

## **80 Rue Saint-Paul**

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Unbeknownst to many, an important moment in the history of black activism in Montreal is symbolized by 80 Rue Saint-Paul. The spot is tucked into the corner of Rue Saint-Sulpice and Rue Saint-Paul in the oldest area of Montreal. Throughout the year 1833, British members of parliament were pushing to end slavery in the West Indies, effectively abolishing slavery in the British Empire. On the 23 July 1833, Alexander Grant, the proprietor of 80 Rue Saint-Paul, called together a group of eleven of his “coloured brethren,” in order to discuss the legislation being considered by the British parliament at the time.<sup>11</sup> This group of twelve including Alexander Grant, was composed of working men from the United States and the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> Most of the group were not literate and none of them held any “political clout”.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Frank Mackey even contends that a few of them had deep-seated personal issues with one another.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite these challenges, the group produced a three point statement regarding the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, marking a significant moment in the history of black activism in Montreal. The statement began by asserting the authors’ appreciation for the liberties they have been afforded as British subjects. It then went on to express the authors’ desire to extend those liberties to their “brethren of the British West Indies Colonies”.<sup>5</sup> In its conclusion, the statement asserted that the “total abolition” of slavery in the West Indies would be the “harbinger of light and life and liberty” to their “fellow brethren” of the West Indies.<sup>6</sup>

While Mackey has noted that in the grand history of global slavery this document had little impact, nonetheless it marked a significant milestone in the history of black activism in Quebec because it was the first time a group of black people drafted and published a public statement.<sup>7</sup> The legislation ultimately passed three days later, although it is unlikely that Grant and his group had any impact on its passing. Nonetheless, Grant’s home on 80 Rue Saint-Paul, serves as a significant landmark in the history of black activism in Montreal, with Mackey considering Grant to be the city’s first black activist.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>. Frank Mackey, “Messing with Dragons,” Black Then: Blacks and Montreal, 1780s -1880s (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 37.

<sup>6</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 37.

<sup>7</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 38.

<sup>8</sup>. Mackey, “There Ought to be a Law,” p. 38.

## **Bibliography**

Mackey, Frank, “Messing with Dragons,” Black Then: Blacks and Montreal, 1780s - 1880s (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004)

Mackey, Frank, “There Ought to be a Law,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010)

## Plate List

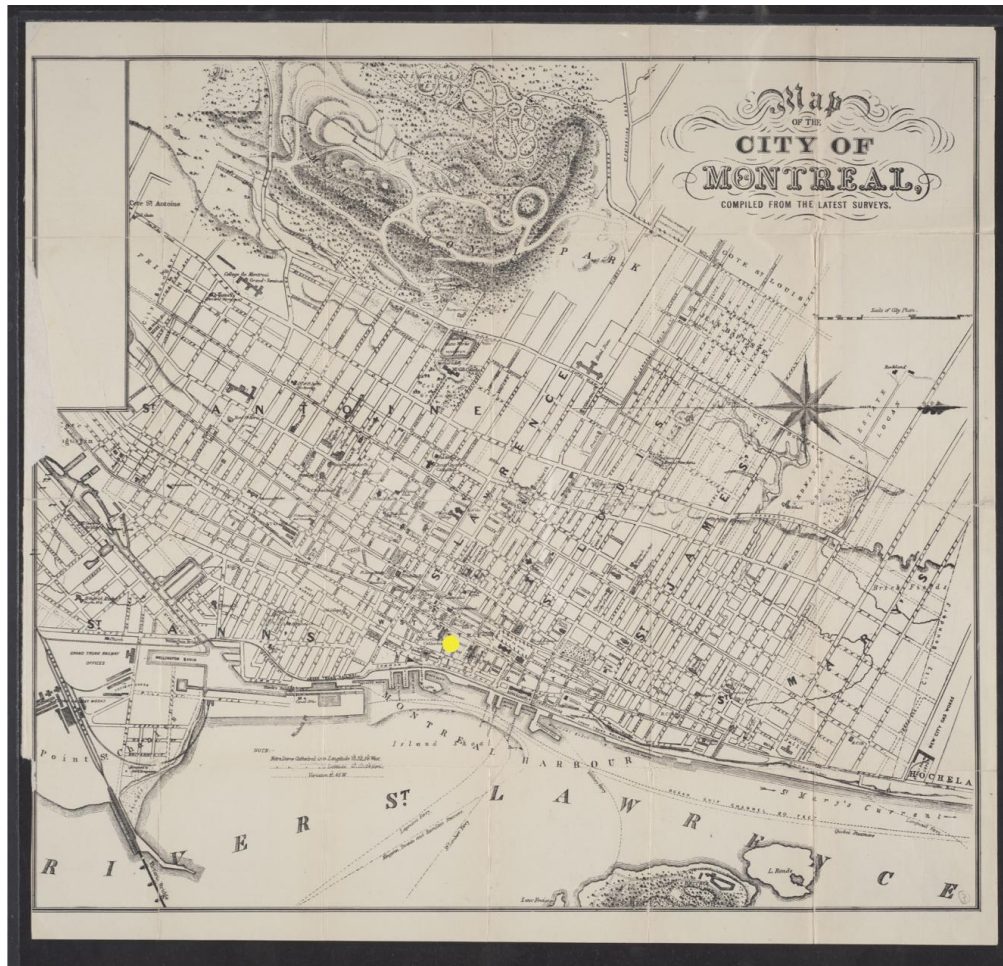


Fig. 1: Samuel Edward Dawson, "Map of the City of Montreal: Compile from the Latest Surveys," map, 49 x 54 cm, Handbook for the city of Montreal, 1888, McGill University Library, Montreal, Quebec.



Source: Google Maps Street View