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HIGH PARK

A Park Lover's Quarterly

Inside: The oak savannah sizzles, cleaning up Grenadier Pond, safety improvements go ahead & the deal John Howard made



High Park

A Park Lover's Quarterly

Publisher and editor - Gigi Suhanic
 Writer - Jill Franklin
 Photographer - Gigi Suhanic
 Columnist - Mary Lou Kumagai
 Graphic artist - Tamara Kure
 Printer - Hayes Printing Services

◆ Publisher's statement ◆

High Park fulfills the personal needs and interests of many people - expansive backyard and playground for those without a patch of green to call their own; a training ground for cyclists and runners; a bird watcher's delight. While the reasons Torontonians flock to the park are many, what they do share in common is an abiding love and concern for the park's well-being. This magazine is intended to keep that community abreast of what the future has in store for High Park's 399 acres.

A special thanks to Tom Hazlitt, my parents George and Michele Suhanic, my siblings Liza, Claudia and West. Also thanks to Ken Winlaw and David Cerney.

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What's all the fuss about?

High Park has been in the news a lot lately. What got it there?

High Park, oasis in a concrete jungle - Torontonians have come to take its 399-acres for granted, to think of the 121-year-old park as a dear relative or friend, whose presence and welcome embrace is expected. When the status quo will no longer do, when the relationship needs to change, that's the wake up call. Ears prick up. Do you fight to stem the tide of change or make the leap into the future?

Now, High Park isn't going anywhere but there are big changes in the offing for this city's most beloved green space. And some people have been building up quite a head of steam over them. Warnings of trees to be cut down and millions of dollars spent have upset many. Somewhere betwix hyperbole and lack of knowledge lie the plans of Toronto's Department of Parks and Recreation.

Municipal officials became the park's stewards when John G. Howard, the first owner of land that today forms High Park's central core, turned 165 acres over to the city of Toronto for use as a public park. Present Parks and Recreation officials are taking that stewardship role seriously. For the past five years they've been conceiving a management plan to take the park into the next century. *High Park - Proposals for Restoration and Management and Framework for Implementation* is the product of those years of work. It first appeared in draft form in May 1992. Following public meetings and open houses on the study's recommendations Parks and Recreation revised its document and released the final version in November 1992.

Some have questioned the need to alter the park's present course. However, in many people's estimation, there are lots of things about High Park that don't work. Trouble spots identified by parks users and special interest groups include safety and transportation, not to mention Grenadier Pond's dismal state.

The study discusses problems related to these areas and possible solutions. It also sports an extensive discussion on the state of the park's "natural environment" - the trees, plants, soil and Grenadier Pond - calling it extremely degraded and in urgent need of upkeep. The recommendations that really turned peoples' heads were those relating to the Black Oak Savannah. It was in the wake of the release of the management study that many of us learned for the first time that High Park is home to this rare ecosystem. According to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, High Park's Black Oak Savannah is a seriously degraded provincial treasure that needs protecting. The Department of Parks and Recreation called for the savannah's "restoration and management". The restoration process is interventionist. It involves clearing brush, setting low ground fires, the use of

herbicides and girdling mature trees.

Most people have taken a deep breath and said, they agree the park needs a re-think but they want to be in on the process. After a tussle between community members who wanted in on the action and a reluctant Parks and Recreation Department, in April 1993, the High Park Interim Citizens' Advisory Committee was established. The committee takes its membership from special interest groups and west end organizations like ratepayer and business groups. For the past year the 20-member committee has focused on the recommendations found in the management study. Four sub-committees, with a membership distinct from the interim committee have fleshed-out detailed proposals on safety, transportation, the natural environment. Some of the safety work group's recommendations will see the light of day this spring when new telephones and directional and information signage are installed in the park.

When community members negotiated for a committee, included in the deal was an understanding the committee would eventually become permanent. It now looks like that will happen. The workings of a permanent advisory committee are on the verge of receiving city hall approval. The committee will continue to operate on an interim basis until next year. Then it will be expected to take its first solo flight. There's general excitement about the prospect of a permanent group with the powers to set its own agenda.

Sam Caragianakos' family has owned the Grenadier Restaurant in High Park for 13 years. Caragianakos has been an enthusiastic member of the interim committee. "I'm very pleased with how things are going. Right from the beginning I was expecting a lot of things from the committee and I haven't been let down. Let's see if we can stick together and have a big influence in years to come," he said.

