

John Howard's High Park

"A Square Mile or Two of Rough Ground..."

David Bain

Volume 101, Number 1, Spring 2009

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065672ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065672ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Bain, D. (2009). John Howard's High Park: "A Square Mile or Two of Rough Ground...". *Ontario History*, 101(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065672ar>

Article abstract

In 1837, architect John George Howard purchased 165 acres west of Toronto as a country estate that he named High Park. In 1876, he donated his land to the city and, almost until his death in 1890, was the primary force behind the planning and development of a natural or forest park that is almost 400 acres in size today. This article looks at John Howard's efforts during his lifetime, as well as his continuing influence in the decades after his death. It also examines the idea of a forest park in an urban setting, and the ideas, events and individuals that have shaped one of Canada's important urban parks.



John Howard's High Park

“A Square Mile
or Two of Rough
Ground...”

By **David Bain**

High Park, circa 1920. Postcard from the collection of the author.

Prominent Toronto architect John George Howard [1803-1890] presented the City of Toronto with a very great gift in 1873, his large west end estate of High Park. In the seventeen years that followed, he managed the process that turned his farm from an isolated retreat in the country into an urban park of almost 400 acres. This article looks at John Howard's efforts to develop this park, as well as his continuing influence in the years after his death. It also examines the idea of a natural or forest park in an urban setting and the ideas, events, and individuals that have shaped High Park.

Most cities in the new world were established on a body of water with the

natural environment—often impenetrable forest—all around. The transition from clearing in the forest to urban center was often rapid. Enormous changes within the lifetime of pioneers saw the once feared forest become a source of nostalgia. Remnants that survived the initial onslaught were sometimes recycled as parks. It did not seem to matter if they were altered, or indeed if they had to be rebuilt into some resemblance of the former landscape, they now became worth preserving. Canadian city parks like Halifax's Point Pleasant Park [1866], Vancouver's Stanley Park [1886], and High Park are examples that both define and stand in contrast to their particular urban environment.¹

¹ The development of Point Pleasant and Stanley parks also depended on the survival of large properties and the single-minded dedication of key figures. Point Pleasant Park was originally a garrison reserve outside of Halifax. Although most of the original forest was removed while it was in military hands, the 185-acre site was eventually reforested and maintained under the strong direction of a parks committee. It

Abstract

In 1837, architect John George Howard purchased 165 acres west of Toronto as a country estate that he named High Park. In 1876, he donated his land to the city and, almost until his death in 1890, was the primary force behind the planning and development of a natural or forest park that is almost 400 acres in size today. This article looks at John Howard's efforts during his lifetime, as well as his continuing influence in the decades after his death. It also examines the idea of a forest park in an urban setting, and the ideas, events and individuals that have shaped one of Canada's important urban parks.

Résumé: En 1837, l'architecte John George Howard fit l'acquisition de High Park, une propriété campagnarde de 165 acres à l'ouest de Toronto. En 1876, il fit don de cette propriété à la ville de Toronto dans le but de servir à l'établissement d'un parc forestier. Dans cet article nous retraçons les efforts de John Howard, le rôle primordial qu'il joua, et l'influence qu'il a eue, même après sa mort, survenue en 1890, dans l'organisation, l'établissement et le développement de ce parc qui compte aujourd'hui plus de 400 acres. Nous examinons aussi le concept de l'existence d'un parc forestier à l'intérieur d'une zone urbaine, et les idées, événements et personnes qui ont permis et contribué activement à la formation de ce parc, l'un des plus importants parcs urbains du Canada.

John Howard arrived in the town of York as a young man, with his wife Jemima, in 1832. Behind him were early

careers as a seaman, surveyor, architect, and speculative builder. There were opportunities in the colonies for a sober, hardworking, and ambitious man. In the course of his career, he was the architect of important early buildings, as well as a popular art instructor at Upper Canada College, a surveyor for the City of Toronto, a land developer and a Justice of the Peace.

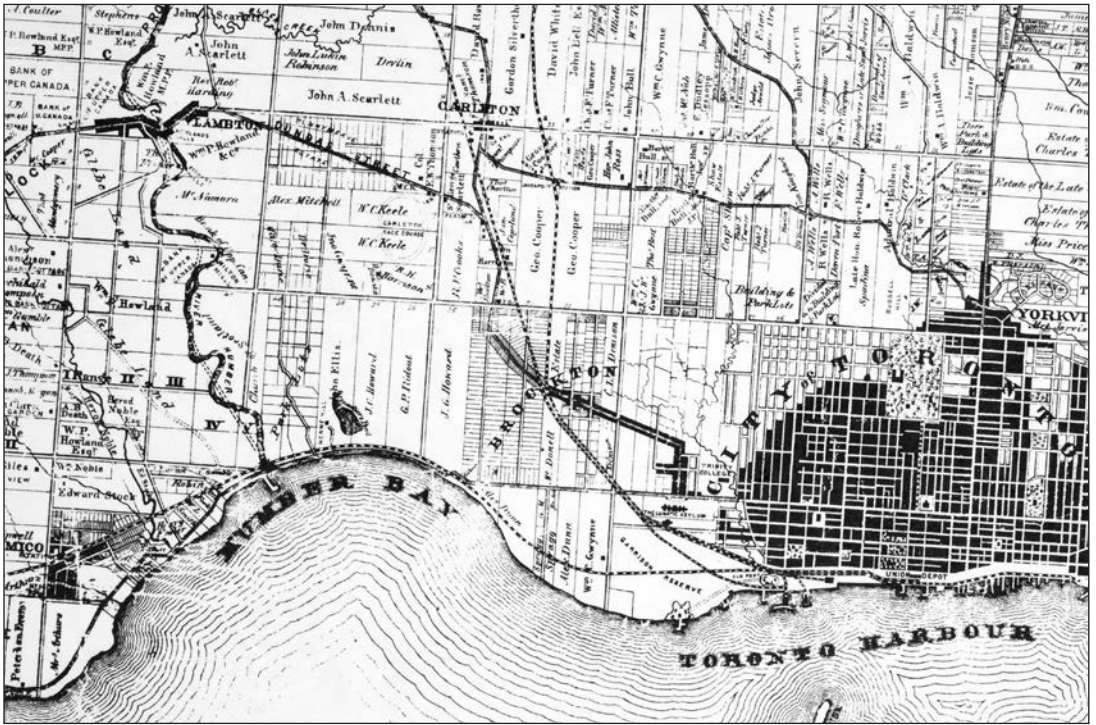
In 1837, John Howard purchased the 160-acre Park Lot 37 on Lake Ontario, some four miles west of downtown Toronto from King's College, for 160 pounds.² Although engineer and publisher James Cull had already been allowed to remove pine forest from this park lot to be used to build Toronto wharfs,³ it remained picturesque, a rugged and uneven landscape covered in part with pine and oak forest, but also featuring areas of typical open, grassy oak savannah. It had numerous water features, most notably a large body of water named Grenadier Pond in the southwest corner linking directly to Lake Ontario.⁴ It also had a sandy lakefront beach. From this time onwards, John and Jemima Howard lived in the country—in Colborne Lodge, the

remains a forest park resisting, for example, automobile traffic and sports facilities. See Janet Kitz and Gary Castle, *Point Pleasant Park: An illustrated history* (Halifax: Pleasant Point Publishing, 1999). Stanley Park, at slightly less than 1,000 acres, owes the original preservation of its forest cover to city councilman Lauchlan Hamilton. Over time, authorities in Vancouver have tried to create a balance in Stanley Park between the forest and other urban needs. See Robert A.J. McDonald, "'Holy retreat' or 'practical breathing spot'? class perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park," *Canadian Historical Review* 2 (1984), 127-53.

² County of York. *Abstract of deeds* 139A.

³ *Swansea souvenir brochure, 1936* ([Swansea, Ont.]: Swansea Historical Society, c.1997), 23. Cull presumably had some sort of arrangement with Kings College, that institution being the original owner of both Park Lots 37 and 38.

⁴ Only the southeastern tip of Grenadier Pond fell on Park Lot 37, with by far the greater portion on Park Lot 38. Park Lot 38 was owned by the Ellis family.



Tremaine's Map of the County of York from the Humber River to Toronto, 1860

High Park developed from a portion of the Ellis property and all of the adjoining Howard and Ridout properties. The other Howard property closer to the city is Sunnyside. The daunting distance between Toronto and the future park is apparent in this map. The direct road route to High Park was Queen Street, which became the Lakeshore Road after crossing the railway tracks at Sunnyside. Given the distance, the lakeshore railway was the best transportation alternative for most citizens going to the park. Other road and rail connections from the populated southern part of the city angle north and west past the future park. Courtesy of Toronto Reference Library

cottage he designed overlooking Lake Ontario—and he made the trip from the city in every sort of weather, embracing the isolation from the pressures of his career and fulfilling his ambition to be a country squire. Although very busy, Howard owned guns and sometimes hunted; he occasionally hosted picnics or gatherings; both he and Jemima Howard were artists; he took an interest in his farming operation; and gardening was a

passion, especially during his retirement years.

