THE HERITAGE VALUE STATEMENT

MOUNTAINSIDE UNITED CHURCH

CIVIC ADDRESS
687 Roslyn Street, Westmount

HERITAGE DESIGNATION
Municipal - Category 1: Important (SPA[P])
Provincial - None
Federal - None

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION
United Church of Canada

OVERVIEW OF THE VALUE STATEMENT

Historical Value
The historical heritage value resides in Mountainside United Church’s deep roots with the Methodist Church and then the United Church of Canada. The various mergers throughout its history contributed different narratives and artefacts. Its location on the western slope of Westmount, on a large property, bears witness to its early and sustained presence in this residential sector.

Contextual Value
The contextual heritage value resides in its urban siting, addressing The Boulevard and its large, open churchyard, permitting dramatic views of the complex from the south and east. Its imposing size establishes it as a landmark in the neighbourhood; however, the impact is reduced by the overall massing, in which secondary volumes form a base from which rises the volume of the sanctuary and bell tower. The churchyard is an oasis of greenery.

Architectural and Aesthetic Value
The architectural and aesthetic heritage value resides in its early 20th century interpretation of neo-Gothic themes, married to those of the Arts and Crafts movement. The rough stonework, the crisp carvings and the large stained glass windows animate the facades. In the interior, the neo-Gothic vocabulary is again woven with the language of the Arts and Crafts. The quality of the functional design, the material palette and the craftsmanship are notable everywhere and there is a high degree of authenticity and integrity. The complex is the result of work by two architectural offices: the parish hall by the American architectural firm of Badgley and Nicklas and the church by the Canadian architect and theorist, Hugh Jones.

Spiritual and Community Value
The spiritual and community heritage value resides in the soaring volume of the sanctuary and the quality of light filtering through the enormous stained glass windows. It is supplemented by the religious and commemorative themes of the windows, and in the consistency of much of the liturgical furnishings and fittings. It has been a United Church place of worship and community since 1927.
SITING
Mountainside United Church is located in the north-west sector of Westmount, on the south-west flank of Westmount Mountain. The building occupies a large sloping lot along The Boulevard, between Roslyn and Lansdowne Avenues. The area is primarily composed of single-family homes with flat or gable roofs, generally two storeys in height. A parking lot occupies part of the site, accessed off Lansdowne Avenue.

DESCRIPTION
The property is composed of two buildings: the church (A) and an adjacent building “Leslie Hall” (B), which was the first to be built on the site. The presbytery (C) no longer belongs to the church. These two constructions only occupy a portion of the very large site.

The church was built between 1925 and 1927, in a Gothic Revival style, influenced by the Arts and Crafts language and ethos. The building has a reinforced concrete structure, with a softly rusticated Credit Valley sandstone cladding. Trim elements are in Indiana limestone. The original roof was framed with steel trusses and clad in Toncan metal, a rust-resistant iron sheeting developed as a proprietary product by the Republic Steel Corporation.

FAITH AND COMMUNITY LIFE
Mountainside United Church is a place of worship and a member of the United Church of Canada. This Christian denomination is the largest Protestant group in Canada. It was formed in 1925 from a merger of several Protestant churches. The head of the church is the Moderator, who is elected for a three year term. Ministers can be either lay or ordained. There is no restriction as to gender, age, marital status or sexual orientation, either for ministry or for adherents. The United Church believes in the centrality of the Bible in Christian faith and worship. However, it does not believe in its literalness, taking instead a historical-critical method for interpretation and understanding. The two sacraments of the church are communion and baptism, including infant baptism, which leads to informed communion at about age 13. As part of its mission, the church provides religious ceremonies, community and charitable activities.

GOVERNANCE
Mountainside United Church is a congregation within the Quebec Presbytery of the United Church of Canada. The governing board (Session) is composed of 14 members. The church is financially autonomous. Donations, endowment fund income, community and religious institution rentals are used for cost recovery.