"We're trying to prove we can be helpful, make the park better and more responsive to the public. My personal feeling is the area where it's important to set a precedent is for healthy involvement of volunteer time in the park," said committee member Jamie Bell. One of the potential roles of the permanent committee envisaged by Bell and others is to kick start fundraising for the park. Parks and Recreation faces a real cash crunch in trying to bring the management plan's recommendations to life. No extra money was allocated to High Park in Toronto's 1994 budget. "It's a shame we can't put the resources into the park," Bell said. "The advisory committee is going to have to do something to encourage a sense of ownership, involvement, stewardship. The bureaucracy is no longer able to."

"I expected a lot from the committee. I haven't been let down."
Sam Caragianakos
Grenadier
Restaurant

Securing park Safety

*Telephones and signage launch
a long-awaited effort to upgrade
park safety*

by Gigi Suhanic

Large, forested areas in the middle of dense urban settings are bound to attract criminal activity. High Park is no exception to that rule. The park has been the scene, in its 121 year history, of some shocking criminal acts. Perhaps the most notorious and highly publicized was the murder of Kenn Zeller in the summer of 1985. Zeller, a 39 year old librarian was in the park's south end near Colborne Lodge on June 21 when he was attacked around midnight by a group of eight Swansea teenagers and died on the scene from injuries he received. Five of the eight young men involved were arrested for murder and sentenced in adult court to nine years prison each. They were eligible for parole after 18 months.

Despite Zeller's murder and a scattering of other high profile crimes that have occurred in the park over the years, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force considers the park to have a pretty clean safety record. Official police statistics back that up. In High Park in 1993 there were 23 reported occurrences. The majority involved the assault of men by other men, mostly in the early hours of the morning; and break and enters. Police received one report of indecent exposure from a woman. There was one report of a woman being assaulted by a man.

However, these modest numbers don't have the calming effect they should. Incidents like Zeller's murder hang like a weight around the neck of the park's reputation. There's a sense when one enters the park that the potential for violence lurks behind a bush, or under a rock waiting to pounce. Where police statistics trail off, a heightened fear for one's personal safety kicks in, especially amongst women who use High Park. It's a place to enter against one's better judgement and at one's own risk. Fear and how it effects women's use of High Park is well documented. In 1987, the city of Toronto conducted a user survey of High Park. It found that many more men than women use the park - 2:1 in the day and 3:1 at night. It confirmed that over

half of the women who answered the *High Park User Survey* questionnaire said they were concerned about their safety in the park with 35 per cent fearing a male prowler. Study participants also reported "a fear of not knowing what was in the bushes". Women also said their apprehension resulted from media reports of crime in the park and a general feeling of isolation and vulnerability.

The findings of the *High Park User Survey* came as no surprise to the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC). METRAC had long understood the way fear of sexual assault manipulates women's use of public parks. The organization argued that a heightened fear of sexual assault governed the number of women who used parks and how they used them. METRAC also cautioned against putting too much faith in official police statistics for sexual assault, in assessing a place's safety. It's a widely accepted fact that 60-90 per cent of sexual assaults go unreported. METRAC concluded High Park needed a safety overhaul, one that would address real and perceived dangers, to make it fully accessible.

The High Park Citizens' Safety Work Group (HPC-SWG) has been hashing out a park safety programme since the group's inception in 1993. The HPCSWG is one of four subcommittees of the High Park Citizen's Advisory Committee which is overseeing the implementation of the High Park Master Plan. The master plan was developed over many years by Toronto Parks and Recreation and was released in its final form in November, 1992.

This May will see the implementation of the first phase of a park safety upgrading programme. Phase one will include the installation of extra public phones, information signs and directional maps. Revamped brochures will also be available at the park's restaurant.

Work actually began last fall when one new phone was installed in the park's north end near the playground. Another phone at the south end near the zoo was relocated. The bulk of the work will be completed late this spring when three new phones are slated for installation at Grenadier Pond, the washrooms on Colborne Lodge Drive and deep in the park's entrails near the municipal allotment gardens.

The park will be peppered with seven maps showing the location of facilities, roads, stairs, monuments and buildings. The backs of the maps will also have information specific to the panel's location. Five nature trail signs, designed to advise walking distances, the trail's degree of difficulty and its location within the park, will be installed in May at the entrance to the West Ravine trail. Park's and Recreation Employee Candace Zboch said the nature trail signs are the first of more to come. "We're just going to keep on going until we run out of money," she said. Phase one will be used as a trial period to gauge public reaction to the programme.

