

## Le Vieux Montréal

The overhaul of the mid-town destroyed many old buildings, but not all. Not surprisingly, the destruction brought a reaction.

As the business centre moved uptown, the original



To save old cities one saves old houses and sometimes, for the tourists, old horses and calèches too.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century city along the waterfront fell on hard times. Rasco's Hotel, where Charles Dickens stayed in the 1840s, became a flop-house. The home of the nineteenth-century rebel and patriot, Louis Joseph Papineau, became a fish market. Other historic homes became warehouses, and hundred-year-old buildings were demolished for parking lots.

In reaction, Eric McLean, the music critic of *The Montreal Star*, took all of his savings and bought the Papineau house and inspired a movement. The city and the Province of Quebec designated most of the area that had been within the original town walls as historic. It is clearly that, since it includes such mementos of the past as the Château de Ramezay, built in 1705 by the governor of Montreal, and Montreal's oldest church, Notre Dame de Bonsecours, rebuilt in 1771 after a fire destroyed the original 1657 building. A commission named Viger, after Montreal's first mayor, was formed, and a law was passed banning any alterations to the old buildings without its approval. In its first show of strength, it blocked a highway planned along the river front. The city spent \$3 million restoring the old market, putting cobblestones in the streets and installing gaslamp-like fixtures on the corners, but by the mid-sixties, preoccupied with Expo '67 (the hugely successful World's Fair held during Canada's Centennial), it stopped investing.

The restoration is a qualified success — it is full of excellent restaurants, crowded discothèques, flower stalls and street singers, but it has few residences and no schools, parks or grocery stores. It is not a real neighbourhood.

## Jeanne Mance

The interest in old buildings took a more aggressive form in the summer of 1975 when the people living in 14 nineteenth-century houses on rue Jeanne Mance, south of Sherbrooke, began getting eviction notices. Instead of moving along peacefully, they collected thousands of signatures and formed the Jeanne Mance Housing Corporation. Their petition began: "We demand that the row of Victorian grey-stone homes on Jeanne Mance be left intact." It got results. The city denied demolition permits, and eighteen months later the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs classified one particularly ornate building as having historic value, which automatically barred the demolition of it and any other structure within five hundred feet.

After negotiating with the organized tenants, the federal government, and the city, the speculators who had planned to tear the buildings down sold out for \$780,000 to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, a federal agency. The city put up ten per cent, and the CMHC forty. The rest was covered by a CMHC loan.

The CMHC transferred the title to the tenants' cooperative, giving it a fifty-year mortgage at eight per cent. The buildings have been converted into sixty-eight living units, ranging in size from one-room efficiencies to an entire house. At the end of the fifty-year mortgage, the title will revert to CMHC.