

HIGH PARK

A Park Lover's Quarterly

**Grenadier Pond
development hearing
packs them in**



Also
**High Park's new playground;
will the community build it?**
&
**Railway accident of the century
rocks High Park in 1884**

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Spring Road skirting the duck pond, 1929. Photo courtesy City of Toronto Archives.

High Park

A Park Lover's Quarterly

Editor – Gigi Suhanic
 Writer – Jill Franklin
 Columnists – Mary Lou Kumagai, Joan Miles,
 Cover photograph by D.W. Dorken

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Park Politics

- a guide to grassroots involvement in High Park

MARCH 21, 6 p.m. Grenadier Restaurant in High Park. The organizing committee for the High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program meets to discuss plans for the upcoming growing season. All welcome.

MARCH 21, 7:30 p.m. Swansea Town Hall, 95 Lavinia Avenue. *Wet & Wild. Natural Restoration in High Park wetlands and in your own backyard.* A talk about growing wetland plants with David Orsini, local landscape designer and naturalist. Exhibits by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don and Metro Zoo Adopt-A-Pond Project. Co-sponsored by Bloor West Eco-Village and the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee. For further info call 766-8852.

APRIL 13 OR 14. An open house/presentation by American architect Robert Leathers on his concept for a community built playground in High Park. A community designed and built playground is one of the proposals for High Park's south end to replace existing equipment. Dates are tentative. For more information regarding the dates, times and location please call 392-1954.

APRIL 25, 6:45 p.m. Mountview Alternative School Library in the Keele Street Community Centre, Keele Street and Glenlake Avenue. The High Park Natural Environment Subcommittee meets to discuss the progress of projects including the shoreline rehabilitation of Grenadier Pond and the Oak Woodlands' test plots.

MAY 25, 11 a.m. Combination celebration/planting at Grenadier Pond to recognize shoreline restoration.



David Hutcheon
City Councillor - Ward One

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Schools swimming in aquatic plants

The Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has been swamped with interest from schools, eager to participate in the authority's program to grow wetland plants.

Over 400 classes from junior kindergarten to grade 13 from Brampton to Oshawa have signed up to grow the Soft Stem Bull Rush which will be planted in wetlands under the jurisdiction of the Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA).

The MTRCA is supplying kits that include seeds, soil, pots, dishpans to soak plants, instructions and transplanting. The seed was provided by the Royal Botanical Garden in Hamilton. Delivery of the growing kits started following March Break.

"It's a simple project and I think that's why it's grabbed on. It fits with school programming," says Leslie Piercey of the MTRCA.

The seedlings will be picked up in late May and early June for planting. Potential destinations for the fruit of the students' labour include Tommy Thompson Park in Etobicoke, and the Brick Works at Pottery Road by the Don River.

The MTRCA started the program last year with the Etobicoke Board of Education, which according to Piercey yielded 400 plants.

Hamilton is the pioneer in this area. Last year the city's Bay Area Restoration Council reaped a crop of 10,000 plants from school kids.

Funding for this year was received

briefly

form the Metro Toronto & Region Remedial Action Plan, the Great Lakes 2000 Cleanup Fund and the MTRCA.

Piercey says the program will be able to carry on next year, even if funding dries up, because the supplies are in place.

Park Watch is for real

When *High Park - A Park Lover's Quarterly* last reported on Park Watch (Spring, 1995) the program was on hold.

Park Watch has since been revived buoyed by support from various Toronto government agencies and Ward 1 councillor David Hutcheon.

Founder Jerry Everson likens Park Watch to a cross between Neighbourhood Watch and Block Parents. One possible interpretation of Park Watch is as an information service for park users.

It would be run by volunteers and recruitment is happening now for the summer season.

Volunteers would have no legal power of authority.

Coring Grenadier Pond

There was no foul play at Grenadier Pond.

The survival-suited individuals crawling over the pond's thin ice during March were hydrogeologists - water experts.

They were putting in place technology that will provide more detailed

readings of the bottom of the pond.

According to the consultant hired for Grenadier Pond, the bottom is covered by four to six metres of contaminated sediment. The equipment installed will provide information on the sediment, what lies under it, and will be used to recommend methods for clean up.

Four piezometres - metres that measure the amount of fresh water entering the pond from the bottom - were put in place. Also, ground penetrating radar and electromagnetic imaging equipment were installed to provide data on the depth of the sediment and its "conductivity".

Once the ice has thawed coring will be done of the sediment and the hard bottom.