It must be noted, however, that, despite his love of High Park, Howard always viewed it, and all his other scattered land holdings, as investments. In 1836, even in the process of acquisition of his park lot, he did a speculative development plan breaking it into villa lots.⁵ He also exploited the natural resources on his park lot, benefiting from using lumber and

⁵ Shirley G. Morriss, *The Journal of John George Howard, 1833-49*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Ontario Heritage Foundation, Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, 198-), 39 (21 May 1836). [Hereafter cited as *Journal*]. Another suggestion of his practical approach to his own land was when, on 9 November of the same year, he went "...to the Humber to lay off some Acre lots."

other resources for building projects.⁶ In 1843, he advertised in one of the Toronto newspapers to try to lease what sounds a great deal like Colborne Lodge and a portion of High Park.⁷ He leased the farming operation to a Mr. Lawrie in 1849.⁸

In 1853, due to the pressures of business, John Howard and his wife took a trip to England and, thereafter, he began reshape his business and personal life. Although he slowly shed his roles as architect, teacher, and City employee, he could hardly be said to have retired. Instead, in the years between 1854 and 1873, John Howard concentrated more and more on his own properties, principally as a land speculator. Most of his efforts focused on Park Lot 35, called Sunnybrook, just to the east of High Park, acquired in 1848 from the principal of Upper Canada College, Frederick W. Barron.⁹ His two

park lots now cemented his role as a leading west end citizen and developer.¹⁰ In 1854, he paid to have a native trail, by then a local road that wound through Sunnybrook, turned into a public street called Indian Road, running from Bloor Street to the Lakeshore Road. He also did his best to have a major crossing street from Dundas Street to High Park, but neighbours to the west of the new road refused, protesting that he was trying to “materially benefit” his own property.¹¹ While this was no doubt true, a public crossing road to High Park at this time would certainly have been an early move towards improving circulation in the area, perhaps preventing later problems. Although the remainder of the 1850s saw Howard’s focus remain on Sunnyside,¹² he also advertised all 165 acres of High Park for sale in 1862.¹³ Apparently

⁶ For example, Howard insisted that red and white pine from his estate be used in the early work at one of his major commissions, the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, which would have amounted to a great deal of timber removed in the mid 1840s. See William Dendy, *Lost Toronto*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1993), 165.

⁷ [Ad] *Star*, 26 July 1843. Although High Park is not specifically mentioned, details suggest Colborne Lodge. The ad offers: “A genteel cottage, handsomely furnished, with from 20 to 100 acres of park or meadow land, delightfully situated on the Lake Shore, within four miles of Toronto.” The actual distance to High Park from City Hall is a little longer, but the description fits. Howard did not own Sunnyside, slightly closer to the city, until 1848.

⁸ *Journal* vol. 6: 75 (July 30, 1849) “leased farm to a Mr. Lawrie”

⁹ County of York, *Abstract of deeds 139A*. Howard built a house, Sunnyside, on this lot in 1850, later the site of St. Joseph’s Hospital.

¹⁰ Howard took a strong interest in local issues like roads, and fought to protect his own interests in matters like taxation. He was also concerned about development on private property, trying to influence what was allowed to happen on land he sold, or offering opinions on neighbour’s plans.

¹¹ City of Toronto, Culture Division, Museum Services [thereafter CDMS], 1978-41-202, J.G. Howard’s report on the state of tracks..., 23 June 1877.

¹² See, for example, “Villa Lots for Sale,” *Globe*, 16 April 1855 & “Ontario Park,” *Globe*, 28 April 1857.

¹³ “To be sold, Colborne Lodge High Park, Toronto,” *Globe*, 12 May 1862. This ad details provides a snap shot of the property at the time: “...comprising 165 acres of land, all cleared. The Lodge contains 15 rooms, bath-room, water-closet? and cellars?, stables, carriage-house, barn, and root cellars, ice-house, etc. The Farm House, detached, contains 6? Rooms and cellar?, with large barn, stable and sheds. The proprietor has expended a very large sum in improvements upon the above premises within the last few years.”

he did not receive any offers worth considering since, by 1864, he had turned to the idea of subdividing High Park. A map from that year drawn by Howard of Park Lots 35, 36, and 37 shows the area of High Park north of the Howard residence divided into 8 large lots between 7 and 27½ acres in size.¹⁴

Almost ten years later, in 1873, when John Howard made his offer of a park to the city of Toronto, he stated that he had “wished for many years” that his property would become “a place of public resort for the citizens, by which means I should be identified with the...City for ever.”¹⁵ If he is taken at his word, and his thinking did shift from developer to public benefactor after 1864, one reason might be that his land sales at Sunnyside and elsewhere finally freed him from financial worry. Certainly his own experiences with the design of Toronto’s public landscape gave him a special sensitivity towards the city’s growing needs. He was, after all, the man responsible for the design of Toronto’s St. James Cemetery [1842] and he also prepared surveys and plans for park development of the waterfront in the 1840s and 1850s and prepared plans for a proposed Toronto park on the Garrison Common

in 1851.

The idea of Howard’s own property as a public open space may not have fully developed until early 1873, when the idea of a west-end park was very much in the news. With the established major downtown open space, Queen’s Park, in jeopardy, a portion of the former military lands of the Garrison Common, between High Park and the center of the city, was being touted as a west-end park. A *Globe* editorialist noted in February of that year: “We do not ask for anything so expensive as the Central Park of New York; but at a mere fraction of the cost the same good might be secured as the Manhattanites enjoy in that splendid oasis among their deserts of brick and stone.”¹⁶ Another February letter to the *Globe* from “Subscriber” promoted the acquisition of not only the Garrison Common, but portions of park lots 22, 23, 24 and 25, north of suburban Trinity College. “...rather than have no park at all, I say by all means purchase the Common, but let us have another park somewhere.”¹⁷

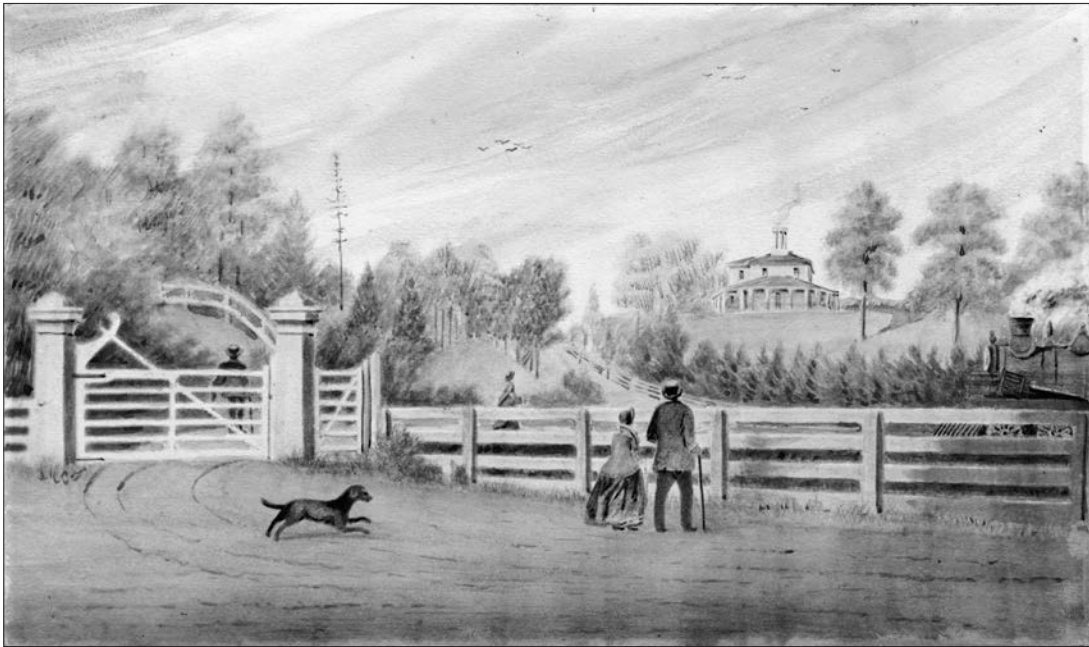
Howard’s offer came first as a letter to the press from Howard’s representative William Boulton, followed immediately thereafter by a communication to the city

¹⁴ City of Toronto Archives, Plan of Lots Numbers 35, 36, 37 First Con. Township of York Feby. [?], 1864.

¹⁵ Toronto City Council Minutes. *Appendix to the minutes* [thereafter TCCA], 7 June 1873.

¹⁶ “A New west-end park,” *Globe*, 12 February 1873. This brief quote suggests the attitude of the average Torontonians of the day towards a soft service like parks. They wanted them but they didn’t want to pay for them. There was often much discussion when privately owned park lots or blocks of government lands were developed for housing or other purposes, since, in British colonial situations, the idea was that some of the best of these should eventually, one way or another, be made available as public open spaces.