Phase one is bare bones in its scope. Still, it's acknowledged as a start, especially for a 399-acre park that until recently could boast of only three public telephones and zero information and directional maps.

"The park's been poorly ordered for a long time. Nobody looked at the dynamics of the situation until now," said Barbara Cowan. Cowan is a west end resident and a member of the HPCSWG. She has worked extensively on the issue of women's safety in green spaces, previously with Toronto's Safe City Committee and the High Park Women's Action Committee.



Fashioning “outer parks” to work like this area in Paris’ Luxembourg Park would increase the number of women in the park and sooth jangled nerves.

photo courtesy Ksenija Brezina Klinger

Cowan welcomes phase one work. “The most important aspect is taking a look at serious long-term planning about how we use the park,” she said.

There’s been no shortage of ideas. Suggestions run the gamut from an urban park ranger programme to increased lighting to instituting a washroom attendant system. The HPCSWG will really cut into the meat of long-term planning for safety when a city-commissioned report is thrown on the table for discussion, possibly this summer.

Ksenija Klinger Brezina is an urban designer and planner. She is the consultant the city has hired to pull together a lot of exciting ideas for improving the perception people have of High Park, and for actually making it safer. Any safety retrofit should focus on women, children and the elderly, Klinger Brezina said. “If it’s safe for them, it’s safe for everyone,” she said. Klinger Brezina also said there needs to be a will on the part of the community to tackle safety issues. An ideal safety programme for the park would be structured on a four-point framework that looks at the park’s natural areas, park infrastructure and buildings, management policies and operations and the creation of “outer parks”.

“Women and the elderly are afraid to use the natural areas. They’re afraid of the bushes and I don’t blame them,” Klinger Brezina said. Information signs about trails leading into natural areas will take away some of the mystery. Programming is the key to opening up the park’s woods. Nature walks conduct-

ed by groups would attract more women into the forests. Lighting the nature trails is not an option. However, park lighting needs to be upgraded and added in a few other areas.

Using staff in some imaginative ways could also boost women’s sense of security. Right now, the park staff is anonymous to users. Gardeners could be assigned an area in the park to make them more visible and accessible. One notion that’s also been batted around quite a bit is a pilot urban ranger programme.

People don’t necessarily have to be drawn into the middle of the park to enjoy it. The idea of the “outer park” originated with the creation of Central Park. At the heart of the concept is the understanding that developing a park’s edges is as important as developing the centre. High Park’s edges are fairly inhospitable. Two “outer parks”, perhaps one at Bloor Street and another at Howard Gate off of Parkside Drive are what’s called for. There would be a playground and seating and programming. The “outer parks ” would function as safe houses. Women could go there and know that others would be there. Also, the “outer parks” would make the park look more appealing from the street.

“The goal is to reduce women’s concerns for their personal safety and increase their presence without compromising the park’s natural environment,” Klinger Brezina said.

THE BLACK O.

High Park's Eco

by

My father is a Toronto-boy, raised in the Parkdale of the 30s and 40s. High Park figured prominently as one of his favourite childhood playgrounds. He fished in and skated on Grenadier Pond. He even swam in it. One of the stories he likes to tell is of a late-night summer bicycle ride through High Park. It's the kind of thing a 13-year-old would do, take in a horror movie and then score a few more cheap thrills, get the blood racing by plunging into the park's still loneliness. Memories of the warm night enveloping his rocketing form still rekindle that sense of adventure and danger in my Dad's eyes. Entering High Park at Colborne Lodge Drive, my Dad recounts creaking up the hill on his one-speed past the Howard's homestead. He was puffing once he had topped the steep, snaking incline. By then, he'd reached the point-of-no-return and had to go on. There were no street lamps to brighten the way. The sky was a purple milky-black. Darker still was the dense woodiness of the oak's gnarled branches, thrusting around and above his head. Anything could have happened.



I too am a head-to-toe Torontonionian. And like my Dad, I have spent and do spend a lot of time in High Park. I've had lots of great experiences there, and a few not-so-great ones. And like my Dad, the park is part of my psyche. Without it I would be a different person. So, I am very emotional about High Park. I would fight hard for it. High Park is *my* park. I know others share the same pangs of ownership. Perhaps that's what is amazing about High Park - it's power to inspire in people a fierce loyalty and possessiveness.