David Miller

Metro Councillor
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Making a grab for the new Parkside playground

American playground guru Robert Leathers gets an invite to High Park

by Gigi Suhanic

For nine months Anne-Marie Patterson "ate, slept and drank" the business of mobilizing the community in Riverview, New Brunswick to design and build a new playground for one of five schools in the town south of Moncton.

From Feb. 14 to Sept. 28, 1994, Patterson, the co-ordinator of the playground project, and a committee of 10 raised \$100,000 and amassed business support and volunteer labour that would culminate with the construction of a playground imagined by the children of the town and built by their families.

"It's a totally positive experience," says Patterson. "You got caught up in it. It was hard to live in the area and to say, 'I didn't have anything to do with that.'"

Riverview's community designed and built playground is one of many in New Brunswick and part of a movement that swept Canada's eastern seaboard in the early 90s.

St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, with a full-time population of 1,600 was first in New Brunswick and Canada to catch the community built bug.

"It's still a bit of a marvel," said Alan Dunfield of the play structure built by the townspeople on the grounds of Vincent Massey Elementary School in June 1993.

Dunfield, a teacher at the school of 260 was co-ordinator with Rob Stephenson of the playground committee that raised \$80,000 in donations and begged and borrowed the rest to complete the Vincent Massey project.

Dunfield says during the five days it took to build the playground, a total of 2,700 free meals were served to the workers who put in 10,000 volunteer hours just for construction.

"It was more successful than I was led to believe it could be," says Dunfield.

Almost three years later Dunfield says people are still pampering their baby.

"One of the things talked about was community ownership. It's not unusual for people to take a rake with them and go clean up the playground. Everybody feels they have an interest

in it," says Dunfield.

Community-designed and built playgrounds are really an American phenomenon that caught fire 10 years ago in the U.S.

Media coverage in magazines like *Time* and *The Smithsonian* focused on Robert Leathers, a 55 year old architect based in Ithaca, New York, and the creator of the community built concept. Leathers has been described as a "Johnny Appleseed", darting around the American continent planting playgrounds.

The pioneer reference is apt since those involved have described the experience as combining the work ethics of a barn raising and the communalism of the 60s.

Leathers has devised a process that requires the ultimate degree of commitment and co-operation right from the initial discussions about the playground until the last nail is driven into the completed structure.

"There were never any serious crises or stormy meetings. It was the same members (of the organizing committee) right up to the end. Everybody supported each other," Dunfield says.

Perhaps one of the more alluring aspects of community built playgrounds is that not only are they for the children, they are also by the children. In addition to fundraising and building, a design day is held where the architects meet with the local kids to find out what they want in their playground.

"The whole Leathers' structure is child-based. The children are the salesmen for the project. They do the promoting themselves," says Patterson.

There are no community built playgrounds in Ontario.

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However, it looks like Leathers has broken into Toronto. The City of Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation has \$150,000 to re-make the 'family area' in High Park's south end beside Parkside Drive which includes the playground, the concession, part of Spring Road and the duck ponds.

Parks and Recreation Commissioner Herb Pirk has tentatively invited Leathers to Toronto in April for an open house to discuss his concept and how it might work in High Park. Also, a design day has been suggested by Pirk for May.

At this point it's not clear whether the new playground in High Park will be a 100 per cent community/volunteer effort, pure Leathers, or whether it will be a hybrid with Parks and Recreation contracting Leathers' services and the community having some input into what the new play structure looks like and offers to kids.

Parks and Rec says it is definitely looking for input into the design from the users. It appears the department wants to go forward with a proposal this year in the fall, not leaving much time should the community decide it wants to do fundraising.

There is also a concern that the community built formula is not an exact fit for High Park; that whatever is built must fit into the 'larger picture', relating to other work being done at the south end including the new concession stand and possible clean up at the neighbouring duck ponds. Parks also envisions a heavy component of the playground's natural surroundings being incorporated into a new play structure.

Meanwhile others see the community built playground as

the kind of project that can stir the volunteer support needed to boost interest in the park, and address issues of safety and programming.

Ksenija Klinger-Brezina is the consultant Parks and Rec hired to complete a safety report of High Park. In her final document presented in 1994 Klinger-Brezina identified the Parkside playground as one of two locations that could be turned into an "outer park", an area where there are amenities and programming that invite people who might otherwise be reticent into the edge of the park.

In order to create these areas Brezina says the people who presently use children's areas and those who might, need to be consulted.

"The reason we want the community to build it is because then they will feel responsible for their park and their children's playground. They do it, they will care for it and raise awareness of what High Park is," Brezina says.

