

## WYCHWOOD PARK - A CENTRAL ENCLAVE

### Its Origin and Future

By: Robin W. JONES and P. Joseph NEWTON

---

"The year 1891 is of interest and importance to those who live in Wychwood Park. Why? Because in 1891, Wychwood Park came into being as a residential subdivision. At that time, the owners of the various parcels of land in the Township of York, collectively forming Wychwood Park, were: Alexander Jardine, Marmaduke Matthews, Cyrilda J. Matthews, Agnes Litster, and Jeanie Hunter.

"On June 10th, 1891, they appointed three of their members: Jardine, Marmaduke Matthews, and Litster, to act as Trustees, to hold the roadways, drives, and the park reserve and reservations as private property...."<sup>1</sup> Since that date, Wychwood Park has remained a co-operative Park community. "When dealing with human communities we must consider three major obligations. We have to understand how communities operate, why they operate as they do, and finally to formulate our opinion about the way in which they could best operate. We all make the grave mistake of concentrating too much on either the first aspect or on the third one: scientists tend to concentrate on the first, and builders of societies, whether administrators

or utopian thinkers, on the last. There is an imperative need for all of us to understand what happens, i.e., why communities operate the way they do and to look at these quite critically."<sup>2</sup> It is our purpose in this study to examine the spatial and social location of Wychwood Park in the hope of understanding why the community operates as it does and the extent to which it is operable today in the context of modern urban development.

#### Background and History of the Park

"The idea of the Park originated with Marmaduke Matthews, R.C.A. Coming to Canada from Oxfordshire in 1861 he hoped to build in the new land a home like the ancestral one in England - Fifield Manor near Wychwood Forest.

"In 1884 Mr. Matthews purchased some ten acres from Mr. Blake and built upon it a large brick residence, somewhat on the lines of Fifield Manor. He resolved to establish an artists' colony. In pursuit of this object, he and a friend, Mr. Jardine, purchased the remainder of Mr. Blake's land - ten acres or more."<sup>3</sup>

In 1891, the land owners of the park agreed to join the various parcels of land which collectively form that property known as Wychwood Park and to appoint trustees to hold the roadways, drives, etc., as private property for the benefit of the land owners. "Later this was modified to give control to the trustees through ownership of a strip of land one foot wide around the properties. Restrictions

were imposed forbidding the sale or use of any property as a site for boarding houses, apartment houses, or business buildings.

\*provision was also made to ensure adequate space around each residence, though semi-detached houses were not barred, and, in the course of the years, a few duplex dwellings have cropped up in the park. The plan has never been operated to discriminate against those of modest means or any particular class, and today residents include a number of tenants and owner-occupants who could not be classed as particularly wealthy.

"At the time of their advent, uncertainty had developed in regard to the status of the trust deed and some of the owners were in financial difficulties in regard to maintaining the colony as a communal enterprise. Mr. Duvernet<sup>4</sup> effected a reorganization, and was responsible for creation of, the now defunct, Wychwood Corporation as a repository of the joint interest of the owners. Later, trouble arose as to validity of both the corporation and the property control exercised under the trust deed. A court ruling finally reinvested in the various residents complete ownership of individual properties, and of the one-foot 'control strip'.

\*Ownership of the roadways and park reserve was also transferred from the old trustees back to the owners to hold in common, with administrative supervision vested in a new trustee board....<sup>5</sup>

"Records show that from June 12th, 1907, Wychwood Corporation acted as Trustees until October 11th, 1917, when Mr. Justice Middleton of the Supreme Court of Ontario issued an order retiring the Corporation in favour of three Trustees, Reid, Love and Clarkson.

"The present Trustees derive their appointment in line of succession to the appointees of Mr. Justice Middleton."<sup>6</sup>

The present self-perpetuating trustees, unlike the earlier Wychwood Corporation trustees, do not own the roads, the park reserves, or the one-foot "control strip". Ownership of these properties has reverted back to the residents, and the trustees are responsible only for the maintenance of the Park's roads, street lights, drains, watermains, trees, gates, tennis courts, and the collection of the costs<sup>7</sup>, on a pro-rata basis, from the residents.

