

The following information was extracted from [highparknature.org](http://highparknature.org). This site provides a great deal of information on our 400 acre backyard. You are encouraged to visit the site on a frequent basis to keep abreast of the events and happenings within the park.

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In 1873 John and Jemima Howard signed an agreement to convey High Park, their country property, to the City of Toronto to be maintained as public parkland. Three years later, in 1876, the City took ownership of 120 acres of the Howards' 165 acre estate. The Howards retained ownership of Colborne Lodge and the surrounding 45 acres until John's death in 1890.

The Howards purchased their lakeside property which stretched from Lake Shore Road to Bloor Street in 1836, four years after immigrating to York (Toronto) from England. Howard, a trained architect, engineer and land surveyor, designed a small Regency-style picturesque cottage at the south end of the property. They named this cottage Colborne Lodge in honour of Howard's patron, Sir John Colborne, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada from 1828 - 1836. They called the property High Park because of the height of the hill overlooking Humber Bay and Lake Ontario. John and Jemima lived on and off at Colborne Lodge and their home in the City until John's retirement in 1855 when they moved back to the Lodge permanently.

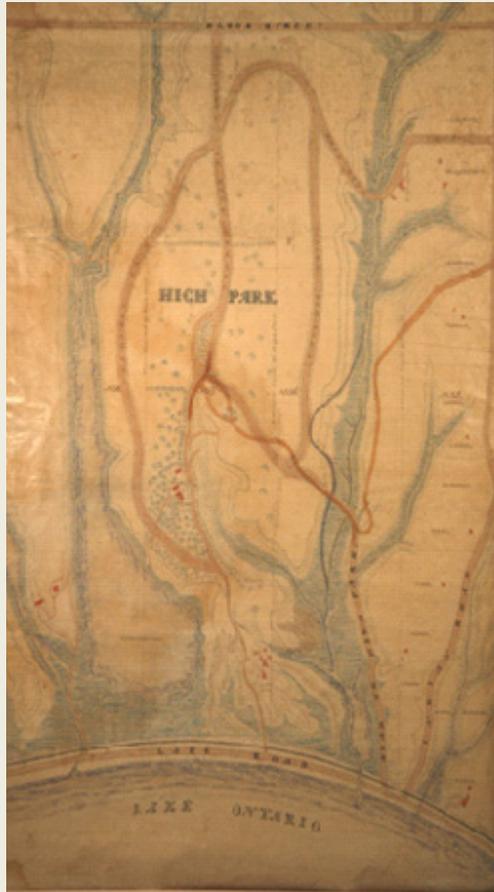


*Colborne Lodge is now open to the public as a historic house museum containing many of the Howards' original belongings.*

The Howards were avid gardeners and planted orchards and extensive gardens around their home and tomb. In John Howard's 1883 diary he recorded that he had counted 10,993 spring bulbs in bloom. They also farmed portions of the land, and rented out a section of land south of the current Grenadier Café to tenant farmers. Primarily though, the land was kept in a natural state throughout which they both enjoyed walks and carriage rides, and John hunted. They also erected a small boat house on the shore of the southeastern cove of Grenadier Pond which was included in their property. The Howards and their friends sailed and fished in the pond, and in the winter skated and harvested ice blocks from it.

Prior to the conveyance of the property, Howard recorded in his diaries numerous requests from charitable organizations to picnic on the property. Howard himself supported a number of charitable organizations, and in an 1873 letter to the Globe, he wrote "In my donating High Park to the City of Toronto it is distinctly stated that ...the grounds are to be kept select, for the wives and children of the mechanics and the working class generally, also the Sunday School children and the different charities picnics." It was this desire to provide a haven of natural, largely undisturbed woods and parklands for those who could not afford their own country properties

that prompted the Howards to stipulate in the agreement, that High Park be held by the City as a *"Public Park for the free use benefit and enjoyment of the citizens of the City of Toronto forever."*



*John Howard's Plan of Survey, High Park 1864*

The Howards' property formed the nucleus of the public park. In 1876, the City purchased 172 acres abutting the Howards' property on the east side from the Ridout family. The western section, formerly part of the Ellis property, was purchased from the Chapman estate in 1930. This 71 acre section included the remainder of Grenadier Pond. Two further acres were added to the park in 1967 when the Village of Swansea was amalgamated into the City of Toronto. Approximately 11 acres along the southern edge of the park were removed in 1972 for the construction of The Queensway.

**Prepared by:** Colborne Lodge, Toronto Cultural Services

[Learn more](#) about John Howard and the establishment of High Park

See also [The Story of a Fence](#)

[More information about Colborne](#)