

THE MONTREAL HUB

THE HISTORIC CITY CENTRE, OLD PORT AND RAILWAY STATION DISTRICT



**Analysis of a group of Montreal heritage sites
by an expert committee**

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THE MONTREAL HUB

THE HISTORIC CITY CENTRE, OLD PORT AND RAILWAY STATION DISTRICT

Introduction

Montreal's strategic geographic location as the gateway to North America, since it was founded at the **exact** breakpoint for shipping on the St. Lawrence River, quickly earned it a key role as a **continental and Atlantic hub**. There are a number of heritage assets that clearly illustrate this role, i.e. the **historic city centre, the old port and the railway station district**.

Montreal's historic city centre, old port and railway station district are home to a remarkable group of buildings and facilities used for transporting, transferring and handling both people and goods. They are evidence of local innovations and important interchanges of influence with other parts of North America and with Europe. The warehouse-showrooms built from 1850 to 1880, for instance, prefigured the 20th-century Rationalist movement (like New York's cast-iron buildings); the functional architecture of Montreal's grain elevators inspired European modernism; the early railway stations proudly reflected the major architectural trends in North America, and another, newer railway station spearheaded an avant-garde urban planning phenomenon.

Montreal's historic city centre, for its part, is an example of conservation unique among the major cities of North America: the late 19th-century and early 20th-century downtown area is still remarkably well preserved, as an irreplaceable witness of the days when Montreal could claim to be the Canadian metropolis. The historic city centre has even retained the layout and some buildings from the old fortified town. Since the historic city centre was vital to Montreal's role as a hub, and moreover was its administrative centre, it is a crucial witness to a whole epoch in the development of North America, and hence of Western history.

Finally, and also related to the functional architecture of the transit facilities connected with Montreal's role as a hub, the City has a number of major examples of functional modern architecture, some of them true icons.

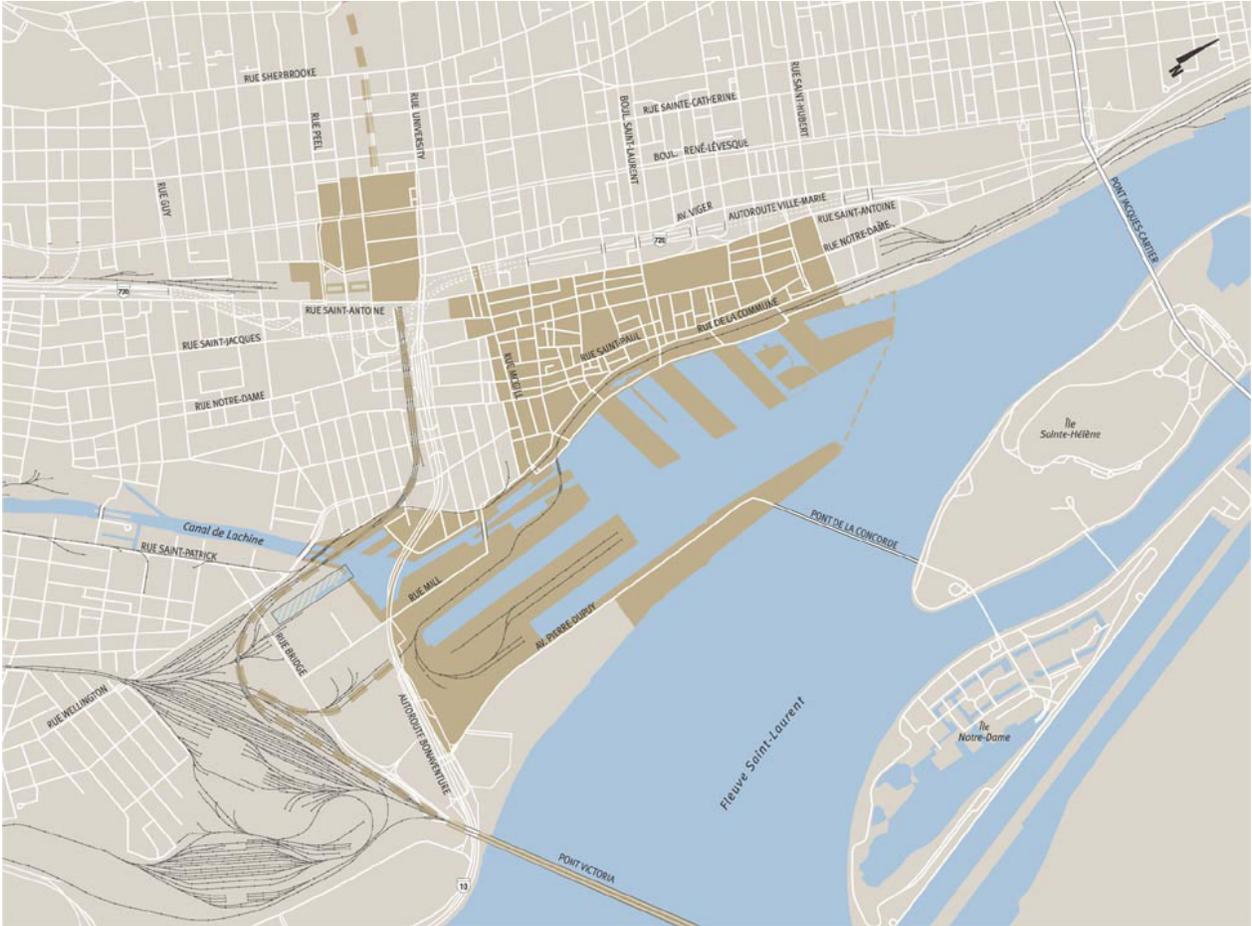


Photo : Denis Tremblay

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Montreal was founded in 1642, on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, at a site that had already been visited for millennia by Natives, located just **at the foot** of the rapids posing the first major obstacle to navigation on the St. Lawrence. • The **heart of the original town** was soon fortified, and became its **business centre in the 19th century**. The area flourished until 1929 and then fell into neglect, only to be protected and redeveloped in later years. • The **old port** and the **nearby entrance to the Lachine Canal**, bypassing the rapids, are inseparable parts of the historic city centre. Here one can still see the huge facilities built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in a carefully restored environment. The **Victoria Bridge**, the first across the St. Lawrence River, lying just downstream from the rapids, and the imposing **railway stations** speak of Montreal's role as a major railway centre at the heart of transcontinental systems criss-crossing North America. • One of these stations in fact served as the nucleus of a remarkable **underground pedestrian network** and led to the erection of a huge modern complex whose

main building, **Place Ville-Marie**, is an internationally recognized architectural symbol of Montreal. Facing it is another such symbol, **Habitat '67**, a huge residential development that has dominated the jetty separating the River and the old port basin since 1967. **All together, these buildings form a unique concentration of North American heritage, a reflection of Montreal's historic role as a North American and Atlantic hub.**



The Montreal Hub
Cartography : Dimension DPR, communication urbaine inc.

A DECISIVE BREAKPOINT OR WHEN GEOGRAPHY MAKES HISTORY

GATEWAY TO A CONTINENT

Montreal occupies a unique geographic position in North America: it was founded at the exact spot where the St. Lawrence River becomes impassable for ships sailing upstream from the Atlantic. The swirling **Lachine Rapids**, southwest of the Island, make it impossible to continue inland. Nor can traffic pass to the north of the Island, for the des Prairies and Mille-Îles rivers there are also blocked by rapids.