In April 1958 the residents of the Park founded the Wychwood Park Ratepayers' Association for the purposes of:

- "1) The preservation, maintenance, and improvement of Wychwood Park and, in particular, to safeguard Wychwood Park in matters which are beyond the jurisdiction of the Trustees of Wychwood Park;
- "2) To raise voluntarily, and to extend, money for such purposes as may be approved by the membership;
- "3) To co-operate with and serve as a liaison with the Trustees."<sup>8</sup>

These two entities, the Ratepayers and the Trustees, are the main governing bodies of the Park. Through them the Park relates to the City. They establish all internal regulations and their control over the residents allows the Park to

maintain the basic character that was established by its founding fathers over seventy-five years ago, preserved by the restrictions written into the contract for land sale in the park.<sup>9</sup>

Wychwood Park has a greater general homogeneity than its environs. In certain respects it is reminiscent of a feudal town - completely enclosed, with restriction of traffic from outside, a self-perpetuating governing body (Trustees), local responsibility for maintenance of Park services (water, sewers, streets, trees, etc.), and a body to prevent encroachment from its environment (Ratepayers' Association). With such peculiarities, however, is an inevitable dependence on the City for services which the Park cannot provide for itself.

The occupational pattern of the residents is executive and professional. Convenient access to university and business centres is an attractive feature of the locale, in contrast to the distance of current upper-class suburban developments. Here one finds the best of both worlds: the tranquility of ex-urbia and the convenience of inner-city living. A further advantage is the proximity of downtown clubs and service groups. This is of importance to women as well, for they tend to give freely of their time to school alumnae, church groups, and the arts. Entertainment is sought outside, in the main, except for occasional parties among the residents.

Higher education has a high priority. Of the total population, 50 per cent. (83 per cent. of those over 21) have completed one or more years of university study. This is in sharp contrast to the five per cent. in census tract 36<sup>10</sup>, and the 3 per cent. average in census tracts 30 through 45, inclusive<sup>11</sup>. Park folk are divided in their view of the relative merits of private and public secondary education. Our sampling of the population showed that 33 per cent. of the families preferred the public school system, 22 per cent. the private schools, and 45 per cent. sent their children to private or public schools, depending upon the need of the particular child. It is evident that Park residents are dependant upon the City public school system which they support through City taxes.

As mentioned earlier, the residents are responsible for installation and maintenance of all the normally public utilities such as water, sewers, roads, and street lights.<sup>12</sup> They are responsible, too, for policing of the community, garbage disposal, snow removal<sup>13</sup>, and maintenance of park trees and grounds. They are, however, able to procure many of these public benefits without extra cost, by leaving the gates open and allowing the public to have access to their private roads. Their "private-community" position does not deprive them of many public amenities.

By its communal and co-operative approach, this community maintains much of the autonomy which has normally been forfeited by others in the wake of urban industrial growth.

The responsibility of maintaining community facilities, however, instills in the residents a feeling of belonging, which is often not evident in twentieth-century neighbourhoods. Wychwood Park has a community identity. Although this bond encompasses neither all Park members, nor exclusively Park members, it is evidenced by an awareness of the Park as a distinct unit. Their economic and social dependance on the larger community means that their bonds and associations go far beyond the fences around the Park and, to some extent, even beyond the City.

Walls, fences, and gates would seem to prohibit encroachment. This, however, has not been the case. With the ever increasing size of the City, and the strong desire of many to reside as near to its centre as possible, the question of population density has become important in the concept of encroachment. While the Park faces little risk of expropriation, the question of overtaxing the local facilities which surround the Park has become a pressing problem. This threat is illustrated by several examples:-

"R. Charles Steinmetz, owner of vacant land situated on the north side of Davenport Road at the rear of No. 4 Wychwood Park, made an application to the Property Committee of the City Council to change the zoning classification from R1 to R2. The first hearing was on March 16th and was adjourned to March 30th, so that a poll could be taken by the Property Commissioner of the interested property owners.

