



Far Left:
Dominion Day
July 1, 1927

Left:
Reynolds' Pavilion,
1950's

All images from Doug Grant

CELEBRATING 110 YEARS OF HISTORY

St. Lawrence Park Brockville

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In 1900 Brockville was a town of 8500 people, with only two open green spaces – Court House Square and Victoria Park, former site of the graveyard for St. Peter's Anglican Church. There was a small park at the Waterworks pump house on Water St. The waterfront was an industrial area, all in private hands.

Our story begins a generation earlier, in the 1870's, when the Thousand Islands were being sold. Citizens in Brockville, Prescott and Gananoque lobbied the government of Sir John A. Macdonald not to sell the islands, but preserve them as parkland.

In 1883, Mayor Ezra Halladay and town council leased 29 islands for residents to use and finally purchased them fifty years later, in 1933 when Fred Wolthausen was mayor.

In 1887, Mayor George Dana and Council discussed purchasing the 33-acre riverfront property from the James Rivers family. (Rivers was manager of the Molson Bank 1873 – 85).

John Harris Fulford, older brother of Senator George Fulford, advocated "the advantages and necessity of a public park," but was not supported.

Twenty years later came the time for action – it was now or never. The newly established Brockville Board of Trade had a dynamic and colourful secretary, named William Shearer. He was a real estate broker who worked out of the Victoria Building. His slogan was "Let Brockville Flourish". In 1907, John Harris Fulford was mayor and the Board of Trade went after the "unused and untidy" Blockhouse Island, "for the benefit of the town." About 1910 a breakwater was extended west from Blockhouse Island.

Rumours began swirling that Melzar Avery, from Sharbot Lake, was going to buy the Rivers' waterfront property known as "The Pines," in order to harvest pine trees.

William Shearer took the lead and offered \$1000 (approx. \$23,000 in 2019 dollars) towards the purchase of the adjacent property of the late Judge George Malloch west of "The Pines" for a public park. He offered to help buy "The Pines" if the town would buy the Malloch property to make a larger park. After extensive and acrimonious debate in council in 1908, they decided the Malloch property would make a better park, because of the fine river frontage of 630 feet (189 m) and 855 feet (256m) back to the highway.

Mayor Charles S. Cossitt argued that the natural beauty would be a magnet for tourists as well. It was the only suitable public access to the river. The land was priced favourably and would be a good investment. Others argued against, complaining that taxpayers would be burdened with the debt for thirty years and that it was too far to walk, that there were costs to light, maintain and police. Besides, 29 islands were already leased. So public pressure was applied. Children were recruited. On June 29, 1908, school children marched to Court House Square carrying small tree branches and banners, reading "For My Sake, Vote for the Public Park".

The ratepayers were consulted and voted yes. On August 5, 1908, the land, now half the size offered for sale in 1887, was purchased from Archie Malloch for \$7500 (approx. \$170,000 in 2019 dollars). \$8000 was debentured over 30 years at 5% interest.



St. Lawrence Park, 2009

On April 5, 1909, town council under Mayor William H. Kyle passed a by-law officially creating St. Lawrence Park.

This beautiful park, with its granite out-crops, white pines and sandy beach, overlooks some city owned islands and is still a jewel of natural beauty and a beehive of summer activity for Brockville families and tourists alike.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. William Shearer and those public-spirited citizens and children of Brockville, one hundred and ten years ago. **LH**

We are grateful to Brian Porter for this valuable account of Brockville's History and the photo's supplied by Doug Grant. Their efforts to educate and inform individuals of Brockville's history through the years has been an invaluable resource to the community.