¹⁷ “A Western park,” *Globe*, 21 February 1873. Several aspects of this long letter suggest Howard himself as the author. For example, the letter sounds like it was written by a speculative builder: “Even as a speculation for the city, [the North halves of park lots 22, 23, 24 and 25] would pay handsomely if part was sold again in villa building lots ten or fifteen years hence.” Similar thoughts were expressed later by Howard to raise money to lighten the burden of acquiring the Ridout lands as a part of High Park. [See



High Park Gate 1870 . Looking north from Lake Ontario the Howard landscape is peaceful and settled, overlooked by John Howard's picturesque Colborne Lodge. Note the train to the right, a tip of the hat to Victorian progress. John Howard watercolour, courtesy of Toronto Public Library T11328

council. In his communication, Howard stated that, for three years, the site was to remain totally in his hands. In 1876, 120 acres were to pass to the City. After the deaths of John and Jemima Howard, Colborne Lodge and the forty-five prime acres along the lakeshore were also to pass to the city. No clearing was to be done on either site. While either remained alive, they were to be paid \$1,200 dollars per annum.¹⁸ The mayor and councilors were “unanimously delighted” by the property

when they visited the site on June 14th.¹⁹ Thereafter, there were a few quibbles and mild expressions of anxiety, but Howard’s terms were quietly accepted by city officials. The deed was signed in November and included several more conditions, namely that no additional buildings were permitted and that no drinking was to be allowed.²⁰ Given the conditions he had imposed, it was clear from the start that the donor intended to be a moving force in the new park’s development.

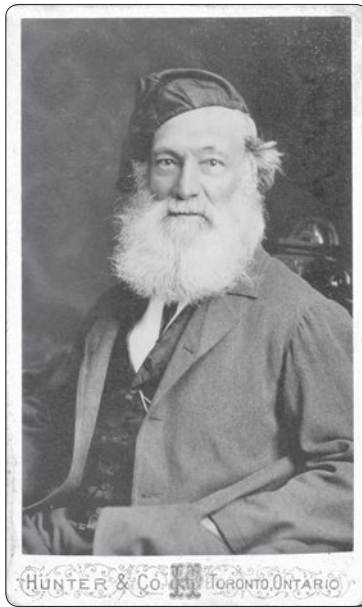
TCCA. Communication from John G. Howard, Esq...: “...sell fifty acres on the east side [of the Ridout land]...to lay out fifteen villa lots of three acres each...” Subscriber continues: “This ground is...peculiarly adapted for a park, having two or three ravines with creeks of spring water running into small lakes; It is also partially wooded, making even as it stands, a most picturesque spot.” This might have been Howard, at a slightly later date, talking about the attributes that he felt would make High Park desirable. At the least, if Subscriber is not Howard, this letter would have given High Park’s owner reason for reflection.

¹⁸ TCCA, Memorandum stating my views of conveying Colborne Lodge High Park to the Corporation of the City of Toronto, no. 100, 7 June 1873.

¹⁹ “A Trip to the Howard Farm,” *Globe*, 15 July 1873.

²⁰ County of York. *Indenture*, 15 November 1873.

What exactly did Torontonians think that this windfall had brought them? A lack of response from the average citizen in the press and elsewhere suggest that the new park, perhaps due to its distant location, simply did not awaken strong feelings, either for or against the idea. Community leaders supported the acquisition, but varied in their ideas of what the park should be. To William Boulton, as stated in the *Globe*, the idea was of a resort, to include hotels near the lake, and a steamer service.²¹ It might be, in other words, the public equivalent of the nearby private resorts available to Torontonians by boat or train on the occasion of any public holiday. To the editorial staff at the *Globe*, placing it in a larger perspective, the western park was to be part of an internal network with improved drives linking parks.²² To city politicians, the new park was simply a windfall. As one alderman noted, “Mr. Howard’s farm [is] a beautiful spot, nature [has] done very much for it, and...this opportunity should not be lost of getting a very fine park for very little.”²³



John George Howard (1874). *The future Forest Ranger is shown during the period when he was planning the park. Courtesy of Toronto Reference Library T32150*

No matter that others were vague about their thoughts on the new park, John Howard had been shaping his own landscape for decades. His rural retreat among the trees was a landscape that blended nature and history. His Regency cottage, farm buildings, and art gallery sat on a hill overlooking Lake Ontario. From this high place, an island of manicured lawns and expansive flowerbeds, there were panoramic views of the vast lake and rustic Grenadier Pond, and glimpses of groves and forest only lightly touched by human presence. Howard consciously preserved touchstones to the past, like native trails, and added grace points, like the modest wooden dock and boathouse among the reeds and grasses at the edge of Grenadier Pond. While Howard’s abilities as an architect and surveyor were useful, this was a landscape that owed much to its owner’s exposure to the artistic trends of the day. His pictures of High Park show both the sublime and the picturesque that he treasured in the landscape. His 1847 forest drawing, *Cedar Swamp*, likely of High

²¹ “Public Park,” *Globe*, 16 June 1873.

²² “Western park,” *Globe*, 21 February 1873. The idea of linking parks was talked about in the press and at council meetings in the 1870s and 1880s, but did not gain steam until the mid 1880s when Alderman John Hallam’s leadership led to the establishment of Rosedale Valley Park.

²³ “City Council,” *Globe*, 22 July 1873.

Park, shows Howard dwarfed by towering cedars, while his watercolour at the entrance to Colborne Lodge [see illust., p. 8], is of a more settled pastoral landscape.²⁴ Howard was now determined to preserve his landscape for future generations.²⁵

For the conversion from estate to park, John Howard had a string of park-like precedents close at hand. His own much admired east-end cemetery, St. James [1842]—winding roads through an uneven terrain on the lip of the wooded Don Valley—was the first Canadian picturesque cemetery.²⁶ He was also likely responsible for Caer Howell [1836- c.1846], on the northern edge of Toronto, an urban pleasure ground that featured a string of recreational focal points strung along Taddle Creek in

a wooded valley on the southwest corner of today's University Avenue and College Street.²⁷ Outside of the city, Howard was able to refer to dozens of examples of waterfront resorts that dotted the Lake Ontario shoreline. From the 1850s onward, day trips from Toronto visited such resorts in or near tourist destinations like Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Hamilton. Oaklands, on Burlington Bay near Hamilton, for example, would have suggested an appropriate mix for a natural park. It was smaller than High Park but offered a balanced blend of elements: a five-acre garden, fourteen acres of park and twenty-one acres of woodland.²⁸

In the grace period from 1873 to 1876, John Howard now became High Park's on-site surveyor, designer and su-

²⁴ See J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 134-37. John Howard was not only a dedicated amateur but also a pioneer in the Toronto art community. He was a moving force behind the Society of Artists and Amateurs of Toronto in 1834 and built his own early art gallery at High Park. Also a dedicated amateur artist was Lauchlan Hamilton, of Stanley Park, who used his considerable influence as a CPR land commissioner and Vancouver councilor to help preserve a sublime wilderness setting as a municipal park.

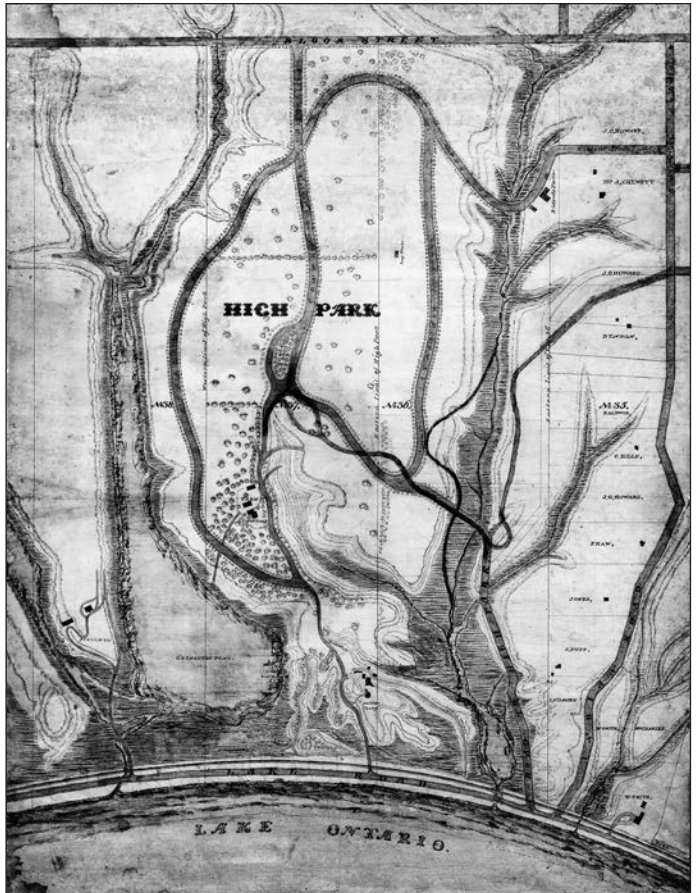
²⁵ John Howard's approach as an artist is also comparable of the way that British sportsmen interpreted the Canadian landscape. Aesthetically, these sportsmen, gentlemen all, used familiar British landscapes, as well as sublime, but familiar European landscapes, to appropriate and control the new world landscapes. See Greg Gillespie, "The Imperial embrace: British sportsmen and the appropriation of landscape in nineteenth-century Canada." Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 2001.

