

The Tale of Manor Park Village - The 1950s



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Happy Anniversary Manor Park 1948 - 1988
by Judy Lishman

This article is the fourth in an ongoing series on the history of Manor Park. From the March, 1988 Manor Park Chronicle.

This year, 1988, marks the 40th anniversary of our neighborhood. Throughout those years the residents have been an active, enthusiastic lot, gathering together to organize activities or to fight for something they believed in. The recent announcement to build a U.S. Embassy on RCMP land, rather than in Mile Circle, was a victory for Manor Park but not all of the battles have been so successful. In this article I will focus on the 1950s and the battles which dominated that decade.

The February, 1953 edition of the Chronicle announced that 400 Manor Park homeowners were launching a mass appeal for a fair tax deal. The property owners, through the Manor Park community association (MPCA) were seeking a revision to the policy which had resulted in their shouldering the entire burden of some \$500,000 in local improvement charges for water and sewer services.

This battle had begun in 1951 but the history of the dispute dated to pre-annexation days when the local improvements were initiated by Gloucester Township. With the annexation on January 1st, 1950, of Manor Park to the city of Ottawa, it was agreed by the residents that it was proper for the city to take over the work contracts and a share of the costs. Charlotte Whitton, mayor of Ottawa, argued that the work should have stopped prior to annexation. The citizens went through a long series of appeals over the next 12 years but they lost them all. Alex Longuir was president of the MPCA when the dispute finally came to an end in 1962. "We lost", he said, "but, we were battling Charlotte Whitton and whoever won that battle?"

But there were many successes for Manor Park in the '50s as well. The year 1952 saw the 1st May Fair held by the home and school association. It had originally been scheduled for the school gymnasium but last-minute plans for varnishing the floor forced the May Fair into the classrooms. However, the move did not hamper the enthusiasm of the participants and the fair was a rousing success netting \$750. It was decided that the May Fair should be an annual event. The second Fair netted \$975 and the profit has continued to grow over the years. This year will be the 36th annual May Fair at Manor Park school.

Another idea that has been around for 36 years is the idea of the Eastern Parkway extending from Montreal Road, behind Alvin Heights and connecting out to the eastern driveway on the river. In 1952 Manor Park residents were assured that St. Laurent and Sandridge would not become part of the driveway. Furthermore, they were told that they needn't worry about the extension of the Parkway because "it won't happen for some time." That prediction was certainly true. This year, 1988, will see that roadway open.

Still on the subject of roads, plans were in the works, in the spring of 1952, for the extension of Hemlock to link up with the 700 RCAF houses at the Rockcliffe Air Base. By 1952, Manor Park was a good-sized community, comprising of 1200 families. Three roads lead into the area and every one was unpaved and impossible because of

potholes. As one resident reported, "we definitely know we have been annexed when it comes to paying taxes, but when it comes to roads we are as far removed from the city of Ottawa as the Tibetans."

Parks and playgrounds have always been very important to this community. The evening Citizen reported on July 14, 1951 the opening of Manor Park playground on the previous evening. 200 children and their parents had listened to official speeches while the children waited impatiently for their turn on the new equipment. The playground had been planned by the MPCA for the 1500 children who lived in the area. One of the highlights of the evening was a pet show featuring a tarantula, a tortoise and a lemming. This year we will witness the opening of a new field house and an updated playground. Have the organizers considered a rerun of the pet show for old times sake?

However, it seems local children did not spend all of their time at the playground. Some of them preferred swinging from the street signs much to the dismay of many residents and the Chronicle editors who suggested that parents encourage their children to swing from the chandeliers at home instead. Of course, their parents could have sent them off to the Eastview Movie Theatre on Montreal Road to see Saturday matinees like "Ma and Pa Kettle back on the farm". Another option for "mothers who wanted to go downtown to shop" was to leave their children with a neighbor who advertised babysitting services for 25 cents an hour and 25 cents extra for lunch.

During the winter, in the '50s as now, the outdoor ice rink was a centre of continuous activity. All house league hockey games were played outdoors during evenings and on Saturdays. The old, wooden hut with its hot stove was an attraction on cold, winter evenings. March 1952 was the date of the first ice carnival held under the auspices of the MPCA. Prizes were awarded for the best costumes. This annual event is still enjoyed each winter in Manor Park.

In the early '50s there was a skiing group organized for Manor Park children who were bussed to Rockcliffe Park on Saturdays. The following "note to parents" appeared in the Chronicle. "Wax should be applied to new skis, so that they will slide forward only".

On May 24th, 1952 the Boy Scout group drew thousands of spectators from Manor Park and surrounding area to their fireworks display held in Mile Circle.

Not all the recreational plans were for the children. The MPCA made history at Manor Park public school when they sponsored a concert for two gifted young Ottawa musicians. In another of these local community concerts in 1953, the splendid contralto voice of 22-year-old Maureen Forrester was enjoyed. How about a return engagement for Manor Park's 40th anniversary?

The '50s were also time of activity for local churches. On Sunday, January 20th, 1952 the church of St. Columba on Sandridge was dedicated. The church had formerly been the old Manor Park school and had been recently purchased by the congregation at a cost of \$45,000.

In February, 1953 the cornerstone was laid for the new our Lady of Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Church. The previous month the new nine-room our Lady of Mount Carmel school had opened.

In 1952, the latest plans for the shopping center had it located on a 25 acre site on the east side of St. Laurent Boulevard running from Hemlock south to the quarry. Construction was scheduled to begin in August and the plans showed the eventual construction of a department store in addition to the original "grocery, drugstore, hardware, dry cleaner, Brewer's warehouse, bank, etc." The final shopping center was

much smaller.

Although many things about the neighborhood of Manor Park have remained the same throughout its history there have been a few dramatic changes. The cost of housing definitely falls into that category. It may all be relative but it seems to me that there has been a real increase in price. Of course, most houses have had significant additions and improvements over the years. There are houses that have sold in the past year in Manor Park for over \$300,000. That is a far cry from 1953 when the standard two-story house sold for \$13,500. The large Cape Cod cost \$15,000 and C. M. H. C. would only give a mortgage of \$8000 because anyone buying such a large house must be rich.

The lots were valued at \$1500 but it was believed that the original developer had paid \$50 per lot. These lots were completely bare -- no trees in sight. The beautiful trees we now enjoy are the result of the hard work of those early residents who often held landscaping competitions.