"At the meeting of March 30th, the Property Committee refused the application - similar action being taken by the City Council.

"The application was taken by R. C. Steinmetz before the Ontario Municipal Board on June 8th, 1955. The Board refused to make a change in the zoning classification from R1 to R2, but directed that an amending by-law be prepared and adopted providing that the Westerly 100 feet of the land may be used for the erection and use of two duplex dwelling houses.

"Restrictions regarding lot frontage, coverage and height, etc., were made.

"The Board also ordered that the relief granted to the application is not to be taken as a precedent in the event of any future application for rezoning of other lands in the area.

"Residents of the Park made a good attendance at the meeting before the Ontario Municipal Board; our case was well presented and our interests protected by Mr. Edmund A. Brown, Q.C."<sup>14</sup>

Again in December, 1968, the residents of Wychwood Park turned out, almost to a man, to voice their protest against the decision by City Council to allow high-rise apartments to be developed on the south side of Davenport Road. Before the Buildings and Development Committee, the Wychwood Park Ratepayers' Association, as well as Ratepayers' Associations for the other residential areas in the vicinity, brought forward the complaint that the increased density that would result from such a move would devastate the diversified (low-density) neighborhoods in the adjacent areas. The question of "high-rise" in the area will now go before the Ontario Municipal Board for further consideration, as the Building and Development Committee decided to reaffirm Council's decision to permit the development of "high-rise". These two cases exemplify the problem facing Wychwood Park in withstanding possible encroachment on the area by the City. Its



strength rests in the solid backing of the Trustees and Ratepayers' Association given by the residents. In their small community, the residents are able to organize quickly with a minimum of conflict, and thus to stand a better chance of halting any threat of encroachment.

Wychwood's ability to ward off encroachment is not shared by all low-density residential areas in the City. Rosedale and Forest Hill are two examples of residential areas which have not been so successful. Although both are vastly greater in size than the Park, their poorly defined borders and lack of direct internal control of residential standards limit their ability to face the ever-increasing pressure for increased density. As a result we find that the southern fringe of both areas has been transformed from low-density, single-family dwellings to "high-rise" and boarding-houses. This has been more evident in Rosedale which reaches farther south than does Forest Hill. The fact that these areas are not private, residential parks means that they do not face some of the problems of Wychwood Park. They are, on the other hand, far less able to control the condition of the areas. These areas also lack the degree of community identity present in the Park. Their larger populations impose less contact with neighbours, with the result that they relate to only a small segment of the total community.

The reasons for living in Wychwood Park, and the relationship of the Park to the City, are a far cry from what

they were when Marmaduke Matthews, in 1884, first invited Mr. Jardine to join him in establishing an exurban artists' colony. Nestled in the wooded Davenport escarpment, the Wychwood Park of that time looked down upon the city to the south, with no concern about urban encroachment. "In 1891, Wychwood Park came into being as a residential subdivision"<sup>15</sup> although "by 1911, some of the restrictions embodied in the trust deed lapsed. But by that time the area had been pretty well built up and the character of the Park established. With the remaining restrictions, with the various methods of control vested in the trustees, and the complete co-operation among the various owners it has been possible to maintain it without any material change in its original character."<sup>16</sup>

Upon passing through the north gates of Wychwood Park, one seems to have been swept out of the city and to be entering a small, rural village. The absence of sidewalks and the dimly-lit streets are probably the first things noticed. Presently one becomes aware of the fact that it is almost impossible to speed through the area, as the roads bend in a garden pattern allowing no acceleration. Unlike many modern, middle-class suburbs, the Park has a canopy of tall, stately trees to block out the sights and sounds of the big city. Another unusual feature of the Park is the noticeable absence of fences between all properties to contain the children and dogs. (Exceptions are found only in reserve areas where there is possible danger to small children, and the enclosing fence around the Park.) "There is a legend about the knoll

on which Wychwood Park is situated. The knoll was called 'Fairy Bank' because of the rings of moss - 'fairy rings' - where the 'Little People' were supposed to come out and disport themselves on moonlit nights. So firmly rooted was this superstition that the Irish gardener employed by Mr. Matthews to prepare his lawn and gardens could scarcely be persuaded to dig up the largest of the rings, certain than an incensed fairy band would mob him."<sup>17</sup>