²⁶ See *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2000 ed., s. v. "Landscape architecture." It is noted in this entry that Howard consulted a guidebook to Mount Auburn Cemetery [1831], near Boston, to guide him in his work. The first picturesque cemetery, it was a popular destination for Bostonians, as was St. James for Torontonians.

²⁷ It is not certain that Howard was the designer of Caer Howell but, given his relationship with Proprietor Alexander Erskine, he would seem the likeliest candidate. He was consulted about alterations to Alexander Erskine's house in September 1833 and later designed a racket court [likely the one in Caer Howell] for him in 1837. See *Journal*, 1: 143 & 2: 111. For more on Caer Howell, see David Bain, "The Early Pleasure Grounds of Toronto," *Ontario History* (Autumn 1999), 167-68.

²⁸ *Hamilton Spectator*, 24 September 1858. The Hamilton area had a considerable number of resorts, as well as urban pleasure grounds. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the community was a draw for day tripping tourists from Toronto and elsewhere, with its sublime "mountain" [the Niagara Escarpment] and outstanding waterfront setting.

High Park Plan c.1875. This plan is most likely the one submitted to the City in March 1875. It assumes the addition of the Ridout property to the east, which happened soon thereafter, and the Ellis property, including most of Grenadier Pond, to the west, which proved to be decades in the future. The main entry road leads from the southeast corner of the Ridout property to the future picnic grounds on the heights above Grenadier Pond. It thus avoids the Howard home and farm in the south central portion of the site. The Howard entrance, not available to park visitors, is midway along the south property line, and is today the main southern entry. Howard's efforts to promote roads from Indian Road, at a point north of his property, are shown by a road past the Ridout farm buildings in the northeast corner, and a more tentative entry just south of that road. Plan, courtesy of City of Toronto. Culture Division. Museum Services.



perintendent. He presented several plans and models of the park to the city in 1874. His foremost idea was that the park should be bigger, and, in March of 1875, a communication to city council indicated that he was now in serious negotiation with his neighbours to east and west, the Ridout and Ellis families respectively.²⁹ A plan accompanied this communica-

tion.³⁰ In this plan, there was a central tree-lined roadway from an entrance at Bloor Street, with a western loop onto the Ellis property and an eastern loop onto the Ridout property, the eastern loop connecting to a second road, Ridout

²⁹ TCCA, A36, [*Walks and Gardens Report #4*], 1 March 1875. John Howard's public comments on park design were often piecemeal, as though he had just gotten a new idea from an article in a newspaper or magazine. We know something of the nature of John Howard's periodical reading since, at a later date, he donated 34 volumes of the *Builder* to the Toronto Public Library, also 61 volumes of *London Illustrated News* and 34 volumes of *Scientific American*. [*Globe*, 1 August 1884]. In this particular *Walks and Gardens* report, Howard included a list of the sizes of British parks, from Regent Park at 401 acres to St. James Park at 58 acres. Probably published in the *Builder*, this list was presumably intended to demonstrate the range of sizes for an ideal park.

³⁰ CDMS. This plan is untitled and undated but, from Howard's description in *Walks and Gardens Report # 4*, 1875, it is likely that this was the plan that accompanied the communication of 1 March.

Street, from the east.³¹ As the southern or Howard portion of the central tree-lined roadway was private, a third entrance road ran from Lake Shore Road, at the southeast corner of the proposed Ridout addition, to the center of the park. After much negotiation by John Howard, Mr. Ridout's 170 acres now proved to be available for \$15,000 [\$85.25 per acre] and was soon purchased in early 1876, with little discussion.³² Soon thereafter, Mr. Ellis also made a verbal proposal to the Parks and Walks Committee for 58.5 acres of his property at \$150 per acre.³³ However, this price was considered too high and, although negotiations continued for some time, no deal resulted, and most of Grenadier Pond and the adjacent lands remained outside the park for decades. An immediate benefit of the acquisition of the Ridout land was that Howard was now able to develop his principal entry road from the southeast corner. The trip was close to a mile to the picnic ground through swamp and forest, but this road solved both the problem of circumventing Howard's forty-five acres in the southwest corner, and having an entrance oriented towards Lake Shore Road, in combination with Queen and King Streets, the only plausible route from the heart of the city.

The year 1875 saw a reawakening of an ongoing public debate about Toron-

to's lack of parks. Although early nineteenth-century Toronto had been rich in open spaces, they started to disappear at an early date and continued to erode throughout the century. Private citizens developed their grants. Pollution, industrialization, and the railroads claimed the waterfront, along with its 1818 promenade. Pollution also claimed the deep Toronto valleys and most were filled to bury garbage and facilitate transportation. Three large adjacent squares in the west end of downtown, Simcoe Place, the Government House block, and Russell Square, survived the century, but the municipality never had any real chance of obtaining any of them from powerful government and educational establishments. Toronto's great nineteenth-century park, Queens Park [1860], was north of downtown, the result of a shaky alliance between the municipality and the University of Toronto. The other park of note, the ten-acre Horticultural Gardens [1860], later Allan Gardens [1903], functioned primarily as the setting of a popular pavilion. Downtown, there were virtually no public open spaces, especially of the sort that welcomed poorer citizens. They could not often afford the trains or boats to distant green spaces, settling for the crowded Island ferry or perhaps a streetcar to the picturesque Don Valley, east of the city.³⁴

³¹ South of Ridout Street, there is a second east side entrance road, drawn in a rather shaky hand, which looks to be a later addition.

³² *Globe*, 4 May 1875. Howard had earlier suggested developing villa lots on some 55 acres to finance the cost of acquisition. See TCCA, A36, [*Walks and Gardens Committee Report #4*], 1 March 1875.

³³ "Walks and Gardens," *Telegram*, 11 May 1875.

³⁴ Toronto Island, in particular, was a favorite place among all classes of Torontonians in the nine-

The 1875 debate now resulted in a competition to redesign the much-loved Queen's Park and to design Phoenix [Riverdale] Park in the east and High Park in the west. While, in the end, the parks competition of 1876 proved to be largely smoke and mirrors, John Howard made it a personal platform for the introduction of his High Park philosophy. When the mayor and members of the Parks and Walks Committee sought Howard's opinion on the various High Park submissions, he took the opportunity to encourage the city officials "to spend but little money in artificial adornments, which would be malapropos to the native beauty of the whole surroundings."³⁵ Reporting on the various High Park submissions, he stated that they were all of no use whatever. His opinion of Henry Engelhardt's plan³⁶ was typical. He called it "a fancy plan...without reference to the form of the grounds." A quote from the British periodical the *Builder* was employed to underline his own direction:

All our parks,³⁷ Kensington gardens included, are artificial, too much so, many people think: nothing is allowed any wildness of growth. A square mile or two of rough ground with

Dame Nature as sole gardener close to London Town is a thing worth trying for.

Howard continued,

You have the Horticultural Gardens, the Queen's and the Phoenix [Riverdale] Parks: they can be laid out with walks and gardens because they are in the immediate neighbourhood of the city. I trust the Chairman and Committee on Walks and Gardens will be warned in time not to allow the beautiful grounds of High Park being cut up into roads, walks, and flower beds by pretenders to the profession of landscape architects. I say very little is required to be done upon these romantic grounds further than enclosing them with a fence and giving the public two entrances. I trust, before you attempt to lay out much money on what is called beautifying the grounds, you will consult Mr. Olmstead [sic].³⁸

Consulting Frederick Law Olmsted [1822-1903], the designer of Central Park [1863] would have been an excellent idea. Decades prior to the opening of New York's influential park, Howard felt he had used the Olmsted approach at St. James Cemetery.

I laid out all the roads and paths, taking advantage of the lay of the land, and preserving as many of the best trees as possible...Olm-

teenth century, and remains so even to the present day. Of Toronto Island, Patricia Jasen noted that: "...while hardly a wilderness, it offered something of a return to nature, with beaches, trees, and freedom from certain urban conventions." See Patricia Jasen, *Wild things: nature, culture, and tourism in Ontario 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 130.

³⁵ *Telegram*, 28 June 1876.

³⁶ His plan was named "Large Excelsior," for anonymity. Engelhardt is best remembered as the designer of Mount Pleasant Cemetery, which opened in November of 1876.

³⁷ His use of the phrase "All our parks" suggests that the Royal Parks of London, like Kensington, rather than the new public parks of England and the United States, were at least a starting point for him. Like High Park, they were estates gradually being opened up to the public, parks with the high level of decorum that he desired.