All this made Montreal a **gateway to the continent**, obliging Natives and early European settlers to make several portages to reach the regions upstream, via the Outaouais (Ottawa) River and the Great Lakes, and from there the Mississippi and the Prairie river systems, as they made their way to the Pacific.



Cartography : Pascal Dumont



The Lachine rapids



Cartography: Guy Mongrain

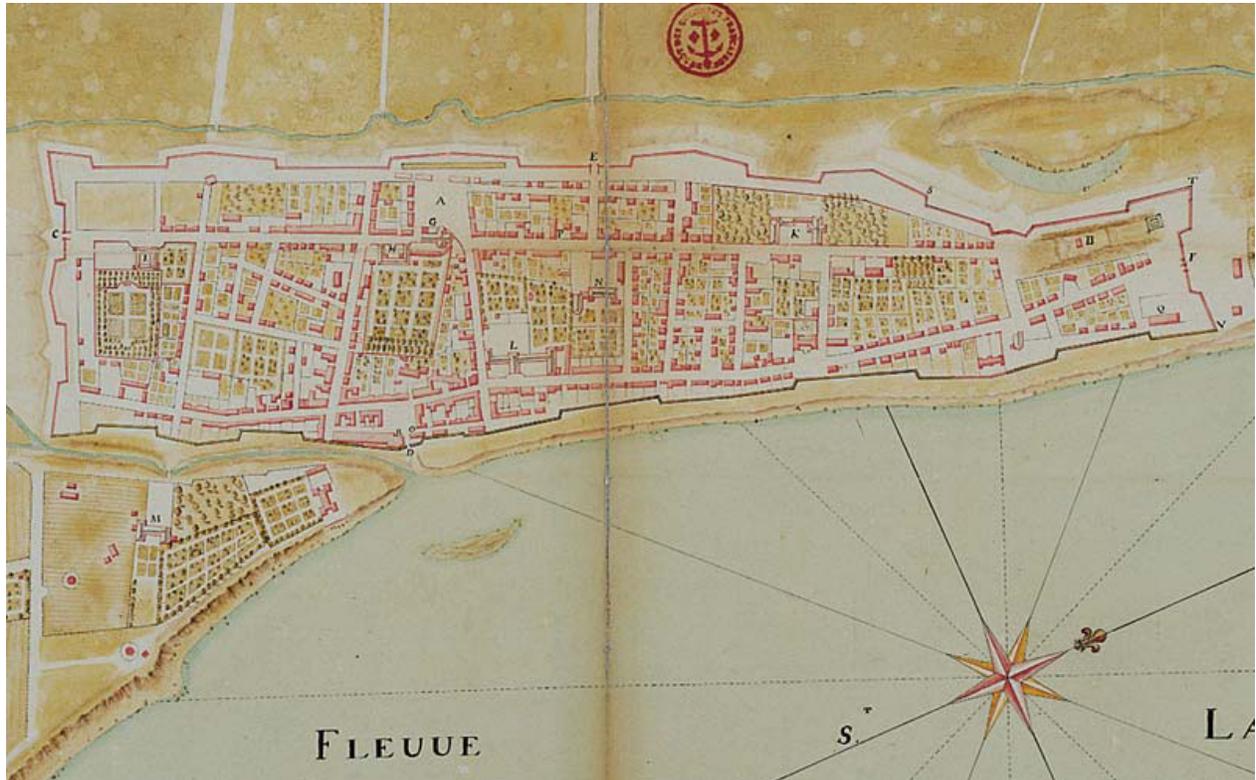
A NATURAL HARBOUR DATING BACK THOUSANDS OF YEARS, AND THE BIRTHPLACE OF A CITY

In 1642, the French who had come to found Montreal settled on the very spot where river traffic was halted, on a point of land at the mouth of a little river, the last natural harbour before the rapids. As archaeological artifacts show, this site had been known to Natives for millennia. Today **Pointe-à-Callière**, the Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History, stands on the birthplace of Montreal and houses *in situ* archaeological and architectural remains, making them accessible to the public.

SOON, A EUROPEAN BRIDGEHEAD IN NORTH AMERICA

Montreal was no sooner founded than it began building an economy based on the fur trade with Natives from the “Upcountry.” The town was fortified in the early 18th century, making it also a **military** bridgehead for the French empire in North America and a valuable **trading centre** for the fertile agricultural lands around it.

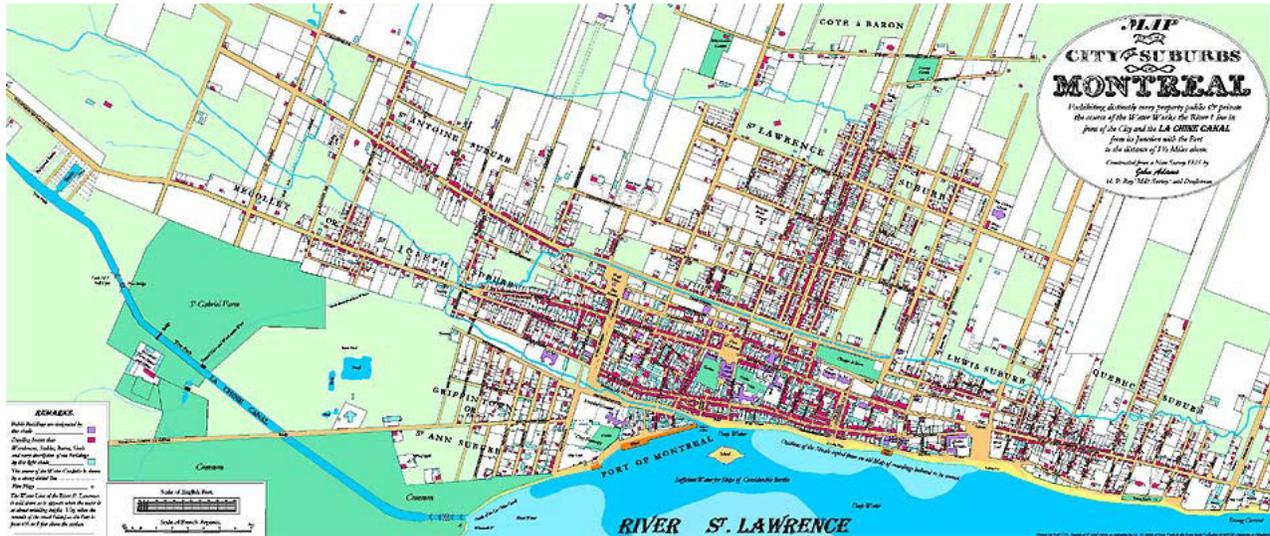
After it was conquered in 1760 by the British, Montreal retained its role as a fur-trading centre, but also struck out in new directions. As had been the case under the French Régime, everything traded to the north of the English colonies (later the United States), between the interior of the continent and Europe, had to pass through Montreal.



