

MAISON NOTMAN

51 SHERBROOKE STREET WEST



Photo: Héritage Montréal

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

In the 1840s, Sherbrooke Street was extended west of Saint-Laurent Boulevard on the sloping terrace then called Côte-à-Baron. It was a rural area at the time, with market gardens and orchards. Only a dozen houses dotted Sherbrooke Street, between Aylmer and Saint-Laurent (a stretch of 8 streets). This was the landscape when the Notman House was built in 1844.

The neighbourhood became more populated with the construction of residences, including the first housing developments in the Square Mile and institutions like the Monastère du Bon-Pasteur in 1846.

THE SITE

The Notman House was built in 1844 and 1845 for lawyer William Collis Meredith (1812–1894). It was designed by John Wells (1789–1864), a well-known architect at the time.

The Notman House was a bourgeois residence with elements of Neoclassical architecture, particularly simple and sober forms, symmetry and the use of cut stone¹. The portico of the main façade, with its stone columns, was inspired by ancient Greek architecture.

Classified as a historical monument by the Quebec government in 1979, the Notman House has a protective perimeter of 150 metres.

VALUES

Historical value

The William Notman House is a testimony to the rapid development of Sherbrooke Street during the 19th century and is one of the rare residences to have survived. At the time, Sherbrooke Street was coveted by businessmen looking for large plots of land on which to build their homes.

Architectural value

Designed by architect and entrepreneur John Wells, the house is a testament to Neoclassical architecture characterized, in particular, by its symmetry and the use of cut stone.

Associative value

The house was occupied by several prominent businessmen in Montreal:

- Sir William Collis Meredith, the first owner, was a renowned lawyer who was also appointed a judge to the Supreme Court of Canada.
- Thomas Evans Blackwell rented the house from 1858 to 1862. He was President of the Grand Trunk Railway.
- Alexander Molson, of the Molson family brewery, owned the house from 1866 to 1876.
- William Notman² (owner from 1876 to 1891) was a photographer. He is recognized as one of the leading photographers of his time. His photographs documented daily life during the second half of the 19th century, in both Quebec and Canada.

(Source: Répertoire culturel du Québec)

MAISON NOTMAN

KEY FEATURES

- Its location on Sherbrooke Street on the site of the former hamlet³ of Côte-à-Baron
- Its volume typical of Neoclassical architecture: a square two-storey building with hipped roof
- Its materials, including cut stone
- Elements of the Neoclassical style, such as the tripartite composition of the facade, the symmetrical windows, the portico and its columns⁴.
- The two-storey rectangular annex (in brick) with its steeply-pitched gable roof, punctuated with both double-hung and casement windows⁴.

(Source : Répertoire culturel du Québec)

INTERVENTION

After St. Margaret's Home moved to Westmount in 1991, the house was purchased and its future remained uncertain for over 20 years. In 2000, the house was threatened by a project to convert it into a hotel tower.

In 2009, plans were afoot to make it the Home of the Web in Montreal. The idea was to give this heritage house a new lease on life through an initiative blending entrepreneurship, new technologies and the conservation of built heritage. Launched by the non-profit OSMO Foundation, the Home of the Web project encourages local creativity and innovation while supporting start-up businesses by providing them with offices, common spaces and various resources.

The house and the former hospital were restored and the two buildings were linked by a glazed passageway with a café, a project by Sid Lee Architecture.

IMPACT

This project destined for young entrepreneurs is a fine example of latter-day action in defence of built heritage in Montreal that is now playing a role in the growth of the city's social economy.

The Notman House was successfully restored and adapted for a new purpose. The House, which once served as a hospital for women, and now houses new technology entrepreneurship, has managed to pursue its public vocation for over a century.

SOURCES

H-MTL Plateform, Notman House, web page viewed on October 25, 2016.

www.heritagemontreal.org/en/h-mtl-platform/?siteSlug=notman-house

Répertoire culturel du Québec, Ministère de la culture et des communications, website viewed on October 25, 2016.

www.patrimoine-culturel.gouv.qc.ca/rpcq/detail.do?methode=consulter&id=92581&type=bien#.V3Fz9KIYPHE

Dunton, Nancy, La Maison Notman, brochure, June 2014.

NOTES

1. Cut stone

Bossage



Any projection left intentionally on the face of the stonework for ornamental purposes.

Cut stone



Stone which is cut uniformly on all its exposed surfaces.

Source: *Glossaire. Vocabulaire de l'architecture québécoise.*

2. William Notman: see his collection of photographs on the McCord Museum's website: www.musee-mccord.qc.ca.

3. Definition of a hamlet: a small village, especially one that is unincorporated.

(Source: *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998)

4. Key features



1. Notman House : tripartite composition of the facade and symmetrical windows

2. Portico and its columns

3. Hipped roof

4. Annex and its gable roof