

Atwater Market: A Montreal Landmark of Culture and History

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Background and Founding of Atwater Market

Atwater Market opened in 1933 amid the Great Depression as part of Mayor Camilien Houde's public works projects to stimulate the economy <u>thetribune.ca</u>. It was built to replace the old St. Antoine Market (dating back to 1861) with a modern facility that could better serve Montreal's southwest neighborhoods <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. The market is named after Atwater Avenue, itself honoring Edwin Atwater – a 19th-century businessman and city alderman <u>en.wikipedia.org</u>. From the outset, Atwater Market's mission was twofold: to provide local residents with fresh, affordable food, and to stand as a symbol of civic progress. Indeed, a contemporary newspaper at its opening called it "one of the most modern, hygienic and elaborate public buildings in the city," thanks to innovations like a central refrigeration system and conveniently located public scales for shoppers to verify weights <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u> cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca. This commitment to orderly,



fair commerce reflected the city's values in that era <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. Situated by the Lachine Canal in the working-class Saint-Henri district, the new market quickly became both a food hub and a point of pride for Montreal. It cost over \$1 million to build – a huge sum at the time – and included not just produce stalls but a vast hall intended for community gatherings <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>.

Historical Development Through the 20th Century

From its early years, Atwater Market was more than a shopping venue; it doubled as a community center and public forum. The building's second-floor hall (capable of holding up to 10,000–12,000 people) hosted many political rallies, social events and even sporting competitions over the decades <u>manchesterhistory.net</u> <u>manchesterhistory.net</u>. Charismatic figures like Mayor Houde and Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis famously "shook the walls" of the market hall with impassioned speeches that drew thousands of spectators <u>manchesterhistory.net</u>. During World War II and the post-war years, the market remained a bustling hub for food distribution and local camaraderie.

By the 1950s and 60s, however, Atwater Market faced challenges common to many North American urban markets. The rise of supermarkets, suburban migration, and the closure of nearby industries led to declining patronage <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u> <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. Saint-Henri's economic base eroded after factories shuttered and the Lachine Canal closed to shipping in 1970, and the once-thriving market began to look outdated. In 1968, the city under Mayor Jean Drapeau actually **closed** Atwater Market with plans to convert the site into a recreation center <u>thetribune.ca</u>. This decision was met with fierce public opposition – local residents protested the loss of their beloved market, ultimately thwarting any demolition <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. The building stood largely underused for years until the city recommitted to its original purpose. After extensive renovations and upgrades, Atwater Market officially **reopened in 1982** as a public market once again, this time with a few new additions like a gymnasium in the former upstairs hall and updated administrative offices <u>thetribune.ca</u>. This revival marked the beginning of a new chapter. The market gradually regained its popularity through the 1980s, reconnecting with Montrealers who cherished its unique atmosphere.

Since the 1990s, the surrounding area has undergone significant change and gentrification. The Lachine Canal was revitalized and reopened for recreation by the early 2000s, designated a National Historic Site and lined with parks and bike paths <u>en.wikipedia.org</u> <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. Atwater Market's proximity to the canal suddenly made it a prime attraction for cyclists, joggers and tourists, and new condominium developments sprang up in nearby converted warehouses. Property



values in the vicinity surged after the canal's revival (a 61% jump in the Southwest borough by 2006, with the fastest growth around the market) <u>en.wikipedia.org</u>. Longtime locals and market administrators did voice concerns about preserving the market's traditional character amid these changes. Nonetheless, Atwater Market firmly maintained its place at the heart of the community. In 2011, it even expanded its offerings by adding a row of new outdoor vendor kiosks on the north side of the building to accommodate growing demand <u>manchesterhistory.net</u>. Through all these evolutions, the market has endured as a beloved institution – adapting to modern needs while retaining its historic soul.

Architectural Significance and Art Deco Design

** ! <u>https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atwater_Market_-Montreal-2017-10-_48.jpg</u> Atwater Market's iconic Art Deco building – complete with its white-and-green clock tower – has become a landmark in Montreal's skyline <u>nationalgeographic.com</u>.** The structure was designed in the Art Deco style by architect Ludger Lemieux and his son Paul Lemieux <u>en.wikipedia.org</u>, and it stands out as one of Montreal's architectural gems <u>mtl.org</u>. The exterior features a streamlined brick façade with tall vertical piers and a prominent central clock tower that evokes the optimism of early 1930s design. When it opened, the market's layout was highly advanced: two levels of vendor stalls (ground floor for produce, second floor for butchers) and a massive third-floor hall for public events <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. It even included on-site apartments for the market manager and custodian – a functional touch reflecting its round-the-clock importance <u>manchesterhistory.net</u>.

