

Date: March 28, 2006



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Burrard View Park - Commemorative Cairn and Plaque

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the installation of a cairn and plaque in Burrard View Park commemorating Judge Helen Gregory MacGill, to be funded by Parks Canada and installed and maintained by Parks Canada under terms satisfactory to the General Manager of the Park Board and Directors of Legal Services and Risk Management.

POLICY

The Board has review guidelines for considering donations of public art and memorials.

<http://vancouver.ca/parks/arts/guidelinesdonations.htm>

BACKGROUND

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation has received a proposal from Parks Canada to install a cairn and plaque in Burrard View Park commemorating Judge Helen Gregory MacGill, the first woman judge in British Columbia. (See attachment 1) During her tenure, Judge MacGill focussed on improving pensions, women's minimum wage and other social laws. The memorial has relevance in Burrard View Park, as it is the site of the former Juvenile Detention Centre (now Cottage Hospice) where Judge MacGill presided from 1934 to 1945.

The proposal was discussed at the Culture and Recreation Committee on May 14, 2003. The Committee requested refinement of the wording on the plaque for increased clarity and Parks Canada agreed to do some further work on the wording, working through their processes.

DISCUSSION

Burrard View Park is located in Hastings Sunrise neighbourhood at Penticton and Wall Streets. It is 2.2 hectares in size and features amenities including tennis courts, children's playground, wading pool, fieldhouse and child care centre. Burrard View Park is also the site of the St. James Cottage Hospice, a restored heritage building originally known as the

“Babies Cottage”. It was built in 1924 by the Children’s Aid Society to house infant orphans. By 1934 the building’s use was changed to that of a Juvenile Detention Centre for Boys and Girls and in 1955 had yet another transformation to the Vancouver Family Court.

The memorial is a standard cairn designed by Parks Canada to withstand vandalism. It is concrete with an aggregate finish on a 70 cm square base and is 120 cm high. (See attachment 2) The plaque is approximately 80 cm. x 70 cm. and bears wording in both official languages:

HELEN GREGORY MACGILL
(1864-1947)

A self-taught legal expert and tireless reformer, Helen Gregory MacGill became an internationally recognized juvenile court judge. From 1917 to 1928, she served as British Columbia’s first woman judge and presided here, at the site of the former Juvenile Detention Home, from 1934 to 1945. Determined to improve the legal status of women, she campaigned for improvements in laws governing inheritance, property and guardianship of children. MacGill was active in the British Columbia women’s suffrage campaign. Pioneering a humane approach to family law, she helped establish the family court system.

The cairn is proposed to be located in the middle of the park at the intersection of the pathways directly south of the Cottage Hospice on an existing paved area.

The guidelines for considering this type of donation involve a public consultation and technical review. The public consultation process occurred in March 2003, and involved posting a sign on site describing the proposal and notification of park neighbours. A notice was also included in the Burrard View News distributed to 1000 households in the neighbourhood. Both the sign and the notice asked for comments on the proposal. No comments were received in support or opposing the proposal. Only one phone message was received requesting additional landscaping in the park. Staff met with representatives from the Cottage Hospice for their input on the proposed plan and site selection.

The technical review was conducted by staff who reviewed the proposed work for safety, durability, design and maintenance concerns, and the proposed site for view obstruction, conflict with park use and underground utilities. All technical requirements are satisfied.

SUMMARY

The proposed commemorative cairn to Judge Helen Gregory MacGill is recommended to be sited in Burrard View Park. It is consistent with Park Board guidelines for donations of public art and memorials and enhances the park with a historical interpretative element which is relevant to Vancouver and the specific site.

Prepared by:
Vancouver East District Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

Judge Helen MacGill

1864-1947

Helen Gregory MacGill was the first woman judge in British Columbia. Born in 1864 into a prosperous and well-connected family in Hamilton, Ontario, Helen grew up an ambitious and educated woman. Helen earned the degrees of Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts.

She was the first female undergraduate at Trinity College in Toronto before becoming the first woman to earn a music degree in the entire British Empire.

After college Helen began a career as a journalist working as a foreign correspondent for *Cosmopolitan*.

At a young age she married Lee Fletcher and moved with him to San Francisco where Lee enrolled in medical school. Lee completed his medical training, and the family moved to Minnesota. Unfortunately, Lee did not live long after this move, dying when he was still young. Two-years after Lee's death, Helen met and married one of her former classmates, James MacGill, who was known as a successful attorney in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In Vancouver, Helen MacGill became a founding member of both the Vancouver Women's Press Club and the Vancouver Creche, a free nursery for children of working mothers.

MacGill continued her fight for women's rights, and found support for her cause at the University Women's Club. After joining the club, MacGill became chair of the Laws Committee. MacGill's efforts for women's rights proved fruitful when, in February of 1912, a bill allowing women to practise at the bar in British Columbia passed into law.

Helen went on to become the first woman judge in British Columbia. She was named Judge of Juvenile Court in 1917. During her tenure, she focused on improving pensions, women's minimum wage and other social laws.

Helen passed on her academic inclinations and independence to her daughter, Elsie Gregory MacGill who became the first woman to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree specializing in electrical engineering

Helen Gregory MacGill died in 1947.

(From the B.C. Government Archives website:

<http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/exhibits/timemach/galler10/frames/macgill.htm>)

ATTACHMENT 2

The cairn proposed for Burrard View Park is a standard Parks Canada design similar to this cairn located at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