So naturally, many, myself included, paid close attention when Toronto's Department of Parks and Recreation released *High Park: Draft Proposals for Restoration and Management* in May 1992. In this long-awaited document Parks and Recreation staff discussed the park's multi-faceted role and confirmed the city's continued commitment to that role. However, the report's authors said that the heavy demands placed on the park had stressed it, in particular, it's "natural environment". The report called High Park's nature "degraded". It warned that several rare ecosystems living in High Park, among them Red Oak and Hemlock forests, Grenadier Pond's wetlands and the black oak savannah, were on the verge of collapse. Parks and Recreation called for their protection and restoration.

Most of us could wrap our brains around rare forests and wetlands. But savannahs? Canadians don't have much experience with savannahs. Visions of Africa's tree-scattered plains spring to mind when the word is invoked. But according to the people who study the natural world, North America has a vast natural history of savannahs. They describe the North American version as half-way between a prairie and a forest with an open tree canopy and a carpet of grasses and wildflowers below. Once



Artist J.E.H. MacDonald captured High Park's savannah on

millions of acres of savannah spread across present-day United States and Canada. Today, World Wildlife Fund Canada calls the savannah Canada's most endangered ecosystem. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has scoured Southern Ontario looking for meagre remnants of savannah to protect. One of the areas it identified was High Park. It's not just because savannahs are a dying breed that the MNR wants them protected. According to the MNR savannahs harbour 30 per cent of Southern Ontario's rare plants.

High Park can claim a share of the savannah's richness. The grasses, Big Blue Stem and Little Blue Stem and Indian Grass thrive in the park. Biologists have recorded two varieties of Woodland Sunflower, Canada Tick-trefoil, Bush Clover, Pasture Rose, Wild Lupine, Cylindric Blazing-Star and many others. But there used to be more. At one time the park could also boast of rare tenants like the Karner Blue Butterfly, the Mottled Dusky Wing, and two species of dragonfly, the Bluet and Halloween Penitent. They went the way of the wind when the plants they fed on disappeared.

High Park's rare secrets are weighty leverage. They certainly worked in Parks and Recreation favour, in convincing Toronto city council to approve the management study's recommendations. With the go-ahead in hand in February 1993, the department has been working toward restoration goal. It hired

HIGH PARK SAVANNAH

Ecological Birthright?

By Gigi Suhanic



High Park in 1912.

photo courtesy National Gallery of Canada

consultant and biologist Steven Apfelbaum to take the savannah's and forest's temperature and make a prognosis. Apfelbaum, a founder of Wisconsin-based Applied Ecological Services Inc., has studied and restored savannahs and woodlands for the past 40 years. In June 1993 Apfelbaum and a group of assistants lived in High Park for three weeks. During that time Apfelbaum's team took the park's pulse at two different sites. What they found was an ecosystem in distress. As Apfelbaum explains, a savannah is not a random assemblage of plants, animals and insects. Rather, it's an intricate community whose dwellers have built up a series of symbiotic relationships over several thousands of years.

Apfelbaum points to several findings that indicate the web is failing. The park is dominated by frail and elderly oak trees. He counts their years at between 135-200 and says many have reached the end of their life span. He estimates in 30 years half of the older trees will be dead. Of greater concern to Apfelbaum was the discovery that no young oaks are coming down the pike to take their elders' place. The team found no oak seedlings on either site. "I've never seen a site with no regeneration. That is of great concern to us," Apfelbaum said. Research in the other areas fared not much better. Non-native plants are outcompeting native plants by 20 and as much as 80 per cent. Bare ground also accounted for 40-60 per cent of the area covered, Apfelbaum said. He also saw evidence of severe erosion of

the park's sandy, nutrient poor soils. "You have a system in spiralling decline. It's such an intimate balance. In a way you're talking about ecological health," Apfelbaum said. He traces the interruptions of those inner workings to several factors including mowing, the use of herbicides, and human impact. Parks and Recreation instituted a no-mowing policy in some areas of High Park in 1988, expressly to encourage the growth of native plants. A herbicide ban exists throughout the park. The incursion of exotic species of trees and plants, ranks highest on Apfelbaum's list of threats. In High Park imported species like the Norway Maple, European Buckthorn, Black Swallowwort and others have taken hold and are choking out native plants. In reversing this process, Apfelbaum said he doesn't propose to eradicate non-natives from the park. What he wants to do is push them back to give the native plants some breathing space. The techniques to do that are invasive. They include clearing brush, setting controlled fires, girdling trees and applying an herbicide by painting the solution onto the stump of a tenacious bush to stop it from resprouting. "We don't want to make any decisions for nature. We want to reestablish a process that provided the basis for functions and the system will reassemble itself. We want to let nature do it," he said. "It's a serious decision to do nothing. It will have grave consequences for this site."