Plan of the town of Montreal, in 1731 *Plan de la ville de Montréal dans la Nouvelle-France, 1731*, by Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry, Archives nationales (France), Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

...AND LATER A VITAL HUB

The fortifications were torn down in the early 19th century and, since British imports had to pass through Montreal, the city became the main regional trading centre between Lower Canada (now Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario). Its role as a hub was confirmed once again with the opening of the Lachine Canal in 1825 (bypassing the rapids of the same name) and, not long afterward, with the building of harbour facilities. The growing number of commercial buildings was a clear sign of its important role.



Map of Montreal, by John Adams (1825) and Robert Sweeny (1999)

Map of the city and suburbs of Montreal (...), John Adams, 1825; reproduction computerized by Robert Sweeny, 1999

...IN CANADA

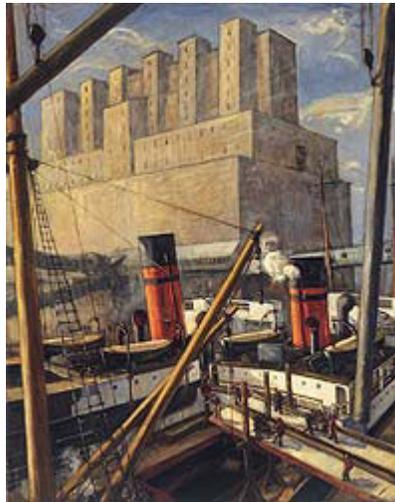
Starting in 1850, Montreal became industrialized, and rapidly grew into Canada's first industrial city. From the Atlantic to the Great Lakes, it also served as a **distribution centre** for all of the newly confederated Canada in 1867.

Around the same time, a canal was dredged in the St. Lawrence, so that bigger and bigger trans-Atlantic vessels could sail all the way up to the harbour. These were real boom times. The Lachine Canal was widened to handle the expanding inland shipping traffic, and the hydraulic energy it provided attracted all kinds of factories, which set up along its banks.

Ocean-going ships and inland transportation also came together on the steel rails converging on Montreal. The very first train bridge ever across the St. Lawrence was erected at Montreal. The Victoria Bridge created a direct link with the United States and with the Atlantic in winter (when the St. Lawrence was frozen), for freight and passengers. The city became Canada's main railway centre. Even the old city centre, itself a transit and administrative centre for both goods and passengers, underwent a radical transformation.



Montreal harbour in 1872
Montreal harbour from Custom House, QC, c. 1872,
photographer: Alexander Henderson. Notman Photographic
Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.
MP-0000-1452.53



Montreal harbour, 1924, by Adrien Hébert
Musée du Québec; Jean-Guy Kéroauc, photographer

...ACROSS THE CONTINENT

During the 1880s, the Prairies, and later the West coast of Canada, were connected by rail with Montreal, which now openly billed itself as Canada's metropolis. Two Montreal companies eventually managed to create uninterrupted routes all the way to the Pacific coast, accomplishing this feat ahead of all other North American railways systems of the time (in the United States, transfers were still needed to get goods and passengers across the continent). Huge continental **railway stations** were built in Montreal to serve the new Canadian rail systems.

At the turn of the 20th century, the port once again saw new development, as gigantic facilities were built to handle Western grain shipments.

Very close by, in the old city centre, Canada's **Wall Street** had gradually taken shape in the 19th century, and now St. James Street (also known as Saint-Jacques) took on considerable importance at the dawning of the 20th century. Meanwhile, a new downtown was springing up where the train tracks had been extended to the more affluent part of the upper town, near Mount Royal.

Canadian Pacific, owner of the first true North American transcontinental railway, established its head office there. By 1903, the company had a fleet of transatlantic ships and another fleet in the Pacific, making it the only railway company in North America with a transcontinental system. Europe, North and South America and Asia were now linked through Montreal.

...AND IN THE MODERN WORLD

In Montreal as elsewhere, the post-war period brought an unprecedented development boom—indeed, it could be seen from the late 1930s on, in the new downtown, with the construction of a modern railway station. Once again, the railways had proved a valuable motor of development and innovation. In 1967, the city also proudly showed its modern face to the world, with Expo 67, the universal exposition, set on and in the St. Lawrence.



The CN complex under construction, in 1946
Montreal's Central Station, looking north, Montreal, Quebec, 1946, photographer unknown.
Canadian National collection, No. CN000148, Canadian Museum of Science and Technology

This spectacular concentration of urban heritage sites, an eloquent illustration of Montreal's role as a continental hub, is unique in its compact nature, more so than in any other North American metropolis. This is for two reasons. First of all, the city is located precisely at the breakpoint for shipping traffic, unlike New York, Boston, Philadelphia or Baltimore. In addition, Montreal never became a megalopolis like New York, so its major facilities were confined to a relatively small area.

We give a brief description of the different components of the groups of sites, beginning with **Old Montreal**, a historic district classified by the Quebec government, and corresponding to the historic city centre, the very site of the fortified 18th-century town.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Aerial photo of Old Montreal. City of Montreal



La Presse, photographer: Pierre McCann

FROM PREHISTORIC OCCUPATION TO PRE-INDUSTRIAL TRANSIT POINT

There are still many traces showing that the site chosen by the city's founders had long been a Native stopping-place and occasional settlement. In the crypts of the museums in Old Montreal, flint arrowheads and stone tools, among other artifacts, are evidence that material goods were used and traded here, often brought from far away. At Pointe-à-Callière, visitors can see the archaeological remains of the first Catholic cemetery and sections of the early 18th-century fortifications. In the Champ-de-Mars, a long section of the foundations of the fortifications is visible: the fortified town gave France, and later England, a valuable logistical base for the continent. The vaults of the Château Ramezay, the building used by the Compagnie des Indes occidentales for its fur exports, are another reminder of 18th-century Montreal.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

The *store-residences* dating from pre-industrial Montreal, (with the store on the ground floor and living quarters upstairs) from the 18th and early 19th centuries, warehouses, the Custom House dating from 1836 and the Bonsecours Market, opened in 1847, are all evidence of the extensive interchanges between Great Britain and Montreal, its Canadian hinterland. Facilities and buildings such as these, related to transport and trade, obviously depict only some of the activities conducted in the city, as the imposing institutional buildings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries remind us.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

WAREHOUSE-SHOWROOMS

The construction of warehouse-showrooms in the 1850s to 1880s, as Montreal was becoming an industrial city, was probably the most spectacular urban transformation to occur in the historic heart of the city. These large multipurpose, multi-storey commercial buildings comprised warehouses, showrooms, workshops and offices. There are **over 200 of such units** still standing in Old Montreal, often grouped together.

Their massive presence indicates the role played by Montreal at the time as the main Canadian distribution centre. Imports flowed through these warehouse-showrooms, as did a very large proportion of locally produced industrial goods, as well. Some items were manufactured there, too, including shoes, jewellery and certain chemicals. Many of them lined Notre-Dame Street, crossing through the historic city centre, making it a popular shopping street for Montrealers who came to admire the industrial goods in the windows of these new retail outlets.



