

To the Chairman & Members of the Calgary Parks Board.

Gentlemen:

I herewith beg to submit my report of work carried out from my assumption of duties on April 1st, 1911, till the end of the year, with suggestions and recommendations in regard to work and improvements for the coming year.

When I arrived here on the first of April last year, a heavy storm and zero weather did their best to discourage me, the more so after having travelled a few days over absolutely bare prairie without a vestige of vegetation. I knew that I was going to undertake a very difficult proposition, but was indeed very agreeably surprised after my first inspection of the existing parks and the islands, and saw that some good trees and shrubs were making a brave show of vigorous growth. I am confident that with my long experience I shall be able to greatly improve the existing parks and improve our streets and boulevards by a good growth of fine shade trees and with some varieties of trees and shrubs which never grew here before.

In the past nine months I have paid close attention to the existing conditions and have carefully studied the causes which in many instances prevented healthy growth of those trees and shrubs which had been planted, and I have come to the conclusion that there are two main factors detrimental to the successful growing of trees in this city, obstacles which in the first instance can be absolutely eliminated and in the second instance greatly remedied.

The first drawback was the soil, which in Calgary consists of a hard dry clay substance known as hardpan and which cannot possibly grow any trees at all. (This is the reason why older trees of from 10 to 15 years suddenly die off in our gardens). The second cause are the Chinook or warm winds which prevail in the winters and which generally come after a period of the coldest weather.

I have proved that the first cause can be absolutely eliminated by digging large holes, filling these in with good black loam and then planting the trees, and the result was that, not only did the trees grow, but they grew to alarming and almost abnormal proportions, greatly helped by the ideal climatic conditions. Another feature of the soil here is its association with alkali, which I propose to neutralize by the manuring with gypsum (plaster of Paris). This absolutely destroys the injurious action of the alkali.

On my trip to the East I took this difficulty of the hardpan up with several of the best soil experts and found that the best treatment which has the advantage of being inexpensive, is the application of dynamite. Experiments in the East have shown that this explosive will absolutely loosen up and pulverize the soil permanently and leave it loosened up for ever, allowing air and moisture to penetrate deeply. I therefore earnestly recommend that experiments with dynamite be taken, which will mean an enormous saving in the cartage of black loam, the more so as the component parts of the Calgary soil, when thus pulverized and treated with gypsum is of excellent growing quality.

Regarding the Chinook winds, I am protecting my trees by wrapping them up with canvas or burlap in the fall, until they will be strong and hardy enough to stand the disastrous effects of the warm winds after severe frost. You will understand that being frozen hard one day and suddenly being subjected to warm weather causes the trees to split and will kill the young trees.

I will at this time also draw your attention to another drawback with which the Parks Department has to contend with, and this is the manner in which funds are appropriated for parks purposes. You know that certain sums are granted for each work and parks separately, which sums must on no account be exceeded, nor any moneys, voted for one park, be used for expenditure on another park. Now the Parks Department differs from any other department in this city in that it deals with living things, like plants, trees, shrubs, and the weather and not with dead materials, like sand, stones, etc., which can be determined in advance. Therefore I would submit to the Board that a certain large sum be appropriated for an emergency fund, which may be resorted to in cases where unforeseen circumstances necessitate the need of extra funds, in order to carry out a certain work to a finish, as there have been instances where absolutely urgent work had to be stopped on account of appropriated moneys running out.

When I first took charge of the Parks Department I did not find any plans of proposed work for any of the parks and boulevards, which made it very difficult for me to start work. This year I am fully prepared and have made a great many plans, which it shall be my pleasure to submit to the Board very shortly for approval. The following is my detailed report of work done and recommendations:

St. George's Island Park

My predecessor had made some arrangements to have the large open space or field directly opposite the main bridge manured and ploughed up for planting with potatoes, which is indeed the very best plan for thorough cultivating and pulverizing the soil. I planted 64 bushels of potatoes in this field and had a very good crop of about 600 sacks of potatoes. Part of this crop was disposed of to the poor and to charitable institutions with the recommendation of the Commissioner I have now about 300 sacks to dispose of. I propose to follow this procedure of potato planting on the other three fields in this park and also in other parks if your Board so decides. The field in St. George's Island park will after some grading be in excellent condition for the laying out of flower beds and lawn. The temporary bandstand which I found in this park has been thoroughly put in condition and the existing two lavatories are in pretty good shape, although not sufficient.

