

Profiling High Park

High Park's First Nations Connections

Recently, Colborne Lodge launched a new education program for Grade 3 students entitled "High Park through the Ages: from Carrying Place and Beyond." The new program compares the lifestyles of First Nations Peoples and settlers and was developed with the support of the Toronto District School Board's Aboriginal Education Centre to meet the new social studies curriculum objectives.

High Park, the verdant enclave in the city's west end bordered by Lake Ontario to the south and residential developments to the west, north and east, was long ago linked to a network of transportation routes that connected to Toronto's famed "Carrying Place" trail. This was the southern terminus of a major portage route used by First Nations Peoples to travel between the upper and lower Great Lakes.

There were reminders of an aboriginal presence in High Park before the Howards moved here. John Howard had indicated on a map of the High Park area that he painted in the 1870s two passages to the east and west of Colborne Lodge which he referred to as Indian Trails (still mostly intact) and an Indian Road to the east of the property. In his 1887 will, he specifically requested "that the old Indian Trail on the east side of Grenadiers Pond be left in the same natural state as it has been kept for the last fifty years."

These ravine ridge paths served the function of navigating around low, wet lying marshlands that were common along the lake. High Park's southern edge was once dotted with wetlands but in the last century were drained and made into duck ponds. Howard painted a self portrait in these wetlands which captured a feel of what the original landscape was like. It is not known when these trails were made, but they were already here in 1837 as indicated in his will.

The earliest aboriginal presence in the surrounding area is documented in the archaeological records. In 1921, at the northwest corner of High Park on a high sandy ridge north of Grenadier Pond, graves dating from the late Archaic to Early or Middle Woodland period (2,500 BC to 800 AD) were discovered during a road construction. Much later with European contact, there are records of settlements by the Seneca First Nations in the 17th century and, in the 18th century, the Mississaugas of the New Credit. After the Toronto Purchase in 1787, aboriginal presence in the area declined with the creation of the Park Lots, of which High Park is Lot 37.



Submitted by Philip Cheong