It's also "a serious decision" to do something. The restoration process sets up an ethical dilemma for me. I'm not comfortable making life and death decisions. I wonder what living communities restoration will disrupt or destroy. The non-interventionist side of me screams, "Leave the park alone". I know, just the same, that the park as it stands today, is a product of human meddling. I also know that every year High Park looks a little less shiny to me. Criss-crossing paths etched by mountain bikers along the west ravine have dug deeper and deeper into the park's flesh. Soil erosion from these spontaneous trails has exposed the roots of trees like veins popping out of a body-builder's neck. Garbage floats aimlessly in the duck ponds. And the virulent green slime that gathers every summer at Grenadier Pond's edges is a real turn-off. Torontonians have benefited from the park's salubrious climes for 121 years now. It's time to return the favour. If restoration is the way to do that this summer may afford park users the perfect opportunity to see it in action.

Apfelbaum will set up demonstration sites and test plots this summer, pending approval from Parks and Recreation managers. The demonstration sites are intended as teasers to give people a little taste of what the park could look like. The test plots will be used to carry out certain research projects. For example, it's one of Apfelbaum's hypotheses that the oaks aren't regenerating because the park's fuzzy and fat squirrels are eating the acorns. He also suspects turf grass may stop the acorns from

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Fishing in Grenadier Pond in the 1920s.

photo courtesy of City of Toronto Archives

Can Grenadier Pond Be Saved?

In the summer, one look at the pond's slimy green surface tells you this place needs help.

by Jill Franklin

With the growth of a city, comes the death of a pond, and High Park's Grenadier Pond is no exception. Since last fall, an intensive study has been carried out both in and around Grenadier Pond to find out what destruction has taken place and what can be done to bring it back to its natural state.

At a meeting held in High Park on April 12, Deborah Martin-Downs, a fisheries biologist with Gartner Lee Limited, and Murray Boyce from Toronto's Department of Parks and Recreation presented the findings of the study and a number of different options that could be implemented to rehabilitate the pond. Participants in the study included the city of Toronto Parks

and Recreation, the University of Toronto, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the consulting firm of Gartner Lee Limited, and citizens' groups and individuals. Back in September the public participated in a field day to look at various issues involved with the study, and take part in field investigations. The field group studied shoreline, fish habitat characteristics, species identification, and took an inventory of waterfowl, rare plants, herbs, snake and turtle habitats. Data was collected from within the pond to check phosphorous and oxygen levels, water temperature, plankton communities, and sediment depths. Surface and ground water measurements were also taken.

A number of factors have contributed to the pond's decline. There isn't one magical solution that will bring it back to life in a short period of time. Each problem and solution is being carefully considered toward an end result of rehabilitating the pond to its naturally functioning ecosystem.

So what's wrong with Grenadier Pond?

High algae levels are a major problem. As the algae decays it consumes oxygen. In Grenadier Pond, dissolved oxygen is non-existent below four metres. There are also high levels of phosphorous supporting the algae growth in the summer. This results in poor water clarity, inhibiting plant growth and light transmission. In some areas, the sediment depth measured up to two metres. This sediment is less permeable than the pond's natural base and prevents the full potential for ground contribution. Most of the water feeding the pond is from ground water, which is of better quality than surface run-off. The pond flushes through on average about once a year, which is a good replacement rate. However, the surface water is too warm for the fish to thrive, forcing them into the deeper areas of the pond where there is no oxygen or light. Since 1960 over 21 species of fish have been recorded, some placed there by stocking. The most common fish at present are Pumpkinseed, Bluegill, Carp, Golden Shiner and Perch. Despite the restocking of Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass, these predatory fish are unable to maintain their populations. The steep rocky slopes of the altered shoreline destroyed most of their spawning grounds, leaving limited locations for spawning on the western shoreline and to a lesser extent in the south.

A surprising lack of amphibians

Wetlands once surrounded Grenadier Pond but are now found in only two areas in the north and southwest. Snapping turtles are reproducing there and the red-eared slider turtle, likely released pets, is breeding along the remaining natural shoreline. But there is a surprising lack of amphibians which could relate to water quality or an absence of suitable breeding grounds. The depleted marsh areas are used by the Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher and Pied-billed Grebe. It's feared these birds will be overwhelmed by the burgeoning Canada Geese population. Attracted by human feeding and lawn areas for grazing, there's been a dramatic rise in their numbers. An excess of feces is feeding into the pond.

