



Property Inventory Evaluation

City Park and Cricket Field

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City Park & the Cricket Field

Bounded By: King Street, West, Court & Barrie Streets

Proposed as a Park: 1852

Rating: S

City Park and the Cricket Field are part of a crown grant of farm lot 25, concession 1, to Loyalist Michael Grass. The south and east part of this land was deemed to be of strategic importance during the War of 1812 because of the need to protect the small town of Kingston -- then east of West Street and mainly developed near the shore of Lake Ontario -- from potential overland invasion by the enemy. A defensive line of picket fences, blockhouses and batteries was erected around the land side of the town and included a section along West Street with blockhouse number 2 (demolished 1858) located at today's West, Wellington and Lower Union Streets.

In 1838, the town's boundaries expanded to the west to include farm lot 25. In the 1840s, Bagot Street was extended west across what is now City Park to Barrie Street.

The relevant part of farm lot 25 was acquired from the Murney family (who then owned it) in 1840 as part of the secret preparations for making Kingston the capital of the United Canadas (Upper Canada or Ontario and Lower Canada or Quebec). The government moved to Kingston the next year and created a Parliament House out of the general hospital. Had the government remained (Kingston was abandoned as the capital in early 1844), the undeveloped land would have likely been the site of a new Parliament House. Kingston requested that the land be turned over to the municipality for a Public Square, but no action was taken, and it became part of the city and area's defences



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during the Oregon Crisis of 1845. The worry over American attack resulted in the erection of a number of Martello towers, including the Murney Tower south of King Street in the area now known as Macdonald Park. The land in what is now City Park became a marching ground for the Royal Artillery until John Counter, Kingston's mayor, officially requested its conversion to a public park in 1852 – placing it among the earliest public parks in the province. Two acres on the northerly portion were given in 1850 by the government as a site for the Midland District Grammar School (opened in 1853, now the Sydenham Public School). To the east was the original town plot and to the west were the general hospital; Queen's College (now Queen's University), which purchased Summerhill villa with its extensive grounds in 1853; St James Anglican Church (1844); and the housing that had developed on the west side of Barrie Street. On 19 December 1853 the province offered three acres of land to the county (then consisting of the United Counties of Frontenac, Lennox & Addington) as a site for a new Court House (since 1864 known as the Frontenac County Court House). The new site was to the west of the city proper and at a height of land overlooking some twenty acres of open land down to the lakeshore. In 1856 Court Street was opened.

In 1855, work was in progress to lay out drives and walks and plant trees following the design of a professional landscape gardener from Rochester, NY.* Architectural historian Jennifer McKendry suggests a candidate for this designer is Frederick Cornell of Rochester, who visited Kingston periodically in the early 1850s while laying out the grounds of Cataraqui Cemetery in the early 1850s. The park plans were modified during construction. The objectives were “beauty and taste, ... recreation and health” (Charles Cooper’s essay of 1856). Not extant are improvements such as an observatory (demolished 1880), music pavilion and fences. Between Court and Bagot Streets was a “Cricket Ground”, part of which was used for organized baseball games from at least 1873. In 1895, a bronze statue by George Wade was raised at the West and King Streets corner to Sir John A. Macdonald (who died in 1891). In recent years, it has been the site of an annual toast to John A. on his birthday, January 11th.



* For more on Cornell, see Jennifer McKendry, *Weep Not for Me: An Illustrated History of Cataraqui Cemetery* (Kingston, 2000).

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Landscape architect F.C. Todd submitted a report and plan for renewing City Park in 1906 but only limited elements were implemented or visible today.[†]

A public washroom building was built between 1941 and 1945 (aerial views) on the south side of Bagot Street but is not of heritage interest. It has a large, steep-pitched, hipped roof interrupted by hipped-roof dormers. The main storey has small windows and a simple roof extension to shelter the pair of entrance doors. A low wing, added after 1965 (aerial view), extends to the east.

Numerous historic and memorial markers and weapons have been added to the park, first in 1895 (the Macdonald statue) with a gap until 1930, such as the RCHA War Memorial (installed 1930), 21st Battalion War Memorial (installed 1931), Early Land Surveying in Ontario (installed 1938), Robert de la Salle (installed 1957), a history of the Militia Garrison 1836-38 (installed 1958), a tribute to poet Charles Sangster (installed 1964), RCAF War Memorial (installed c1967), the site of the observatory (installed 1985), and Burma Star War Memorial (installed 1995).[‡]

Looking at the general forms of the park today in comparison with the Innes map of 1865, the street layout (Barrie, Court, West, Bagot & King) is more or less the same. The odd shape of the north part of the park ("the cricket ground" -- a title shown on the 1865 map) bounded by Bagot, Barrie, Court & West and the trapezoid formed by Bagot, Barrie, West and King are more or less the same. Now incomplete, the concept of a circular drive in the part south of Bagot is found in 1865 and has the same wavy outline. A major exit towards Stuart Street still exists, as well as a diagonal path from the main circular drive to the corner of West and King. The diagonal paths found today were not present in 1865, which featured more organic curved routes. Trees lined the streets on the borders of the cricket ground in 1865 as they -- more or less -- do today. No paths show on the cricket ground in 1865, whereas diagonal ones are now present. The name "City Park" appears on the 1865 map.

Of fundamental heritage importance is the continuous concept of a public park since 1852.

[†] For the text of Todd's report and an illustration of his plan, see Jeff Earl, "Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment of City Park between Barrie Street, Court Street, West Street and King Street West, City of Kingston, Ontario" consultant's report by Past Recovery Archaeological Services for the City of Kingston, October 2007: 43-6. A good history of the park is included.

[‡] See Kingston Historical Society, *An Illustrated Guide to Monuments, Memorials & Markers in the Kingston Area* (Kingston, 2000): 140, 145-8, 153-8.