RELEVANT DATES
1912-1914
Construction of Leslie Hall
(the first construction of the Dominion Methodist Church)
1927
Opening of the Dominion-Douglas United Church (now called Mountainside United Church)
1927
Installation of the organ and the stained-glass windows
c.1964-1965
Installation of the doorway leading to the Leslie Hall
Modification of the interior of the church: addition of sanitary facilities, partitions and doors
1985-86
Construction of St. Andrew’s Chapel, on the lower floor of the church
1990
Modifications to the Sanctuary
1994
Installation of a new organ and interior refit
2001
Roof repair
2006
Restoration of the windows
2007
Sale of the presbytery, converted as a residential building
HISTORICAL VALUE

DESCRIPTION

Mountainside United Church as Part of the Development on the Western Slope of Westmount Mountain
By 1906, the north-west sector of Westmount was subdivided into lots and the current street pattern laid out. Access to public transportation along The Boulevard and the increasing popularity of the private car meant that the area was no longer isolated. The opening of Roslyn School in 1908 provided further incentive for families. The relocation of the Dominion Methodist church to the site in 1912-1914 is consistent with a church following its membership. The size of the lot is an indication of how early on the church bought its land.

Leslie Hall as the First Church Building on the Site
Leslie Hall was built in 1912-1914 as the first construction of the Dominion Methodist Church. Further building was halted by World War I and then by a lack of funds. Leslie Hall maintains its original secondary function, as a parish hall, for community activities and Sunday School.

Mountainside United Church Coincident with the Founding of the United Church of Canada
The United Church of Canada (UCC) was formed in 1925 through the amalgamation of four Protestant churches: the Methodist Church of Canada, the Union Congregationalists of Ontario and Quebec, about 60-70% of the Presbyterian Churches and the western-based Association of Local Union Churches. The UCC remains the largest Protestant church in Canada. In 1925, two Montreal Methodist churches merged: the Dominion and the Douglas. Shortly after their coming together, the new congregation joined the UCC. Mountainside United Church is one of the first United Churches to be built.

Mountainside United Church: Many Congregations Merged Together
The current Mountainside United Church is the result of the amalgamation of several congregations: Dominion Methodist and Douglas Methodist (1925), Emmanuel Congregational (1948) and Melville Presbyterian, which became St. Andrew’s United (1985). In 2004, the Erskine-American (itself a merged congregation of two Presbyterian churches) joined. This provoked the final name change in 2005, the 80th anniversary of both the creation of the Dominion-Douglas congregation and the founding of the United Church of Canada.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

- The continued presence of the two constructions on the property, both of which retain a high degree of integrity: Leslie Hall, 1914; The Mountainside Church (formerly Dominion-Douglas Church), 1925.
- The artefacts brought by each successive merger, representing in physical form the rich evolution of the site (such as memorial plaques).
- Memorial themes of the stained glass windows.
- The continual use of the property for community worship and activities.
CONTEXTUAL VALUE

DESCRIPTION

A Landmark in the Neighbourhood
Mountainside United Church is a landmark in the north-west sector of Westmount, due to its setting on the flank of the mountain, its imposing volumes and substantial size, in contrast to the two-storey residential properties which surround it.

Its position on The Boulevard, and the generous surrounding lawn afford sweeping views of the church from many vantage points. With the exception of the view looking north from the south-west corner of the site along Roslyn Avenue, these views have remained unchanged since 1927. The view plane from the lookout on Upper Roslyn is also unobstructed and the picturesque roofline of the church is a notable element in the view towards the river.

Despite the constraints imposed by the construction of Leslie Hall, the church integrates well into its site; the plan takes advantage of the 6 m (20 ft) drop in elevation along the length of the site to provide separate entrances to the community hall and the narthex.

The Church and its Picturesque Setting
The property of Mountainside United Church is in a park-like setting. There is an extensive lawn, with trees and shrubbery, on the west side and to a lesser extent, on the east side.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

- Its location on the flank of Westmount Mountain, which provides views of the church from different vantage points.
- Its imposing volumes, including the sanctuary and bell-tower and secondary ones of porches and smaller volumes.
- Its integration into the sloping site and its numerous points of entry in response to this dynamic.
- Its porosity, through its several entrances, which in consequence, mitigate its fortress-like appearance.

