

History of St. James Park (later known as Vimy Ridge Memorial Park)

Background

- St. James Park, a 6-acre (2.43 ha.) piece of land, was purchased in 1894 at the cost of \$6,002.78. The Park's location at that time was described as: Ward 3, south of Portage Avenue, immediately west of Lendrum Street.
- St. James Park was one of Winnipeg's earliest designated green spaces (by the end of 1894, there were only eight green spaces in Winnipeg).
- The design of St. James Park was that of a formal space, with open lawns, curvilinear walks and massing of trees / shrubs.
- St. James Park was later renamed as Vimy Ridge Memorial Park, commemorating Canada's historic victory of April 9, 1917, at the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
- Vimy Ridge Memorial Park is currently home to three war memorials: The 44th Canadian Infantry, The Royal Winnipeg Dragoons and the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

Yearly Reports for St. James Park, 1892-1926 (Winnipeg Public Parks Board)

1892-1905

- When acquired this Park was outside the area of dwellings. In recent years, however, these have been considerably extended, and it is now surrounded by a large population. With the exception of the planting of a few trees no improvements were made until the year 1905, when roadways were graded and drains laid.

1907

- As this Park is only partly improved, considerable labour was spent in putting the walks and shrubbery beds in good condition. Over 350 trees and shrubs, and 300 perennials were planted and various minor improvements carried out. The centre lawn is rough prairie sod which has been heavily top dressed and will be seeded in spring. With good care and improvement this will be one of our best Parks in a few years. The trees should be thinned around the fence.

1908

- All the misshapen maple trees in the borders were cut out, some good ones transplanted, and the borders grassed up to the fence. This has greatly improved the appearance of the Park.

1909

- The park is improving in appearance yearly, as the trees and shrubs increase in size. A number of trees were transplanted to the big centre lawn, and 98 additional shrubs were planted in the beds. A flower garden was laid out on the east side of the park, and prepared for spring planting.

1910

- All the walks were re-graded and surfaced. The new flowerbeds on the east side were planted, and afforded a fine display, adding very much to the attractiveness of the park. Four tennis courts were in constant use all season.

1911

- A new tool-shed was built at the south-west end of the park, and a bubble drinking fountain installed near the flower garden.

1912

- A good system of lighting was planned for, and partly installed in this park, as its position makes it one of the most frequented, after dusk, of the smaller parks. Twenty-one concrete standards of artistic design, 10 feet high, each carrying a 250 candle-power Tungsten lamp with a 14-inch frosted globe, were placed in position. The concrete posts were made by the park men during winter. The current will be supplied through an armoured cable laid under the sod. The laying of this cable was held over until spring, owing to delivery not being made until after the ground had frozen up.
- Recommendations: The construction of a shrubbery and perennial garden on the west side of this park, as its use and position warrant a better floral display than is now possible.
- Summer band concerts: Veterans Band and 100th Grenadiers Band

1913

- The completion of the lighting system was carried out early in the spring, and the results were very gratifying. The daylight appearance of the granite finished, concrete post is quite handsome. The illumination at night is ample, while the moonlight effect given by the opalescent globes seems to be peculiarly fitting and effective amongst the masses of foliage. A garden for herbaceous perennials was laid out on the west side of the park and prepared for planting.
- Summer band concerts: 100th Grenadiers Band, Citizens Band, 106th Regimental Band, Maple Leaf Band

1914

- A three rink bowling green was laid out on the east side (in a central and conspicuous position), and bowls provided at a cost of ten cents per set, per game. Although late in the season when acquired, a great many indulged in the game of lawn bowling, until late in the autumn. In the coming season it is the intention to have this bowling green put in excellent condition.
- Four grass tennis courts were provided, and this game was so popular that double the number of courts would have been used, if space would have been found for them. Three hundred perennials were planted in the new flower beds on the west side.
- Summer band concerts: 106th Regimental Band

1918

- Recommendations: A fence for the new bowling green

1919

- Tree and shrub planting: 2 trees, 36 shrubs

- A fence was built around the new bowling green; and a sand box put in under the trees on the west side.
- Bowling green lighting: A special grant from the City Council made possible the installation of a lighting system at the St. James Park Bowling Green. Overhead lighting units of 500 Watts are used – 6 on the 7-rink green at St. James.

