

# Local history comes alive in Westmount's Hurtubise home

By P.A. Sévigny

Two hundred and eighty years after Louis Hurtubise built the house that became the family's home for the next two centuries, Professor Stéphane Côté made sure that the 20 boys and girls who make up his sixth grade class in NDG's *École St. Raymond* got to understand how their history is a lot more than just the time, dates and events that fills up so many pages in their history book.

"Take a good look at that picture," said CHQ (Canadian Heritage of Quebec) Director Jacques Archambault as he pointed out the picture of a farmer working the plow that was hitched behind a massive black bull. "That's how you plowed your fields back when there were no tractors."

During a brief power point presentation that described the home's (nearly) tri-centennial history, Archambault stressed that Canadian history owes a massive debt to the Hurtubise family who managed to save all of the family's legal documents ever since Jean Hurtubise first bought the property from the colony's Sulpician Order back in 1699 when the French regime was still at war with the Mohawk nation.

"You must remember that the year 1701 was a very important year for everybody in Ville Marie," said Archambault, because that's when the French signed 'The Great Peace' – *La Grande Paix* – the peace treaty that ended the wars with all of the 39 tribes that represented the Native nations in the St. Laurence River valley.

As three acres of the property faced the (now diverted) St. Pierre River that used to run through what is now Montreal's Sud-Ouest, the Hurtubise farm had access to its own water and now occupied a narrow rectangle that stretched all the way from St. Henri (below the Glen) up to what is now the Westmount Boulevard. Based upon the family's efforts to conserve census records, land deeds and all of their assorted legal documents (bills of sale, tax receipts,) related to the property, Canadian history owes the family a massive debt because their detailed archives continue to provide a coherent reflection of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century labor that defined life on the land in the new colonies. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the family began to sell off its land to developers up until the mid 1950s when there was nothing left but the house and its stables.

Following the death of Léopold Hurtubise in 1955, local residents who understood what the home meant for future generations rallied to save the property after which the CHQ was created to preserve and protect Canadian Heritage properties in Québec. Sixty years later, Archambault made sure that his audience got their fair share of fruit juice and cookies before he reminded them that "...it's your history, and it's up to you to care for it and to respect what these people did to build this nation."

"That was a morning well-spent," said Linda Simard as the entire class began to make its way back to school. As Simard is principal of the school, she was pleased to share the morning's tour with the children, and she hopes that there will be more tours for other classes in the new year. "These are the kind of school trips that combine classroom education with a real experience, and that's always a good thing for the child."