

Remembering Black Little Burgundy

Montreal's traditional Black community would have called the area "St. Antoine" but it is now known as "Little Burgundy." The community's history can be explored through the plaques, panels and murals commemorating Black achievement and the parks dedicated to celebrated figures. The tour begins at Lionel Groulx metro station and ends at Georges Vanier metro station.



1 Union United Church
Union, as it is affectionately called, has embodied Black Montreal's institutional life. In 1907, with Blacks

unwelcomed in Montreal's mainline churches, several Black women established Quebec's first and only nondenominational Congregational church, open to anyone regardless of their religion. With beloved Reverend Este at the helm, Union quickly became the community's soul and conscience, advocating for racial justice, challenging military and immigration policies, giving asylum to refugees, and leading African Liberation campaigns. Its stance in the global anti-apartheid fight led Nelson Mandela to declare that Union was his second home. Yes, Mandela, Blacks in Montreal would concur.



2 Charles Drew Park
African American Charles Drew invented the blood bank, which saved billions of lives. A 1933 McGill graduate, Drew became the first Black to obtain his surgical license. He practised at the Montreal General Hospital. In the USA he continued his research into blood plasma and transfusion. During World War II, Britain invited Drew to set up and manage the world's first blood bank. On November 30, 1994, Montreal recognized Drew's contribution to the world by opening this park.



3 Universal Negro Improvement Association
Marcus Garvey's West Indian movement took root in Montreal with Canada's first chapter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Linked to millions of Blacks worldwide, Montreal's Garveyites took great pride in the precepts espoused by one of the greatest Black philosophers of the 20th century. Garvey called for universal brotherhood, economic segregation, self-reliance, and collective action. The UNIA's Liberty Hall was THE centre of social, educational, vocational, religious and economic activity in St. Antoine. Not all Blacks followed Garvey's "radical" teachings, but until his imprisonment in the 1920s the UNIA was the preeminent source of Black training and leadership. In June 2019, Parks Canada recognized the UNIA's centenary with a commemorative plaque.



4 Jazzmen Park and La Passerelle
Jazz was the rage of the Montreal entertainment scene for decades, but like many aspects of Montreal's public life then, jazz was segregated in the mainstream downtown venues. In St. Antoine, however, jazz was inclusive: Blacks and Whites were welcomed and feted, and the drinks and social intercourse were mixed.

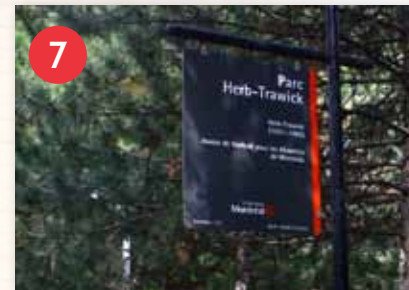
The La Passerelle panel presents a telling contrast to the free social mixing of the Black jazz clubs: these railroad lines eventually became a natural barrier to residential movement. By 1950, more than three quarters of Blacks in the district lived, played, worked, and socialized "above the tracks," rather than south of St. Jacques Street.