1921

- Insurance for buildings, contents and equipment established for St. James Park at \$150.00.

1922

- A building of shingle and stucco exterior, with natural wood interior finish, and containing dressing rooms, lockers and lavatories for the use of lawn bowlers and tennis players, was built at the east side of the park, and the necessary water and sewer connections made.
- Tree and shrub planting: 18 shrubs

1924-5

- St. James Park Memorial erected – “44th Battalion”, at a cost of \$72.30.
- Insurance for buildings, contents and equipment \$2,150.00.

1926

- Tree and shrub planting: 24 shrubs

Photos



St. James Park, 1908



New lighting at St. James Park, 1913



Looking North Across St. James Park, ~1913
1914



Lawn Bowling in St. James Park,



Tennis courts at St. James Park, 1915



Old bowling shelter at St. James Park, January 1963



New shelter at St. James Park, 1966



Vimy Ridge Memorial Park, 1969



Royal Winnipeg Rifles Memorial, 2002



Royal Winnipeg Dragoons Memorial, 2002

Value of the Park in early years

| | Assessed Value* | Total increase in value (as per the original cost of \$6,002.78 in 1894) |
|-------------|------------------------|--|
| 1905 | \$15,000.00 | \$8997.22 |
| 1907 | \$147,390.00 | \$141,387.22 |

*The assessed values did not take into consideration any improvements in the properties, the estimate being on the land only.

Expenditures

| | Expenditures: St. James Park (1899-1926) |
|-------------|---|
| 1899 | \$192.04 |
| 1900 | \$50.15 |
| 1901 | \$100.15 |
| 1902 | \$126.11 |
| 1903 | \$138.25 |
| 1904 | \$131.60 |
| 1905 | \$1,869.00 |

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| 1906 | \$1,842.61 |
| 1907 | \$1,017.22 |
| 1908 | |
| 1909 | \$729.47 |
| 1910 | \$804.42 |
| 1911 | \$1,053.07 |
| 1912 | \$1,729.61 |
| 1913 | \$1,889.71 |
| 1914 | \$1,247.89 |
| 1915 | \$1,131.37 |
| 1916 | \$1,048.49 |
| 1917 | \$1,212.19 |
| 1918 | \$1,583.25 |
| 1919 | \$2,242.59 |
| 1920 | \$2,326.48 |
| 1921 | \$2,298.17 |
| 1922 | \$4,161.17 |
| 1923 | \$2,213.45 |
| 1924 | \$2,293.47 |
| 1925 | \$2,143.53 |
| 1926 | \$2,144.90 |

Sources

Anavets Unit 283. [Vimy Ridge Park](http://anavets283.com/memorials.html). Accessed June 21, 2004. Available: <http://anavets283.com/memorials.html>

Blackwood, J.H. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Reports 1892-1909. The Franklin Press Ltd., Winnipeg.

Blackwood, J.H. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1915. De Montfort Press, Winnipeg.

Blackwood, J.H. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1916. T.W. Taylor Co. Ltd., Winnipeg.

Blackwood, J.H. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1918. Edited and compiled by J.H. Blackwood (secretary), Winnipeg.

Blackwood, J.H. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Reports 1922-3-4-5. Edited and compiled by J.H. Blackwood (secretary), Winnipeg.

Champion, G. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Reports 1910-13. Stovel Co., Printers and Lithographers, Winnipeg.

Champion, G. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1914. De Montfort Press, Winnipeg.

Champion, G. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1917. Edited and compiled by J.H. Blackwood (secretary), Winnipeg.

Champion, G. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Reports 1919-20-21. Edited and compiled by J.H. Blackwood (secretary), Winnipeg.

Champion, G. Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report 1926. Edited and compiled by J.H. Blackwood (secretary), Winnipeg.

The City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee. The Thelma Apartments. July 1992. Accessed June 21, 2004. Available:
<http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/historic/pdf-consv>

New Winnipeg. Winnipeg War Monuments Remind us of Military Past. November, 2003. Accessed June 21, 2004. Available:
<http://newwinnipeg.com/news/2003/03-11-07rememberance.htm>