The generous vegetative cover on the property, the mature trees, the extensive lawn between The Boulevard, Roslyn and Lansdowne Avenues, all of which contribute to the picturesque setting.
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (1/4)

DESCRIPTION

A Substantial Church Complex
Mountainside United Church is made up of two distinct constructions: 1914 Leslie Hall and 1927 Dominion-Douglas Church.

Leslie Hall was designed by the Cleveland Ohio architectural firm of Badgley and Nicklas. An architectural perspective drawing is in the possession of the church. It shows the intended complex: the hall was designed to be attached to a Gothic Revival church, more traditional in its massing and early English Gothic language than the church which was completed 13 years later.

Leslie Hall itself is a squat, two-storey building. Clad in ashlar Indiana limestone, with a rusticated stone base, the architectural detailing is restrained. Only buttresses and an entry porch reference the neo-Gothic style planned for the main church. Consistent with its intended secondary purpose, Leslie Hall presents a modest face to the street, giving little indication of the quantity and quality of the rooms within. The architectural interest of the building lies in its two-storey hall, capped by a clerestory band of art glass windows and the Arts and Crafts detailing of the woodwork. Despite it having been designed to be attached to a different church, integrates well with the present church, presenting a coherent whole.

A Substantial Church Building
Mountainside United Church is notable for its imposing volumes, complex massing and early 20th century Gothic Revival language. The main façade, on the Boulevard, offers a complex and asymmetrical play of volumes and a stark crispness to the detailing. The distinctive bell tower is placed beside the north transept.

The structure of the building is in reinforced concrete. The exterior walls are clad in Credit Valley sandstone, with Indiana limestone trim and carvings. This latter material references the 1914 Sunday School which is faced in the same stone.

The main roof of the Sanctuary was originally clad in Toncon metal, a proprietary metal roofing developed for its anti-rust properties.

The Sanctuary has a central nave with shallow transepts and vestigial side aisles. Its interior decoration follows the austere, non-figurative traditions of the founders of the United Church of Canada. The plain plaster walls are embellished with cast-stone trim; the ceilings in the nave and chancel are in dark-stained oak, in coffered or beamed patterns. This simple, durable and sober palette is used throughout the other rooms in the building.

Of note are the secondary spaces: the narthex and the Saint Andrew’s Chapel, which was built in 1985-86 when St-Andrew’s United Church amalgamated with the Dominion Douglas Church. Stained glass windows designed in the 1960s by noted glass artist, Theo Lubbers, were relocated from the Cote St. Antoine sanctuary, and incorporated into the chapel. The radiating wood ceiling also contains recuperated materials.
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (2/4)

The liturgical furniture, in elaborately carved fumed oak, counterpoints the severity of the space. The original colour scheme was carefully balanced between cool and warm tones, and integrated the warmth of the fumed oak woodwork with the gold treatment found on the chancel ceiling and the light fixtures.

In 1994, subtle modifications were made to allow the Sanctuary to function as multi-purpose space, primarily for concerts. The Chancel remains the focus of the room.

A Building by a Well-known Canadian Architect
The architects of record were Jones Wood Marshall. No other work is known about the firm, and it may have been formed only for this commission. In the Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada article (Vol. IV, October 1927) which highlights the church in detail, credit is taken only by Hugh Griffith Jones, R.C.A, F.R.I.B.A (1872-1947).

As the assistant chief architect to the Canadian Pacific Railway, Hugh Jones was one of the three architects credited with the design of Union Station, Toronto. He was also an accomplished planner and painter.

A Gothic Revival Building
The design is inspired by the Gothic Revival architecture of the early 20th century in North America, influenced by the sensibilities and detailing of the Arts and Crafts movement, including the work of the American architect Bertram Goodhue.