As a result of these findings, Gartner Lee has put forth a list of desirable characteristics for the pond which include: better water clarity; better oxygen concentrations in the bottom; more natural vegetation along the pond margin and in the pond; self-reproducing predator fish species such as Largemouth Bass and Northern Pike; improve diversity of wildlife; reduce waste from waterfowl along the pond's edge. These goals will need to be achieved by a phased approach so that everything isn't disturbed at once and experimentation in small areas can be properly assessed. In addition, the city of Toronto Department of Public Works is studying the feasibility of building a sediment pond at Grenadier's north end. The project is currently being monitored by citizens concerned with invasive construction in the park. The



photo by Mike Bahan

Canada Geese are flocking to High Park in astounding numbers. Their feces are degrading the pond.

options developed to meet the desirable characteristics will focus on chemical or bacteria treatment; removal or covering of the sediment; reducing the algae and phosphorous, increasing oxygen; improving the water clarity; altering slopes and edge structure; lowering the water levels and removing the interference of animals and people. Through education, the general public can play an integral role in the pond rehabilitation. Residents north and west of the park, in the area supplying the ground water, can limit fertilizer and detergent use around their homes. People fishing in the pond need to become aware of and respect the sensitive spawning areas. If the public would stop feeding the geese, their population would substantially decrease.

Increasing carnivorous fish

The cost of rehabilitating Grenadier Pond is currently being studied, and will directly influence the implementation of any of the proposed options. The Canadian Sportsmens Show/Outdoor Canada has offered to fund two demonstration projects. These will include an experiment to increase the abundance of carnivorous fish in the pond, and the installation of education signage and restrictions on feeding waterfowl. The Department of Parks and Recreation has submitted a proposal to the Great Lakes Clean-Up Fund to rehabilitate plankton populations, install sediment exclosures, alter the shoreline, and create an amphibian breeding pond. The return of controlled boat use has yet to be decided. Rowboats were available for rental at the pond in the recent past. Swimming is not advised because the bacterial content is unknown and sharp rocks on the bottom are hazardous. No matter what recreational uses will be permitted on the pond, there is sure to be increased activity going on over the next year as park users witness, and get involved with the return of life to Grenadier Pond.

Pondering freedom in the winter and spring of our discontent

At first we could hardly wait for winter - the crispy white stuff, the bracing air, the legitimate excuse for drinking hot chocolate with little marshmallows. Then, a few endless weeks later, the excitement began to wear thin. Winter, apparently, didn't know when to quit. In fact, it went way beyond the bounds of good taste, of reason, of, well, Winter As It Was Meant To Be. Depending on whether we had spent the winter as sofa spuds or snow bunnies, we suffered from either cabin fever or thermal underwear itch. We were mad as hell. We wanted it to be over. We lusted in our hearts after spring.

What turned it into the winter of our discontent? I blame the High Park Bison Incident. Let out of their cosy winter digs by football ninnies who thought they were freeing buffalo (never mind the paddock sign that nagged "Bison {bison bison}"), the bison frolicked all night through the snow-filled park. People came out to watch the fun and do a little frolicking themselves. All the television news programmes covered the story - on the tube it looked exciting, exotic, romantic - a sort of Dances with Bison. We empathized, of course: who didn't dream of being set free from something? Outdoorsy types cheered the action. Even couch potatoes considered poking their noses out into the cold. It looked like all-Canadian winter fun. But what was this? At dawn the shaggy revelers turned tail, and headed home for the bison equivalent of hash browns and eggs over easy. They'd had enough of winter. And, when we thought about it, so had we.

We began to look in vain for signs of impending spring. We weren't greedy - a little melting slush sloshed over the boot tops would have made us happy. Luke-warm afternoons would have made us delirious. We wanted to commit to a long-term relationship with sunlight. Instead, we got a few one-day stands. We seethed with frustration. Some of us got desperate and tried to rush winter

out the door.

Tuques bobbed behind the snowbanks on the tennis courts as the seasonally-challenged swung a racket with one hand while they blew on the fingers of the other to restore circulation. Stir-crazy parents hauled stroller-loads of runny-nosed toddlers across the tundra to visit the zoo. Rollerbladers minced gingerly around the ice patches they could see, and did triple lutzers on the ones they couldn't. Human desperation is never a pretty sight.

