is still much land to fill. But streets such as McGill College, Union, University and St. Catherine are virtually complete giving the area a certain maturity. Here Georgian symmetry, elegance and orderliness prevail. The finer terraces with their flat roofs sloping to the rear are hard to miss. Certainly the "Prince of Wales Terrace" is predominant in the lower right-hand side of the view. But the most noble streetscape of the entire "New Town" is McGill College Avenue with elegant, flat-roofed terraces lining both sides of the street. A conception of remarkable dignity, this is the finest street Montreal had to offer in the 1860s.

The end of the "New Town" as a townscape in the Georgian tradition came quickly. The new stress on individuality highlighted in the "Princess Royal Terrace" and certainly evident in mansion and church construction, underlined the fact that the "Romantic Movement" begun in the eighteenth century was finally filtering down to architect, builder and ultimately the public. It was anti-rationalist, hence anti-Georgian, and for mass housing it marked the beginning of a reaction against the imposed orderliness and symmetry of eighteenth-century planning. In architecture it sought relief from monotony, exaggeration of individuality.⁹ Terraces, as the epitomization of Georgian rationalist planning, were doomed to extinction. Terrace construction continued to the end of the 1860s but tapered off rapidly. By the early 1870s, the last named terraces, though no

longer really terraces but simply elegant row houses, were completed. By 1894, the Montreal directories no longer listed the names and locations of terraces. They became faceless entities known only by a street address like any other house. Following the principles of Romantic planning, trees had been planted along all the "New Town" streets in the 1850s. While forging a whole new streetscape of shade and colour, they ran against the purpose of terrace architecture which was to expose the façade. As the trees matured, the terraces disappeared behind a barrage of foliage, demolishing their potent visual effect on the streetscape and probably hastening public disregard for them.

The intriguing fact about terrace development in what is now Canada is that a comprehensive terrace townscape occurred only in Montreal. While the reasons for this occurrence have been explored in the local context, it would be of value to consider the circumstance in relation to a broader milieu. What for example does the "New Town" tell us about Montreal in the nineteenth century urban system in Canada? Can any parallels be drawn between Montreal and major cities in the United States? Finally, where does the Montreal terrace fit in the framework of urbanization in the English-speaking world?

The first component which enters into consideration is a time reference. The terrace flourished as a popular form of urban housing between the years 1770 and 1860. This period was in fact the beginning of widespread urban growth in both Great Britain and the New World. The terrace must be considered against this setting. It is tempting at this stage to

introduce some notion of scale. As the terrace was manifestly a high-density type of accommodation, it is easy to suppose that some sort of threshold population was required to support the incidence of terraces. Yet cities both huge and small, as witnessed by London and Bath, had their terrace townscapes. But if only the size of the upper middle class of the social spectrum is considered, then the terrace townscapes may be placed in their proper context. A review of the cities in which terraces were prevalent reveals a prosperous and growing upper middle class. In terms of function, those cities fell into three basic camps: commercial centres, administrative centres, or a combination of both. Montreal flourished because of its prime commercial position in the Saint Lawrence system. New York did likewise through its Mohawk corridor. Boston thrived on a mixture of commercialism and public administration. Across the ocean, commercial cities like Bristol and Liverpool had their terraces, but Glasgow, with its leading commercial position in the nineteenth century, offered the most dramatic demonstration of the relationship between terrace and commerce. On the public administration side, Edinburgh offered an equally dramatic display of the links between terraces and that function.

A terrace townscape in an urban centre within the time frame considered was indubitably linked with a strong upper-middle-class sector of the population. Administrative and commercial cities drew considerable numbers of government officials and merchant entrepreneurs respectively. These in turn were seconded by a huge lower middle class fulfilling ancillary functions to the basic

roles of government and trade. Those people, while not sufficiently well-off to afford a terrace residence, did on occasion climb the social ladder. In contrast, in an industrial centre vast pools of working class labour under the aegis of a small handful of industrialists tended to congregate. Where manufacturing predominated there was little need for a middle class and the manufacturers themselves formed a very small segment of the total population. Hence cities such as Birmingham or Manchester in Great Britain had fine mansions and a profusion of row housing but no terrace townscape.

The sole remaining anomaly in the case of the terrace was its strong presence in small urban centres in the south-central and south-western part of England. Bath and Leamington Spa were replete with terraces. Brighton and other coastal cities had their share as well. These centres were all resort areas for the idle rich, housing aristocratic and primarily upper middle class residents, mostly elderly, seeking the relief of the health spas. The resorts lay within 120 miles of London, and their terraces may even be considered as extensions of the terrace townscape of the metropolis.

London itself was omnipotent and ultimately all developments in the urban sphere were mirrored through it, even if it did not originate them itself. Hence the terrace saw its Georgian-era flowering in the small city of Bath, but it was in London that the terrace was modelled on a truly massive scale and exported throughout the British world. London's terraces were the result of the commercial and

administrative capacities of a metropolis whose position in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries was unassailable.

In British North America, the urban scene was not sufficiently mature to support terrace housing until the nineteenth century. Halifax, a large administrative, military and commercial centre, first saw terrace construction, albeit on a very minor scale, in the 1820s. It remained until the 1840s, however, for terraces to erupt simultaneously in virtually all major commercial and administrative centres in Upper and Lower Canada. Even then, by the 1860s, cities such as Toronto, Hamilton and Quebec had only a few isolated examples of fully developed terraces. It remained for Montreal alone to develop a comprehensive terrace townscape.

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NOTES

- 1 Contracting activities were gleaned from various personal account books of John Redpath on deposit at the McCord Museum, Montreal.
- 2 The plan was probably issued sometime in the transition between the years 1841 and 1842 as city By-law 74 of June 27, 1842 refers to the completed plan. Unfortunately no copy of the plan and its recommendations appears to be extant. Possibly it was destroyed in the City Hall fire of 1922. The street dimensions quoted here were deduced from contemporary subdivision plans registered with City Hall.
- 3 Subdivision plan by John Ostell, on deposit at Archives

- Nationales du Quebec, in Montréal.
- 4 The *Gazette*, April 11, 1845.
 - 5 Christopher Tunnard, *The City of Man* (New York, 1970), p. 57.
 - 6 Urban disasters have always prompted an exodus from the city. Just as the dreaded plagues of the thirteenth century onwards spawned the multiplication of villas outside the city walls, so do suburbanites today cite their quest for "a cleaner, healthier neighbourhood" as the prime reason for their flight from the city. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, 1961), p. 487.
 - 7 Unpublished information pertaining to George Browne available in Percy Nobbs Room of Blackader Library at McGill University.
 - 8 Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* (New Haven, 1954), pp. 411, 414.
 - 9 Mumford, *City in History*, p. 489.