

FREDERICK G. TODD AND THE CREATION OF CANADA'S URBAN LANDSCAPE

Peter Jacobs*

For nearly half a century (1907-1948) Frederick G. Todd (Fig. 1) planned, designed and carried out "public and private works of beautification and utility with nature herself as partner." He was the first truly resident landscape architect in Canada and for most of his professional life was one of a small group committed to the art and practice of structuring urban growth in the first half of this century. His projects ranged from Vancouver, B.C. to St. John's, Newfoundland, from the smallest scale details of garden design to a study of the nation's capital. He was an articulate author and a passionate advocate of the wise use of natural resources.

Todd's significance lay in his ability to foresee and to understand important social movements in urban Canada, and to interpret these movements with sufficient conviction and quality that the vast majority of his proposals were implemented. This legacy remains an essential component of the urban quality of life enjoyed to this day by Canadians from coast to coast.

Todd worked with some of Canada's most important industrialists, innumerable public clients, a variety of citizens' groups, the clergy, politicians, artists, scientists and associated professionals. Yet he was a modest man whose work and ideals are little known in his own country.

His work can be divided into three areas: urban parks, site planning and public works. This article focuses on a selected set of projects in each area that highlights a particular social condition in urban Canada, and illustrates how Todd's creative and practical proposals were instrumental in resolving social concern and physical design.

Urban Parks

In 1875, Frederick Law Olmsted was asked to design an urban park on Mount Royal, Montréal, Québec and Frederick Todd may well have moved to Montréal because of his association with the elder Olmsted's proposal as an apprentice landscape architect. Progress

in implementing the project was sporadic, and Olmsted was sufficiently frustrated with the lack of appreciation and understanding of his plan that he felt obliged to write a small book in its defence.¹ The project remained on open file in Olmsted's office even after his sickness, and Todd was involved, as an apprentice landscape architect, in supervising ongoing work on the park plan. In fact, the first recorded project signed by Todd imme-



1. F. G. Todd, 1909. (Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montréal).

*Peter Jacobs is Vice-Doyen à la recherche, Faculté de l'Aménagement, Université de Montréal, Montréal, Québec.

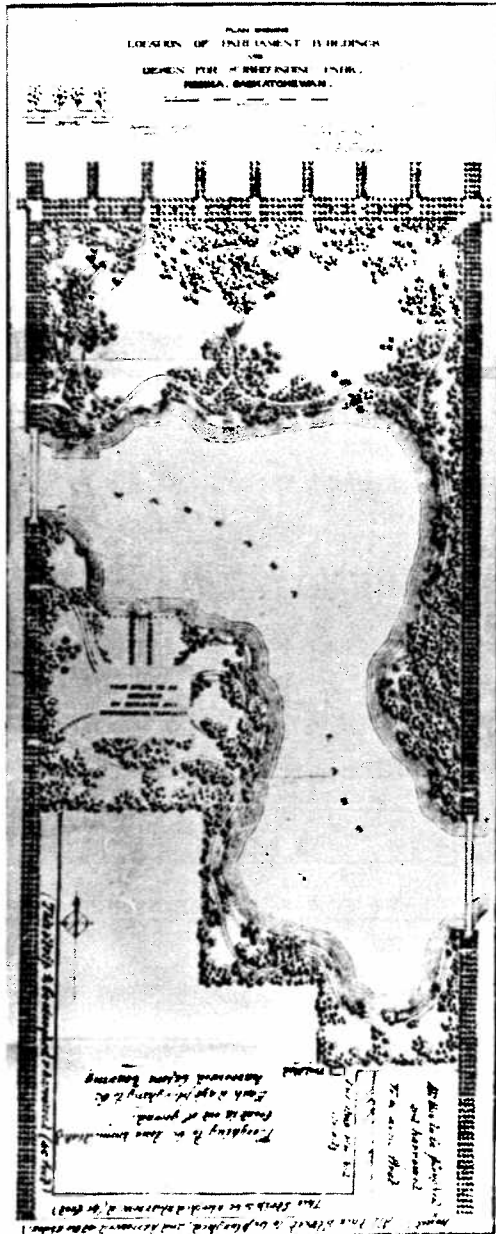
diately after his move to Montréal was a proposal for the look-out on Mount Royal. Later in his career, Todd was to successfully implement a plan for Beaver Lake in Mount Royal Park, a focal point in Olmsted's proposal that had not been realized.

Todd's proposal for the look-out was never built, but he was commissioned to design a number of parks that were built prior to the First World War, and exist in their mature form today. His preoccupation with the integration of nature into the growing urban fabric of Canada's cities and towns is evident in his proposals for

the Battlefields National Park on the Plains of Abraham in Québec City, Québec, as well as his proposal to build the new provincial parliament buildings in Regina, Saskatchewan, in a park setting (Figs. 2, 3).