Some are concerned that if the city foots the bill that groundswell of activity that builds around these creative playgrounds won't happen.

Jamie Bell is the chair of the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee and brought Leathers and community built to the city's attention. Bell says he would like Parks and Rec to give the community the opportunity to flex its muscles on this project.

"There's no way, says Alan Dunfield, the community could have gotten as big a bang for their buck if it had used the \$80,000 to buy a commercial play structure. "I don't like to be hard on the industry, but when you see what's available for a similar price..."

If the community wants to and can grab the reins on the High Park playground, both Anne-Marie Patterson and Dunfield leave no doubt as to the project's absolutely overwhelming nature.

"Someone asked my daughter if she was happy it was over, and she said, 'I'm just glad to have my mother back'," says Patterson.

Dunfield recalls when the St. Andrews steering committee was in the midst of fundraising, he received a letter from one of the local businessmen wondering if he would be asked to contribute to the project.

"As the thing gets going everyone wants to be seen to be involved," Dunfield says.

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Railroad carnage



High Park in 1884

by Jill Franklin

The 1884 New Year came in with a crash for the residents of Colborne Lodge and area surrounding High Park. Jan. 2 was a cold, stormy day as dawn was breaking and Suburban Train #13 – known as the ‘dummy’ – was bringing 43 workers westbound to their jobs at the Dominion Bolt and Iron Factory located at the foot of Windermere. Just as the train was passing Colborne Lodge, it was hit head on by a freight train travelling eastbound on the single track.

By the time the conductors and engineers saw each other’s headlights through the blinding snow, they realized that disaster was inevitable. They blew their whistles and jumped to safety just seconds before the freight bore down on the Suburban. The fireman on the freight died in the crash.

The Globe newspaper reported, “What had before been a car full of strong, hearty men became in an instant a sickening deathtrap filled with tangled, bleeding humanity. A second later the boiler of the dummy engine exploded and the steam and water scalded and carried death or more awful injuries to the majority of the poor creatures. But this was not all. Fire followed and completed the calamity. The air was filled with shrieks and groans.”

Five men travelling in the rear passenger car of the Suburban were uninjured and tried to put out the fire with handfuls of snow. The caretaker of High Park, constable Thomas Wise, heard the whistle and crash, rushed to the scene, then climbed the hill to Colborne Lodge – 50 yards away – in search of pails.

John Howard, the founder of High Park, had sold part of his property to the Grand Trunk (GTR) for the railroad line 30 years before. Now in his 81st year, Howard met Wise at his front door, from where he could smell the burning clothes. His groom, Charlie Hills grabbed an axe and along with Wise, helped carry pails of water from the swamp to the steaming, flaming carnage.

Howard wrote, “The groans of the poor fellows who were wedged in and could not be got out until the car was chopped open were distressing in the extreme. A horrid sight was then witnessed. Men with their legs broken and dangling were placed against the fence and soon died. Altogether a more sickening sight could not be imagined.”

Three doctors who lived nearby soon arrived, and Mr. Howard’s housekeeper, Elizabeth Hodgson, sent down sheets to wrap the wounds and brandy to ease the suffering.

A Parkdale resident witnessed the crash – a sight he would never forget. “...he saw many of the men in the foremost car laughing and talking pleasantly together, little thinking that within the next few seconds many of them would be hurled into

eternity.”

The Globe further reported that, “One little boy, fatally injured, turned round to Dr. Riddell, who was attending to him and gasped out, ‘Oh, doctor! I’m done for. Wish mother good-bye for me.’”

Another young man, recently married, begged to be pulled from the wreckage and heartily thought he could walk. Then he looked down and cried out in horror, “Oh God, my legs are off!”

Conductor George Barber from the freight train was held responsible for the collision and arrested at the scene. Parkdale Coroner Dr. Lynd called for an inquest, chose the jurors on the spot and instructed them to meet that afternoon at a local hotel.

Within two hours the injured were arriving at the General Hospital and 15 mangled bodies were being laid out in the morgue.

News of the crash spread throughout the city and by the afternoon a curious mob had descended on the ‘Death House’ – some with the gruesome task of trying to identify their disfigured loved ones; others came as eager onlookers to the indescribable injuries.