Amid the legends and the tranquil setting we find a dichotomy in the life cycle. On the one hand are senior, retired (and retiring) residents, while on the other hand are young and middle-aged parents in the process of raising a family. Through time, the significance of either of these stages varies in a cyclical fashion. As one generation grows up, the parents gradually begin to move out of the Park, for the convenience of smaller homes or apartments, thus making room for another, younger generation to take their place. Only those who have developed an especially strong attachment to the Park remain through their declining years. The blend of young and old allows for the assimilation of feeling and attachment to the Park from one generation to the next. A significant number of people who grew up in the Park have returned as second- or even third-generation residents, reinforcing much of the traditional feeling towards the Park and "what it stands for".

At present, Wychwood Park is passing through a family-raising life cycle. Approximately 70 per cent. of the

residents are at various stages of rearing families, about half are dependents of parents, and one-third of the total population is ten years of age or younger, whereas only 17 per cent. of the population of census tract 36 is nine years of age or younger.<sup>18</sup> Today's parents of Wychwood Park are little different from those in other parts of the city where socio-economic conditions are similar. They tend to pay close attention to their children's progress in school, and have a keen interest in the quality of education their children receive. Mothers show a more active involvement in their children's education through such institutions as Home and School Associations and related groups, while fathers spend much of their time involved with business in an effort to maintain their standard of living. Although the men are less actively involved with the children's education, their concern is equally acute and is expressed in decisions as to the schools (public or private) which their children will attend. One distinct and very important advantage of the Park for child-rearing is its open spaces, free from traffic, where the smaller children may play freely. The older children, as a result of education facilities being outside, and with their parents' encouragement, associate with many of their own age who do not reside in the Park. Such outside associations help to prepare the child for the time when he will leave the Park and family.

"Nearness and distance, though spatial concepts, depend on more than space. Friends may live far apart and yet

remain in spiritual communion. Neighbors may be worlds apart, even though they live next door. This tension between physical proximity and spiritual uncertainty adds to the ambivalence of the relationship as individuals are ever moved by twin impulses to look at neighbours subjectively as they would at themselves or to look at them objectively as they would at strangers. Although this may be a problem anywhere, it is more crucial in small communities where escape from difficult or intolerable neighbours is not readily possible. Not surprisingly, then, it is in these communities that definitions of the neighbours are most clear-cut, rigid, proscribed, and formalized. To minimize conflict and to preserve some privacy under conditions of physical proximity it is necessary to maintain some psychological distance even in the most intimate relationships. This is even more necessary in relationships where, as among neighbours, the partners are both near and distant, joined and yet separate.

"The consensus as to what the neighbour role is and the degree of formality of the role vary with the importance of services rendered by neighbours to one another. Where the need for these services is great and the neighbour's contribution is thus indispensable and irreplaceable, the role is rigidly defined and firmly anchored in local customs and habits. This is likely to be the case in rural villages, small towns, and special cultural enclaves in large cities; that is, wherever people are thrown back upon their own limited resources but can muster up enough collective spirit

to mobilize these for emergencies."<sup>19</sup>

"The essential differences between neighbours, kin, and friends have been noted repeatedly. Good neighbours, it has been said, are friendly but not friends. It is not uncommon to hear, 'If I wanted to borrow, I might go to a neighbour, but if I were in real trouble, I would go to friends.'. You lose a friend by failing him; you lose a neighbour by moving away; you never lose a relative except through death."<sup>20</sup>

Keller's acute perception of the concept and patterns of neighbouring, as seen above, fits well with what we found to be the case in Wychwood Park. As a result of being a small community, most of the residents know each other, but rarely does this relationship become intimate. As Keller observes, being a good neighbour does not necessarily imply intimate friendship. The Park people, while being conscientious neighbours, as can be inferred from their amicable borrowing and lending of household and garden tools, do not necessarily expect or desire these relationships to become intimate. The neighbours do come together, however, for a yearly meeting with the Trustees and an occasional Park party. Beyond this, the tennis courts in summer, and skating on the pond in winter, bring the residents together.