Over the years, various renovations have been careful to preserve this Art Deco character. The building's form and layout remain largely unchanged since 1933 <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>, though its surfaces and systems have been refreshed. The clock tower, in particular, remains a proud symbol of the neighborhood – so much so that even during restoration work it is treated with care (the tower underwent a restoration in recent years, ensuring its continued prominence). Heritage authorities have recognized Atwater Market's architectural and historical value: the City of Montreal designated it as "a building of exceptional heritage value," integral to the area's identity <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. Community activism also helped save the building – the citizen protests in the late 1960s ensured this Art Deco monument wasn't lost to redevelopment <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. Today, walking into Atwater Market is like stepping into a living museum of 1930s architecture that's still fully alive with commerce. Its preservation is often cited as a model of how Montreal balances heritage with urban vitality.



Role in the Local Economy and Community

Throughout its history, Atwater Market has been at the center of the local economy in Montreal's Southwest, acting as both a marketplace and a gathering place. In its early decades, it fulfilled a crucial role in providing fresh meat, produce, and dairy to working-class families in Saint-Henri, Little Burgundy, Verdun and beyond <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. The city's investment in public markets was driven by practical concerns like controlling food costs, improving public hygiene, and ensuring access to nutritious food for urban residents <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. The presence of **public scales** and strict oversight in the 1930s market hall meant shoppers could trust they were getting fair deals, illustrating how the market was meant to foster a "well-ordered public economy" <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u>. By concentrating farmers, butchers and grocers in one place, Atwater Market supported countless farm families and small businesses, linking the city to its rural hinterland. It also generated jobs – from produce vendors to fishmongers – and helped keep food dollars circulating in the local community rather than in distant chain supermarkets.

Beyond commerce, the market became a social anchor. Neighbors would mingle on their daily shopping trips, exchanging news along with recipes, making the market a focal point of community life. The large hall upstairs hosted everything from dances to boxing matches and political meetings, reinforcing the market's identity as a civic space. Even when times changed and supermarkets proliferated, Atwater Market never lost its core community of vendors and loyal customers – though it did go through quieter years in the 1970s. After its 1982 revival, the market's economic and social role only grew stronger. It became a major draw for food-loving tourists, introducing an influx of visitor spending to the local economy. Today the market bustles year-round, supporting about twenty-five+ permanent merchants inside and dozens of seasonal farmers outside, from multigenerational butcher shops to specialty bakeries manchesterhistory.net manchesterhistory.net. This mix of vendors provides employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and ensures that Montrealers have direct access to locally produced foods. The City of Montreal, through its Public Markets corporation, continues to operate Atwater Market as an essential public service. In recent years the market has also embraced its role as a site of cultural exchange – hosting food festivals, tasting events, and workshops that engage the community (for example, evening craft beer tastings or summer outdoor dining events have become common) mtl.org. All of these activities reinforce Atwater Market's identity as a thriving economic engine that also nourishes the social fabric of Montreal.

Iconic Vendors and Culinary Traditions

One measure of Atwater Market's significance is the lasting presence of certain vendor families and the rich culinary traditions they uphold. Over the decades, many merchants have become local legends. Notably, **Boucherie Adélard Bélanger et Fils** has operated continuously at the market *since the day it opened in 1933*, spanning four generations of family butchers <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. Today, the Bélanger stall is run by the founder's great-granddaughter alongside longtime employees, serving loyal customers who recall stories from her grandfather's era <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. This continuity – from Adélard to his descendants – speaks to how knowledge and savoirfaire have been handed down behind the counters, preserving old-world butchery skills while adapting to modern tastes. (As Éliane Bélanger notes, decades ago shoppers cared about quantity, whereas today's customers seek quality and artisanal cuts <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>, a shift her family business has embraced.)