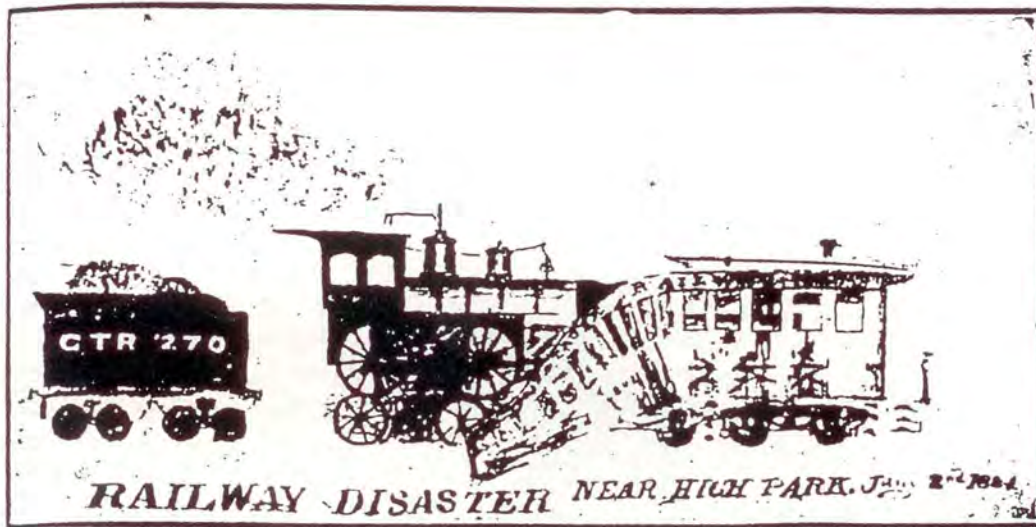
The Globe called it a “Carnival of Death”, reporting that 6,000 people had “surged” into the room that “reeked with the smell of burnt flesh and steam which still rose from the boiled and roasted corpses.”

During the first inquest meeting, Conductor Barber told that he left Point Edward on the St. Clair River the night before, arrived in Hamilton at 4:50 a.m. and received the orders to “run through to Queen’s Wharf (at the foot of Bathurst Street) avoiding all regulars”. He had the timetable for the regulars, admitted that he “just forgot” about Suburban #13, and should have stayed at the Mimico Station until it arrived, after its scheduled unloading of Bolt employees at the Humber Station.

The inquest adjourned until the next Tuesday, and the Conductor was sent to jail. Rumours that Barber hanged himself by his suspenders in his cell that night were reported as being untrue.

The victims’ family circumstances were printed in the paper...many of the dead and injured were the sole support of widowed mothers and younger brothers and sisters. One mother lost three sons in the disaster; a wife had just given birth; another had lost her only child the previous week; and one young man was to have been married two days later.

Some of the men had recently come to Toronto from Ireland, Scotland, the U.S. and Quebec, with no one in the area to



This sketch of the "Humber Disaster" was done at the time of the train wreck.

take care of their burials or look after their injuries. The GTR immediately arranged to send their lifeless and wounded bodies back to their families.

At a time when there was no life insurance, accident benefits or social safety nets, Mayor Boswell convened his aldermen to form the Civic Relief Committee. They had no faith in the GTR giving financial assistance to the destitute families and quickly voted to contribute \$2,000 in aid. *The Globe* then took up the cause, creating "The Humber Accident Fund" to collect donations from the public. The outpouring of sympathy and sorrow extended throughout North America and abroad.

A public funeral for 18 victims was held on Saturday, Jan. 5 with thousands lining the procession route from City Hall at Market Square to cemeteries at St. James, St. Michael's and the Necropolis.

Sleighs carrying the bodies were amidst the mournful procession of Royal Grenadiers, three bands, a detachment of police, officials from the City, GTR and Bolt works, Secret Societies, family members and over 100 co-workers.

It took an hour for the procession to pass any given point of mourners gathered in front of closed businesses with storefronts draped in black along King, Yonge and Wellesley Streets.

Even the Orangemen and Roman Catholics joined together in the public grieving and it was hoped that "this spirit of brotherly love and mutual toleration and respect might continue."

Churches were filled the next day, with every pulpit delivering the same message on "lessons from the calamity" – "a merciful provision that man knoweth not his time...that it would add to the burden of life if each of us knew precisely the day and hour of his death...to live not knowing when our time might come – to live as knowing that we are responsible for making the best use of the present time."

The death toll continued to rise – 31 lives were lost, the youngest being 12. Normally, 60 employees of the Bolt factory travelled on the #13 each morning and *The Globe* reported the individual stories from those who missed it that day – for reasons of torn clothing, premonitions and going back to bed after waking to such foul weather.

