



Montréal's Botanical Gardens.
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.

Brother Marie-Victorin, from the Brothers of the Christian Schools congregation, had dreamed since 1920 of giving Montréal a big botanical garden. He had tried to convince many political and scientific men, but it was thanks to support from one of his former students that the project came into being. This former student was none other than Camillien Houde, Mayor of Montréal. Houde admired Brother Marie-Victorin immensely and when he heard about the project, he dedicated himself to convincing the municipal councillors that Montréal should have a botanical garden. In 1931, the city administration gave the project its support and voted it a credit of \$100,000. Mayor Houde used municipal workers to create this huge scientific garden and so the project also helped to fight unemployment. Brother Marie-Victorin's dream came true.

Camillien Houde's accomplishments at the municipal level

Camillien Houde was elected mayor seven times. He was given the nickname "Mister Montréal" for this reason. 1928-1932, 1934-1936, 1938-1940 and 1944-1954: his mandates were not always consecutive. His first three mandates were for two years each which then, starting in 1944, became three-year terms.

Work and support in fighting the Depression

Camillien Houde was very popular with Montrealers because he tried to help the less fortunate. During the 1930s, while he was mayor, a severe economic depression shook Montréal. Many people were out of work and had no way to feed their families. In these years, there were no benefits for people who were unemployed and there was no such thing as social security. People who lost their jobs had to rely on family members, on charity, to survive.

Camillien Houde tried to alleviate poverty by having the unemployed undertake public works projects. The city also distributed "direct help," an allowance that made it possible for people without work to feed themselves and pay for heating.

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Dining room at the Meurling shelter during the Depression of the 1930s.
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.



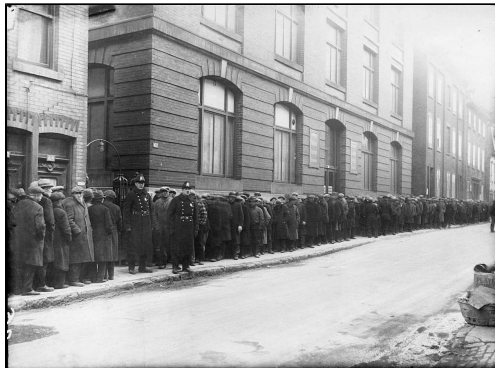


Work for the unemployed

In the early 1930s, an industrial unemployment commission was set up at the request of Mayor Camillien Houde. Many construction projects were undertaken in Montréal to give work to the unemployed.

Passages were built under railway tracks, as were pedestrian tunnels, police and fire stations, a central fire alarm system, public baths, markets, an incinerator for the western part of the city, a chalet at the Mount Royal lookout, vespasiennes (public urinals), sewers and sidewalks. There was also work done on the aqueducts and many roads were paved.

The City of Montréal paid for a part of this work and thus greatly eased the suffering of the unemployed. Further, in October 1930, the city set up a consultative commission on unemployment, with the goal of offering direct help to the homeless poor.



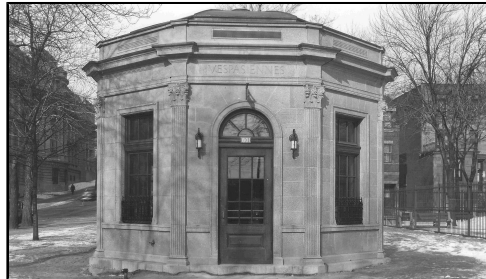
Photograph of the unemployed lined up outside the entrance to the Meurling shelter (435, rue du Champ-de-Mars) during the Depression, 1933.
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.



Pedestrian tunnel on Sherbrooke street facing Notre-Dame Hospital, [193-].
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.

Pedestrian tunnels

To enable children and other citizens to get to the public parks safely, the Camillien Houde administration had tunnels built. These made it possible to get to the city's major parks without crossing main roads where the traffic was dangerous.



Photograph of the Vespasienne (also known as "Camillienne") on Viger Square (today situated in Saint-Louis Square) in the 1930s.
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.

Vespasiennes

Montréal had no public toilets (known as "vespasiennes") before the Houde administration came to power. To correct this situation, these were built in key locations around the city, like parks and public places.



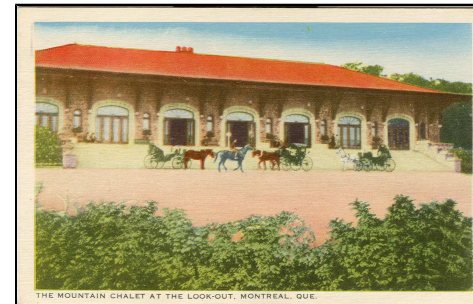
1930 to 1932: something new in leisure activities

The City's "Public Recreation" Department (today we would say Leisure Services) also contributed to the effort made to assist the unemployed. Between 1930 and 1932, the City built 31 new skating rinks. During this period, it also built seven chalets and four vespasiennes (public toilets) for the playgrounds. In Lafontaine Park, it built a rink for roller skates. It also built public baths and installed modern filters in 15 permanent, public pools. It built new playgrounds and modernized the equipment for others. It dug a pond in Laurier Park. In Morgan Park, it oversaw the construction of a chalet and sewers. Finally, in 1932, Montréal installed big new slides.



Généreux Public Bath (2050 Amherst Street), March 28, 1957.
Source : Ville de Montréal. Gestion de documents et archives.

A lake and chalet for Mount Royal



The Chalet on Mount Royal.
Source : Postcard, private collection, Centre d'histoire de Montréal.

Mount Royal also benefited from the public works undertaken to help the unemployed. In 1932, a big chalet was built at the summit, opening directly onto the belvedere (the observation area) with its magnificent view over downtown, the river and the islands. The chalet offered a restaurant, public toilets and shelter from the rain for the thousands of people who walked in the park, summer and winter. The City also used the chalet for official receptions. Beaver Lake was also the result of work done by the unemployed during these difficult years. In 1937 and 1938,

160 men using picks and shovels dug a lake two metres deep. There they found the vestiges of dams built by beavers at least 300 years previous, which explains the name given to the lake.