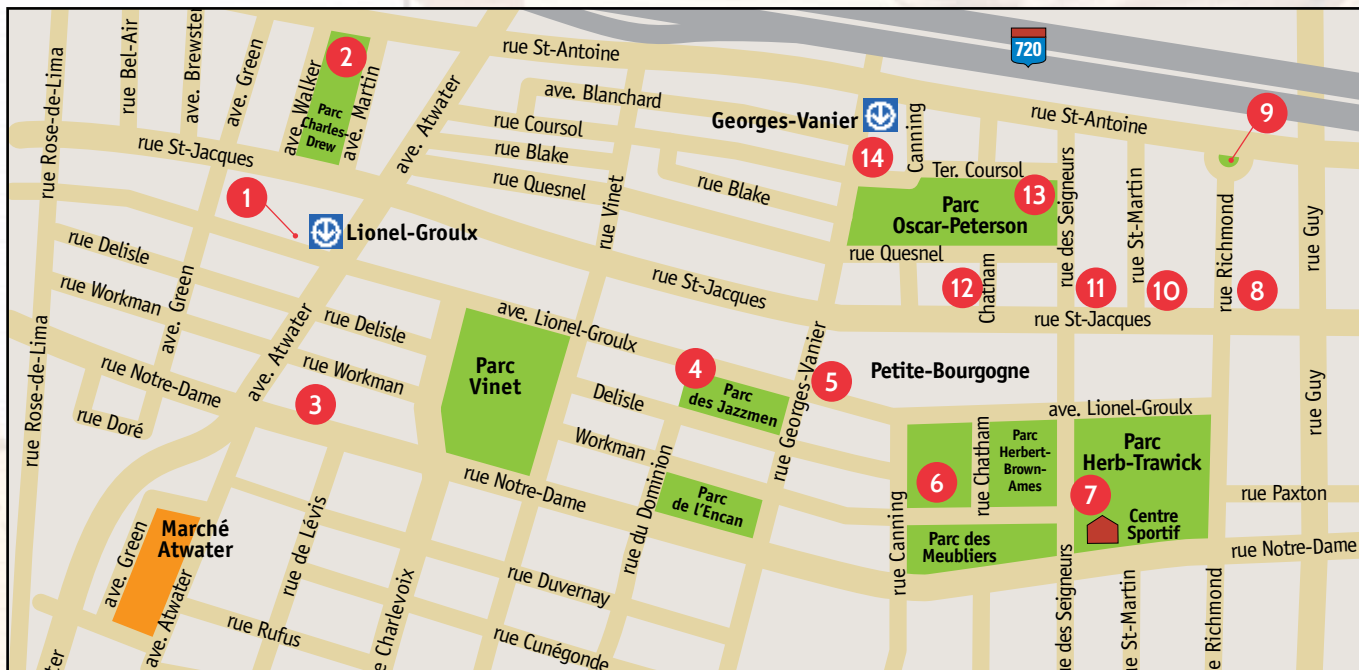
5 "Hommage à Oliver Jones" Mural: Dan Buller and Five Eight, 2014.
Virtuoso Oliver Jones has a big heart. The community Jones "gives back" to extends beyond Black Little Burgundy. He readily responds to pleas to put on benefit concerts for Montreal charities and other worthy causes within the Black community. Oliver was a local prodigy under the tutelage and mentorship of Montreal's great pianists, including Daisy Peterson Sweeney. His international touring career spans decades, yet his array of local, provincial and national honours speaks to his Canadian focus. For Blacks in Little Burgundy, Oliver remains in their hearts as he devoted much of his musical genius to their betterment.



6 Eureka Association Park
In the early 20th century, obtaining decent housing was a challenge for Blacks in St. Antoine. Though negrophobia was no longer official policy, anti-black racism persisted, leaving many Black Montrealers few options but sub-standard rentals. The Eureka Association was conceived to promote Black homeownership. In 1921, with investment from Black residents, it became Quebec's first Black-owned, for-profit realtor. By 1927, with 8% annual profits, it owned 6 houses in St. Antoine and was preparing to increase its holdings when investment dried up with the Depression. Acknowledging this milestone, Montreal designated this park in March 1994.



7 Herb Trawick Park
In 1946, Herb Trawick broke the colour barrier in Canada's professional football league as an offensive back for the Montreal Alouettes. Trawick made his mark first as a star rookie, then as a fierce playmaker on the gridiron. Like Jackie Robinson before him, he remained stoic in the face of discrimination and segregation on and off the field. Nevertheless, Trawick fell in love with the city, became a Canadian citizen in 1953 and ended his career as the only original Alouette player left in 1957. Hundreds came together for the dedication of the Herb Trawick Park on July 16, 1997.



8 "Hommage à La Petite Bourgogne" Mural: Roadsworth, 2016
It goes on and on, this block-long tribute to the lived Black culture in Little Burgundy. Here is a salute to the "Boulevard," once peppered with Black residents who made it. Yet one need not know much area history to read this mural. Its main motif is music: the instruments, instrumentalists and the gospel singers so widely acclaimed from this district. The vibrancy in the mural also comes from the play of the many railroad companies, the Black builders and porters whose industry helped to create and sustain the dynamism of the Black district.