Another famed vendor is La Fromagerie Atwater, a cheese shop known city-wide for its vast selection of Quebec cheeses and specialty imports. Visitors can find creamy local creations like the award-winning **Ciel de Charlevoix** blue, as well as Quebec microbrewery beers, ice ciders and gourmet treats to pair with the cheeses nationalgeographic.com. The fromagerie's presence highlights the market's role in showcasing Québec's terroir products. In the meat department, the Boucherie & Charcuterie de Tours stands out – often hailed as the butcher par excellence of the market <u>nationalgeographic.com</u>. De Tours operates multiple counters brimming with house-made sausages in inventive flavors (maple-pecan, apple-cranberry, lime-coriander, and even a fiery "Inferno" sausage) nationalgeographic.com. Right next door, traditional butchers like Claude & Henri or Les Deux Frères continue to offer classic cuts and homemade pâtés, maintaining the market's long reputation for top-quality meats. Seafood lovers are drawn to the **Poissonnerie du** Marché Atwater, where an array of fresh fish and oysters from across Canada's coasts are on display - the oyster selection alone ranges from New Brunswick to British Columbia harvests nationalgeographic.com, reflecting Canada's Atlantic and Pacific bounty brought to Montreal. Meanwhile, **Première Moisson**, a bakery that started in Quebec, operates a stall at Atwater Market, perfuming the halls with the aroma of fresh breads and pastries. Their enormous almond croissants, dusted in powdered sugar, are a perennial favorite for shoppers in need of a snack nationalgeographic.com.

Of course, the market's beating heart is still its farmers and produce vendors. Longtime orchardists and market gardeners bring seasonal produce that generations of Montrealers have grown up with. For example, vendors like **Les Vergers Alain Dauphinais** offer apples, pears and stone fruits that have people lining up each fall <u>nationalgeographic.com</u>. One unique treat from the farm stalls are



cerises de terre (ground cherries) – tart golden berries in papery husks that appear in late summer and have become a bit of a local delicacy, often noted by visitors for their unusual, bright flavor nationalgeographic.com. The market's flower sellers and horticultural stands are another cherished tradition: every spring, greenhouses of the region send horticulturists to Atwater, transforming the outdoor area into a sea of blossoms, seedlings and gardening plants marchespublics-mtl.com. Many Montrealers mark the start of spring by browsing these flower stalls for bedding plants or herbs. And when the harvest season peaks, the market overflows with pumpkins, squash, and fall produce - an autumn display that is famously photogenic with its vivid oranges and yellows (one can often see rows of pumpkins stacked high, ready for Halloween) nationalgeographic.com. In winter, Atwater Market carries on another Montreal tradition by becoming one of the city's prime destinations for Christmas trees. Come December, the outside lot turns into a mini "forest" of firs and spruces, as local tree farmers set up to sell evergreens alongside wreaths and winter décor manchesterhistory.net. Many families make an annual outing of picking out their tree at Atwater, sipping hot cider as the smell of pine fills the frosty air. Through these vendors and seasonal customs, Atwater Market connects Montreal's past and present – offering goods that have been staples for decades as well as new flavors that reflect the city's evolving palate.

The Market's Present-Day Atmosphere and Seasonal Rhythms

Today, Atwater Market thrives as a year-round destination that adapts dynamically to the seasons. **In the warmer months (spring through fall),** the market spills out beyond its indoor hall – dozens of produce stalls line the perimeter of the building under the open sky <u>nationalgeographic.com</u>. The atmosphere is lively and colorful: tables overflow with bright berries, tomatoes, corn, cut flowers, and artisanal goods, while shoppers weave between displays of gourds or barrels of apples. The spring kickoff is marked by the arrival of horticultural vendors, who set up nursery plants and flowers around the market's exterior as soon as the weather allows <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. By summer, an area called the *Pôle des Saveurs* (Flavor Zone) comes alive, essentially a food court of gourmet street-food stands offering quick bites <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. Here one can lunch on everything from barbecued ribs to vegan bowls. A perennial crowd-pleaser is **Satay Brothers**, a fixture on the market's north end known for its Southeast Asian street food; their grilled pork satay skewers and famous pork belly **bao** sandwiches draw long lines of hungry patrons <u>nationalgeographic.com</u>. The market provides picnic tables and even a terrace by the Lachine Canal, so visitors often grab these ready-to-eat meals and dine al fresco, watching cyclists and pedestrians pass by <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. Summertime also brings special events – the market



has hosted craft beer tasting festivals, "Les Sucres" maple syrup celebrations, and evening pop-up restaurants, all capitalizing on the long days and warm nights <u>mtl.org</u>. The vibe is a mix of neighborhood folks doing their weekly shopping and tourists discovering local delicacies, all against the backdrop of the Art Deco architecture and the nearby canal's greenery.

