

Shearer never forgot Westmount, film historian tells WHA

BY MARTIN C. BARRY

Legendary Hollywood star Norma Shearer once said in an interview that she felt attached to only one thing during her life: the engagement ring she received from her late husband, Hollywood producer Irving Thalberg.

However, Concordia University film historian Oksana Dykyj told members of the Westmount Historical Association on February 18 that a conclusion she reached after a thorough study of the actress' life was that Shearer felt an attachment to something else – 507 Grosvenor Ave. in Westmount.

Shearer, one of the biggest movie stars of the 1930s, began life in Westmount before moving to New York and then on to Hollywood.

According to Dykyj, who champions Shearer in some of her academic work, film company publicists made numerous references to 507 Grosvenor throughout Shearer's career and "would not have constantly put that address into all these publications had she not kept telling them to do that – to tell them how wonderful her life was where her dream began.

"When we look at a lot of Hollywood

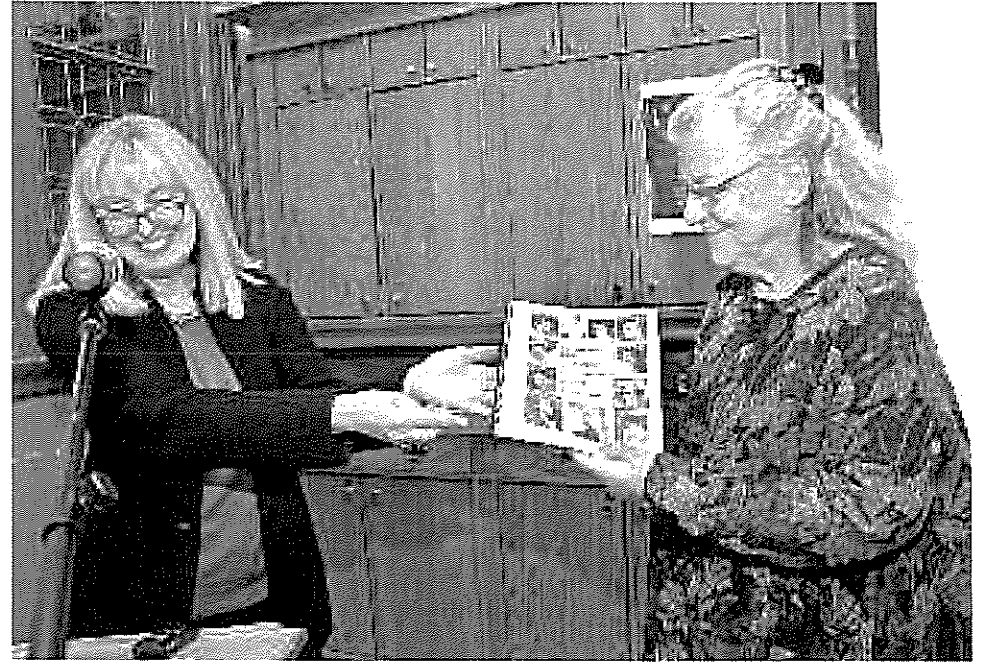
publicity material, articles about her, interviews that she'd granted to people, 507 Grosvenor always appears. There's always a mention of exactly where she lived."

While other movie stars in their biographies would usually mention the town or street they came from, Dykyj said they almost never referred to a specific address as Shearer did.

The actress was born in Westmount in 1902, the youngest of three children. Her father, Andrew, owned a construction supplies company, and the family initially enjoyed a privileged life. According to Dykyj, Andrew Shearer's annual income would have been the equivalent of around \$200,000 today, taking into account that there was no income tax then.

Dykyj's research suggests that the Shearers appeared to be socially active in Westmount. Her parents were mentioned in a community newspaper, the *Westmount News*, on February 23, 1912 as being guests at a Victoria Hall dance. In one of the many articles on Shearer that Dykyj read, Shearer mentions that 507 Grosvenor was built by her father as a wedding present for her mother, Edith.

A number of publicity materials have claimed that Shearer attended a variety of



Film historian Oksana Dykyj, left, presents WHA president Doreen Lindsay with a copy of Norma Shearer's unpublished memoir.

schools in Westmount, including Roslyn School and St. Paul's Academy, although Dykyj could not confirm this. But she dismissed a claim made by at least one author that Shearer attended Westmount High

School.

"Based on what Norma herself said, she never did go to Westmount High – sorry Westmounters," said Dykyj, while adding that *continued on p. 14*

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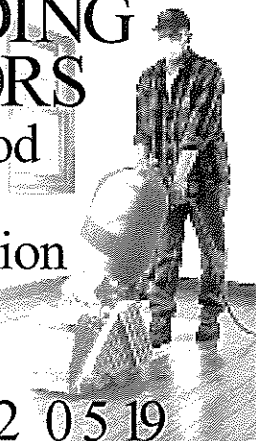


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