McGill Street, c. 1870
McGill Street looking north from St. Paul, Montreal, QC, 1870-71, photographer: Alexander Henderson. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. MP-1984.47.30



Rue des Récollets, 1868
Alexander Ramsay's paint store, Recollet Street, Montreal, QC, 1868, photographer: William Notman. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. I-33462



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

...VICTORIAN PRECURSORS OF FUNCTIONALISM

Montreal's warehouse-showrooms, the epitome of functionality, offered a combination of great interior flexibility, thanks to their structures of wooden beams and cast-iron columns, and large openings thanks to the fine window frameworks, with traditional local greystone cut into slender monolithic blocks. This construction method (like the cast-iron buildings of New York and St. Louis, although their façades were entirely of cast iron), prefigured the 20th-century Rationalist movement, which saw form as a reflection of function. Architectural beauty was a product of this simplicity. Architectural historians refer to this as **proto-rationalism**. In Montreal as in New York, this structural approach would continue for several decades. Nonetheless, building façades would become more and more exuberant, inspired by Renaissance architecture and quite in keeping with Victorian tastes. Old Montreal has some superb examples of this style.

Even for the most austere warehouse-showrooms, architects were able to style their façades and roof lines to adapt the buildings to the surrounding Victorian streetscapes.



Caverhill building, 1866. Photo : Pierre McCann, *La Presse*



Urquhart building, 1855. Photo : Denis Tremblay

... AND DIRECT PLAYERS IN THE COMMERCIAL LINKS BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE PORT

Most of the warehouse-showrooms forming the “River-side” in the old port of Montreal have another public face, on Saint-Paul Street. This “city-side” façade was designed to attract customers, retailers and wholesalers from across Canada to see new products, and was always much more elaborate than the port side, designed for receiving and shipping.



Photos : Denis Tremblay
Aerial view of Old Montreal
City of Montreal



Photo : Denis Tremblay

These groups of warehouse-showrooms, fairly packed together and well preserved, are exceptional examples of the **transformations in business in North America**, and in Montreal in particular, from the **1850s to the 1880s**.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

A HISTORIC CITY CENTRE A RARITY IN NORTH AMERICA

Unlike most large North American cities whose historic central districts vanished after the Second World War, Montreal reserved a different future for its “old Montreal”: the new downtown, which began taking shape in the late 19th century some distance away from the old city centre (to the northwest, nearer to Mount Royal), would absorb most of the modern post-war transformations, thereby helping to preserve the historic centre. The area’s designation as a “historic district” in 1964 also secured it vital protection.

Strolling along the streets of Old Montreal, one can easily see how the street grid **inherited from the 17th century** has remained almost unchanged, as have extensive blocks of pre-industrial buildings dating back to before 1850. The vast majority of the large buildings erected from 1850 to 1880 are still visible, as are those built between 1880 and 1930. Here in the heart of Montreal is **the only nearly complete example of the downtown core of a North American metropolis in the early 20th century.**



View of Old Montreal
La Presse, photographer: Pierre McCann



The Grand Trunk and Canadian Express headquarters building, in 1924
Canadian National Railways Headquarters building, McGill College Ave., Montreal, Quebec, c. 1924, photographer: unknown. Canadian National collection, No. CN000667, Canadian Museum of Science and Technology

...CONCENTRATED IN ONE PLACE

This historic city centre has historically been inseparable from the port and, more generally, from Montreal’s role as a **hub**. The many buildings originally built as headquarters for transportation and communications companies are proof of this role. For instance, there are the former head office of the Grand Trunk Railway and the building of its subsidiary, Canadian Express. Canadian Pacific is also represented, of course, in particular with its express service, its telegraph service and its two railway stations at the eastern end of the neighbourhood, which we will discuss in the section on The railway station district.

The historic city centre includes an impressive number of banks, insurance company and trust buildings and head offices: the Royal Bank, Bank of Montreal, Sun Life Insurance Company and others. Even today, these buildings symbolize the power and far-reaching influence historically enjoyed by these financial institutions, and by Montreal in its role as a Canadian hub and sometimes even an international one.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

The city's importance in those days can also be seen in the number of factories in various neighbourhoods and the great number of other urban activities. The administrative buildings in the historic city centre are related to these industries, and to transportation operations.



St. James Street and the Royal Bank, in 1930
Archives of the Royal Bank, photographer: S.J. Hayward Studio



Photo : Denis Tremblay

...AND RELATIVELY UNTOUCHED BY THE MODERN WORLD

The historic district designated as “Old Montreal” in 1964 did not encompass all of the historic city centre: the current northern section, between Notre-Dame and Saint-Antoine, was not included. As a result, two projects with a modern flavour went up in the 1960s, in the spirit of the architectural style currently popular in the railway station district of the new downtown. This was relatively little in comparison with what happened to the historic centres of other large cities in North America at the time. Standing as a clear modern presence just to the west of the historic city centre is the Stock Exchange tower, dating from 1966, whose remarkable design by Pier Luigi Nervi creates a sort of modernistic bridge between the old and the new downtowns.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

THE OLD PORT AND THE ENTRANCE TO THE LACHINE CANAL

The old port and the entrance to the Lachine Canal, with their vast and spectacular grouping of transportation facilities, mark the meeting place of ocean-going and inland vessels, and the very heart of Montreal's function as a North American hub.



Cartography : Dimension DPR, communication urbaine inc.

THE OLD SEA PORT

Today, the port of Montreal extends for kilometres. Fortunately, as in the case of the historic city centre, it expanded without harming the older sections. It is this historic part, running alongside the historic city centre, that will be discussed here.

The “River-side” façades of Old Montreal face the old port, a reflection of the symbiosis between the city and harbour in the 19th century, as we saw with the warehouse-showrooms. On the south side, the Cité du Havre shields the vast port basin from the powerful current of the St. Lawrence and from ice. This jetty, originally called the Mackay Jetty, dates from the very end of the 19th century, when the construction of the huge piers began.



Plan of Montreal Harbour, in 1930 (detail)
Archives of the Port of Montreal



The old port, c. 1945
Aerial view of Montreal harbour, QC, c. 1945, photographer: unknown. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. MP-1985.47.1

The old port **today** corresponds to the complex that emerged between 1896 and 1914. Its huge piers, its sheds—some still used for their original purpose and others turned to new ends—, its mobile elevators on rails, its grain elevators and conveyors, and even the remains of a demolished grain elevator, are all examples of the scope and diversity of facilities at one of the **world’s largest ports in the first half of the 20th century**. The grain elevators and conveyors, still standing today, are among the most visible “mechanistic” elements of the time. We will return to them on The grain elevators page.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist



The old port in 1999
City of Montreal, photographer: Denis Labine



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

In the 1980s, Montrealers and the federal government, which is responsible for the facilities, decided to redevelop the old port to make it accessible to the public, while maintaining as many activities as possible in the port. A simple stroll around the site or a boat trip lets one appreciate the significance of the site.

THE ENTRANCE TO THE LACHINE CANAL

The Lachine Canal, opened in 1825, immediately became an essential link in the shipping network between Montreal, the Ottawa River valley and the Great Lakes. This network in fact competed with its rival in New York, the long Erie Canal, running from Albany to link the Hudson River to Lake Erie.

The mouth of the Lachine Canal is an integral part of Montreal's sea port. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ocean-going ships could traverse the locks to reach the first basins—one was even triangular shaped, to allow the great ships to turn around. In this way, goods could be transferred between inland ships, or "lakers," and their sea-going counterparts. Cargo could also be transhipped to railway cars.