Meanwhile, nature kept her cool. It was business as usual at the pond where the Canada geese, those charming feathered pigs with wings, continued to scarf all the food and terrorize innocent bystanders. Over in the paddocks, the Highland cattle, looking like Rula Lenska on a bad-hair day, ruminated philosophically. Life was unfolding as it should. The light began to dawn. Perhaps we should take a tip from nature and relax, we thought, put our feet up, sip a little soothing hot milk (with chocolate and marshmallows). The first day of spring had to arrive - the calendar said so. On March 20, our troubles would be over. When the equinox pulled into town, bringing sunshine, semi-warm air and blue skies, we were ready. We basked like tourists on the beach at Ochos Rios. Some of us went so far as to take off our coats. We



photo by Mike Bahan

Football ninnies let High Park's Bison out for a romp.

began to make plans involving daffodils and bicycles - but cautiously. Like the cheatee in a country hurtin' song, we'd loved and been lied to before. We knew it couldn't last. Sure enough, the rains hit the next day and spring turned nasty - it was *deja vu* all over again. But this time we knew what to do. Right away we started dreaming of summer - warm, toasty, sweet-smelling - we had to have it. We started looking for all the signs. We could hardly wait.

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reaching the soil. There's every reason to hope they're on the right track. Up behind the green houses, High Park gardeners Terry Fahey and Solomon Boye have successfully sprouted acorns under what looks like chicken wire. That's not the only thing they've grown. Fahey and Boye have collected native plant seed for the past two years. Inside the greenhouse a small section of flats is now brimming with species of wild flowers and other native flora nurtured by the Boye. The intention is to re-introduce plants that are known to have flourished in the park not that long ago. The test plots will also be used to gauge the land's response to the hard-core restoration techniques. Apfelbaum expects the results of this research to be known and understood in the next two years.

If burning and girdling are a little hard for some to swallow, the beauty of restoration is it's not a closed process. The park's full-scale restoration will depend on a sizeable volunteer corps. Right now in New York City volunteers are helping to restore 90 acres of woodland in the north end of the 843-acre urban park. Volunteering for restoration work is a good way to understand the process and take control of it, and maybe even alter it if we don't like what's happening.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has gone out on a limb with this project. So have a lot of other people. Fahey and Boye are giving public talks on the savannah all on their own time. Groups like the west end based Environmental Dialogue have committed time and money from their own pockets to organize public education forums on the park's ecology. So, let's talk. The restoration is complicated and thought-provoking. It calls on each of us to make some difficult decisions. Let's not hang the department and others out to dry without giving them a hearing. And let's not let High Park slide because we're too afraid or suspicious to do something about it. Let's get in there and get our hands dirty. Let's take care of High Park. After all, it is ours.

High Park in history.....



John Howard



Jemima Howard

High Park - the best deal the city of Toronto ever struck

The gods smiled on Toronto when John G. Howard set sail in 1831 for Canada from England with his wife Jemima. Howard contributed significantly to the development of Toronto in his several professional capacities. He was the city's first appointed land surveyor. He was a city engineer and architect and designed St. James Cemetery, designed sewers and laid down the planks for sidewalks on King Street. He was also the first drawing master at Upper Canada College, a position he held for 23 years.

His greatest contribution to Victorian Toronto and future generations, was his decision to transfer ownership of his 165-acre estate into the hands of the city of Toronto for use as a public park. Howard purchased the estate in 1836 from the Crown and began construction of Colborne Lodge one year later. Colborne Lodge is named in honour of Howard's benefactor and friend Sir John Colborne. When Howard first purchased the estate he intended to use it as a rural retreat. Shortly after he and his wife Jemima made it their full-time home. It was many years later, in 1873 that Howard had the foresight to offer the land to the city of Toronto. While many have come to believe that the acreage was an unconditional gift, in fact, it came with

a few conditions attached to. Howard and city officials agreed that no alcohol would ever be served in the park. That rule still holds true today. The city also agreed to pay Howard a yearly annuity of \$1200 for the remainder of his life. He also received \$1 a year for his role as honorary park warden. Payments to Howard following his death in 1890 totalled \$20,400 in annuities and \$17 as honorary warden. It's estimated at the time of Howard's offer in 1873 that the land was worth \$24,000. Most will agree High Park was a bargain at any price.

Did you know?