The most important improvement, to my mind, was the erection and installation of the most up-to-date playing apparatus, and I may safely say that it has rarely been my good fortune to see such a crowd of thoroughly satisfied and happy adults and children, as on the day when this was thrown open for use. Your Parks Board could do no better thing than installing playing apparatus in the other parks to gain the popularity of the parents and the gratitude of young Calgary.

During this past summer I have caused several thousand holes to be dug all over the park amongst the other trees and had these holes filled with black loam and trees planted, which I took from Central Park, and evergreens from Banff. These evergreens are a very attractive feature in St. George's Island Park, especially so in winter. I have also made an extensive and minute survey of the whole park and the surrounding islands, so that I shall be able to draw up plans for future improvements.

In August last I commenced the improvement of the main driveway around the island and as soon as weather permits I shall bring this work to completion. This driveway is to be the only thoroughfare for automobiles and light vehicles and will be wide enough to allow visitors in carriages to the park concerts to stand still on one side, without impeding the passage of moving vehicles.

One important work which I would like your consent for is the erection of animal buildings for the zoo park, and I hope that we can prevail upon the Calgary citizens to vote a very substantial grant for this purpose.

A very necessary addition to the park is a building which is a combination of lavatories and shelter. This shelter will consist of an open hall, with lavatories in the basement. Last summer it happened that a very heavy rainstorm burst over the park suddenly during a concert, and as the crowd was a very large one a great many people could not find shelter, and got a thorough wetting. This great open hall would, therefore, be a great boon.

Another building that I recommend is a tool house with a stable for a few horses, as there is a large amount of work to be done in this park this coming summer. I would suggest that the horses for use of the Parks Department be stabled here, which will save lots of time. The man who is to have these horses under his care could sleep over the stables and at the same time act as watchman. I would also recommend the installation of a telephone in this tool house.

In order to prevent indecency being committed in this park, I would request that good solid gates be erected across both bridges giving access to the island, and a light installed over them to burn at night. The Board could then decide at a later date at which hour these should be shut.

At a meeting in August last your Board decided to lay out a nursery on St. Patrick's Island. I started on this work by plowing up the open space in the centre of this island, and I hope that I will be able to supply our own nursery stock from here in the future.

Central Park

Not very much work was done in this park in 1911, and only the cutting down of weeds and other minor work was done, as other parks needed more attention.

I have drawn up plans for the work to be executed in this park for the coming year, which I will lay before your Board for your approval. As this park occupies a very small acreage and is situated in the heart of a fine residential centre, I would propose to the Board to lay this out as a formal garden, with the proposed South African Soldiers Memorial statue in the centre and two large and monumental fountains as indicated in my plan. In the West end of this park I recommend putting up a large shell-shaped bandstand facing the soldier's statue. This bandstand is to have two open halls on each side furnished with tables and seats for use of visitors on cold nights or rainy weather. The rear of these wings will be closed.

In order to have the flower beds in this park in full view of passers-by, I would recommend to fill up the centre of this park to a height of 5 feet, with a gentle slope to the sides. This work will of course cost a great deal of money, but I believe that if I would notify contractors that they could dump excavated earth from their work in this park, they will gladly avail themselves of this opportunity and help materially in reducing the cost. Another good thing which this filling up would do is to effectually and permanently do away with the dandelion pest. Although this park will cost a good deal of money to put in shape and to maintain in the future, we will have the advantage of being able to supply our own flowers, etc., from our greenhouses.

On the south side of Central Park on 13th Avenue, I intend putting up a long row of lattice-work summer houses, covered with vine and furnished with tables and benches. These will be divided up into several individual bowers and will be a boon to families and friends who desire a quiet and private resting place to enjoy the beauties of this park on the sunny side.

In front of the Carnegie Library, I intend, with the Board's approval, laying out a large flower bed with a statue of the "Amazon Group" in the centre.

Victoria Park

The work done here during the past summer consisted of planting a great number of trees along the entire length of the fence and around most of the buildings. It is a pity that I could not finish all the work on this park, as the funds appropriated for this work ran out. It shows here that it is almost necessary to establish a separate fund for just such contingencies, as I have alluded to before in these pages. As it is we shall probably lose quite a few of the planted trees here, as I could not give them proper care for lack of funds, or protect them from the rigors of the winter.

For the next season I recommend the grading up of the open spaces for seeding with grass seeds and the replacing of all the trees that were killed this winter. I have made a very careful survey of the Exhibition grounds and have a true copy of the plan of this park. The plan which I drew for the sunken garden will now be useless, as I understand that the Exhibition company contemplate erecting a building on this land.