Ships were repaired at the mouth of the canal, as is shown by a boat repair shop dating from the early 20th century, which has recently been carefully converted into office space for a high-tech firm.



Entrance to the Lachine Canal, in 1931
National Archives of Canada



Entrance to the Lachine Canal, in 2001
City of Montreal, photographer: Denis Labine

A VAST HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

In the 1960s, after the St. Lawrence Seaway was opened (near the other shore of the River), the Lachine Canal was closed and its entrance filled in. Later, as part of the celebrations to mark Montreal's 350th birthday (in 1992), the locks and the oldest recoverable components from the 1840s or 1870s were restored and made accessible to the public, along with the Old Port promenade.

Work on restoring the canal was still ongoing in 2002, as efforts continued to uncover most of the basins around the triangular section; a sort of *in situ* archaeological project, carried out as part of plans to open the entire canal to pleasure boating. Many studies, and much development work, have gone into making use of the rich archaeological resources, including the canal infrastructure, industrial water mains and railway equipment.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

THE GRAIN ELEVATORS

Located at the crossroads of inland and ocean-going shipping, just at the mouth of the Lachine Canal, the huge grain elevators, with their rail-mounted mobile elevators and their conveyors, form a gigantic machine for receiving and transferring grain from the West, by ship or railcar. This machine is still in operation, for while the huge elevator No. 5 is now unused, several neighbouring elevators are still working.



Photo : Denis Tremblay

AN EXAMPLE OF MODERNITY AT THE GATEWAY TO THE CONTINENT

The square steel form of the oldest part of elevator No. 5, built between 1903 and 1906 for the Grand Trunk Railway Company, was designed by the John S. Metcalf company of Chicago (Metcalf himself was a native of Sherbrooke, Quebec), a world leader in this type of structure at the time. The port also awarded the company the contract for elevator No. 2—a gigantic structure of reinforced concrete, the latest technological wonder in 1910. The remains of this elevator were conserved after it was demolished in 1978 and can still be seen.



The oldest part of Elevator No. 5, in 1920
 "Cornish Point" and "Admiral Cochrane," Montreal Harbour, QC, 1920,
 photographer: William Notman and Son. Notman Photographic Archives,
 McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. VIEW-19569

In 1923, when Montreal had become the world's largest grain-handling port, the famous architect Le Corbusier, like other great modernists, marvelled at North American elevators in his book *Vers une architecture*, and mentioned Montreal's elevator No. 2 as an example. As for elevator No 5, additions and expansions followed in 1913-1914, 1922-1923 and 1958-1959, and all the essential internal and external components are still in place today. While there are many other elevators elsewhere, this one is a particularly impressive and complete example of this type of functional architecture, at the very site of the gateway to the continent, in Montreal.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

RAILS AT THE WATER'S EDGE

The first large grain elevators in Montreal, steel-clad wooden structures, were built for Canadian Pacific between 1885 and 1887. Twenty years later, the Grand Trunk railway (later merged into Canadian National), built its own. These initiatives by the railway companies were a central part of a traditional and vitally important activity at the port of Montreal.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

The tracks of these great railway companies were laid right next to the elevators, sometimes even passing underneath. Mechanisms in elevator No. 2 made it possible to tilt the railcars to empty them.

Railway infrastructures became an omnipresent feature on the piers in the port and alongside the canal. The tracks and their related equipment—bridges, stops, switches, etc.—although not remarkable in themselves, are an integral part of the urban landscape and the port handling “machine.”

Today, the unused tracks and archaeological remains are reminders of all this bustling activity. But it is important to note that **operating** tracks run right through the old port and alongside elevator No. 5, abandoned now. This major line passes beneath the conveyors and connects the main CN transcontinental line or the Victoria Bridge, at the western end of the port, with the original CP transcontinental line at the eastern end.



Photo : Denis Tremblay

HABITAT '67

Across from the old port, in the waters of the St. Lawrence, on the Cité du Havre pier, stands an exceptional modern architectural complex.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

The Canadian cement industry suggested this innovative idea to the organizers of Expo 67, who called on a young architect named Moshe Safdie, trained at McGill University. He in turn worked with other Montreal architects and several engineering firms.



Habitat '67 under construction
Bâtiment, June 1967



Habitat '67 today
Normand Rajotte, photographer

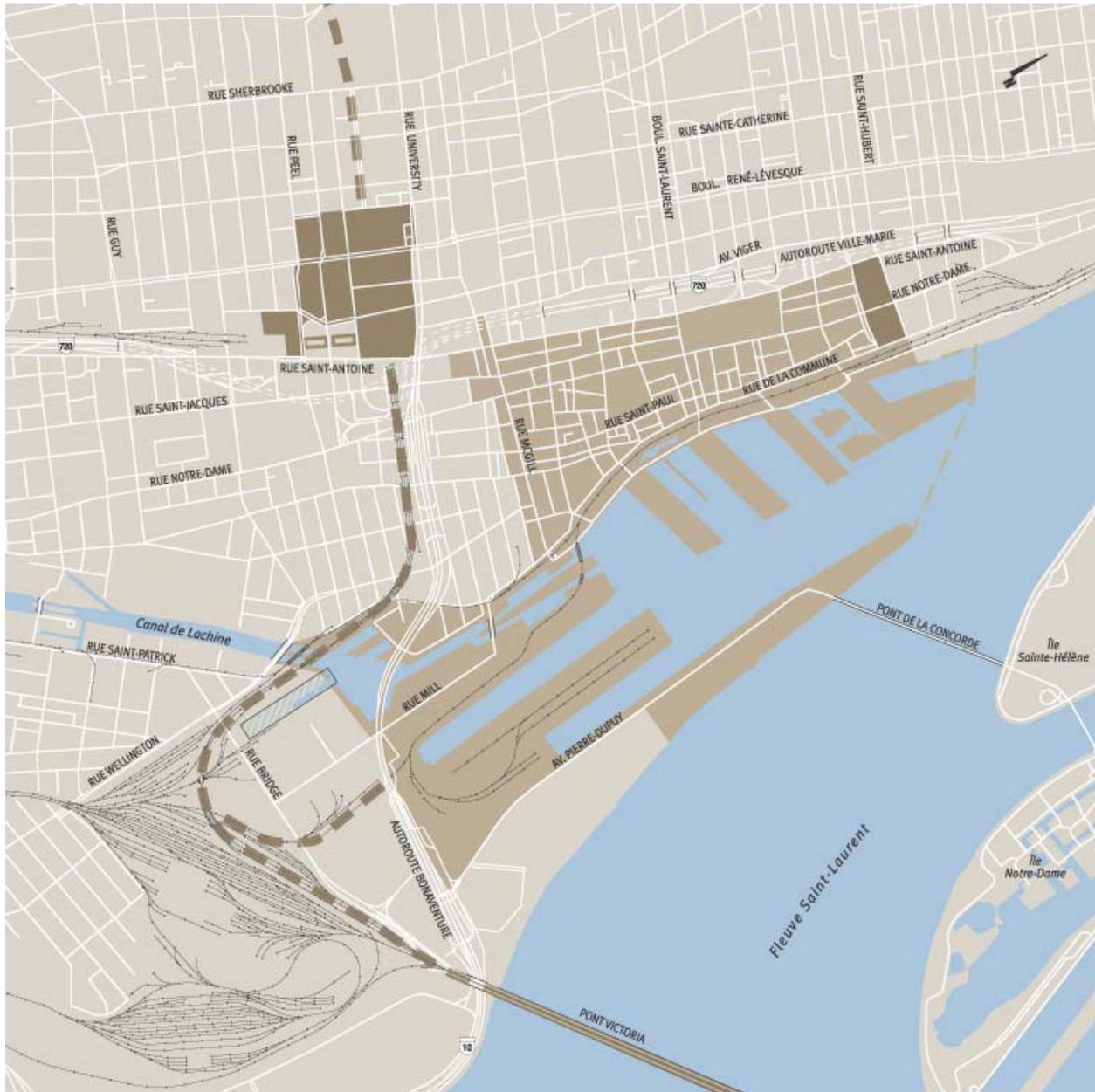
The building process began in 1965 and was completed in 1967. The final result was an indisputable architectural and engineering tour de force, one that enjoys worldwide recognition. Habitat '67 consists of a complex assembly of prefabricated concrete blocks, assembled on site. All in all, 354 boxes of different shapes make up 158 dwellings. Walkways on the 6th and 10th floors, with visible elevators, also play a structural role.