³⁸ "High Park proposals. Mr. Howard's report," *Telegram*, 12 July 1876. The original source given for the quote was *Builder* was 11 June 1874, but a search in this source failed to find this article.

stead [sic.] always drew his plans after the roads and walks had been laid out according to the lay of the land.³⁹

While Olmsted might have approved of Howard's technique for locating roads, and would certainly have been enthusiastic about the design opportunities provided by the rugged landscape of High Park, "Dame Nature as sole gardener" was counter to his approach in an urban park. Instead, he strived to help the public pursue a tranquil state of mind, through broad landscape effects—the creation of a work of art—with the picturesque aspects secondary to the pastoral. Even at Montreal's Mount Royal Park [1876], a challenging site for a man who often started with a blank canvas, his focus on urban needs was primary, with the site playing a secondary role.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Howard's own vision of rough ground first and people second now found a Toronto audience, without apparently any great need for public discussion. This may have been because his forest and field landscape was a comfortable fit, with something of the sense of the Royal forests of Great Britain. Howard and the rest of predominantly British population of Toronto certainly would have recollections of such large manicured forests as Sherwood with little undercover, scattered fields of wildflowers, tilled fields, and even villages.⁴¹ His reverence for such forests is underlined by the fact that, a few years down the road, he asked for and was granted the official title of Forest Ranger or Keeper of the Royal Forest.⁴² Such forests were very open and, perhaps tellingly, Howard's

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ The construction of Mount Royal Park was fraught with problems, causing Olmsted to attempt to educate the politicians and the people of Montreal, on more than one occasion, that, although they were dealing with a unique site, people's needs were primary. Alex Murray quoted Olmsted on this point, also noting a shift in the great man's thinking: "As a general rule, [Olmsted] wrote, rugged and broken ground is the last that should be chosen for a public recreation ground in the immediate vicinity of a large city." But as he got into the project, Olmsted became increasingly convinced that the deficiencies of the site could be turned into assets. The essential genius of the mountain must be established..." See A.L. Murray, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the design of Mount Royal Park, Montreal," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 26:4 (October 1967), 166. For details on Mount Royal, see also: "Planning a park on a mountain site" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted supplementary series volume 1. Writings on public parks, parkways, and park systems*, edited by Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn F. Hoffman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 350-418. The ongoing work at Mount Royal was reported in the daily press in Toronto and John Howard would have had at least some exposure to the discussions around the design of that important municipal park.

⁴¹ The Royal forests were hunting preserves that once covered a large part of Britain. Once the domain of royalty, they were protected by their own legal code. Citizens were granted rights to, for example, graze livestock and remove firewood. The surviving British forests, according to Patricia Jasen, were connected with class and privilege, perhaps suggesting why the public acquisition of such a landscape as a park would appeal to British North Americans. See Jasen, *Wild things*, 82.

⁴² According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ranger was, during the nineteenth century, "the official title of the keepers of the royal parks." Ranger of the forest was previously a forest officer or gamekeeper. At least one alderman was unclear to what the position was about and felt the title should not come without any definition of duties. Another thought that, perhaps in lieu of an elderly forest ranger, council should be considering a park board to oversee park development. See "City Council. High Park," *Globe*, 9

own woodlands were opened up by a routine removal of the underbrush in the years following his semi-retirement in 1853.

In the early years of the new park, John Howard's main strategy was to facilitate access. He donated two acres of land between Dundas Street and Indian Road that permitted a road between Dundas and the park. He supervised construction of this road and its extension into the park to intersect the main entry road from the lakeshore, with construction completed in 1878.⁴³ Previously he had designed a railway platform that was built on Lake Shore Road, near the foot of Indian Road, with trains already stopping here in 1877. In late 1879, he contributed plans and \$100 of his own money towards an improved covered platform.⁴⁴ Aware of the ongoing revenue needed for the big park, he had early on indicated to authorities that he felt that one quarter of the revenue from Parks and Walks property, about \$2,000 per annum, might go

to High Park.⁴⁵ In fact, in the first years, this is more or less what happened, with money spend on roads, a pavilion overlooking Grenadier Pond as well as rough sheds, latrines, and a shelter with table and fireplace, all Howard designs.⁴⁶

However, the greatest barrier to success was the park's isolation. For the minority able to come by carriage or taxi, the most direct route along Queen Street and Lake Shore Road had miles of inadequate roads and multiple railway crossings. While the Great Western Railroad did provide regular suburban train service, the location of the High Park station, near Indian Road in the southeast corner of the park, was far from the picnic grounds.⁴⁷ In the early days, the walk to the park from the platform was also dangerous, requiring visitors to cross the tracks from the railway platform located on the north side of the road, walk along Lake Shore Road to the entrance, and cross over the tracks again by way of several gates.⁴⁸ Other transportation pos-

July 1878. Thereafter, Howard often added the initials F.R. after his signature.

⁴³ See TCCA, A386, [Committee on Property Report # 10], 10 October 1877 and TCCA, A49, [Committee on Property Report #2], 12 February 1878. This second entrance was in the vicinity of today's High Park Avenue, some $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile up Indian Road and less than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile short of the northern boundary at Bloor Street. The idea was to connect busy Dundas, Street to the park at a point to the north where this street ran close to the park, but also to locate the new entry fairly close to the midway point of the long east side of the park. This is likely the second road from the east that was added to the 1875 map.

⁴⁴ TCCA, A682, [Executive Committee Report #36], 25 September 1879. Either at this time or soon thereafter, maps indicate that the platform was relocated in the southeast corner of the park near the entrance.

⁴⁵ TCCA, A432, [Committee on Property Report #19], 18 June 1878.

⁴⁶ Toronto Reference Library, *John George Howard. Papers. Section III*, 399 [Design for Rough Sheds] & 400 [Design for a Rustic Pavilion, also privies] & 403 [latrine, also shelter with table & fireplace]. His plans for High Park Station are also held at Toronto Reference Library.

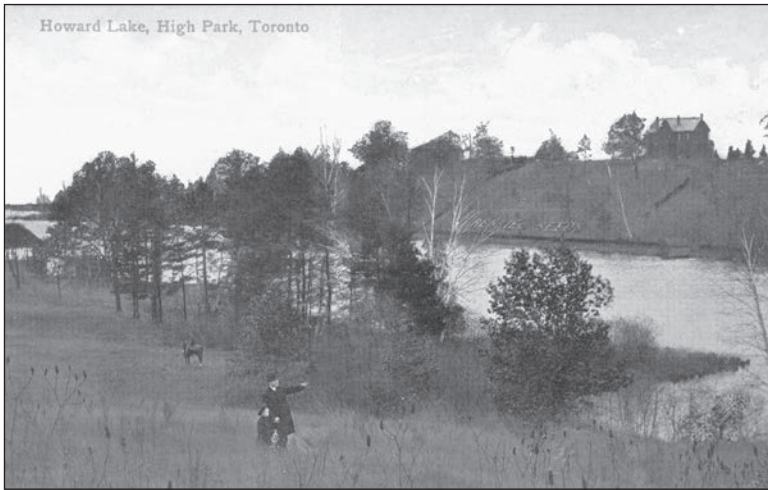
⁴⁷ Built in 1874, the first station was just a platform. See "City News. Successful picnic," *Globe*, 24 June 1874.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *Globe*, 22 July 1879, "High Park" [letter from schoolteacher John Hague]:

sibilities, like streetcars and lake steamers, were not yet available. It was decades before population density between the city and the park encouraged the privately owned streetcar service to reach

themselves, but to grant concessions that would tempt entrepreneurs to undertake the risk.⁴⁹

Despite these ongoing difficulties, John Howard continued to do his best to develop park services. He was a dutiful host, regularly entertaining the mayor, the members of various committees and other prominent citizens. Sometimes this meant also entertaining their ideas. In 1877, for example, he was asked to pursue the idea of placing the new Exhibition Grounds on the Ridout [eastern] portion of the park. He did not dismiss it outright, but surveyed the northwest corner of High Park and, when he



Grenadier Pond 1907. *The landscape near the pond remained pastoral well into the twentieth century, a contrast to the now manicured look of the Ellis and Rennie properties in the background. Note the “Rennies Seeds” sign near the waterline. Postcard, courtesy of Toronto Public Library T13918*

that far west. While Howard, historian John Ross Robertson, and others enthusiastically promoted the building of a dock for steamer service, the City was not only reluctant to build the structure

found it wanting, suggested that the politicians consider the old Keele racetrack grounds just north of the park.⁵⁰ He was also capable of exploring ideas beyond the somewhat undeveloped notion of

“The road to the park opens from a point on the railway some distance west of the platform, which is on the north side of the line...I will never be a party to our school visiting this most charming park until the platform is placed so as to give an easy and safe approach from it to the park entrance gate...The road from the railway to the park is so placed as to give a circuitous and difficult approach to the high ground used for picnics...The high plateau where the parties are held, near the cottage could be reached from the railway by a road one-third of the length of the present one, starting by the east end of Garrison Pond...” Although a covered platform was built in the southeast corner of the park, Howard declined repeatedly to consider a station and a park entrance east of Grenadier Pond, a much shorter road to the heights, because it would cross his property and compromise his privacy. See, for example, *Telegram*, 14 August 1879: “I must oppose it, because it would be opposite my tomb. You can’t do it now, and when I’m gone, my trustees can prevent you.”

⁴⁹ In contrast, a private resort of the late nineteenth century, Victoria Park [established 1878], that developed along in the east-end shoreline at a similar distance from the city center, owed its success to a reliable steamer service.

⁵⁰ CDMS, 1978.41.202, “J.G. Howard’s Report on the State of Tracks...,” 23 October 1877:

a forest reserve, especially if the idea was his own. In 1881, in a return to the grand plans of his glory days, he floated a scheme to add 600 acres to the west side of the park, drain the swampy lower areas west of the enlarged park with canals, develop two new streetcar lines and a ferry boat service to the park, as well as a village and grand hotel near the Humber.⁵¹ If the idea was simply to stir up interest, it was a well-received effort by a skilled promoter to highlight the need for planning ideas for the west end, especially regarding transportation links.