Far from imposing a single style on the development of urban park projects, however, Todd sought to highlight the particular characteristics of each site. This specific quality is perhaps best illustrated by comparing his concept for the Plains of Abraham (Fig. 4) designed between 1909 and 1914, and that for Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba, (Fig. 5) designed between 1904 and 1906.

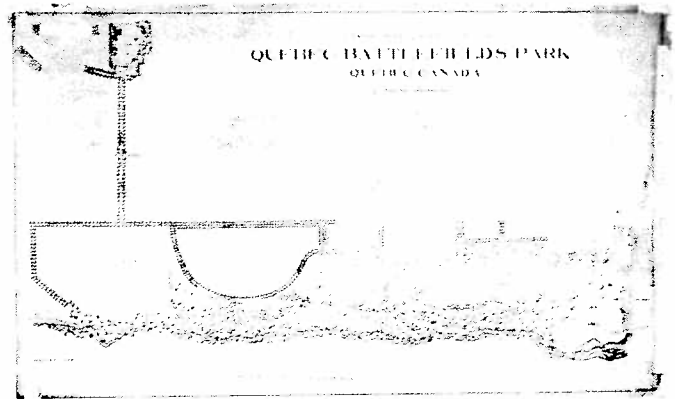
Of the proposal for the Plains of Abraham, he wrote:



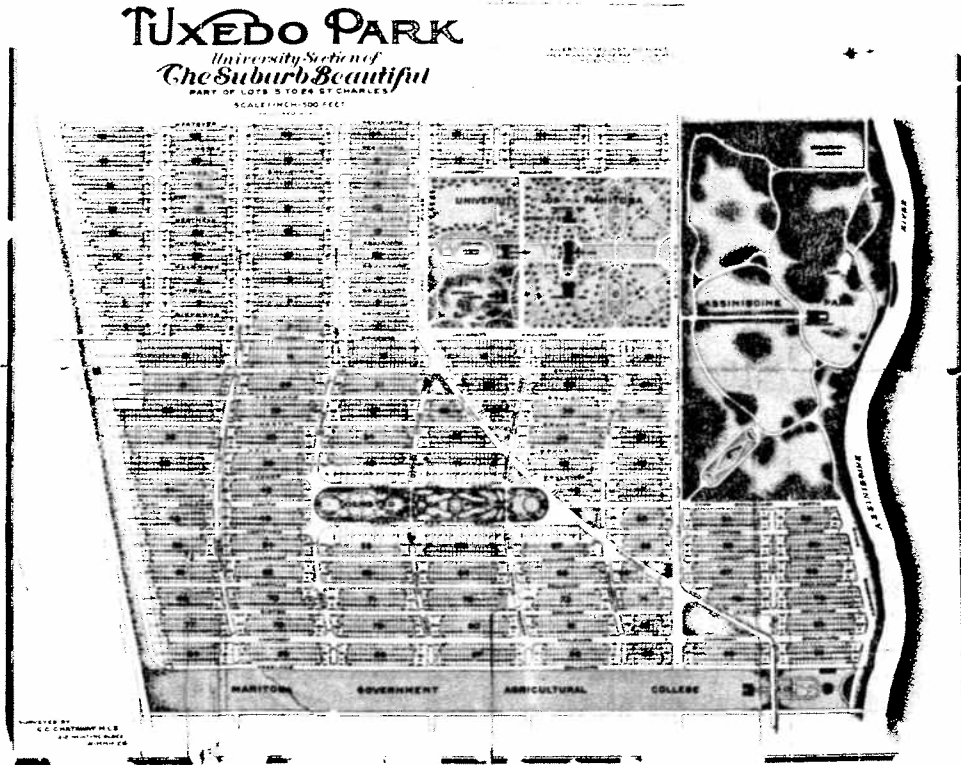
2. Wascana Park Plan, 1907. Wascana Park was designed both as a public urban park and as a setting for the new provincial Parliament building. The formal alignment of street trees was intended to be extended throughout the core of the capital city. T. H. Mawson, an English landscape architect and town planner, later developed a comprehensive town plan for Regina. (Saskatchewan Public Archives).