The project was marked from the very beginning by a strong desire to **innovate**, in both the approach to construction and the approach to living. Habitat '67, to use Le Corbusier's expression, is a unique "machine for living in." Indeed, the project very quickly became a **symbol** of modern architecture. Its concrete boxes, resembling containers, and its location in the port across from the historic city centre and the new downtown, show how a city that has always been so closely connected to its river has contributed to modernism.



Photo : Denis Tremblay

THE RAILWAY STATION DISTRICT



Cartography : Dimension DPR, communication urbaine inc.

The “railway station district,” both an onlooker and a player in the creation of the new downtown to the north of the historic city centre, with its two stations and their respective urban environments, is surprisingly successful at combining what one would expect to be the conflicting Victorian and modern worlds.



The railway station district, in 1961
Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec,
Direction de Montréal



Photo : Denis Tremblay

With the construction of Windsor Station, at the close of the 19th century, the city's transportation infrastructures and business centre began shifting to the more affluent upper town. Before that time, all the major facilities of this kind had been located around the historic city centre, in the lower town. To serve this upper town, tracks were first laid along an escarpment. Then, in the 20th century, other tracks were laid beneath Mount Royal, through a specially dug tunnel. Finally, a long urban viaduct, straddling several streets, brought the tracks from the southwest part of the city, where the Grand Trunk facilities taken over by Canadian National were still located. This all meant that ocean-going passengers were only a few moments away from continental trains: immigrants arriving by the thousands in the port, along with wealthy tourists travelling first class on steamers owned by CP or its competitors, simply had to transfer to the railway stations and board trains owned by the same companies.

A new downtown emerged around the two stations, one Victorian and the other modern.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

WINDSOR STATION AND ITS VICTORIAN SURROUNDINGS

In 1887, Canadian Pacific, just after completing the country's first transcontinental railway, began building Windsor Station in the upper town: the company wished to have a suitably imposing station in the new centre, where it could locate its head office. (Even after moving to the new location, CP would continue to play an important role in the port and the historic city centre, with its office buildings occupied by subsidiaries, and its Viger Station and Hotel.)

Bruce Price, the American architect responsible for Windsor Station, designed it in a Romanesque Revival style—one mastered by his compatriot Henry Hobson Richardson. CP then called on Price again, giving him the opportunity to create the “château” style that would become the company's architectural trademark, for instance with the Viger Station and Hotel mentioned earlier. Windsor Station was completed in 1889, and substantially expanded in 1900-1903 and 1910-1913 by Canadian architects. The firm of Edward and William Maxwell handled the third phase, which included a fifteen-storey tower, and managed to maintain the superb overall character of the building.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Windsor Station, in 1933
View of Windsor Station from dome of Saint-Jacques cathedral in 1933, Canadian Pacific Archives.

Among the thirty or so metropolitan railway stations in North America that have survived, Windsor Station is the oldest to remain intact, including the brightly lit concourse from 1913. The tracks, which follow the same escarpment as in 1889, now stop farther west and are linked to the station by a corridor. Nonetheless, the building remains one of Canada's heritage jewels, one of the best examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in the country, and an essential component in Montreal's role as a hub.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

...AND ITS GREAT METROPOLITAN NEIGHBOURS:

Windsor Station was built on the southwest corner of **Dominion Square** (today Dorchester), created some ten years earlier. This superb Victorian cityscape boasts a number of impressive commemorative monuments, including those honouring former prime ministers John A. Macdonald and Wilfrid Laurier.

BOTH RELIGIOUS...

Before the station went up on the Square, a new Baroque Revival Catholic cathedral was built close by. Although work began in 1875 on this scale model of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, designed by Victor Bourgeau, a well-known Montreal architect, it was not completed until after the railway station. Bourgeau specialized in religious architecture, but was also responsible for some particularly lovely warehouse-showrooms in Montreal.

While the Cathedral welcomed people from across the country for great celebrations, the delicate St. George's Anglican church nearby discreetly catered to its local congregation. The Gothic Revival church was designed by architect W. T. Thomas (who also has some warehouse-showrooms to his credit), who won a design competition held in 1869.

In 1881, writer Mark Twain visited Montreal. Looking out over the Square and its surroundings from his hotel room window (the Windsor Hotel, of which only a part dating from the early 20th century remains), he noted the many churches, most of them Protestant—leading him to joke at a lecture he gave that in this city “you couldn't throw a brick without breaking a church window!”



Dominion Square seen from Windsor Station, in 1922
Dominion square from Windsor Station, Montreal, QC, 1922,
photographer: William Notman and Sons. Notman Photographic
Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.
VIEW-6436



Photo : Denis Tremblay

...AND FINANCIAL

Between 1914 and 1918, the influential Sun Life Insurance Company, located in the historic city centre, had a new head office built on Dominion Square. The building, in the shape of a gigantic ancient temple, was expanded in 1922-1925 and then, in the same style, elevated to a skyscraper in 1929-1931: its style a tribute to the past, and its size a promise of the future. This huge metropolitan building stood as the symbol of the new downtown for a time. Standing near Windsor Station, it was even closer to the construction site for Central Station, where construction began at the same time.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

CENTRAL STATION AND ITS MODERN COMPLEX

To properly appreciate the resolutely modern and sober Central Station, inward-looking and surrounded by its fellows, we must go back to its origins and consider its ramifications.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

In the very early 20th century, when Canadian Northern built a trans-Canadian railway system to compete with the CP network, it needed a way of reaching the heart of Montreal. All access was blocked to it, however. Then, in 1911, the company surprised everyone with the announcement that it would be digging a five-kilometre tunnel under Mount Royal. It also planned to build a long viaduct in the southwest part of the city, with tracks in a trench extending to the upper town, where they would meet up with the tracks from the tunnel. There the company would build a railway station, along with an enormous office complex.