Contributions from the public kept pouring in. The Albion Hotel

and butchers from the St. Lawrence Market arranged for a staggered delivery of over 4,000 pounds of donated meat to the families.

A skating benefit at the Moss Park Rink with bands from the Queen's Own Rifles and 10th Royal Grenadiers sold over 2,000 tickets. Theatres, singing groups and acting troupes all donated their space, time and talent.

The Civic Relief Committee calculated and administered the donations, deciding to pay 36 families according to lost wages in amounts of \$3 to \$12 per week for the next nine months.

An announcement was made that the relief fund would not be used for Mrs. Barber, and the public began to make further contributions for her wellbeing.

The results of the inquest committed Conductor Barber and Engineer Jeffrey to trial for manslaughter; the Grand Trunk Railroad was found negligent in requiring personnel to work long shifts – especially in bad weather; the orders to "Run to Toronto avoiding all regulars" were ambiguous and "a reckless system of dispatching trains – fraught with the greatest danger to the travelling public"; they recommended that a double track between Toronto and Mimico be laid at once.

Opponents of the verdict objected on the basis that Conductor Barber's orders were no different than any others issued daily by the GTR, and the company couldn't be held responsible for the "forgetfulness" of one conductor. It was reported that in 1881 over 200 million passengers had travelled safely on the continent under such orders, with only 200 casualties from accidents.

Despite the eventual acquittal of Conductor Barber and Engineer Jeffrey, they too were casualties of the Humber Disaster.

Through a report in *The Globe*, the Church reminded the public to have deep sympathy for those responsible for the collision, asking, "Who of us is there that does not forget – that is sometimes careless – that does not sometimes let things go easily instead of making careful investigation into all that we ought to be doing? Which of us is going to cast the first stone at a brother for his carelessness?"

Photo courtesy "The Way We Were", Toronto Sunday Sun.

Grenadier Pond's 12 year old sea serpent

by Gigi Suhanic

On a weekday afternoon when Grenadier Pond is quiet and there is nobody around watch for a ripple that swells and bubbles and spreads far afield as if something enormous would burst from its centre...

"A sea serpent? In Grenadier Pond?" No way! Really?!

Tales of sea serpents stretch back into recorded history. When the European explorers took to the seas in search of lands to conquer many of their maps showed toothy, tangled monsters boiling viciously out of the water.

Later, much later, an eerie photograph of a serpentine mammoth skimming the surface of Loch Ness in Scotland was made famous to the world. Tourists visit the lake hoping Nessie will rise and give them the most wonderful sight of their life.

To be sure, David Peacock's *The Sea Serpent of Grenadier Pond* is a fanciful tale for children. At the same time, it's also about making the unbelievable, tantalizingly possible.

The 1984 book written by Peacock and published by Hounslow Press tells the story of a benign, almost huggable, bread eating sea creature that emerges from the depths of Grenadier Pond to reveal itself to a "sensible" little boy.

The rest of the story chronicles the public's discovery of the creature and the subsequently successful attempt by the boy and a knowledgeable professor to lead the sea serpent across the Queensway and Lakeshore Blvd. to the safety of Lake Ontario.

Peacock says he got the idea for this book when he was illustrating the *Great Canadian Alphabet Book*. For the letter 'O' he illustrated the Ogoopogo, Lake Okanagan's answer to Nessie.

"I think the appeal is that it's a fanciful idea with enough plausible rationale that it's almost believable," says Peacock.

Peacock builds the "plausible rationale" into several details of the story starting with the inside cover of the book, a map of Toronto showing the city's major streets and the exact location of High Park. The map depicts Lake Ontario with fierce sea serpents frothing from the water.

Also, the sea serpent first shows itself to the little boy "Willy" while he is feeding the geese bread, something we've all done in High Park.

Peacock also uses the professor to add touches of realism. When the media discovers the creature the professor is interviewed and postulates that the serpent could be one of many pre-historic sea dwellers. "It might be a member of the trinacromerum species or from the elasmosaurus family or even a zeuglodon," the Professor says.

"I think if it's more believable, if it has things that ring truth then it becomes more challenging," says Peacock.

For example, children are held enthralled says Peacock when he tells the story of the haunted house he lived in for seven years. "It was a benevolent spirit but a troublesome presence," Peacock says.

The family ghost would remove light fixtures from the ceilings, open windows and open doors although the house had been locked and nobody was home. "We had this terrible evidence of things happening in that house that were inexplicable," he says. "I have never spoken to the people who bought the house," he says. "I think it didn't follow us."

