

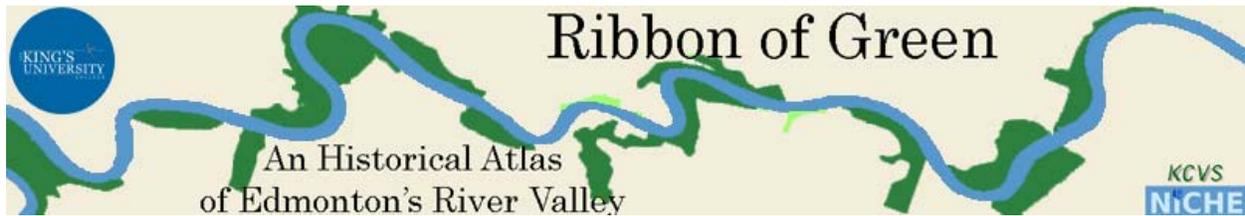
Land Purchases: the Beginning of the Edmonton River Valley Park System

Written by Katie Wallbaum

The expansive park system which Edmonotonians enjoy today has humble beginnings. In late 1905, the Edmonton City council began to take steps towards purchasing land to be used exclusively for parks and recreation. A man named Inglis had contacted city commissioner Kinnaird with a suggestion to create a driveway through his river flats land from Victoria avenue to Riverside avenue because it would create: “a very pretty driveway, and the land between Riverside avenue and the hill would make an excellent site for a park.”¹ The council took this suggestion to heart and instructed the parks committee to create a report on the idea. Ten days later the report appeared and a six part plan was introduced. The council heard the plan which included, fencing, grass seeding, tree, shrub and flower planting, land purchases (the Queen’s avenue school, a portion of jail property and an extension of Jasper avenue), the institution of the Riverside driveway along the river bank, and finally for the city to purchase the exhibition grounds, part of Donald Ross’ property or “from the Hudson Bay Co. either the whole or part of the flat to the west of the old fort and east of the old town boundary.”² This plan was not immediately approved but it was passed along for cost estimates to be done. The city of Edmonton was taking its first steps towards creating the city-wide interconnected parks system which today’s citizens enjoy today. However the first tangible step came a few months later. In a February 1906 *Bulletin* article, the journalist describes the secret deal which several Edmonton

¹ “The Park Question,” *The Edmonton Bulletin*, November 30, 1905.

² “City Park System,” *The Edmonton Bulletin*, December 9, 1905.



alderman procured while the mayor and rest of city council were vacationing in Winnipeg. The article writes: “aldermen have purchased for the city 140 acres of park site in the east end, and 100 acres in the west end, giving the city 240 acres of park. The deal was concluded with considerable secrecy, for good reasons, and outside of the city council and the newspaper reporters there were probably not three men in the city who knew what was going on.”³ This action enabled the city to capture the land necessary to begin the development of a great park system. The irony in the whole situation was that an Edmonton by-law kept the actual city of Edmonton from purchasing these lands without first getting citizens approval through plebiscite.

As the article explains,

According to the charter, the city council has no authority to spend money for parks or public works’ of any kind unless authorized to do so by by-law vote of the ratepayers. As it would take at least sixty days to get the bylaw through, and such a thing as giving an option on such desirable property for sixty days is something that the owners of suburban property adjacent to Edmonton would not consider, the aldermen had to buy the land themselves and hold it in their names until a bylaw could be submitted, or throw up the park proposition altogether.⁴

Thanks to the quick action of Edmonton’s aldermen, the city now owned the land needed in order to begin developing a vast and integrated park system.

³ “City Purchases Park Sites,” *The Edmonton Bulletin*, February 1, 1906.

⁴ *Ibid.*