The tunnel was completed in 1916, but because of financial difficulties the company was able to build only a temporary station; the rest of its plans were shelved. In 1918, the federal government took over Canadian Northern, and in 1923, Grand Trunk. The new railway company it created, Canadian National (CN), decided to pursue and even expand on the project launched by Canadian Northern. It excavated a huge area, but the crash of 1929 put real-estate projects on hold. The viaduct leading to the downtown area was completed, however, as well as a new railway station (1938 to 1943), above the tracks. Cars and trucks were provided with separate access ramps, a distinctly modern touch. Inside, passengers reached the fifteen tracks via escalators from the concourse.



Central Station c. 1945. C.N.R. freight station, Dorchester Street, Montreal, QC, c. 1945, photographer: unknown. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. MP-1976.262.30

While other railway stations in North America are served by a tunnel or viaduct, Montreal's Central Station is the only one to **combine these two methods of access** and to be laid out accordingly. The most recent of the great metropolitan railway stations in North America is also the only with a **modern** spirit. Note, too, that it is still fully operational, serving both regional and national passengers.

Little by little, office buildings rose around Central Station. In 1956, CN agreed to a new overall concept, crowned by a 1200-room hotel, the Queen Elizabeth. Ground was broken in 1957 and the work was completed by the following year. Its architects, themselves CN employees, gave it a very austere style, with the accent on functionality, comfort and interior decoration. It was even air conditioned, a first for a Canadian hotel.



Photos : Denis Tremblay

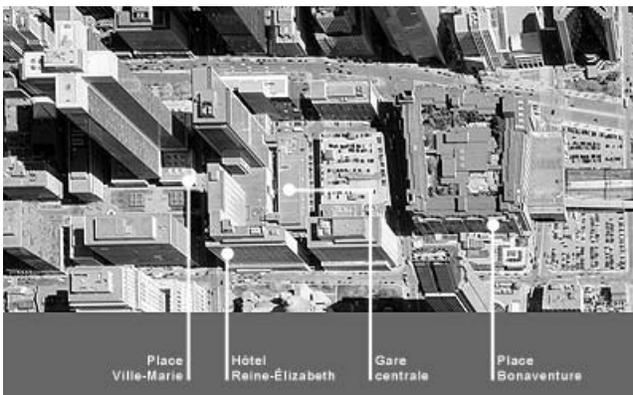
An integral part of this concept was an indoor passageway directly from the hotel to the Central Station concourse—the first piece in what would become **Montreal's underground pedestrian network**. The other buildings that rose around the hotel, and gradually enclosed the station, as had been planned in 1911, are also austere, even minimalist: the CN headquarters building, the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization, and the multi-storey parking lot serving the complex.

A PAEAN TO MODERNISM



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

By the late 1950s, Central Station was totally enclosed. Nevertheless, there were still two large gaps to be filled in above the sunken tracks: to the north of Dorchester Boulevard, created in 1944 (today René-Lévesque Boulevard), and on the opposite end, to the south. On the north side, Place Ville-Marie would rise around a new, raised public square. On the south side, Place Bonaventure, built in 1966-1967, would straddle the viaduct. In the latter case, the “public square” would be located inside. A huge cube covered with panels of textured concrete, it houses shopping promenades, huge exhibition halls, showrooms and offices, all topped by a 450-room hotel, and all linked to the underground pedestrian network (Place Ville-Marie, Central Station, the metro...) and sitting atop the **tracks** (railway traffic was never interrupted during its construction). **No better example could be found in North America of functionalist urban architecture inseparable from transportation systems.**



Aerial view of the railway station district
City of Montreal



PLACE VILLE-MARIE

Place Ville-Marie, with its characteristic cruciform shape and its vast underground shopping malls, crowns the complex begun in 1911, and was built between 1959 and 1962. The surrounding buildings were added in 1963-1964, and one was raised in 1980.

The architects of this remarkable modern work, backed by an American developer, were the New York firm of Ieoh Ming Pei and associates, who would gain international renown with their design for the Louvre pyramid, and the Montreal firm of Affleck, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud and Sise, who would also be responsible for Place Bonaventure. The focus of the whole project was a public square looking out over the McGill University campus and Mount Royal—an idea first proposed in 1952—that could be enjoyed both by pedestrians and by many of the guests at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel.



Main building of Place Ville-Marie, in 1961
Architecture, Bâtiment, Construction, October 1961



Place Ville-Marie today
Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec,
Direction de Montréal, photographer: Normand Rajotte

The shape of this 42-storey building, with its international style, had been used elsewhere but remained innovative nonetheless. This “modern-day cross,” a shape chosen on functional and economic grounds, would rapidly become a symbol of Montreal. In the same way, the searchlight beams sweeping over the city every night like some futuristic vision are an essential part of the Montreal imagination. The layout of the ground floor was an elegant response to the functional requirements of the Royal Bank, which took the opportunity to shift its head office from the historic city centre to the new downtown. Finally, the underground shopping malls that linked Place Ville-Marie with the Queen Elizabeth Hotel and Central Station would truly launch the underground city.

Today, tracks still run beneath the shops in Place Ville-Marie and into the Mount Royal tunnel, dug back in 1911 to give transcontinental trains access to downtown.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Photo : Normand Rajotte



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

HEART OF THE UNDERGROUND PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

As mentioned earlier, Montreal's underground pedestrian network, which began beneath the Central Station complex, took off during the 1960s when Place Ville-Marie was built.



Photo : Denis Tremblay



Underground pedestrian network. International Quarter

This initial core would expand considerably with the construction of Place Bonaventure. The metro, which opened in 1966, would extend it much farther still.

Here too, the transportation infrastructures criss-cross and complement each other. The elegant Place Bonaventure metro station, for instance, designed by Montreal architect Victor Prus, links the CN complex with the rest of the city and allows pedestrians to reach Windsor Station without venturing outdoors.



Bonaventure metro station. Photos : Denis Tremblay

Other cities have tried to construct networks sheltering pedestrians from inclement weather, but the Montreal system, the world's longest and best-known, with its kilometres of corridors and shopping promenades, has clearly managed to pull together all the right conditions to enjoy great popular success.

The underground city is still growing today. In recent years, a link has been added between Place Ville-Marie and shopping centres farther north, themselves linked to another metro line. Another recent connection gives access to the southeast, to the Stock Exchange tower and a new urban complex, and even to a gateway to the historic city centre, where pedestrians can stroll along the narrow streets, outdoors.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

TWO RAILWAY STATIONS IN THE HISTORIC CITY CENTRE

Aside from the railway stations in the new downtown, **Canadian Pacific**, a company founded in Montreal, has riverside facilities at the eastern end of Old Montreal.

DALHOUSIE STATION

Dating back to 1884, Dalhousie Station is Montreal's oldest standing railway station. In 1886, the first CP train to Vancouver departed from here—the very first transcontinental train voyage in North America, with no transfers, from an ocean port on the Atlantic all the way to the Pacific.



Dalhousie Station, in 1885
Canadian Pacific Archives



...today.
Photo : Denis Tremblay

THE VIGER STATION AND HOTEL

The very powerful Canadian Pacific, owner of an immense network of railways, cargo ships, steamers and prestigious hotels, after building Dalhousie Station (1884), the adjacent elevators (1885-1887) and Windsor Station (1887-1889), had the Viger Station and Hotel built (1896-1898) in the “château” style characteristic of its finest hotels—like the famous Château Frontenac, in Quebec City. This station, with its eleven tracks (now torn up), was the last of the great combination hotels and railway stations in North America.