"Credibility – and the way you tell a child's story – a true story is much more exciting."

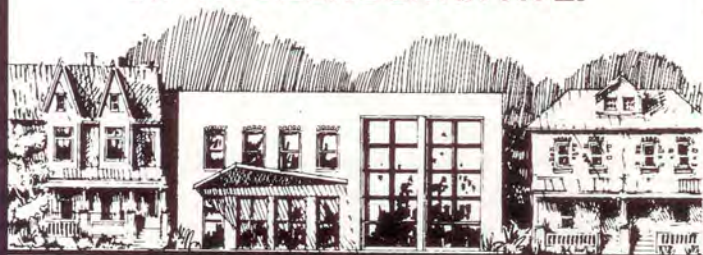
Peacock also says he tries to work a happy and problem-solving solution into the end. As *The Sea Serpent of Grenadier Pond* progresses it becomes clear that such a towering creature cannot continue to live in a pond that everyone knows is only about 20 feet at its deepest point. So, he is led to Lake Ontario and freedom.

Like truth, "Something good always comes out of the element of hope".

The Sea Serpent of Grenadier Pond is still in print and is available for \$12.56 at Book City on Bloor Street West or at the Toronto Public Library.




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Park view worth \$71,000 per year, economist says

Public comes out in droves to make deputations at Overs hearing

by Mary Lou Kumagai

Michael Overs' plans to subdivide the part of his property adjoining Grenadier Pond into six building lots has sparked much controversy, especially among neighbours and park lovers.

So when members of the public both against and in favour of the proposal had their chance to speak out at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing held for that purpose on Mar. 7 at Toronto City Hall, they seized the opportunity.

The all-day marathon meeting heard speakers from 10 a.m. until 9:30 p.m., while many others simply attended the event or sent letters to express their concerns. A petition containing over 600 signatures protesting the proposed development was also submitted to the board.

Speakers objecting to the project outnumbered those in favour more than five to one. Some worried about the addition of six more households to the delicate and vulnerable ecosystem of the pond. Area resident and birdwatcher Verna Higgins estimated that the proposed development could add 24 people, six cats and three dogs to the pond environment, which would have a "marked effect on songbirds and shy waterbirds".

It was pointed out by Gerald Swinkin, counsel for Overs, that there are already more than 50 homes on the perimetre of Grenadier Pond. However, as the pond is a major feeding and breeding ground for many species, including some endangered ones, and an important rest and refuelling stop for migrating birds, Higgins and other speakers advised against any increase in risk.

Others voiced concern that the wildlife-rich ravine area below the proposed homes would be placed in jeopardy. Neighbour Ruth Crow pointed out that the temptation to clear vegetation to improve the view might prove irresistible for some.

Several said that additional buildings might spoil the "wonderful view" of the pond from the east shore in High Park. They worried about the loss of trees and vegetation, and the imposition of man-made objects on one of the few "natural" vistas left in Toronto's urban landscape.

Vida Victor, an economist and area resident, calculated a hypothetical dollar value for the view to park visitors. He proposed a value of \$71,000 per year, based on an estimated 284,000 visits to the pond at 25 cents a visit. The value would increase yearly, he suggested, as the population grows and green spaces are swallowed up by urban development, to \$11 or \$12 million after 100 years.

Counsel for Overs suggested that trees and other vegetation would hide the proposed houses from park visitors, so the buildings would not interfere with their enjoyment of the view. However, Victor maintained that "It's absolutely implausible to me that people would want to buy houses in that location and not enjoy the view. If they can see the pond, then I can see them." Counsel also suggested that many people prefer built cityscapes to natural landscapes. "Not in a park," said area resident Graham Ellis.

Area resident Edward Michael Slapsys spoke in favour of the proposed subdivision, saying that the additional homes would not spoil the view. Another resident, Carolyn Gillespie, argued that people should be free to do as they wished with their own property "whether the rest of us like it or not, as long as it's legal".

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Public voyeurism at the Overs hearing

Park Pundit

To be or not to be, eh?, Whether 'twas nobler for the city to suffer six new houses on the banks of Grenadier Pond, or to take them before the Ontario Municipal Board, and by opposing, end them. (Maybe) Would landowner and developer Michael Overs be allowed to build his private hillside hamlet? Or would public parklands be protected from the slings and arrows of what many saw as outrageous development? As the curtain rose, the Ontario Municipal Board hearing (OMB) to sort out this little drama had just begun on the 16th floor of a downtown office tower...

