

Montreal History Project

A walk through **Griffintown** history
and photography by *Patrick Lambert*



The Fief of Nazareth



The **Fief of Nazareth** is the name given to 112 arpents of land granted to Jeanne Mance in 1654 after she founded the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Montreal, the first such hospital in New France. As the first nurse in the new continent, she worked closely with Paul Chomedey, the administrator of the colony, to ensure health services could be delivered to all the colonists and native Indians.

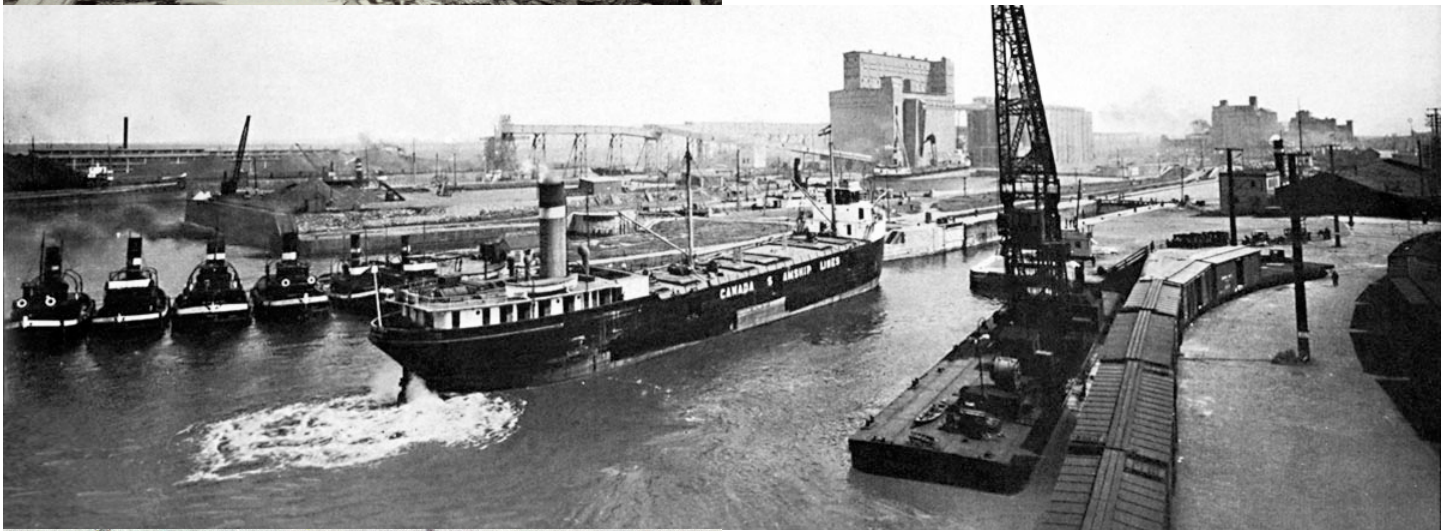
The land that would eventually become known as Griffintown was administered by her staff of nuns, the Religious Hospitaliers of St-Joseph, along with the hospital. Most of the land was used as farm land until the British arrived in 1760.

By 1791, the Irish businessman Thomas McCord leased the Fief from the nuns in order to establish some commercial areas, although the lease ended up being illegally sold to Mary Griffin a few years later by McCord's business partner.

The name Griffintown is retained to this day from Mary's last name thanks to a 1804 map she commissioned from land surveyor Louis Charland in order to turn the area into lots. Even though McCord won a court battle against Mary Griffin a few years later, the name Griffintown stuck.



Lachine Canal

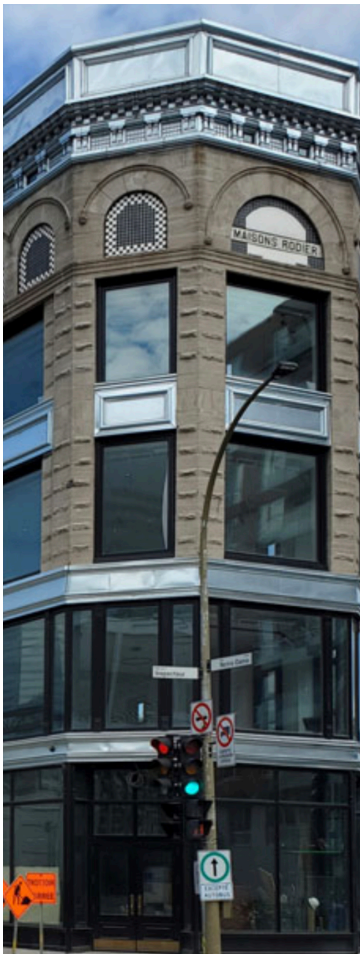


Griffintown was a coveted area from the very beginning thanks to the long-planned **Lachine Canal**. Plans can be found all the way back to 1689 for a canal that would allow trading vessels to avoid the treacherous rapids on the St-Lawrence river, although construction didn't start until 1821.

The original canal was 14 km long and 6 meters wide. It was enlarged twice in 1840 and 1873 to allow bigger ships to pass through. This transformed Griffintown into an industrial district with many factories being constructed along the waterway.

Griffintown was a working-class suburb of mostly Irish descent working along the canal and the conditions were fairly poor. Up to 6,000 Irish migrants died of typhus in 1847 due to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Many of the workers had fled from the Ireland potato famine.

