

SWANSEA NEWS



SWANSEA HISTORICAL SOCIETY - 95 LAVINIA AVENUE, TORONTO, ON, M6S 3H9

GENERAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 2012
7:30 P.M.
ROUSSEAU ROOM

SWANSEA TOWN HALL
VISITORS WELCOME - LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

GORDON TURNER

WILL PRESENT

CANADIAN PACIFIC STEAMSHIPS
"A LINK TO OUR PAST"

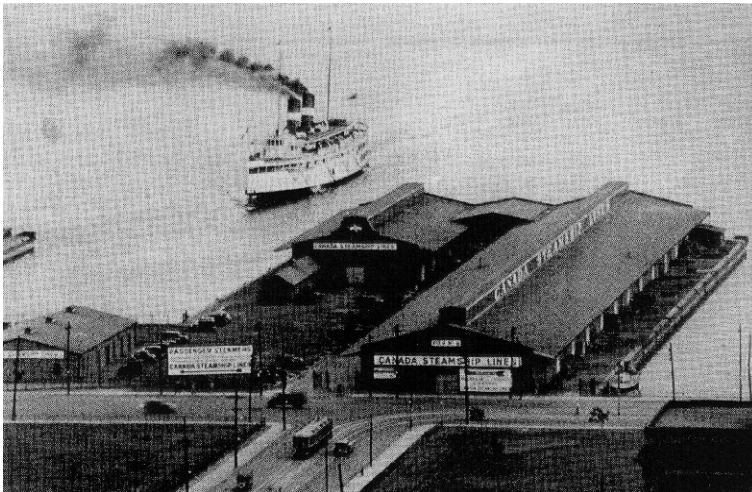
HIGH PARK

AS REMEMBERED BY GEORGE PECKOVER

in his booklet

"Recollections of Ellis Avenue and Swansea"

I would like to talk about the interesting history of the heavy cast iron fence that guards the John Howard Memorial in High Park. I have read four different versions of its history, but none of them included its historical background. Notwithstanding their variations, they generally agree that the fence spent about 200 years guarding St. Pauls Cathedral in London and that these sections crossed the ocean, were shipwrecked, salvaged and finally reached High Park. The Great Fire of London in 1666 destroyed Old St. Paul's and also rid London of the rats that were the cause of the bubonic plague, the Black Death. It spread from Turkey to Naples, up through Italy and throughout Western Europe and across the Channel to London. It is said that one-third of the population of Europe died from it. Before the Fire, Old St. Paul's



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was nearly 600 feet long, It was right in the most dense part of the city, where business was conducted on the ground floor and the merchants lived on the floors above. It had long been the habit of the people in the neighbourhood to walk through the building, using its many doors, instead of walking around it. Many people conducted their business within the building and others built temporary stalls along the outside walls. Sir Christopher Wren's sense of what was proper would not countenance such civil misuse of the premises, so he designed a strong cast iron fence to surround the new cathedral. After about 200 years, the fence, or some parts of it were removed. When John Howard heard of this, he bought what he needed and had it shipped across the Atlantic. Unfortunately, the ship ran on a reef off Cap Chat, about 160 miles east of Rimouski and sank. The fence sections were salvaged and finally arrived safely in Toronto. One report mentioned that the memorial stands on hallowed ground, which means that it has the same status as a church cemetery.



You know about the four toboggan slides that the Parks Department maintained each winter, in earlier years. Ted remembers that in the early days, very long toboggans could be rented at the top of the slides. They were long enough for twelve or fifteen people and had steel runners on the underside. They were so fast that there had to be a chain, attached under the curl, that could be thrown over the front, to slow them down before they started up the hill on the other side. Some people had been injured when they didn't get stopped

in time. Can you remember back to the days when Toronto did not allow sporting activities on Sundays, and that included the closing of the toboggan slides. To enforce this restriction, they placed logs across the slides, at the bottom. As Ted tells it, the "young people" in their overcoats and scarfs and galoshes - and with their girl friends - would walk out from Parkdale on Sunday afternoons, so that they could have their own kind of fun on the slides on Sundays. Perhaps as many as fifteen or twenty of the young men would line up at the top of the slides and hold onto each other and run as fast as they could to the icy part at the top of the slides and away they would go down the slides, standing up, sliding on their feet. So then the logs were placed half way up the slides on Sundays. The sliders-on-foot would still be going too fast at that point, to jump out of the slides without falling and getting hurt. Now let's turn our attention eastward to the Zoo. Did you know that before 1930, there used to be a bob sled run down the steep road on the west side of the Zoo? Because of its steepness, that road was closed to traffic in winter. The toboggan slides had permanent earth sides, but the bob sled run was on pavement, so the sides had to be built up each fall and removed each spring. We had a four-man bob sled, and when the ice was fast, we could get all the way to where there is now a parking lot near the duck pond, beyond the southeast end of the Zoo.



The toboggan slides were replaced by the maple leaf garden.

SWANSEA Historical Society



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Please send to: Swansea Historical Society Membership Secretary, 95 Lavinia Avenue, Box 102, Toronto, Ontario, M6S 3H9