I wish to recommend to do away altogether with the useless experimental tree nursery near the main gates, and in order to give a pleasing aspect to visitors to our fairs as soon as they enter the grounds. I would wish to convert this ground into magnificent flower beds and tear down the fence which now surrounds this plot. This plan would certainly make a material difference to this part of the park.

Mewata Park

The soil of this park is for the greater part absolutely unfit for parks purposes, and I would therefore suggest to keep this for sports purposes, and there is no doubt that this park has a great popularity as such--witness the great crowds which visits these grounds at times.

I intend to plant shade trees all around this park, and a driveway. This driveway will eventually meet the proposed boulevard which is to run all along the river. The athletic grounds in this park are all in good shape. The old shed which stood on the grounds has been moved back to the river bank and put in good order as lavatories and dressing-rooms for ladies and gentlemen.

I would submit for your approval my plan to excavate a wading pool for the younger children in the west corner of this park, which will be a popular novelty for the children during the summer months.

Riley Park

The location of this park and the great fertility of its soil lends itself admirably for extensive improvements, and it should therefore be laid out for a first-class park. I have started by surrounding the grounds with a good picket fence and have had two beautiful and costly entrance gates erected. The ground all around the outer edge of this park has been plowed, disced and harrowed three times for an all-over width of 50 feet. This strip will be worked over again once this spring and should then be in splendid shape for planting with evergreens and shrubs.

On the north side of the park, in the lowest spot, I propose to lay out a large pond with terraced concrete sides. The water for this pond is easily obtainable, as there exists a good live spring on the side hill to the northeast. This pond will be planted with pond lillies, water roses and other aquatic plants.

Reservoir Park

The work done here during the past year consisted of grading up the grounds and putting the same in good shape all around the reservoirs. Around the edge of the basin we have planted about 2,000 large spruce trees, which was not done only with a view of beautifying the grounds, but principally to prevent the dust blowing on the waters. In order not to have things here disturbed, I would request the Board to see that the military camp will not be held there in the future and the gates be kept closed the whole year.

Shouldice Park

All that was done here this winter was some preliminary surveying.

It is really a pity that not all of this park is fronting the river and it has been suggested to prevail on the trustees of the Western Canada College, who own land in this park with river front to accept in exchange a part of the park away from the river, so we could obtain a piece of land with entire river frontage. As it is, a right of way to the college exists through the park, which is not desirable. I would therefore submit that steps be taken to approach the college trustees and see what could be done for an equitable exchange.

For this year's work on this park I would suggest building a woven wire fence all around the land side and plough a 50-foot strip of land alongside it for tree planting purposes.

Tuxedo Park

As this park is situated in a very sparsely populated district and as we have more urgent work elsewhere, I would propose to plough up part of the level land there and do some grading around the pavilion. Although this property is very valuable for park purposes, on account of the fertility of the soil, I propose to lay it out for a formal garden for next year.

Shaganappi Park

This park, being situated in a much exposed and windy spot, combined with the poor quality of its soil, will to my mind be unfit for parks purposes, and should be laid out as a field for sports at a later date. This would not cost much to fix up as such. However, I will leave this matter to the judgement and suggestions of the Board.

Boulevards

Very many new streets and sidewalks have been laid out by the city this year, so that there are about 150 miles of boulevards ready for tree planting and other improvements. This will of course not be possible to do and I would therefore ask the Board to inquire of the Commissioners which streets and boulevards should be treated this year, or to leave this matter to the Parks Board.

I wish to bring to your notice that during the past year there have been several instances where boulevards, which were in splendid condition, have been dug up and absolutely ruined by the several city departments, who have charge of water, gas or electric connections. We have had to spend a lot of money and labor in every instance, as these departments left the boulevards in an awful shape. Could no arrangements be made with these departments to notify the Parks Superintendent of their intention to dig up a certain boulevard, so that arrangements could be made which would prevent too great a damage being done? I request the Board to lay aside a certain sum to defray expenses from this cause.

Bylaw No. 955, Section 31, forbids walking across boulevards. In order to prevent this, I would like to lay cement tiles 2 feet square and two feet apart from the entrances of the houses to the street across all boulevards, lay them flush with the surface and these might be colored to blend with the color of the grass. The cost would be very small and we could probably get each householder to contribute towards these tiles.

Another suggestion which I have to make is to hide approaches of bridges and subways with attractive plantations.

Furthermore I think it would be a very material help to the beautifying of our city if any new bridges, which may be built in the future, be constructed of solid concrete, which would do away with the ugly steel upper structure. This is being followed in all modern cities which I visited in the East.