Heritage Tour

Black Little Burgundy

This Heritage Tour was created as part of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network's "Diversity and Achievement in Anglophone Quebec" project, which explores the history of social and cultural communities across the province. The project also features "Your Story, Our Story," which is both a bilingual travelling exhibition profiling several cultural groups and geographical regions and a lavishly illustrated companion book. "Diversity and Achievement" reflects QAHN's ongoing mandate to promote the history and heritage of people in Quebec who have identified with the English language as first official language spoken, regardless of place of origin, cultural background, or time spent in Quebec.

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9
Jessie Maxwell Smith Park
 Jessie was a little lady with a big heart and a generous personality – just ask the multitudes of homeless she fed! Jessie loved children; through the years she fostered many. A community activist, Jessie took seriously the African maxim “It takes a village to raise a child.” In Westmount High School, students knew when Jessie was in the hallways, and when she volunteered at nearby Tyndale St-Georges where her children often went. This park came about with the sweat of military volunteers and local residents determined that this little green space would show their love for the small Black woman who stood tall in so many hearts.



10
“Hommage à Daisy Peterson Sweeney”
Mural: Kevin Ledo, 2018
 Go ahead and ask anyone old enough: “What do you remember of Daisy Sweeney?” They will recall a woman who gave over her life to music. With a wink and a nod, some would say she was better than Oscar, her brother; others would remember her care for the hundreds of children and grandchildren she trained. A piano teacher, Daisy worked with many families to instill values of pride in accomplishment, hard work and discipline into their children. Daisy believed that music brought meaning to life and her wonderful gift to the community was to nurture its musical soul.



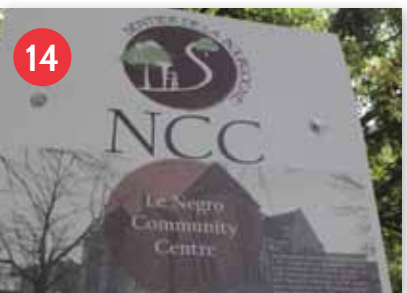
11
Oscar Peterson: “Jazz Born Here”
Mural: Gene Pendon, 2011
 Across from his namesake park, Oscar looms larger than life, covering an entire building's west side. How apt that this mural towers above all else, reposed on the western-most edge of the projects, yet facing the centre of Black Little Burgundy. This building, St. Martin's Blocks, began the revitalization of the housing stock in the southwest, which led to the decimation of the historical St. Antoine Black community. Yet, with this nod to the community's roots, the impressive Oscar Peterson mural faces what once was, and remains, the beating heart of Black life in the district.



12
Black Little Burgundy: Coopérative d'habitation Kamouraska
Mural: Coalition de la Petite Bourgogne, 2017
 Feast your eyes on the intricate visual details of this mural – breathtaking as it wraps around the front of the co-op building. The vibrant images arrayed give nods to so many key elements of the area's Black history and culture. Front and centre is that beautifully imposing locomotive, signifying how the railroad was the major drawing card for Blacks into Montreal. For decades, the Black porter and his family were the bedrock of this district. The mural illuminates the culture and institutions of the early community with joyful scenes of music and dance, including jazz and the praise of God through rousing gospel music.



13
Oscar Peterson Park, Seigneurs Street
 A mural was not enough. There was a groundswell of support to rename Campbell Park after the most celebrated Black person from Montreal. The “Maharajah of Jazz,” Oscar produced hundreds of albums and won scores of music awards and other tributes. His musical genius put Canada on the map, and he is celebrated throughout. Local residents did not forget, for Oscar was raised here and his humble roots have forever marked the area. Though he died in 2007, the enormous legacy of Oscar Peterson constantly breathes life into Little Burgundy's Black history and culture. A mural was definitely not enough.



14
Negro Community Centre
 It wasn't the oldest social and community centre, but to the thousands of Blacks and Whites who passed through its doors, the Negro Community Centre was iconic. Affectionately called the NCC, it housed a day-care, library, Credit Union, gym, performance space, music rooms and a kitchen that fed lunch daily to hungry children. Here one learned about government, social, and health services. Young mothers learned pre-natal care. Through the NCC, Blacks networked across Canada and the world. When it closed in 1989, there was disbelief. When the western wall fell in 2014, and was later bulldozed, only grief followed.



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