It's not really a court, although it does a heck of an imitation of one – real flags, a fancy coat of arms, and an imposing court-style bench for the board members to sit behind. Next are the lawyers, principals and their staff, who get tables up front, facing the board, with their backs to the public. The riff-raff get to sit in back and be very, very quiet. They have to be. The cavernous, grey-carpeted room with its humming air-conditioning swallows sound whole, and everyone keeps forgetting to use the microphones.

Lawyer-culture reigns supreme. This resembles yogurt culture, in that it serves to turn the proceedings thick and opaque. Lawyer-culture uses archaic language and calls its opponents "friends". It also says you are nobody special unless you are wearing a suit, preferably dark, tailored and expensive. Fittingly, the board chairman is the best-dressed man in the room. The riff-raff, composed of visiting schoolkids, teachers, local residents and park lovers are a mixed bag of fashions – not a dark suit in sight. In this room, they are the outsiders, their noses pressed figuratively to the window, the Stella Dallahs of the OMB. The schoolkids are disappointed – they were looking forward to some action. Pinned to their shirts and sweaters are frog faces cut from green construction paper with little

by
Mary Lou
Kumagai

bug-eyes and long red tongues hanging out. These are meant to represent denizens of the pond needing protection. Some local residents are wearing the amphibian support badges too. Soon, we are beginning to feel the way the frog faces look.

The project architect, Carson Woods, provides a detailed, nay, exhaustive pedigree of the property, with show-and-tell historical photos, aerial photos, recent photos, maps, drawings and plans. They overflow the display easel and pile up near the witness box. The city's lawyer, Karl Jaffary, drily compliments Woods on his thoroughness – "If you had been working for the CIA, there'd never have been a Cuban missile crisis". A flood of letters from various Pooh-Bahs, agencies and utilities is read into the record, all seemingly with no objection to the development. They've even had an archeological assessment done that found nothing of interest on the site but a pet cemetery (shades of Stephen King?). There is talk of artificial dips and natural dips; of fine sand and silty sand and disturbed sand and cohesionless sand. Yes, we are sinking quickly.

It is increasingly obvious that Woods and Jaffary are not singing from the same page in the song book. What about restoring the land to its earlier splendour, Jaffary wants to know. Woods agrees enthusiastically. He speaks fondly of the formal gardens once created by a certain Mr. Peckover, perhaps tennis courts, and a croquet green. (But no polo grounds – too steep for the ponies, likely.) That, it turns out, is not what Jaffary had in mind. He was thinking more of matching it up with the back-to-the-wild look currently being restored across the pond.

Even the board loses its place from time to time. When lawyers and architect speak of the house on the up-slope, the house on the down-slope and the house above the slope, the chairman throws up his hands – "Who lives in this house? Who lives in that one? Where does Mr. Overs live?"

"It's like that old 'Who's on first?' routine," observes the other board member cheerily.

After long days of this and a much-needed break, the public will get its kick at the can. In a couple of weeks, says the chairman. But not now.

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Taking the hardline with mountain bikes

High Park staff are getting tough, if not with mountain bikers, then at least with the myriad of trails they have created throughout High Park.

Bikers have cut a webbed network of spontaneous trails in the park's ravines and on its slopes, that have led to some pretty devastating soil compaction and erosion.

According to Carol Guy, High Park's recently appointed superintendent the damage in 1995 was particularly bad because the winter was mild and the ground never had a chance to freeze solidly.

Aggressive measures have been put in place to deter mountain bikers.

Fencing has been extended across the tops of the trails and below them enormous logs have been staked in place. Signage will also be put in place that says, "No Access".

"It's hard to tell, but I think it's making a effective point," says Carol Guy. Guy says she thinks the bikers are getting the point because the snow fencing hasn't been cut open yet.

It is acknowledged that cyclists can simply ride around the barriers. But the situation is so critical on the slopes, that

some form of protection has to be provided.

Guy says she believes it could take several years to rehabilitate some of the slopes that have been subjected to anywhere from 10-15 years of abuse.

Trails cut by bicycles, especially on slopes, tend to be gully shaped. Rain water rushes down them picking up loosened soil along the way.

When erosion occurs on slopes tree roots are often exposed, and are stepped or ridden over and threatening the tree's health.

Last fall Guy and other staffers toured the park and from that created a map showing all the trails in the park no matter how small.

Using that map, Guy says Parks and Recreation would like to try and establish a formal trail system to keep hikers

and dog walkers off of the park's delicate slopes.

"We need to identify which ones are the primary junction spots to major facilities and the ones we need to get rid of that don't make any sense," Guy says.