Union Cemetery

Not only does the civilized world of the present time feel the need of beautifying the last resting place of its fellow beings, but even the ancients had their more or less barbaric rites in connection with the burial of their dead although their ideas in that direction were often very crude.

The care of the dead was formerly very narrowly connected with the religious conceptions of the people, hence the existing custom of having the burial places adjoining the churches in which burial services were held.

The constant increase of the population and the attendant expansion of the town were instrumental in abolishing churchyards and the laying out of burial places on the outskirts.

This opened a new field for the landscape artists, as more sympathetic and loving care were exacted in the laying out of cemeteries. Not only were problems of architecture and landscape gardening to be solved, but questions of hygiene, technique and management had to be considered. This naturally revolutionized the old regime and beautifully designed cemeteries were everywhere created in every country of the civilized world, breathing peace, love and poetry.

Most cemeteries of today are to be regarded as a place where the relatives of the dead and visitors could enjoy a peaceful and impressive spectacle.

Does a cemetery with closely packed tombstones, cold obelisks, factory-made statuary, which are neither artful, practical or aesthetic, give one a solemn impression? The impression one gets here is as if conventional society rules, according to rank, from the richest to the poorest, were still being followed. *

However, we must not altogether lose sight of what the cemetery means to those who stand at the graves and think back of those that have gone to the Great Beyond. In moments of sadness we always try to find a beautiful and wooded spot in which to meditate, and therefore we should aim to lay out our cemeteries in a park-like manner. Although cemetery lands are expensive, the steep side-hills at the Union cemetery lend themselves well for park-like plantations, as these are unfit for grave purposes anyway. On the most beautiful and suitable spots seats should be provided with view on the pretty surroundings. Furthermore, I would like to be allowed to construct a fountain basin, which will be planted with water lilies and other aquatic plants. Not only would this fountain be a nice feature for the cemetery, but the water, which will be warmed by the rays of the sun, will be invaluable for sprinkling purposes of the flower-beds and flower decorations of the graves.

The main object of my recent trip to Eastern cities has been to inspect the burial grounds of the modern centres, and I have therefore taken great pains to study them thoroughly. I am glad to say that we are very fortunate in owning our own cemetery, for of the dozen or more which I have visited, only one was owned by a city, and that was the Hamilton cemetery, which I believe is the most beautiful and best managed cemetery on this continent. I would therefore suggest that new bylaws be drawn up for our cemetery with adoption of the rules in force in this Canadian city.

Our citizens have in the past voted goodly sums for cemetery purposes, which have enabled me to make far-reaching improvements. I have no doubt in my mind that the ratepayers will again be free-handed in their grants for the Union cemetery this year, and I intend doing my utmost in making this a place to gladden the eye. For the Union cemetery, with its undulating surface, is an ideal burying ground and in a few years will, no doubt, be a spot well worth showing.

In all the cemeteries I visited in the East, the Green Lawn system has been adopted, and there is no doubt that we shall have to follow this system here, too.

Our chapel, although located in a bare and bleak spot, will have to do for a year or so. It does not conform with the most modern ideas, but I shall make provision for locating a spot where a combination of crematory, vault and chapel, according to the newest ideas, for the future.

Before concluding my yearly report I wish to convey my thanks to the Board for their confidence and the public for the liberal sums which were voted for the different purposes, and which have enabled me to carry out my work to my entire satisfaction.

However, I wish to draw your attention to a very wrong custom, but for which I might probably have made a better showing. This is the custom of voting certain definite sums for each separate work. I would suggest that a certain large sum be laid aside for one park only, for instance for St. George's Island Park. This work should be entirely brought to a finish, when another sum could be voted for the next park, etc. In this way a much better showing could be made. This is different in cities which enjoy a very luxuriant growth of vegetation, but it must be remembered that in our city every tree and plant must be literally nursed and carefully watched during its growing period, and should a certain sum be used up, this care, according to the prevailing system, would have to be withdrawn, with attendant loss, of course.

If I could be given permission to finish off our natural park on St. George's Island, for instance, I would be able to finish this work and make a splendid recreation ground for our citizens, which I think, is sufficient according to our population, for some time to come. Next year another park could be finished off, and so on, until we have a series of finished parks.

Regarding work for private purposes, it has been a very good idea of the Board to allow me to do this and this has been very much appreciated by the citizens, so that there have been very many applications from home owners for plans and drawings for beautification of their new grounds. These are mainly applications connected with new gardens, but I would also be glad to advise the citizens with their older grounds so that a good system of improvements of gardens is carried out in the whole city.

Respectfully submitted

(sgd) RICHARD IVERSEN.

Supt. of Parks and Union Cemetery.