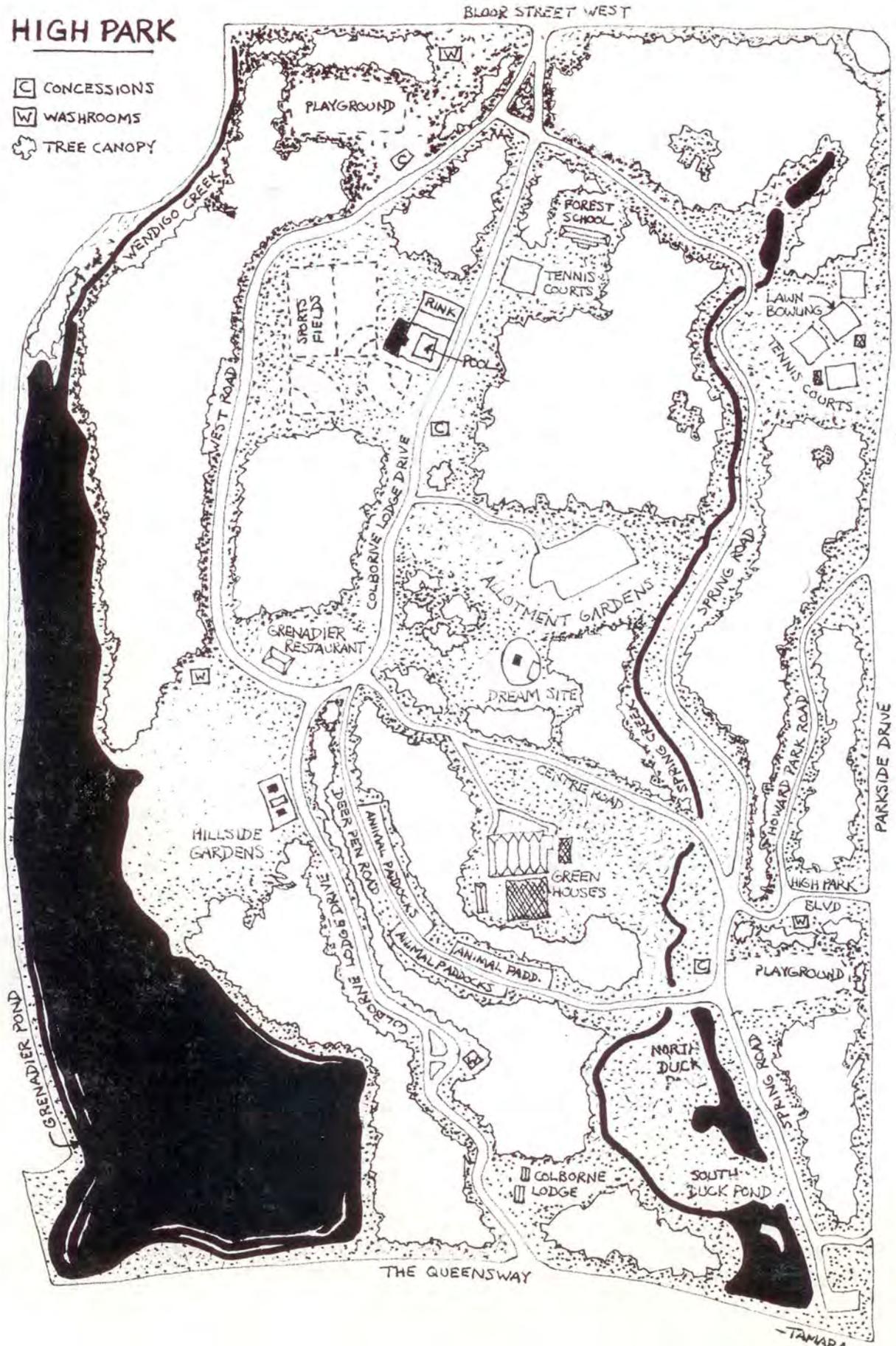
●Jemima Howard was extremely ill during the last few years of her life. Descriptions of her illness which she recorded in her diary have led the Toronto Historical Board to attribute her premature death to breast cancer.

●Jemima and John Howard are buried in High Park under a granite cairn. The wrought-iron gate surrounding the tomb is fencing from London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Howard had the wrought iron gate shipped overseas. The boat it was travelling on sank in transit near Montreal's harbour. The fencing surrounding the tomb is what could be salvaged from the wreck.

sources - Toronto Observed by William Dendy and William Kilbourn, Toronto by Bruce West, Toronto Magnificent City by Nick & Helma Mika and Toronto Historical Board.

HIGH PARK

- C CONCESSIONS
- W WASHROOMS
- ☁ TREE CANOPY



-TAMARA-