Viger Station and Hotel, in 1901
Place Viger, C.P.R. hotel and station, Montreal, QC, c. 1901,
photographer: William Notman and Sons. Notman
Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History,
Montreal. VIEW-3175



...today.
Photo : Normand Rajotte

THE VICTORIA BRIDGE

In the mid-19th century, Montreal's location would have lost some of its importance if it had not had a permanent, year-round rail link with the Eastern Seaboard. The Grand Trunk, a British company formed with the support of the Canadian government to connect the Great Lakes with the Atlantic, would achieve the great feat of building the first bridge, a railway one, over the St. Lawrence River.



The Victoria Bridge under construction, in 1859
Centre tube and No. 13 pier, Victoria Bridge, Montreal, QC, 1859,
photographer: William Notman. Notman Photographic Archives,
McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. VIEW-7013.0

The Victoria Bridge, built between 1854 and 1859 and inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in 1860, was the crucial piece in the “longest railway in the world owned by a single company,” as the shareholders of the time boasted (the other systems consisted of small, independent railways). No less than three miles long, the bridge included 24 ice-breaking piers, for the designers rightly feared damage from ice, which would in fact delay construction work during the first years. The deck was a long structural metal tube made of prefabricated sections (from England) and designed by Robert Stephenson, son of the builder of the famed *Rocket* locomotive.

In 1897-1898, the metal tube from 1860 was replaced by metal trusses, common at the time. To minimize traffic disruptions, the trusses were assembled around the tube, while the tube continued to carry train traffic. The tube was then demolished.

The stone piers from 1860, slightly altered in 1897, still testify to the excellent original engineering. The Victoria Bridge is a key historic structure, one **still used** by the Canadian—and North American—rail systems, and remains a major contributor to Montreal's role as a continental hub.



Design : Claire Senneville, graphic artist

CONCLUSION

As both players and onlookers in Montreal's historic role as a North American hub, the historic city centre, the old port and the railway station district form a remarkable group of heritage sites, a result of Montreal's location at the exact breakpoint for shipping on the St. Lawrence River, making it a major gateway to North America. Better yet, because Montreal grew into a metropolis but never a megalopolis, this group of heritage assets is confined to a small area. In short, nowhere else in North America can one find such a well-preserved and highly concentrated continental hub.

REMARKABLE TRANSIT FACILITIES

Old Montreal, the historic city centre, has always served as a transit point, as the prehistoric, historic and pre-industrial remains show. The industrialization of the city, starting in 1850, and Montreal's heyday as Canada's metropolis, from 1880 to 1930, also left many tangible and eloquent traces: warehouse-showrooms from the 1850s to the 1880s, the Victoria Bridge, port infrastructures and grain elevators, and huge metropolitan railway stations. Finally, in the modern era, the city has not only successfully protected a large number of these witnesses of the past, but also created the last major North American railway terminus of the 20th century, and introduced a whole new type of urban transit system, an underground pedestrian network.



Photos : Denis Tremblay

Such a variety of transit facilities could not have been created in a vacuum. Montreal has always enthusiastically **exchanged ideas and trends**, particularly in architecture and engineering, with other parts of North America and with Europe. Montreal's warehouse-showrooms, for instance, offered an original approach, while in return, American and British innovations were soon imported and put to use in Montreal. Neither can the contribution of Montreal's elevators to the modern architectural movement be overlooked, nor the international example set by its underground pedestrian network. **Montreal has long been at the cutting edge of international innovation in terms of port, rail and transit facilities, and has often led the way.**

A HISTORIC CITY CENTRE UNIQUE IN NORTH AMERICA

As we have just noted, Montreal's role as a North American hub remains visible in its historic city centre. But the attraction of the old town also lies in its **exceptional conservation, making it unique** among large North American cities. While the 19th-century and early 20th-century buildings are symbols of the importance of Montreal's role as a transit point for goods and people in the past, the historic city centre also reflects the city's role in managing all aspects of the country's development from its main gateway—as evidenced by its early 20th-century financial centre.



Photo : Denis Tremblay

Historically, other major North American cities have played similar roles, and sometimes on a much larger scale— New York or Philadelphia, for instance. But in today's Montreal, unlike other metropolises, the modern post-war boom produced few changes in the historic city centre and the old port; instead, the downtown and the port both simply moved, leaving their earlier incarnations in place. The city also managed to conserve four of its five major railway terminuses.

GREAT EXAMPLES OF ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN MODERNISM

Habitat '67, whose modernity dominates the old port while fitting in seamlessly, is an **ideal international example** of modern functionalist architecture—the goal of this widely debated project, right from the outset, and one confirmed many times since in numerous international publications. Montreal's underground pedestrian network, which developed more gradually and organically, since it did not start from any unique initial plan, is another remarkable urban planning achievement, and one whose original nucleus, part of a railway project launched back in 1911, also deserves special attention. Finally, a number of imposing buildings are stunning examples of the **modern architectural movement of the 1960s**.



Photo : Denis Tremblay

We must stress once again that such a rare North American group of heritage assets could never have existed but for the city's particular geographic location, and must be seen in terms of that location, the primary cause of Montreal's historic and still very vibrant role as a **North American and Atlantic hub**.

EXPERT COMMITTEE AND DISTRIBUTION CONTEXT

Montreal has a rich cultural heritage that must be safeguarded and showcased to encourage current and future generations to think of it as their own and make wise use of it. The Société de développement de Montréal, with considerable expertise in the field of heritage and many years' experience in the city's historic district, asked an expert committee to assemble a group of heritage sites on the specific theme of Montreal as a continental and Atlantic hub. The group they suggested covers only part of Montreal's heritage, but it is a sufficiently coherent whole that the results of the study deserve to be released to a wider audience. The North American Conference of the Society for Industrial Archaeology is to be held in Montreal in May 2003, under the theme of *Montreal, A Continental and Trans-oceanic Turntable, 1850-2000*, and will be the ideal opportunity for distributing the results of this study. Since Old Montreal is an integral part of the ensemble, the www.old.montreal.qc.ca Website is the perfect vehicle.

The members of the expert committee, who met in the second half of 2001, were as follows:

Sylvie Blais, art historian, ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, Direction de Montréal

Dinu Bumbaru, B.Arch., M.A. in conservation, Program Director, Heritage Montreal

Anne Marie Collins, museologist, Société de développement de Montréal, Committee chair

Yvon Desloges, historian, Parks Canada Agency, Quebec Service Centre

Jacques Des Rochers, art historian, heritage and development consultant

Jean-François Gravel, architect, Department of Economic and Urban Development, City of Montreal

David B. Hanna, geographer, professor, Université du Québec à Montréal

Gilles Lauzon, B.Arch., M.A. in history, Société de développement de Montréal, Committee secretary

Jean-Claude Robert, historian, professor, Université du Québec à Montréal and Director of the History Department

Brian Young, historian, professor, McGill University

The Committee was established at the initiative of

Gilles Morel, of the Société de développement de Montréal