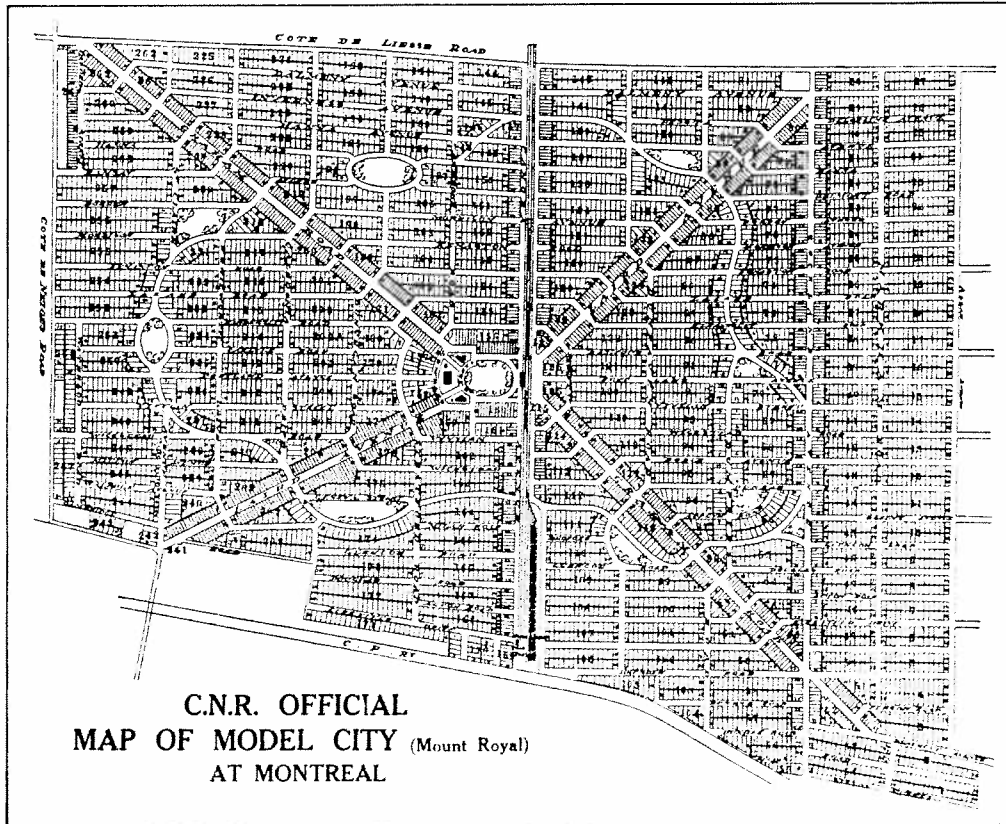
3. Wascana Park View, 1964. The modern photograph across Wascana Lake that focuses on the Parliament Building illustrates Todd's plan at maturity. The landscape architect must visualize and provide for the changes that occur in a landscape design concept as plant material grows and matures over a period of many years. (Saskatchewan Government photograph).



4. Parc des Champs de Bataille Plan, 1913. The plan for the Québec Battlefields Park, the Plains of Abraham, successfully structures a series of historical events within the limits of a complex site. Simultaneously, the plan reaches out into the growing urban fabric of Québec City to link the Battlefields Park with Ste. Foy Park across the axis of the Grande Allée. (Archives de la Commission des Champs de Bataille, Québec, Qué).



5. Assiniboine Park and Tuxedo Park Plan. The original design plan for Assiniboine Park has been lost. The park is illustrated here adjacent to the “suburb beautiful” of Tuxedo Park which was originally designed by Rickson Outhet, the only other landscape architect in Montréal at the time. Todd was invited to rework the plan for Tuxedo Park, illustrated here, following his work on Assiniboine Park. “Olmsted Park” is an obvious tribute by Todd and Outhet to their mentor. (Photograph of map owned by Hilderman, Feir, Witty, Landscape Architects, Winnipeg, Manitoba).



6. Town of Mount Royal Plan, 1938. The 1938 plan of the Town of Mount Royal maintains the basic diagonal structure and contrasting curvilinear necklace of parks originally laid out by Todd. The city hall was established at the symbolic core of the plan further increasing the allocation of green space in the model city. (Town of Mount Royal Library Archives).

“Nothing can prevent the magnificent views obtainable from these plains from being the great characteristic feature of the park, but the whole park is so bound up in the history of this continent that the opportunity of designing the park in such a way as to perpetuate this history would seem to be much more interesting than to lay it out as an ordinary park, with clumps of trees dotted about, and the whole cut up with walks and drives”.

Of his plan for Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, he remarked:

“In the West where parks must necessarily be located upon the open prairie, and where at best the open surface is only partly rolling, I have taken as the chief character of the park, the open plain itself”.²

A few years after Todd developed his plan for Assiniboine Park, he was asked to revise the residential plan for Tuxedo Park immediately adjacent to it, thus providing the City of Winnipeg with an integrated urban image of the emerging principles of civic design at the turn of the century.

Todd wrote articulately and with passion in professional journals, newspapers and pamphlets throughout his life, seeking to stimulate a concern for the quality of urban life and for those whose position did not allow them the luxury of escaping to the countryside.

People whose whole lives are lived among the bustle and strife of a large city require some place where they can rest after the day's exertion; mothers with little ones, whose life in the narrow tenements is ill-suited to fit them for life's battle: to all these what a boon are the public parks, where the air at least is more pure than on the street, and the children can romp on the grass or roam through the woods.³

The “garden city” and “city beautiful” movements were logical extensions of the urban park movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Urban growth in Canada was spurred by massive immigration and the bold vision of the railroad companies who were busy linking 3,000 miles of Canadian territory, and in the process developing many of Canada's newest “garden cities”. Todd designed a number of model urban communities for the Canadian Northern Railway; Shaughnessy Heights in Vancouver and the Town of Mount Royal in Montréal are representative of this phase of his work.