The canal remained a major trading path until the opening of the St-Lawrence Seaway in 1959. Today it's used as a recreational and tourism area.



Rodier House

One of the most iconic commercial buildings in Griffintown is the **Maison Rodier**. This building is present on the short list of H ritage Montr al as a historical building worth preserving.

Built in 1875 by Charles S raphin Rodier Jr, a renowned businessman and politician, the entire building was renovated in 2018 in order to restore it to a usable state.

The Rodier House now hosts a co-working space for entrepreneurs, office spaces, a bar and a pool.

On the right we see the original building construction. Of note is a hay chariot pulled by a horse.

St-Stephen church and a hay market would be built just south of the building, as seen below.





St. Ann's Church

In 1854 **St. Ann's Church** opened its doors as one of the first major Catholic churches in the New France. Located at the corner of McCord and Basin streets, it remained a central location of worship for Griffintown residents until the building was demolished in 1970.

The church offered services in both French and English and it became an important symbolic location in the area. Many non-profit organizations were established in the church, and a school dedicated to St. Ann was built nearby. The area became known as St. Ann's District.

The size of the congregation started to dwindle after Lachine Canal was closed to trading ships, leading to the decline of Griffintown and other areas along the waterway.

Today a small park is located where the church once was, and the stone foundations can still be seen across the grass.





New City Gas

Built in 1847, the **New City Gas** company complex transformed coal into gas to light the street lights throughout the city. Now, it's a center for art, music and dining experiences.

Since 2012, the historical landmark buildings were re-purposed to host shows, events and concerts of all types.

MUSIC
ART
CULTURE
GASTRONOMY

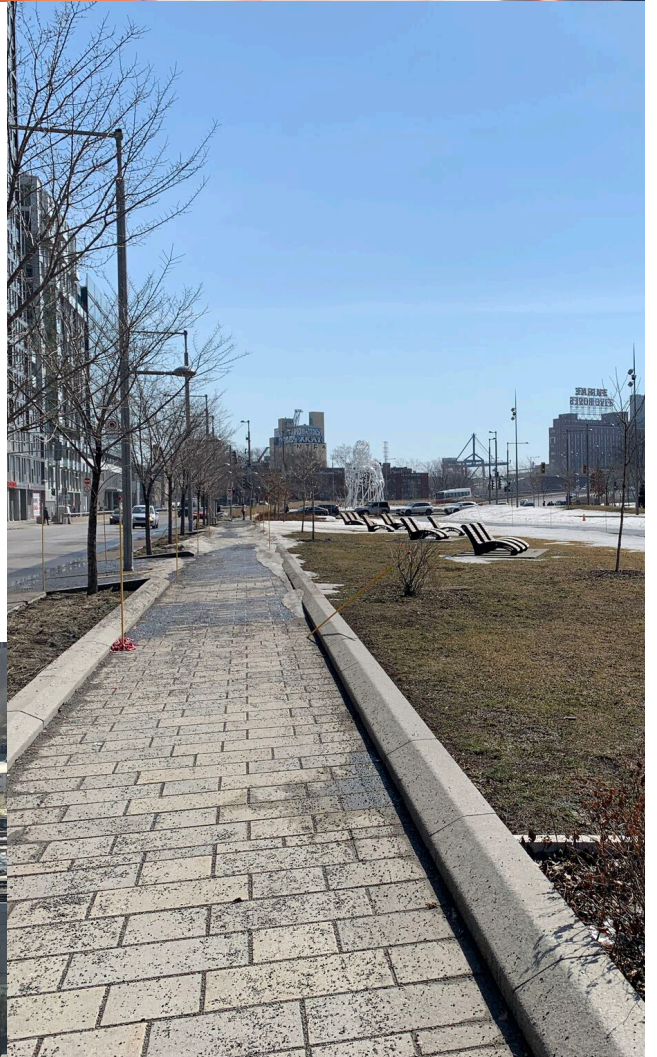


Dalhousie Corridor

The narrow strip of land along Nazareth street to the east of Griffintown known as the **Dalhousie Corridor** was the site of many transportation related disruptions over the years.

The elevated CNR viaduct was built in 1935 along this north-south corridor. The Bonaventure Expressway then cut through the district in 1963. In 2010, the city started a major revitalization of the area, adding elongated parks in-between the northbound and southbound lanes.

Finally, the REM light rail is the latest transport type to discover the area in late 2023.



Montreal's Master Plan

In 2002, a new **Master Plan** was drafted by the city with the long term vision for Griffintown, followed by a second set of public consultations in 2012. In the plan, the city announced 3 goals for the district:

1. Preserve the character and scale associated with the area's industrial past.
2. Intensify and diversify the area's activities by fostering the cohabitation of economic and residential activities.
3. Reinforce recreational and tourism uses in the Peel Basin area as well as the nautical vocation of the Lachine Canal, by taking advantage of the proximity of Old Montréal, the Old Port and the Central Business District.

Since then, many residential projects were initiated to transform the dilapidated industrial area into a modern sector. In 2005, Prével restored the Lowney Chocolate Factory buildings into 15 phases with over 1,700 condos.

Dozens of other modern constructions were also built, including condos, apartments, hotels, restaurants and shops, completely transforming the skyline of Griffintown along the canal. Over 20 different condominium towers between 10 and 20 floors have been built by 2023, with the population reaching over 10,000 residents. Several buildings are still under construction, with the entire renovation planned to last until 2025.