In contrast, during winter, the market ingeniously transforms to keep the experience enjoyable despite Montreal's harsh cold. As the first frost hits, the outdoor produce kiosks are winterized: modular walls are erected around the open-air sections, effectively enclosing the perimeter stalls in a temporary heated structure marchespublics-mtl.com. This allows butchers, bakers, and produce vendors to continue trading in a sheltered environment, and shoppers can browse without winter winds biting. The indoor hall, naturally, remains heated and cozy year-round. December is an especially enchanting time at Atwater Market – besides the rows of Christmas trees for sale, the site hosts Montreal's Christmas Village, a holiday market event that has in recent years set up in the plaza next to the market. Small wooden chalets offer crafts, mulled wine, gingerbread, and local products, and activities like caroling or visits from Santa entertain families, making Atwater a focal point for holiday cheer in the Sud-Ouest borough. During the dark of winter, the market's clock tower is often illuminated, and the bustle inside – with vendors selling hearty tourtières, cheeses, and seasonal treats - keeps alive the warmth of community. By late January, the pace is quieter, but many core vendors (butchers, cheese shops, etc.) are still doing steady business with loyal clientele. Once the spring thaw comes, the cycle begins anew: the temporary walls come down, and the market opens back up to the fresh air marchespublics-mtl.com, ready for another vibrant summer. This seasonal cadence has become part of Atwater Market's identity. It's a place that **"moves to a** seasonal beat," as Tourisme Montréal puts it, thriving in all weathers with different offerings at different times of year mtl.org. For visitors, this means no two visits to Atwater Market are quite the same – one month you might find heirloom tomatoes and outdoor food trucks, another month it's ice sculptures and hearty soup tastings – yet the spirit of friendly exchange remains constant.

Future Outlook and Community Initiatives

As Atwater Market approaches a century of operation, efforts are underway to ensure it remains a vital part of Montreal's urban life for generations to come. City planners and local stakeholders have been reimagining the surrounding area to better integrate the market with public spaces and transit. One exciting proposal (emerging from the *Montreal en Mouvement* urban design initiative) is to create a pedestrian-friendly promenade linking the Lionel-Groulx métro station directly to Atwater Market <u>prevel.ca</u>. The vision includes an **esplanade or plaza around the market** – essentially extending the market's footprint into a car-free public square between Notre-Dame Street and the



Lachine Canal <u>prevel.ca</u> prevel.ca. Such a project would make it even easier and more pleasant for people to access the market on foot or by bike, and provide additional space for outdoor kiosks, performances, or even a seasonal skating rink on the canal in winter <u>prevel.ca</u>. Local officials, including the Sud-Ouest borough mayor, have expressed enthusiasm, noting that coordination with the City and Parks Canada (which manages the canal) is in progress to bring this vision to reality <u>prevel.ca</u>. The City of Montréal has already taken steps in this direction by establishing **Place du Marché**, a pedestrian plaza just steps from Atwater Market on Rue Saint-Ambroise. This plaza, inaugurated in recent years, serves as a flexible gathering spot that hosts activities for all ages in summer and during the winter holidays <u>montreal.ca</u> <u>montreal.ca</u>. With misting stations for hot days, picnic tables, game areas and a small performance stage, Place du Marché complements the market by giving the community an inviting place to linger and socialize beyond just shopping. Events like outdoor movie nights, yoga classes, and children's workshops have been held there, indicating how the market area is evolving into a multifaceted cultural hub.

At the same time, the market's management (La Société des Marchés Publics de Montréal) is spearheading social initiatives to keep the market inclusive and sustainable. For instance, in 2023 they expanded the successful "Récolte Engagée" program to Atwater Market marchespublicsmtl.com marchespublics-mtl.com. This project, run in partnership with local charity Partageons l'espoir (Share the Warmth), collects unsold fruits and vegetables from market merchants and redistributes them to low-income households in the southwest borough, thus reducing food waste and fighting food insecurity marchespublics-mtl.com. Since its launch at Atwater, the program has recovered large quantities of produce that might otherwise be discarded, turning them into hundreds of produce baskets and prepared meals for families in need marchespublics-mtl.com marchespublics-mtl.com. Such efforts highlight the market's role in the sustainable food movement - as the market already promotes short supply chains and local sourcing, it is a natural leader in waste reduction and community support. Another new initiative is "Tous à Table!", a program responding to rising food costs by distributing market gift certificates to food-insecure Montrealers marchespublics-mtl.com marchespublics-mtl.com. With corporate sponsors and community organizations, this program put tens of thousands of dollars worth of fresh market food into the hands of vulnerable families, effectively opening the market's bounty up to those who might not otherwise afford it <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u> <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>. These forward-looking projects show how Atwater Market is leveraging its strengths – local food and community spirit – to tackle contemporary challenges like affordability and sustainability.