Early in his career, Todd was asked to develop a strategic report for the Ottawa Improvement Commission about the future growth of Canada's capital city. Although the report was never cited in later and better-known reports by the Holt Commission and Jacques Greber, many of Todd's recommendations were incorporated into subsequent plans, including the majority of his proposals for and location of parks, avenues and boulevards. His philosophy of town planning was carefully articulated within the report, and serves, even today, as a timely reminder that urban planning is essentially optimistic, future oriented, and concerned with

human welfare. In his report to the Ottawa Improvement Commission, Todd wrote:

“You may ask, is it reasonable to look so far ahead as one hundred years or more, and to make plans for generations in the distant future? We have only to study the history of the older cities, and note at what enormous cost they have overcome the lack of provision for their growth, to realize that the future prosperity and beauty of the city depends in a great measure upon the ability to look ahead, and the power to grasp the needs and requirements of the great population it is destined to have . . .”⁴

The strongest characteristic of Todd's proposals for new communities was the attempt to lace systems of open space through the pragmatic subdivision of urban fringe land which was so typically undertaken to achieve fabulous profits from land speculation. In this respect, a new suburb in Vancouver called Shaughnessy Heights was described in the following manner:

“Instead of the conventional style of streets crossing at right angles, the center of the heights was laid out in the form of a park, with streets radiating in different directions like the spokes of a wheel; intertwined with these are the boulevards and other smaller park spaces.”⁵

The most ambitious of Todd's town planning schemes was developed for the Canadian Northern Railway in Montréal. The railway needed access to the centre of the city in order to establish its major eastern terminal. The most obvious access running east-west through the island of Montréal had already been established by the Canadian Pacific line. William MacKenzie, president of the Canadian Northern Railway, developed a proposal that was as bold as it was expensive. He proposed to reach the heart of the city by digging a tunnel from the north underneath Mount Royal to reach what is now the CNR Terminal under the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. The open trench that resulted was subsequently filled by another entrepreneur of equally broad vision, William Zekendorf, who conceived the Place Ville-Marie complex 50 years later. Both schemes contributed substantially to urban growth in Montréal, both were staggeringly expensive and both were equally profitable.

In order to recover the costs of the tunnel, MacKenzie proposed developing a model city to the north of Mount Royal connected through the tunnel to downtown Montréal only 10 minutes away. The design of the Town of Mount Royal, as the model city is now called, was entrusted to Frederick Todd, who organized it around a basic scheme already set out by Frank Darling, who was both chief engineer of the railway and the first mayor of the model city. This scheme was a formal diagonal axis of boulevards split by the railway line with the station at the centre.

Todd worked and reworked the street and lot layouts of the model city (Fig. 6), respecting and at the same time moulding the formal geometry of the town to better suit his vision of a generous town centre and the pragmatic concerns of traffic circulation. His most signif-

icant contribution to the town plan lay, however, in the ingenious way he wove a green necklace of parks around and through the axial geometry of the town plan.

The scheme was an enormous success, probably the most successful real estate venture ever in Canada. In the first morning more than a million dollars worth of lots were sold and the newspapers spoke glowingly of the scheme as:

“A new Westmount, a garden city in the very best sense of the word, blossoming in that part of the island of Montréal that lies between Outremont and the Back River, easily accessible by a suburban electric train service through the heart of Mount Royal, making it a ten-minute run from the new suburb to the heart of the city.”⁶

