

Lost creeks, ice and mountains

by Frank Remiz

Have you ever wondered about the earliest history of the Junction ... how the land itself came to be? There are clues in the landscape and in the foundations of our buildings. Many of the periods were linked with a literally earthshaking drama. Indeed, there were two episodes of mountain-building that occurred here 1 to 3 billion years ago. Some of the mountains were as high as the Himalayas. Over time, millimetre by millimetre, they were completely eroded.

450 million years ago, a rich diversity of tropical life flourished here, as this area and much of the United States was an inland sea. Today, only their fossils remain.

Three million years ago, the ancestral Laurentian River, flowing south from Georgian Bay, cut into the bedrock to form the Humber and Don valleys. In the Junction, it lies 40 m underground, moving very slowly. A few years ago, in the course of some drilling, it erupted.

20,000 years ago, an ice sheet 1 km thick blanketed this area, and as far south as Ohio. This was just the latest of several periods of glaciation. Each time the ice retreated, it left massive amounts of accumulated sand and gravel.

I recently wrote an eight-page booklet on Toronto's geology, with a focus on the Junction and High Park. It can be viewed online at www.highparknature.org (click on the 'history' tab). A limited number of hardcopies can be purchased from the WTJHS Archives office (all proceeds go to WTJHS), otherwise through the Toronto Field Naturalists. The booklet also describes some of the ancient animal life, and explains how Grenadier Pond, Wendigo Creek and Spring Creek were formed.

Comparatively speaking, those creeks are quite young,

about 5,000 years old. Wendigo Creek has its source on Laws Street just north of Annette Street. Spring Creek started just north of Hillview Avenue and Medland Crescent. They meandered south and emptied into Lake Ontario. In 1880, David Kennedy dammed the Wendigo to create a trout pond. By the early 20th century, the parts north of High Park were channelled into storm sewers to create streets such as Clendenan Avenue and Keele Street.

WTJHS is conducting educational outreach with some of the local schools. In April, Gib Goodfellow led a field trip for three classes of Grade 7 Annette Street Public School students to find evidence of the Wendigo Creek beneath their school. His talk included former uses of that watercourse, as well as the mineral baths at the St. Leger mansion on Gothic Avenue. The students also participated in a joint fine arts program that encourages them to imagine streams

past and future, using Wendigo as their inspiration. In May, they celebrated their lost rivers heritage.

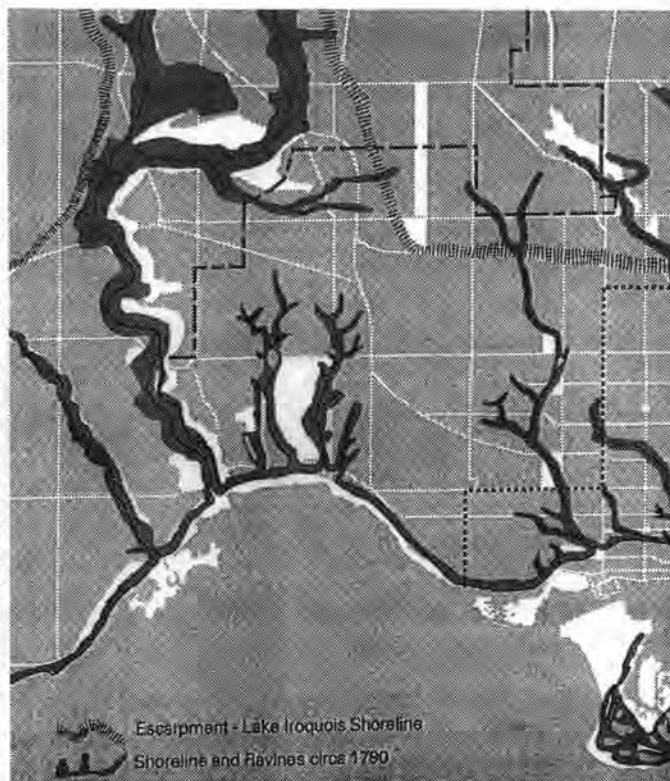
Meanwhile, the students at Mountview Alternative School were excited to learn that Spring Creek originally flowed almost directly under the school. Neil Ross shared this information with them during his presentation at the Junction History Mash-Up.

Awareness of the Junction's earlier watercourses is being facilitated by others as well. Helen Mills, founder of the Lost Rivers organization, is undertaking research in the Junction and Swansea, and led a walk for The Student School (125 Evelyn Crescent) during their April 26th conference on water issues. Contact her if you have stories: helen@greengardeners.ca.

The supply of water was a big challenge in the Junction's development. A 4 km² sand and gravel bar, extending from the west end of Davenport Road west to Scarlett Road, meant that many drilled wells were dry, and caused the south-flowing water of Black Creek to meander west to the Humber River. To meet the need for a regular source of water, arrangements were made with Swansea around 1890 to create water mains under Elizabeth Street (Runnymede). For a time, effluent was discharged directly into watercourses. Lavender Creek, which originated near Dufferin Street and Eglinton Avenue, and flowed near the site of the West Toronto's meat-packing plants north of St. Clair Avenue before joining Black Creek at Smythe Park, was sometimes stained red with baloney dye. Waste water was properly addressed in 1914 with the construction of a sewer along Keele Street/Parkside Drive.

Collectively, these efforts are reconnecting people with the Junction's primeval matter!

Lost Creeks and Waterways in the High Park Area



Researched by L.DeSorcy