In the 1880s, development did start to create changes in and around High Park. The community of Parkdale, squarely between city and park, was incorporated as a village in 1878, and a town in 1885. Its western boundary was only a few hundred yards from High Park. North of Parkdale, Brockton, incorporated as a village in 1881, was located on the Dundas Road near where it passed the northeast corner of the park. Further along this road, the new railway community of Toronto Junction developed rapidly to the

north of the park.⁵² To the west, residential growth was slower, but, by 1880, the Grenadier Ice Company was harvesting ice from that large portion of Grenadier Pond that the city had failed to acquire, and a bolt factory was established just west of the park and employed several hundred by the mid 1880s. Unfortunately, the road system and transportation network remained poor and, as one letter writer in the *Globe* quite correctly put it, "It is a great pity that the advantages to be derived from that beautiful Park...are almost lost to the masses through the want of cheap and safe means of access..."⁵³

Thus, for decades, High Park remained isolated. The great hope of a ferry service never really developed. A modest wharf was built about 1881, but it was 1885 before Humber Ferry Company unveiled a proper wharf. Unfortunately, this "fine new iron wharf" only lasted two years before being swept away in a storm.⁵⁴ Visitors coming by train grew steadily from holiday crowds of several hundred in 1879 to almost 10,000 in the late 1880s. However, outside of Victo-

"Having told them [Hon. Wm. Wood and Christy]...I would find them 30 acres of level land on the Ridout Property to locate the permanent Exhibition Buildings...in no part of the 30 acres could a level plot be obtained...having turned my thoughts to the level Sandy land in the rear of High Park North of Bloor Street...40 or 45 acres can be obtained from Wm. Keele...was [formerly] laid off for a Driving Park and Race course..."

⁵¹ "High Park projects," *Globe*, January 11 1881. There is an incomplete Howard plan in the City of Toronto's Atlantic Avenue facility that may relate to this particular scheme, either in 1881 or at an earlier date [it has a tentative? date of 1850-53 added]. See CDMS, 1978.41.202, "Plan of the Village of Humberville The Property of Mr. J. G. Howard Architect & DP Surveyor." It looks to be High Park, much altered, with an elaborate dock, a canal or channel of sorts and villa sites, with a list of their merits [eg. "a fine romantic site"].

⁵² Both High Park and Brockton actually became part of Toronto's St. Mark's Ward in 1884. Toronto Junction was incorporated as a village in 1887.

⁵³ "High Park and its approaches," *Globe*, 30 July 1879.

⁵⁴ "Humber Ferry Company," *Globe*, 23 May 1885 and "The Storm at the Island," *Globe*, 28 May

ria Day and summer celebrations, a picnicker wandering away from the central grounds was more apt to meet a gun-toting hunter than another park visitor. An important breakthrough occurred in 1886 when the streetcar reached the tollgate at Roncesvalles, about ¼ mile short of the park boundary.⁵⁵ However, it wasn't until 1893 that the Dundas line reached Bloor Street, east of the park, and the summer of 1894 before this service was extended along High Park Avenue and into the park itself.⁵⁶ Until the early decades of the twentieth century, Bloor Street near the park was very hilly, thus stalling the inauguration of streetcar service until 1915.⁵⁷

During the 1880s, the now aging Forest Ranger started to lose his influence. In 1883, when he was honoured on

the occasion of his eightieth birthday, he was still presenting reports and recommendations. However, the money that the City now agreed to spend was about half of what was spent in the late 1870s.⁵⁸ A direct blow in 1882 was the arrest of Howard's hard working assistant, park constable, and caretaker John Albert, for shooting and killing a young trespasser on Grenadier Pond.⁵⁹ The last years of John Howard's life were now to be increasingly marked by bouts of illness and, in his rare public moments, he seemed increasingly rigid in the defense of the status quo.⁶⁰

Just prior to Howard's death in 1890, several noteworthy projects around the edges of the park presented challenges and possibilities. In April of 1889, zoo pioneer and former alderman Harry Piper set up his new zoo immediately to the

1887.

⁵⁵ "Parkdale first street car," *Globe*, 27 November 1886.

⁵⁶ Louis H. Pursley, *Street railways of Toronto, 1861-1921* (Toronto: Electric Railway Pub., 1958), 41.

⁵⁷ *Toronto Star*, 23 February 1915.

⁵⁸

Year	High Park Budget: nearest \$50	Total Park Budget: nearest \$50
1878	2050	8150
1879	2600	6300
1880	1550	9100
1881	700	7500
1882	800	9550

Figures are compiled from annual Auditor's budget figures in the appendix of the City of Toronto's City Council Minutes. In 1882, an article on the final report of the Property Committee underlined the post 1880 attitude: "At the beginning of the year Mr. J.G. Howard, Forest Ranger of the Park, sent in a report of the improvements that he thought it would be desirable to have carried out during the year; but the committee could not see their way to the expenditure of so large a sum of money as the work set forth in Mr. Howard's report, consequently the work done during the year has been of a very limited [nature]."

⁵⁹ See *World*, 25 July 1882 and *Globe*, 25 July 1882. Albert was born in New York State and immigrated to Canada around 1850. He served at Ridgeway and was a police constable at Brockton from about 1872 until 1876, thereafter at High Park. Trespassers, especially hunters, were an ongoing problem in High Park and sometimes acts of vandalism resulted. Albert was convicted and jailed, but did not serve a long sentence. His successor, Henry Woodhouse, was relieved of duties after it was revealed that he had faced charges for larceny, threatening and assault.

⁶⁰ For example, when D.W. Clendenan, the developer of housing to the north of the park, offered the

west of the park. He had acquired control from the Chapman family of 33 acres, even including some land along the east side of Grenadier Pond,⁶¹ and now proceeded to change the name of Grenadier Pond to Howard Lake.⁶² A steam yacht, the *Aggie May*, carried visitors from newly established Howard Lake Railway Station to see buffalo “running at large,” as well as a long list of birds and other animals. In addition, picnic parties were hosted on a ten-acre picnic ground, with the remaining land reserved for housing.⁶³ That same year, on the opposite side of the park, permission was granted to property owners east of the park to extend Keele Street south from Bloor Street along the edge of the park. Lots on the east side of this new

street were to be at least 120 feet deep by 50 feet wide with the considerable value of no less than \$2,500.⁶⁴ The idea, stated Alderman Macdonald, “...was to make a grand road [along the edge of the park], the city owning it but giving the property owners the privilege of fronting on it provided they paid the maintenance and construction.”⁶⁵ No one could be certain what effect allowing high-end development along the pristine eastern edge would have on a forest park, but change was definitely on the way. Thus, when the 87-year-old Forest Ranger died on 3 February 1890, the barbarians appeared to be at the gates.

John Howard’s will, written in 1887, was a lengthy document with his scat-

stands and gate from the old Carleton Race Track for park use, John Howard said in the press: “You wish me to do certain works in High Park this season to subserve [sic.] your plan, which appears to me, as a Provincial Surveyor for over 47 years to be a very stupid one, and inaccurately drawn as far as High Park is concerned, and must have originated in your own fertile brain.” Howard also took the opportunity to tell Clendenan and remind the public that both structures and intoxicating beverages were forbidden in the park. Clendenan was restrained in his response when he said merely: “...no doubt standards have declined since the olden times.” See: “A Protest from the Forest Ranger Howard,” *Globe*, 9 April 1883 and “A Reply to Forest Ranger Howard’s protest,” *Globe*, 10 April 1883. Even in earlier decades, Howard was never very patient when he felt residents of his west-end neighbourhood had overstepped. In one situation, he engaged in very public sparring with his neighbour to the west, Joseph Davidson, about the way he developed the land adjacent to High Park that Howard had sold him, taking exception to his underbrushing, his trout pond and his fence line, among other concerns. See “Mr. Howard and the western nuisance,” *Globe*, 24 September 1877.

⁶¹ This was Harry Piper’s third zoo. The first was a highly successful undertaking on a small site on the northwest corner of Front and Bay Streets. The second was a less successful reincarnation on the Exhibition Grounds, which only did a proper business during the annual exhibition. For this third attempt, Piper signed an agreement to acquire the property for \$38,000 in 1889 and paid \$200 to terminate the agreement in January of 1894. See County of York, *Abstract of deeds for Park Lot 38*.

⁶² The name Howard Lake was applied on occasion to Grenadier Pond for decades after Piper’s enterprise was gone.

⁶³ For a description of the opening, see, for example, “Howard Lake opened,” *Globe*, 25 May 1889. Prior that occasion, in a shaky hand, Howard wrote of Piper and his May 1889 opening, “I have received an invitation to attend a meeting of that Scalleywag [sic.] Harry Piper to open the Grenadiers Pond to the Public on that day [.] which has been open to the Public for 50 Years.” CDMS, [Request from the Worthingtons for a picnic], 22 May 1889.

⁶⁴ TCCA, [Report #11 of the Committee on Parks and Gardens], A974, 19 June 1889.