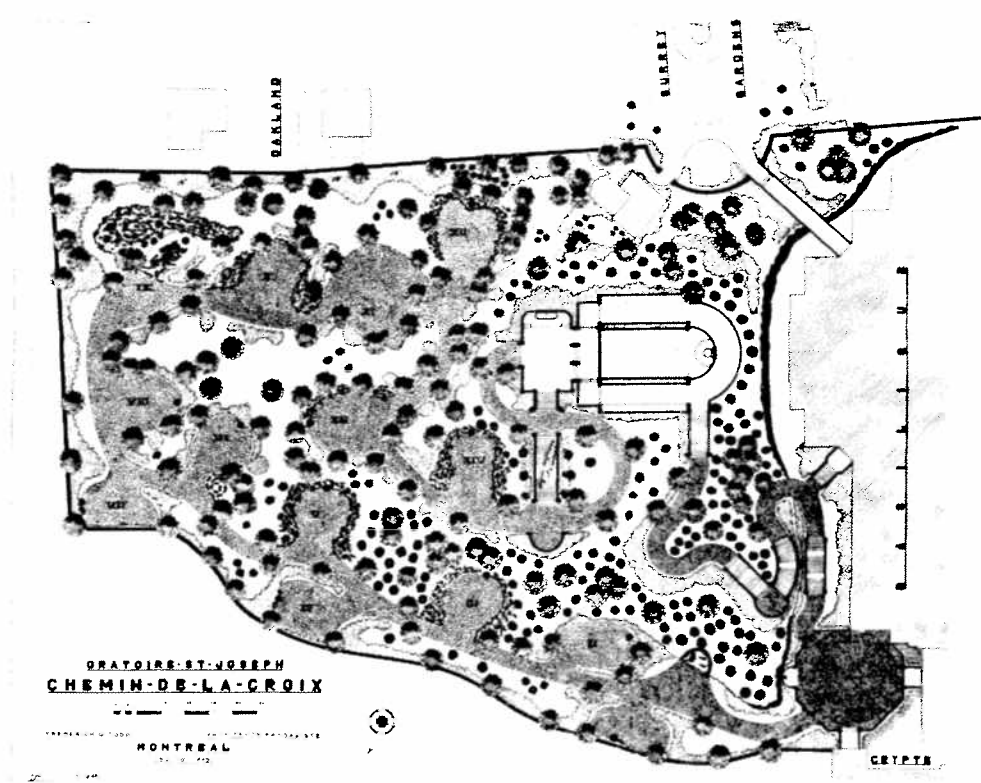
Site Planning And Design

Throughout his career Todd designed the grounds for private and institutional clients where his skills as a design professional were given wide expression. The grounds of Trinity College in Toronto were one of his earliest commissions. The Sewell garden in Montebello, Québec (Fig. 12) was designed between the two World

Wars and the symbolic Garden of the Way of the Cross, adjacent to St. Joseph’s Oratory, Montréal, was the last commission Todd completed before his death.

Todd’s freest design exercise — the garden developed for W.B. Sewell on the Seignior Club grounds near Montebello, Québec — was described in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* as “a native personality . . . found hidden among the trees.”⁷

If the Sewell garden was Todd’s freest expression, the Garden of the Way of the Cross adjacent to St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montréal was his most symbolic work (Figs. 7, 8). The site was extremely steep and Todd moved a path diagonally across the slope thus reducing the apparent incline. The various stations of the cross were strung like pearls on a rosary against a background of lush vegetation selected to meld with and accentuate the wooded slope. The entire setting was designed in close collaboration with Ernest Parent, the architect responsible for the fountains and basin, and Louis Parent, the sculptor responsible for the statues. Adhering closely to the theme of each station, Todd “succeeded on the one hand in establishing an equilibrium between the vegetation and the statuary, and on the other in highlighting the lyricism of each scene, either by colour, texture or by accentuating the form of plant materials.”⁸



7. Chemin de la Croix Plan, 1945. “I have been deeply impressed by the beauty of such a Way of the Cross and with its religious significance and value in the carrying out of the religious work which you are doing. The natural beauty of the location is unique for this purpose, and if the changes required in order to provide the necessary walks and stations and other features of the Way of the Cross are carried out in harmony with the natural site and in sympathy with the Passion of Our Lord it must have a tremendous and far reaching influence for good upon the hundreds of thousands of people who will visit St. Joseph’s Oratory.” (TODD, F. G. 1943 — Letter to the Reverend E.M. Brassard, Saint Joseph’s Oratory Archives, May 31 C.S.C. (Archives St. Joseph’s Oratory)).

Public Works During The Depression

Perhaps the most ambitious and socially relevant projects in Todd's illustrious career were a direct result of the depression. Landscape architecture projects such as the restoration of St. Helen's Island and the implementation of Beaver Lake on Mount Royal provided literally thousands of jobs for unemployed laborers while requiring relatively small expenditures for materials and equipment.

The revitalization of St. Helen's Island Park (Figs. 8, 9) gave Todd the opportunity to develop an important work relief program during the depression as well as the

possibility of pursuing his long-held objective of establishing viable additions to the natural and cultural fabric of urban Canada.

The park program developed by Todd included the restoration of the military installations on the island that dated from the 19th century. The military barracks now serves as a museum, the powder-house serves as a summer theatre, and the Martello tower at the high point of the island is a splendid observation point. Throughout the island, Todd wove paths to connect these historical points of interest. In addition, he developed a lake and stream to accommodate needed drainage work on the island, one of the first playing fields for girls, a children's playground and an elaborate scheme for swimming on a sand beach built into the St. Lawrence River. The bathing beach is the only aspect of the plan that was not built.