Although almost a quarter of the women work outside the home, a much larger number are involved with clubs and service organizations. This stems from their awareness not only of local activities but also of those available outside the Park, which are both rewarding and enjoyable. While some

are purely social in nature (sewing circles, ballet guilds, theatre groups), many are devoted to politics, youth education, and health and welfare. For the latter, the women have both the time and the academic and cultural development necessary to do a worthwhile job, and can be of great assistance in these affairs. The outside organizations (formal and informal) offer the women of the Park an opportunity to mingle on a social level with people outside the Park. It is often on this level that close friendships develop. Men tend to shun the purely social organizations, concentrating more on professional associations and functional groups, such as the Ratepayers' Association. Their level of socializing within the Park is far less than the women's, as would be expected. Since they spend less time in the Park than do the women, they are far less likely to be the initiators of close friendship (as opposed to neighbouring).

From our study so far, there would appear to be little threat to the future of Wychwood Park from within. As with most low-density residential areas today, the most serious menace to their future lies in the risk of unmanaged, high-density, residential development. The needs of large cities for places of residence have been for a long time, and will, for a long time in the future, remain one of the most serious problems of city governments. If the proposed "Official City Plan" for Toronto is implemented, Park residents will be safe from threat of unplanned, spotty, high-density development in the area.

Today the Park is not significantly different than it was seventy-five years ago. It is subject to the growth of myth, as is any peculiar institution, and certain invalid assumptions about the Park have been accepted by other city folk. It has, for example, been supposed that the purchase of any house in the Park by any buyer had first to be approved by the residents - or 'no deal'. This notion is refuted in the quotation on p. 3 above: "The plan has never been operated to discriminate...." It is still a place where only the economically favored can afford to live. One of the residents estimated to us that the lowest income in the Park is about \$18,000 a year. Another such estimate was that house prices there would begin at approximately \$60,000. While neither of these estimates has been verified, they seem to us to be indicative of the economic factor in determining entry into the "enclave". This narrows the extent of implications which might be taken from the racial, religious, and occupational mixture which exists. Though specific barriers to admission are not imposed, only upper-middle-class (or higher) persons can meet the financial demands of Park residence.

While the legal status of the Trustees has been changed, the character of the Park has remained constant. It is interesting to contemplate the changes which might occur once the few "old-timers" are gone. Their presence adds to the charm of living there. The return of many people to the Park to raise their families as second- or third-generation residents may mean that much of the tradition will remain.



If successive generations should return, it is unlikely that any significant change from within will come rapidly, as it does in many other residential areas of the city. For more than three-quarters of a century the Park has escaped the usual transition of land use which most residential areas experience. This suggests that it bridges the "generation gap" and has something significant to offer to people, regardless of age.

With the privacy and autonomy of small-town living, Wychwood Park affords some of the conveniences most desired by city residents. As a private community, it eliminates the problem of safeguarding young children from heavy traffic, and avoids the noise often found in the city. Once inside the gates, residents are able to exercise initiative in the upkeep of their community, knowing that they are an integral part of it. Perhaps if there were more residential areas of this sort, the threat of problems found in the city (e.g., alienation) would be significantly reduced. "Jane Jacobs also considers self-management necessary for a successful city neighborhood. It should operate at two levels, .... Street and district (levels) thus have distinctive, yet equally essential, organizational objectives - one stresses the unique personal character of the local habitat, the other forms a common link to a wider external world on which the local unit depends."<sup>21</sup>

The mosaic which could develop from increased local management of residential areas would afford the city one

of the most rewarding learning aids it could desire. The stimulation of external differences from one area to the next could revitalize people's observational powers and capacity for understanding and coping with their environment.

February 1969