⁶⁵ “A new street in High Park,” *Globe*, 20 June 1889. The idea seems to have been to establish a high-end subdivision virtually in the park, perhaps similar to that adjacent to Queens Park.

tered holdings and possessions left to a long list of relatives and friends. As regarding his beloved High Park, it made a special effort to influence the development of his forty-five acres. He directed the Corporation to:

...take measures for keeping Colborne Lodge and outbuildings in good order and repair so that it may last and retain its present appearance as long as possible...request...that the private entrance from the Lake Shore Road, and the Avenue of shade trees leading therefrom to Colborne Lodge will be retained for a footpath; and a Carriage drive thirty five feet wide be formed to the west of the said avenue by cutting down the hill and filling up the Swamp and that a drain, six feet wide, be cut through the said Swamp to the outlet into the Lake from the Ridout property. I also request that the Old Indian Trail on the East side of the Grenadier's pond, be left in the same natural state, as I have kept it for the last fifty years. Also Lovers' walk leading to the said Indian Trail and the flower Garden to the East of the Tomb, to be kept in order and repair.⁶⁶

While these hopeful reminders to municipal officials were mostly forgotten, perhaps surprisingly, the strong influence of John Howard was to live on.

The first Toronto Parks Superintendent was John Chambers, appointed in 1884. As superintendent of Exhibition Park, he had worked with John Howard as early as 1880 on estimates for High

Park, and was aware of his vision for a natural park and, in theory, supported it.⁶⁷ From the mid 1880s, he proceeded with a variety of upgrades in High Park. A major change, starting at that time, was to expand the road system at High Park well beyond Howard's north to south roadway. He improved and widened the roads already existing and constructed new ones, particularly to the east on the Ridout property. In fact, his exuberance for road building, and his use of fire to remove the forest undercover and to burn forest waste caused a considerable backlash. Even prior to Howard's death, in 1888, Provincial Forester R.W. Phipps, and other like-minded citizens, fanned public sentiment against Chamber's methods, while fighting to preserve a natural park. Phipps lamented both the damage that the new roads caused to slopes and ravines, and the creation of open sandy meadows by the removal of underbrush.⁶⁸ While members of the public might not hesitate to haul away wildflowers by the bucket, or to sign a petition to fill in the swampy Catfish Pond area for a sports field, there was considerable sympathy towards Phipp's efforts to preserve at least the illusion of Howard's High Park.

In the 1890s, the park changed quite a bit, moving beyond its quiet isolation

⁶⁶ County of York. [Will of John George Howard, 1887] The Corporation also received Colborne Lodge and most its furnishings, Howard's picture gallery and its contents, as well as the boathouse, several boats and several carriages.

⁶⁷ In 1885, for example, he said: "As there appears to be a desire that this park should be left as much as possible in its natural condition, very little has been done...beyond the cutting of necessary roads and paths and the erection of accommodations for picnic parties." See TCCA, [28th and final report of the Committee on Property for 1885], A1230, 11 January 1886.

⁶⁸ "Devastation of High Park Forester Phipps' opinions on the subject," *Globe*, 16 June 1888.



Alexander and Cable's Map of the City of Toronto 1891. High Park is now on the edge of the city and more people live nearby, particularly to the north and east. However, it remains unavailable to the heavily populated downtown areas. The direct Queen-Lakeshore connection still involved a long trip, with no streetcar connections into the park. It was not until later in the decade that streetcars reached the park from College and Dundas streets to the west. At this time, the lakeshore railway remained the most reliable connection.

for the first time. After mid-decade, people were brought in larger numbers by streetcar, and, in 1896, these numbers were greatly boosted by Sunday service. In addition, there was the cycling boom of that decade, High Park proving to be the right distance from the city to become a prime destination for bicyclists.⁶⁹ Increased use meant increased demands. Lacking direction beyond John Howard's strongly held personal views, the Parks and Gardens Commit-

tee continued to oppose building and to protect the natural setting. As Howard had been vague about the details of a natural park, the committee looked both to John Chambers' pragmatic policies and, on occasion, reacted positively to petitions from citizens. In 1895, a toboggan slide, described by John Chambers as a "substantial structure," was opened under the management of James Downs.⁷⁰ In 1896, citizens of nearby Parkdale were permitted to develop a public nine-hole

⁶⁹ Though the Toronto Bicycle Club had visited High Park as early as 1885, [See "Toronto Bicycle Club," *Globe*, 26 May 1885] improvements in bicycle technology now made it a reachable destination for many. For example, on a Sunday in May of 1896, a day described as oppressive and windy, close to 3,000 men and women entered the park on their bicycles. See "Cyclists on the Sabbath," *Star*, 11 May 1896.

⁷⁰ TCCA, Twenty-fourth and final report of the Committee on Parks and Gardens, 10 January 1896.

golf course north of Grenadier Pond, straddling the western boundary in the northwest corner of the park.⁷¹ When Harry Piper's sprawling Howard Lake enterprise died in 1894,⁷² a small zoo with a few deer was opened in the middle of the park.⁷³ Finally, in 1898, entrepreneur Pauline Myers persuaded the city to allow her to plan and build a restaurant serving 200 people.⁷⁴

Thus, at the end of the century, people were beginning to see two different parks. A *Globe* editorialist still saw the park that Howard left behind when he said, "Right in the city we have High Park, where the street car runs to an extensive piece of natural forest opened by roads, but not destroyed by landscape gardening."⁷⁵ On the other hand, *Toronto Star* columnist Madge Merton saw something for everyone:

You can tire yourself with walking if you

wish for exercise, you can wheel along the best of roads, you can wander through wood, and cross the meadow, you can wade through swamp land and, if you desire, make one of the crowds about the booths. Many other parks have certain advantages, but it seemed as if this great one rolled them all together and gave, to crowds of divers[e] tastes, amusement and recreation and rest, as each individual desired.⁷⁶

At any rate, if new developments might seem to indicate an ultimate move away from the idea of a natural setting, this did not prove to be the case.⁷⁷ Ideas were often rejected, usually in part because they would disturb the status quo. In 1894, for example, it was proposed that a hospital for consumptives be built in the park, but, while this idea proved difficult to dismiss, it was never acted upon.⁷⁸ Also, although the extension of College Street across the Grenadier Pond to Swansea, first promoted by Wil-

⁷¹ See, for example, "Public golf links," *Globe*, 4 May 1896 and "Toronto topics," *Star*, 4 May 1896. The clubhouse, Herne Cottage, built in 1904 was actually outside the park.

⁷² The land reverted to the Chapmans.

⁷³ See, for example, "Deer for High Park," *Star*, 11 March 1897 & "Nucleus of a big zoo," *Star*, 2 October 1897. The deer were from a Mr. Strothers of Newmarket, with the proposed site utilizing about two acres in the wooded heart of the park. Mr. Strothers idea was, not surprisingly, promoted by Harry Piper who, in 1899, further indicated that "... he could get buffalo, moose etc." See *Globe*, 26 April 1899.

⁷⁴ See, for example, "Those park booths," *Star*, 20 January 1898 and "Chit-Chat," *Globe*, 19 July 1898. Mrs. Myers also ran the restaurant at the Exhibition, and, for many years, the popular Myer's Restaurant on Lake Shore Road east of High Park.

⁷⁵ "A City to live in [ed.]," *Globe*, 18 July 1898.

⁷⁶ "Madge Merton's Page," *Star*, 13 July 1901.

⁷⁷ For better or worse, city council handled important park decisions, with a caretaker committee handling day to day matters. There seemed to be a British distrust of the idea of an independent park board, a sense that the political process was being circumvented, and also that the idea that a park board was an overly democratic American idea, often elitist and corrupt. See, for example, "Chicago Affairs," *Globe*, 14 November 1877: "It would seem that membership in a Board of Park Commissioners—there are three of them in the city—infallibly leads to unpleasant consequences...One of the [South Park Board] members is said to have appropriated \$90,000 worth of bonds...another walked off with a landscape gardener, and is still concealing his whereabouts."

⁷⁸ See "To interview Mr. Gage," *Star*, 26 May 1894. For later efforts at hospital building in High

liam Ellis in 1880,⁷⁹ and the leasing of the beach in front of the park to private interests⁸⁰ were both brought forward on various occasions, neither was permitted to go ahead. As well, the new attractions, like the zoo and the restaurant, while given a foot in the door, were not allowed to grow beyond a certain point. All of these issues were complicated. The extension of College Street, for example, was enormously expensive, and Riverdale Park was better located to house Toronto's first major zoo. However, a strong reason that the old buildings still stood, the zoo stayed rustic, and the park remained a natural park were the foundations established by John Howard.