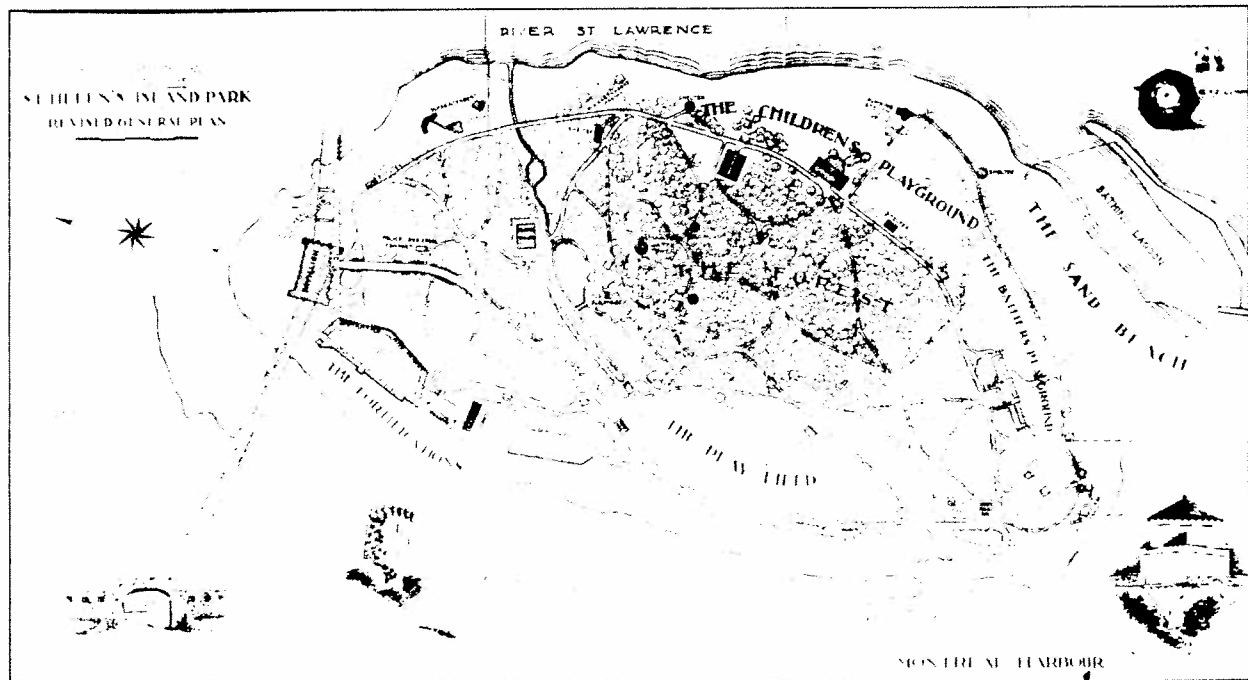
Todd's arguments on behalf of the work program established for St. Helen's Island echo and reflect his earlier essays on behalf of the urban park movement at the turn of the century:

"St. Helen's Island Park will provide Montréal's underprivileged citizens with a much needed rest and recreation center. Within walking distance of the homes of 100,000 people, it is readily accessible to the others who live farther away. The historical background of St. Helen's Island Park alone made the work interesting — for there is no place where Montréal's early history can be so vividly portrayed."⁹

At approximately the same time, Todd developed a scheme to finally complete the reservoir on Mount



8. Station of the Cross, View 1979. (Photo M-C. Martineau)



9. St. Helen's Island Park Plan, 1937. Todd's bold idea to restore the historic integrity of the heart of St. Helen's Island, and expand the recreational complex to include Ile Verte, Ile Ronde, and a chain of shoals to the south foreshadowed the plan for Expo '67 by 30 years. The proposed bathing pool for St. Helen's Island was to be sheltered from the strong currents of the St. Lawrence River by extending a sandy break-front from the island creating a quiet lagoon.

Royal first proposed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1876 (Figs. 10, 11). In his letter to the Honorable William Tremblay, Québec Minister of Labor during most of the depression, Todd argued that the development of Beaver Lake would entail virtually no capital expenses. He alluded to Olmsted's design intentions, and to the marginal use of the land in its current state.

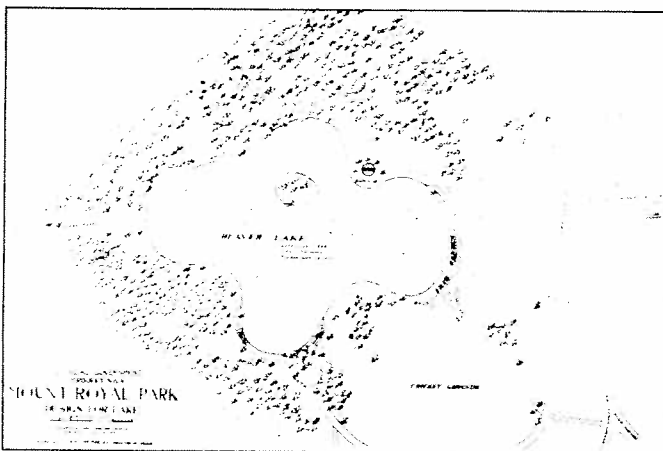
"A lake at the westerly end of Mount Royal Park, near Shakespeare Road, would add greatly to the beauty and usefulness of the Park, and would occupy swampy ground which is little used at present. A lake of about seven acres in extent is shown at this same place on the plan which was prepared by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1871. He gave careful study to the planning of Mount Royal Park, and I feel sure that everyone would be glad to see this recommendation of his carried out."¹⁰

Few design professionals have affected so many urban Canadians as did Todd. Hundreds of thousands of urban citizens in Montréal alone enjoy Mount Royal and St. Helen's Island every year. Untold thousands stroll through Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Bowering Park in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Plains of Abraham in Québec City and Wascana Park in Regina, Saskatchewan. Others have lived in the many successful communities that he designed throughout Canada. Still others benefited from his counsel and learned from his social activism. Todd's modesty, and the fact that he is virtually unknown in the design professions and to Canadians in general, may well be the most ironic symbol of the extent to which he melded into his adopted country.