Parks will maintain the trails it wants people to use with woodchips and put signage in place showing where trails lead to.

Stewardship program gets under way

1996 is the inaugural year for the High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program.

A hotline number 392-7276, ext. 301 has been established and those interested can leave their name and number as details of the volunteer program become available.

Some of the work volunteers might do through the program include weeding, planting native wildflowers and grasses and trees.

The volunteer program won't do any of the work done by High Park outdoor staff.

Last August, a small group of volunteers weeded High Park for Dog-Strangling Vine, and Purple Loosestrife. Purple Loosestrife is a European plant that according to Ducks Unlimited Canada is taking over wetlands in Ontario.

With few predators to control them both of these plants out compete native plants and spread quickly. A brochure published by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists on invasive plants in Ontario says each plant of Purple Loosestrife can produce up to 2.7 million seeds per year.

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Underground springs spawn park road's name

by Joan Miles

Glacial Lake Iroquois covered High Park 12,800 years ago. On receding it had transformed the sandy plain into flat and rolling uplands, ravine bottomlands and a network of ponds and streams.

John G. Howard's 1836 purchase from James Cull of approximately 160 acres of York Township — the central portion of High Park — had a steep incline 250 feet above Lake Ontario rising to 367.8 feet in the north.

Grenadier Pond lay partly in Howard's domain to the west. The Spring Creek system and a smaller pond to the east were in Joseph Ridout's terrain.

The linkages of the pond and stream watershed and of the lakefront marshes with Lake Ontario were first disrupted by the fill required for the construction of the Grand Trunk Rail corridor south of Colborne Lodge in 1853, then by laying out Lakeshore Road to the south. Outlets from Grenadier Pond were the only points at which the natural flow from Grenadier and Spring Creek to Lake Ontario continued.

While landscape designer Henry Engelhardt had prepared early plans of High Park, it was Howard who by 1875 had laid out the road system whose cornerstone was the oval north-south carriage drive. Spring Road followed the construction of the eastern bank of the creek. In 1876 the city acquired Ridout's parcel and the stream whose source was north of Bloor and west of present-day Keele Street. A small tributary flowed east, parallel

to Bloor Street. The natural underground spring still evidenced by moist surface areas in the north-eastern part of the Park lent the water course its name.

By 1894 the current interior road network was virtually intact. By 1909 Torontonians were coming to High Park in ever increasing numbers on foot, by bicycle, and in motorized vehicles. Yet while fashionable High Park Avenue had cedar block paving, the High Park arterial network was unpaved, and remained so for many years. In 1912 a bill was introduced in city council to regulate vehicular traffic in public squares and parks.

By 1910 the dense marsh in the south-east area had been filled in order to extend Spring Road and provide more park land and two man-made duck ponds. Further intervention resulted in the channelization of Spring Creek into the storm sewer system.

In 1955 it was recommended that a link be built from Parkside Drive to Spring Road. In 1969 and again in 1977 precise regulations regarding one-way traffic were set out.

Today, the bottomland of Spring Creek is valued for the Manitoba Maple forest, meadow marsh, Red Osier Dogwood and Speckled Alder it sustains. The water's banks offer a haven to the Blue-winged Teal, Pie-billed Grebe and the Red-winged Blackbird. *Sources: City of Toronto Council Minutes; Archives, Parks & Rec.; High Park Draft Proposals for Restoration & Management, 1992.*



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May 5.....Spring Babies at the Zoo and the Pond

May 12.....Songbird Migration **Meet at 9 a.m.*

May 26.....Spring Flowers

June 2.....Shrubs

June 9.....Invasive Weeds

June 16.....Lupines and the Karner Blue Butterfly

June 23.....Turtles

Volunteer Opportunities

What is a **V.S.P.**? It's a **Very Special Person** who participates in the High Park **Volunteer Stewardship Program!** You can help care for and restore High Park's natural environment through supervised, scheduled activities such as weeding, planting, monitoring and public education.

What is **Park Watch**? It's a volunteer-driven program designed to help park users who require assistance while enjoying High Park. It's looking out for yourself and for your neighbours, like Neighbourhood Watch and Block Parents.

To volunteer for the **V.S.P.** and/or **Park Watch** or get details on the next walking tour, call:

• **High Park Volunteer Hotline: 392-7276, ext. 301**

Tours organized and presented by the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee, Colborne Lodge (Toronto Historical Board) and the city of Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation.

Tours take about 1 1/2 hours. \$2 donation suggested to support volunteer programs.