A Building Reflecting an Arts and Crafts Sensibility
The following quotation by Jones demonstrates the dedication to craftsmanship and its design ethos: "Just a word about the detailing may be of interest. Generally but particularly in the pattern and section of tracery the aim was to secure variety and interest without having too much regard for consistency, style or period. Ornament was very loosely full sized in charcoal and every encouragement given to modellers to depart from detail and carvers to deviate from the models when they felt they could improve the quality of the work. The grief was considerable, but the result more than ever convinces us that it is only by encouraging initiative and allowing latitude to craftsmen in all trades that we can get away from a bookish hard quality. There is such a thing as too little Architect in the larger design relations, and too much in the parts of the work that are rightly in the craftsmen’s sphere."

Hugh Jones wrote of the importance that the stained glass windows had in shaping his design for the church. Several stained-glass windows in the church and Leslie Hall were executed by master glassmakers such as Robert McCausland Limited, A.S Walker, Hobbs Co, Lofengrin. Of note are the North Transept Window, known as the Gospel Window, or the Griffith Window, in honour of its donor and the South Transept Window, known as the Resurrection Window. It is noted that the window is placed so that sunlight at Easter time streams through it, into the Sanctuary.
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (3/4)

In 1945, two memorial windows to fighter pilots who lost their lives in the Second World War were installed in the Narthex. They were designed by the celebrated C.W. Kelsey. Stained glass windows originally designed in 1968 by the Dutch-Canadian stained glass artist, Theo Lubbers (1922-1993) ornament the St. Andrew’s Chapel, located beneath the narthex.

The Charles W. Kelsey Stained Glass Windows
Charles William Kelsey (1877-1975) - C. W. Kelsey was a prominent stained-glass artist, who worked primarily in Canada. Born in England, he trained there in the Arts and Crafts tradition. Kelsey arrived in Canada in 1922 and soon set up his studio in Westmount. He designed windows mainly for churches, but also for private buildings.

The themes of the church windows are either ecclesiastical or commemorative memorials to the dead of both world wars. Aside from those in Mountainside United Church, his windows can be found on the Montreal island, in the Anglican churches of Saint-George, Saint-Matthias and the former Saint-Stephen; the Ascension of Our Lord Church; the former Erskine and American Church (now Bourgie Hall, part of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts); Westmount Park United Church and St. James United Church. He also provided the stained glass windows for the Memorial Chapel at McGill University and the Chateau Frontenac Hotel in Quebec City.

The present organ, with its huge three-part wind chest on both sides of the console was made by Rudolph von Beckerath, initially designed in 1959 for Queen Mary Road United Church in Hampstead. It replaced a smaller, original organ and organ screen. The present construction blocks a portion of the west window and overwhelms the Chancel.

The lighting fixtures were custom-designed for the spaces.

A Well-Preserved Gothic Revival Decoration
Mountainside United Church is characterized by its remarkable authenticity and integrity. It has not undergone any major modifications since its construction in 1927.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Exterior features
- Asymmetrical play of volumes provided by the tall bell tower, various porches, and secondary volumes of the spaces that surround the sanctuary.
- Pitched roofs with visible roofing materials.
- Stonework of walls, early 20th century neo-Gothic detailing and crisp carvings influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement.
- Stained-glass windows, varying in size and location, generally with complex tracery motifs.
- Original doors.

Leslie Hall, view from Roslyn
Photo by: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

The seats for officiants
Photo by: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

The hanging light fixtures, a stained-glass window
Photo by: Bergeron Gagnon inc.
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (4/4)

Interior features
Neo-Gothic and Arts and Crafts detailing and elements throughout:

- **Sanctuary and Gallery**: Central nave with shallow transepts, vestigial side aisles, rectangular chancel and soaring, uninterrupted volume. Original interior decoration: gold decorative treatment on chancel ceiling; wooden ceilings – both paneled and beamed, plasterwork, cast-stone trim, wood paneling, cast stone, and ceramic tile floors.
- **Narthex**: Interior finishes (flooring, wood paneling, doors and frames, window frames, plasterwork, lighting).
- **St. Andrew’s Chapel**: stained glass windows.
- **Leslie Hall (Sunday School)**: All original finishes (woodwork, fireplaces, plasterwork and art glass in clerestory) and interior planning of rooms located around a central open space.
- **Furnishings and Fittings**: Liturgical furniture: Sedalia for the clergy, seating for visiting clergy, Elders’ Chairs, sittings for the Choir, the Lord’s Table (originally identified as the communion table), the lectern, baptismal fonts, balustrades. (It should be noted that the ornately Gothic Revival chairs for the officiants were taken from the Erskine-American Church. Only two of the original three were moved to the Mountainside Church.) Other furniture: pews, etc. Organ. Original light fixtures.

The organ console and wind chest
Photo by: Bergeron Gagnon Inc.
SPIRITUAL AND COMMUNITY VALUE

DESCRIPTION

A Plan and Furnishings Reflective of the Religion
The interior layout reflects the importance of community activities within the church. This is not a building solely for worship; it is also for community and for teaching. On the lower level is an assembly hall, with a stage and a kitchen, designed to host large gatherings. There is a direct connection to the Sunday School housed in Leslie Hall. This building contained a 350 seat hall, originally used for church services, pending the construction of the church, which was postponed until 1927. On the floor above, the sun-lit narthex gives access to the church sanctuary, originally accommodating 790 worshippers, in both the nave and on the mezzanine-gallery.

The decoration of the sanctuary is faithful to the United Church precepts of sobriety and simplicity. The primary elements associated with the religious celebrations are rendered in oak, rather than in stone. They include the sedalia for the clergy, seating for visiting clergy, Elders’ Chairs, settings for the Choir, the Lord’s Table and the lectern. These are all designed to be complementary to each other and together, to be the architecture of the chancel. The importance given to the Word of God is clearly expressed with the emphasis on the lectern. The position of the organ demonstrates the importance of music in the liturgy.

A Gathering Place for Religious and Community Activities
This house of worship offers various religious and community activities. Religious activities include regular prayer services, baptisms, weddings and funerals, as well as religious schooling. The church also hosts and supports several charitable activities, such as the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church of Canada; Montreal Presbytery; Montreal City Mission and St Columba House. In addition, a vibrant community life is reflected in the various activities offered to the general public such as Scouts & Girls Guides, the Jean Vanier Event, the fruits and vegetables collections, choir rehearsals and exercise groups.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Symbolic religious components

- Simple, austere interior layout; the absence of representation is consistent with United Church principles.
- Liturgical furniture, such as the communion table, pulpit, pews, baptismal fonts and the balustrades; the organ.
- Religious themes of the stained glass windows.
- Assembly spaces for community gathering and activities (Sanctuary, Assembly Hall, Sunday School).
DÉMARCHE

L’énoncé d’intérêt patrimonial est basé sur une visite de l’église réalisée en automne 2016 et des études ainsi qu’un groupe de discussion entrepris le 29 mars 2017.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE SOMMAIRE

Gubbay, Aline and Hooff, Sally, Westmount, Montreal’s Little Mountain, A Portrait of Westmount, 1979

GROUPE DE DISCUSSION

Le révérend John Forster, pasteur, Église Mountainside United
Don McLeod, président, fiduciaire, Église Mountainside United
Julia Gersovitz O.C., présidente, Conseil local du patrimoine de Westmount (CLP)
Clarence Epstein, directeur, Affaires urbaines et culturelles, Université Concordia
Caroline Breslaw, membre, Association historique de Westmount et CLP
Tom Flies, directeur, Service de l’aménagement urbain, Ville de Westmount
Myriam St-Denis, secrétaire, Conseil local du patrimoine de Westmount

RÉDACTION ET RÉVISION

Julia Gersovitz, présidente, Conseil local du patrimoine de Westmount
Myriam St-Denis, secrétaire, Conseil local du patrimoine de Westmount
Nathalie Jodoin, directrice adjointe, Service de l’aménagement urbain, Ville de Westmount