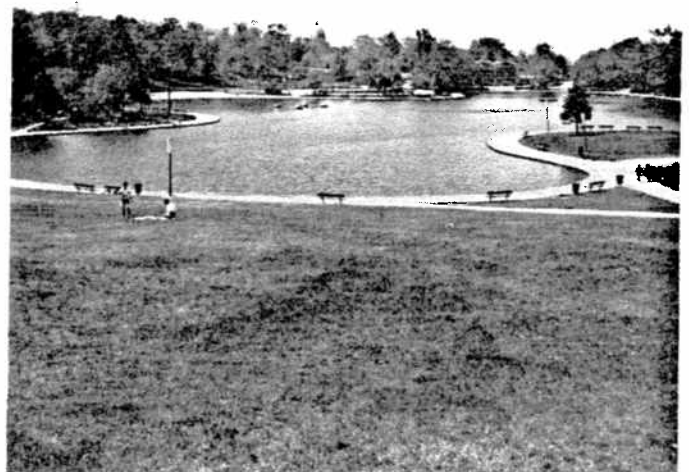
Frederick G. Todd

- 1876 — March 11, born in Concord, New Hampshire.
- 1896 — Completed studies at the agricultural college in Amherst, Massachusetts where he studied botany, biology, agriculture and site engineering.

- 1896-1900 — Apprenticed as a landscape architect with the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot, in Brookline, Massachusetts.
- 1900 — Moved to Montréal and established the first resident practice of landscape architecture in Canada.
- 1903 — Prepared a comprehensive report on the future growth of the nation's capital for the Ottawa Improvement Commission.
- 1904-1907 — Prepared and executed the plans for Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg and Wascana Park in Regina, and developed a prototype for future garden cities.
- 1930-1940 — Designed and supervised major public works projects in Québec during the depression including St. Helen's Island (1936), Beaver Lake in Mount Royal Park (1939) and developed a proposal for an impressive sports centre for the British Empire and Olympic Games in Maisonneuve Park, Montréal (1938).
- 1938 — Became a fellow of the Institute of Landscape Architects of Great Britain.
- 1939 — Elected president of the Québec Horticultural Society.
- 1939-1945 — Appointed vice-president of the City Improvement League, Montréal.
- 1941 — Completed plans and construction of the Montréal Memorial Park Cemetery started in 1935.
- 1940-1942 & 1944-1948 — Appointed municipal councillor for the City of Montréal. City projects at Bowling Green, Pointe-Claire, Québec.
- 1905 — Became a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects.
- 1907-1912 — Designed three major garden city projects in British Columbia; Shaughnessy Heights and Point Grey in Vancouver, and Port Mann on the Fraser River.
- 1913-1918 — Designed and supervised major urban parks in Québec City and Bowering Park in St. John's, Newfoundland as well as developed the model city plan for the Town of Mount Royal Montréal.
- 1918-1930 — Worked as a consultant for Alcan and designed a number of private gardens and institutional grounds as well as urban parks for smaller urban communities.
- 1922 — Became a founding member of the Town Planning Institute of Canada.



10. Beaver Lake Plan, 1939. Todd's initial plan for Beaver Lake included a bathing beach, ample provision for bridle paths, and an art garden for summer activities. The toboggan run was supplemented with a skating rink in the winter providing a full program of recreation opportunities throughout the year. (Archives La Presse, Montréal)



11. Beaver Lake View 1980. Modern view of Beaver lake with the dome of St. Joseph's Oratory in the background. (Photo J.P. Gariépy)

- 1945-1946 — Became president of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects.
- 1945-1948 — Initiated plans and supervised construction of the Garden of the Way of the Cross adjacent to St. Joseph's Oratory, his last commission.
- 1948 — February 15, died in Montréal at the age of 72.

Footnotes

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Mount Royal* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1881).
2. Frederick G. Todd, "Character in Park Design," *Canadian Municipal Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 10, October, 1905, p.322.
3. *Ibid.*, p.24.
4. Frederick G. Todd, "Report by Frederick G. Todd on Parkway System of Ottawa Improvement Commission," Canadian Public Archives, p.21.
5. Frederick G. Todd, "Premier Residential District of British Columbia," *Point Grey Gazette*, 1907.
6. Frederick G. Todd, "Ville Mont-Royal," *The Herald*, 20 December 1911.
7. "In the Laurentian Hills," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December, 1933.
8. J.F. Roland, M-C. Martineau and Peter Jacobs, "The Symbolic Garden of the Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph's Oratory, Montréal," *Landscape Architecture Canada* (L.A.C.). Vol. 4, No. 3, 1978, p.23, translated by L.A.C.
9. Frederick G. Todd, "St. Helen's Island Park," *McGill News*, Summer, 1933, p.25.
10. Frederick G. Todd, Letter to the Honorable William Tremblay, Minister of labor, Québec, McGill Archives, 6 March 1937.