Looking ahead, Atwater Market's future seems bright. City plans for development will likely continue to emphasize its preservation as a heritage site while enhancing its surroundings for public use. There is talk of modest interior renovations to improve accessibility and energy efficiency, but any



changes will respect the building's Art Deco integrity. The market's administrators are also mindful of balancing the needs of new, trendy vendors with those of legacy merchants to maintain the unique character that comes from its mix of old and new. If the past is any guide, the market will keep evolving with Montreal's food culture – perhaps incorporating more organic produce growers, zero-waste shops, or international street foods reflecting the city's diversity – all while the stalwart butchers and bakers continue doing what they've done for decades. As one current vendor put it, Atwater Market is *"history in motion"* marchespublics-mtl.com, constantly adapting yet rooted in tradition. It remains, above all, a people's market. Residents and visitors alike are drawn not just by the delicious wares, but by the ambiance of human connection that fills its halls and courtyards. From the gleaming vegetables arranged by a fourth-generation farmer, to the friendly butcher who remembers your favorite cut, to the summer chef demos and winter festivals – Atwater Market encapsulates Montreal's past, present, and future in one vibrant place. After nearly 90 years, it stands as a living monument to the city's heritage and a cornerstone of urban life, poised to serve and inspire well into the future.

Sources: Official Montreal public markets site, City of Montreal archives and heritage evaluations, *Montreal Gazette* reports, *Tourisme Montréal* guides, *National Geographic* Travel article on Montreal markets, and research by Concordia University <u>cityaspalimpsest.concordia.ca</u> <u>thetribune.ca</u> <u>manchesterhistory.net</u> <u>nationalgeographic.com</u> <u>marchespublics-mtl.com</u>, among others.

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Tags: atwater, market, montreal, landmark, culture

About 2727 Coworking

2727 Coworking is a vibrant and thoughtfully designed workspace ideally situated along the picturesque Lachine Canal in Montreal's trendy Griffintown neighborhood. Just steps away from the renowned Atwater Market, members can enjoy scenic canal views and relaxing green-space walks during their breaks.

Accessibility is excellent, boasting an impressive 88 Walk Score, 83 Transit Score, and a perfect 96 Bike Score, making it a "Biker's Paradise". The location is further enhanced by being just 100 meters from the Charlevoix metro station, ensuring a quick, convenient, and weather-proof commute for members and their clients.

The workspace is designed with flexibility and productivity in mind, offering 24/7 secure access—perfect for global teams and night owls. Connectivity is top-tier, with gigabit fibre internet providing fast, low-latency connections ideal for developers, streamers, and virtual meetings. Members can choose from a versatile workspace menu tailored to various budgets, ranging from hot-desks at \$300 to dedicated desks at \$450 and private offices accommodating 1–10 people priced from \$600 to \$3,000+. Day passes are competitively priced at \$40.

2727 Coworking goes beyond standard offerings by including access to a fully-equipped, 9-seat conference room at no additional charge. Privacy needs are met with dedicated phone booths, while ergonomically designed offices featuring floor-to-ceiling windows, natural wood accents, and abundant greenery foster wellness and productivity.

Amenities abound, including a fully-stocked kitchen with unlimited specialty coffee, tea, and filtered water. Cyclists, runners, and fitness enthusiasts benefit from on-site showers and bike racks, encouraging an ecoconscious commute and active lifestyle. The pet-friendly policy warmly welcomes furry companions, adding to the inclusive and vibrant community atmosphere.

Members enjoy additional perks like outdoor terraces and easy access to canal parks, ideal for mindfulness breaks or casual meetings. Dedicated lockers, mailbox services, comprehensive printing and scanning facilities, and a variety of office supplies and AV gear ensure convenience and efficiency. Safety and security are prioritized through barrier-free access, CCTV surveillance, alarm systems, regular disinfection protocols, and after-hours security.

The workspace boasts exceptional customer satisfaction, reflected in its stellar ratings—5.0/5 on Coworker, 4.9/5 on Google, and 4.7/5 on LiquidSpace—alongside glowing testimonials praising its calm environment, immaculate cleanliness, ergonomic furniture, and attentive staff. The bilingual environment further complements Montreal's cosmopolitan business landscape.

Networking is organically encouraged through an open-concept design, regular community events, and informal networking opportunities in shared spaces and a sun-drenched lounge area facing the canal. Additionally, the building hosts a retail café and provides convenient proximity to gourmet eats at Atwater Market and recreational activities such as kayaking along the stunning canal boardwalk.





Overall, 2727 Coworking combines convenience, luxury, productivity, community, and flexibility, creating an ideal workspace tailored to modern professionals and innovative teams.

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