In fact, Howard's conservative thinking continued to be the major planning tool well into the twentieth century. The idea of a healthy outdoor "forest school" for poor children [1913] fit the Howard template and, in a much-altered form, remains to this day.⁸¹ In the 1920s, the

Women's Canadian Historical Society, led an effort to refurbish the badly deteriorated Howard buildings, the earliest municipally supported effort at architectural preservation.⁸² While the City's own conservative approach meant politicians were loath to put money into these buildings, they jumped at the chance to honour Howard and preserve history, both at a minimal cost to the taxpayer. The rest of the park continued to have large stretches of forest and savannah, despite regular petitions for recreational activities. One concession was made when, after the golf course left the northwest corner and moved east to Port Credit in about 1907,⁸³ the less invasive sport of lawn bowling established a foothold in the isolated northeast corner.⁸⁴ However, it was not until 1934 that a sports field was finally added.⁸⁵ Even this change was offset by the fact that one of Howard's strongest recommendations for completing High Park was realized in 1930, when

Park, see "Smallpox hospital site," *Star*, 27 June 1898 and "War waxes warmer on High Park site," *Star*, 30 November 1917. Other major parks were not so fortunate. Queen's Park was reduced to the backyard of the Ontario Parliament Buildings when they were allowed to be constructed there in the 1890s and prime land on Bayview Avenue was taken from Sunnybrook Park to build a military hospital during the Second World War.

⁷⁹ When John Ellis sold Grenadier Pond to Wilma Chapman, of the Chapman Ice Company, in 1880, he placed a clause in the agreement to preserve a right of way for a bridge across the pond to the Ellis Estate on a line with College Street. See "Spence knocked out," *Star*, 2 April 1896. The idea resurfaced regularly thereafter.

⁸⁰ See "Among the Aldermen," *Globe*, 14 April 1893.

⁸¹ The idea of such a school in the park was mentioned as early as 1901. See "Resort for poor children," *Star*, 11 September 1901. There is a brief overview of the movement in Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 68. The two Toronto forest school sites were High Park and Victoria Park.

⁸² "Home of John Howard is opened by Mayor," *Star*, 30 June 1928.

⁸³ James A. Barclay, *Golf in Canada: a history* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, c.1992), 61.

⁸⁴ TCCA, Report #8 Committee on Parks and Exhibitions, 28 April 1910.

⁸⁵ "New athletic field is opened by Mayor," *Mail*, 1 October 1834.

Grenadier Pond 1971.

George Bell's great changes are clearly shown here. Ironically, the area in the vicinity of the pond outside the park is now heavily treed. Postcard, courtesy of Toronto Public Library MTL2194

the City moved to add Grenadier Pond and adjacent land to the west side of the park.⁸⁶

Despite the affection that the citizenry retained for High Park, only the accident of location allowed it to retain its green cloak for so long. The relatively low density in the immediate neighbourhood and the slow development of Bloor Street as a major thoroughfare were factors. As well, growing neighbourhood recreational needs were largely accommodated in the open spaces within established communities, like the Junction and Parkdale, or, in the case of Swansea, redirected to Rennie Park [1939] just outside the western park border.⁸⁷ Thus High Park's forest legacy, more debatable with every passing year as the city closed around it, remained mostly intact through the depression thirties and



the wartime forties. However, the lack of a balanced mandate and increased pressure for recreational space left the park highly vulnerable to the needs of a rapidly growing city and booming economy after World War II.

Sudden change arrived in 1954 in the person of new Parks Commissioner George Thomas Bell. Bell made High Park one of the cornerstones of his “parks for people” philosophy that championed man-made landscape and diverse recreational opportunities.⁸⁸ Starting in 1954 and continuing throughout the next decade, the earth movers moved in to create a hillside garden, a sunken garden, a rose Garden, a redevelopment of the

⁸⁶ See, for example, “Favour paying \$150,000 for Chapman Property,” *Toronto Star*, 15 October 1930.

⁸⁷ “Donor plants first tree in Rennie Park, Swansea,” *Globe*, 27 April 1939.

⁸⁸ Bell had been the City's personnel director, and was an internal appointment to the Parks and Recreation job in 1954. At that time, some were skeptical of his qualifications to oversee parks use and development. However, he was a capable administrator, immediately moved to reorganize and modernize the creaky parks department. Bell's sweeping twenty-five year plan of 1955 was the first conscious attempt to look at the whole network of parks. For additional information on Bell and his career, see “More places to play,” [editorial] *Globe*, 27 October 1958, “George Bell, the man who runs parks for people,” *Star*, 25 June 1964, “George Bell – parks for people,” *Star*, 29 December 1964 and “City Hall's George Bell dies,” *Star*, 13 July 1979.

area around Catfish Pond, the filling of swamp for picnic areas, the creation of new play areas, the upgrading of the park restaurant, and the addition of nature trails, lavatories, and shelters.⁸⁹ It was a dramatic and heavy-handed transformation that sent out shock waves.

George Bell had no doubt that he was doing the right thing, but public opinion was more divided, with some pleased and others incredulous. J.B. Dymond, president of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists noted in 1957 that, "Unfortunately some people do not enjoy nature: they want everything artificial...It will be a great loss if every vestige of wild nature is destroyed in our cities and their environs to make way for complete artificiality."⁹⁰ Still Bell's recreational improvements were indeed popular. A *Globe* editorial writer spoke for change when he applauded the "effective efforts" to clean up parks and noted that, "Up to 30,000 people may visit High Park in a day...where hundreds once came, thousands come now."⁹¹ In 1963, just before Bell's retirement, letter writer Ruth Stewart represented the continuing split in opinion among the citizenry when she said,

Could it be that Mr. Bell's idea of a park differs radically from that of a good many other people? Perhaps he prefers wide open spaces, carefully swept bare of trees, shrubs, or any other 'mess' growing in its natural state and adorned with swings, slides and, of course, a

baseball diamond.⁹²

George Bell had certainly changed the face of High Park, but it was increasingly clear that, while he was a great salesman with the power to implement his ideas, his solutions would continue to create controversy.

In the decades since the busy 1950s, High Park has struggled to balance historical precedents with its recreational mandate. There has been support for the protection of the natural park and equal enthusiasm for the "parks for people" philosophy. On the one side, government bodies, park staff, and volunteers have worked to preserve and even recreate the natural environment, managing water levels in Grenadier Pond [1996], attempting to restore 135 acres to pre/re-settlement conditions [1995+] and creating a High Park Nature Centre [1998]. On the other hand, there has been the addition of more and more facilities, including a swimming pool [1963], an outdoor theatre [1982] and an adventure playground [1998]. The overall approach has been more of everything, with a constant attempt to maintain a balance point between nature and recreation. An important factor has been a citizens' organization, the High Park Advisory Committee, created in 1995, that has a role in advising and assisting in everything from renaturalization to dog control to playgrounds.

⁸⁹ See "Face-lifting at High Park," *Star*, 8 October 1954

⁹⁰ "Parks for every taste" [letter], *Globe*, 10 June 1957

⁹¹ "The Parks pay off," *Globe*, 4 September 1957.

⁹² *Globe*, 26 June 1963.

However, High Park, despite all its good bones and its status as Toronto's premiere park, still does not rank among North America's great urban parks. For a role model it needs only look west to Vancouver's Stanley Park. This sprawling forest park has also struggled with the balance between preservation and urban needs, but, despite prolonged debates, has faced and resolved its big issues. At High Park, the preservationists and recreationists have fought to hold the upper hand, both sides exposed to the political expediency of the day, while, in Stanley Park, Vancouver's elected park board has represented the middle ground between two divergent points of view. At High Park, progress has suffered, because of the power ceded to capable but ultimately limited thinking of insiders like John Howard and George Bell, while Vancouverites have invited and debated the ideas of well regarded prominent professionals like urban planner Thomas Mawson and others. At High Park, under Park Superintendent John Chambers, roads came first and the forest second, while at Stanley Park, under the leadership of Park Superintendent W.S. Rawlings [1913-1936], a philosophy was implemented that created transition areas between the forest and the park features.⁹³ In the final analysis, world-class Stanley Park has innovations like the five and one half miles of seawall that stands as its greatest attraction, while High Park's

has totally lost any connection with its greatest asset, Lake Ontario. High Park has been sadly undervalued by Torontonians in a city where piecemeal planning has been permitted to overrule great ideas.

While High Park is clearly still a work in progress, this fact does not tarnish the great gift of John Howard. Indeed his contributions to the west end park and his passion for building its foundations are a honourable chapter in Toronto's history. In the British tradition, park lot owners were intended to enrich the community by their generosity and wise practices, but few did so. When prime blocks of downtown land were no longer needed for administrative or educational uses, they were allowed to slip away one by one. Yet Howard was not afraid to push for the idea of a large west end park, offering both his expansive country estate and his considerable abilities as a surveyor, developer, and architect. However, it was beyond him to gain the co-operation of a political system that was more interested in taxable real estate and hard services, leaving parks and other soft services as an afterthought. We can be especially thankful that Howard's efforts enlarged High Park by hundreds of acres, and that his strongly held views, even decades after his death, kept hospitals and other intrusions out. Now it is up to future generations to do their best with the opportunities that he made possible.

⁹³ Lyle Dick, "Commemorative integrity and cultural landscapes: two national historic sites in British Columbia," *APT Bulletin* 31:4 (2000), 29-36. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1504674>>. Stanley Park is now a National Historic Site. For more on Stanley Park as a National Historic Site, see the park's Commemorative Integrity Statement: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/board/2003/031006/sp_cis.pdf>.