PETER JACOBS
CURRICULUM VITAE



PETER JACOBS is Professor of Landscape Architecture, École d'architecture de paysage, Faculté de l'aménagement, Université de Montréal. He has served as Professor at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University on three occasions and has lectured widely in North America, Europe and Latin America. He is the recipient of the A.H. Tammsaare Environment Prize, the President's Prize of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, and the Governor General's medal on the occasion of the 125^e Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. Following his early practice in architecture, he has focussed on landscape planning and urban design.

He is a Fellow and Past president of the Canadian Society of landscape Architects (CSLA), Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), an Honorary Member of the Columbian Society of Landscape Architects, and has served as Canada's senior delegate to the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA). He has served as the Chair of the College of Senior Fellows, and was named the first Beatrix Farrand Distinguished Fellow, Landscape and Garden Studies, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

For 12 years he served as Chairman of the Environmental Planning Commission, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN); and is Chairman of the Kativik Environmental Quality Commission for Nunavik Northern Quebec (KEQC). He has been nominated to numerous Canadian Committees, Commissions and public hearings concerned with environmental issues and sustainable development, and Chaired the Public Advisory Committee on Canada's State of Environment Report.

He is a member of numerous scientific and professional editorial advisory committees, and has written and edited publications related to sustainable and equitable development, landscape perception, and planning theory. Current studies focus on the histories of the idea of landscape, the meanings assigned to landscape in different cultural settings and how these inform management strategies and actions over time.

He has served on numerous design juries and as a consultant to the City of Montreal for the development of urban open space systems, including the restoration of Mount-Royal Park, originally designed by F.L. Olmsted; the re-design of the St. Helen's and Notre Dame Islands, the former site of Expo '67; and the design of a new urban square in downtown Montreal, Place Berri. He continues to collaborate on numerous urban design projects throughout the country and a number of his projects have received professional planning and design awards.

Professeur titulaire à l'Université de Montréal
Faculté de l'aménagement, École d'architecture de paysage
C.P. 6128 – Succ. Centre-Ville
Montréal (Québec) Canada H3C 3J7
Tél.: (514) 343-7119 – FAX (514) 343-6104
E-mail: peter.jacobs@umontreal.ca

PETER JACOBS est professeur à l'École d'architecture de paysage de la Faculté de l'aménagement de l'Université de Montréal. Il a agi comme professeur invité au Graduate School of Design, Harvard University à trois reprises, ainsi que comme conférencier à travers l'Amérique du Nord, l'Europe et l'Amérique latine. Il a reçu le prix A.H. Tammsaare pour l'environnement, le "Prix du président" de la Société canadienne des architectes paysagistes et la médaille commémorative du Gouverneur Général à l'occasion du 125^e anniversaire de la Confédération du Canada. À la suite de sa pratique en architecture, il s'est concentré sur la planification du paysage et le design urbain.

Il est Fellow et ancien président de la Société canadienne des architectes paysagistes (AAPC), Fellow de l'American Society of Landscape Architecture (ASLA), membre honoraire de la Société des architectes paysagistes de la Colombie, et a agi comme délégué sénior du Canada au sein de la Fédération internationale des architectes paysagistes (FIAP). Il a été nommé président du Collège des "Senior Fellows", ainsi que la première « Beatrix Farrand Distinguished Fellow », Landscape and garden studies à Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.

Depuis 12 ans il a agi comme président de la Commission du développement viable au sein de l'Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature et de ses ressources (IUCN) et est président de la Commission de la qualité environnementale Kativik au Nouveau-Québec (KEQC). Il siège au sein de plusieurs comités canadiens concernés par les problématiques environnementales et du développement durable, et a agi comme président du Comité public aviseur sur l'état de l'environnement au Canada et

Il est membre de plusieurs comités aviseurs de revues scientifiques et professionnelles et a rédigé et a publié des textes sur la perception du paysage, les théories et méthodes reliées à la planification du territoire ainsi que sur le développement viable. Ces études actuelles portent sur les histoires de l'idée du paysage, les sens accordés au paysage à travers des cultures variées et comment celles-ci informent les stratégies de gestion et des actions à travers le temps.

Il a agi sur plusieurs juries de design et est consultant auprès de la Ville de Montréal pour le développement des réseaux d'espaces libres y compris la restauration du parc Mont-Royal, oeuvre originale de F.L. Olmsted; sur la réhabilitation des îles Ste-Hélène et Notre-Dame; et sur le design de la place Berri au centre-ville de Montréal. Il collabore sur plusieurs projets de design urbain à travers le Canada, et plusieurs de ces projets ont été reconnus et primés par les associations professionnelles.