

THE GATINEAU PARK CHRONICLE

Fall 2007

www.ncc-ccn.ca



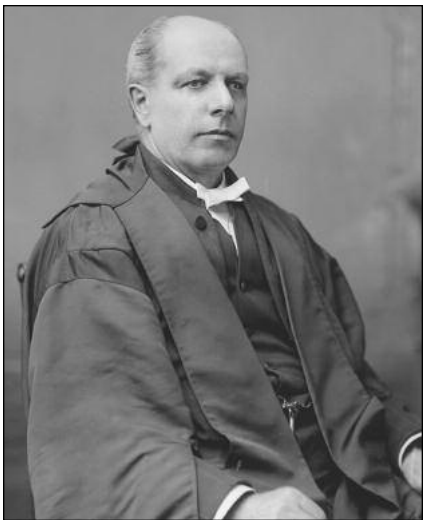
Canada



Text by Denis Messier, historian • Bibliography available upon request

Cottagers in the Hills

In the middle of the 19th century, several factors contributed to the rise of a continent-wide movement focused on a return to nature. Industrialization, rampant urbanization and the unhealthiness of the cities prompted people who had the financial means to look for “a little piece of paradise” in the country. In addition, philosophical, political and philanthropic movements, inspired primarily by the romanticism that characterized the era, called for both the cleaning up of cities and a return to nature. The influx of cottagers to the Gatineau Hills and the later creation of Gatineau Park were events that flowed from these ideological movements.



Sir John George Bourinot

The Founders of Kingsmere

In the years following Canada's Confederation, several senior federal public servants built cottages on the shores of Jeff Lake (now Kingsmere Lake), on sites that had been cleared by pioneers in the early 19th century. **Sir John George Bourinot** — who was a writer, historian, chief clerk of the House of Commons, co-founder of the Canadian Royal Society, and purported to be the first political scientist in Canada — was one of the first and the most noted of the cottagers during this period. John Stoughton Dennis was a surveyor, militia officer and deputy minister of the interior under the governments of John A. Macdonald, and was involved in the events leading up to the Métis rebellion in Manitoba and the suppression of Louis Riel and his rebel companions. He is also recognized as an early resident of the area. It was Bourinot who, in 1880, along with several other summer residents, renamed Jeff Lake and founded Kingsmere, a model cottage community. They were followed by several others, such as Dr. William Thomas Herridge, who served as minister of Ottawa's St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church for 30 years. Dr. Herridge built a cottage which was bought by William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1924, and became Moorside.

The Beginnings of a Park

Gatineau Park covers an area of more than 36,100 hectares, situated between the Gatineau and Ottawa rivers. It is made up of more than 1,400 parcels of land acquired by the Canadian government over a period of almost 70 years. Today, for residents and visitors to the Capital region, Gatineau Park is a vast expanse of rolling, green space on the horizon north of the city. It is a paradise for fresh air enthusiasts and nature lovers. It has become a treasure of natural and historical heritage, preserved for the enjoyment of current and future generations of Canadians. However, this has not always been the case.



Lookout in Gatineau Park

Charles Edmond Mortureux and the Ottawa Ski Club

At the same time that these cottagers built secondary and sometimes permanent residences in the hills, thousands of other citizens left their mark by making, maintaining and using an entire network of trails, on which they engaged in their favourite sport: skiing. They gathered at the Ottawa Ski Club, which was established in 1910, and at one time had more than 10,000 members. It was the largest ski club in Canada, and one of the largest in the world. At first organized for ski jumping in Rockcliffe Park, the club changed its focus at the end of the First World War. At that time, it set its sights on the lands around the property of

Garrett Fortune, a pioneer of the hills, whose modest cabin would become Camp Fortune. The members of the club developed an entire network of trails, between Hull and Camp Fortune. Part of this network included a series of shelters and huts that were built to provide shelter for the skiers.

Without a doubt, the most well-known of these shelters is Kingsmere Lodge, a former farmhouse converted into an inn, on a 100-acre parcel of land that **Captain Gerald Wattsford**, a veteran of the Boer War (1899–1902), had purchased in March 1921 from a farmer named William Murphy. The farm included a 13-bedroom house to which a nine-hole

golf course and a tennis court had been added. For several years, this place was the centre of activity for the residents and their guests. The Ottawa Ski Club used this land during the winter. Its members regularly stopped there before skiing all the way to Wright's Town (Hull) and then taking the streetcar back to their homes.

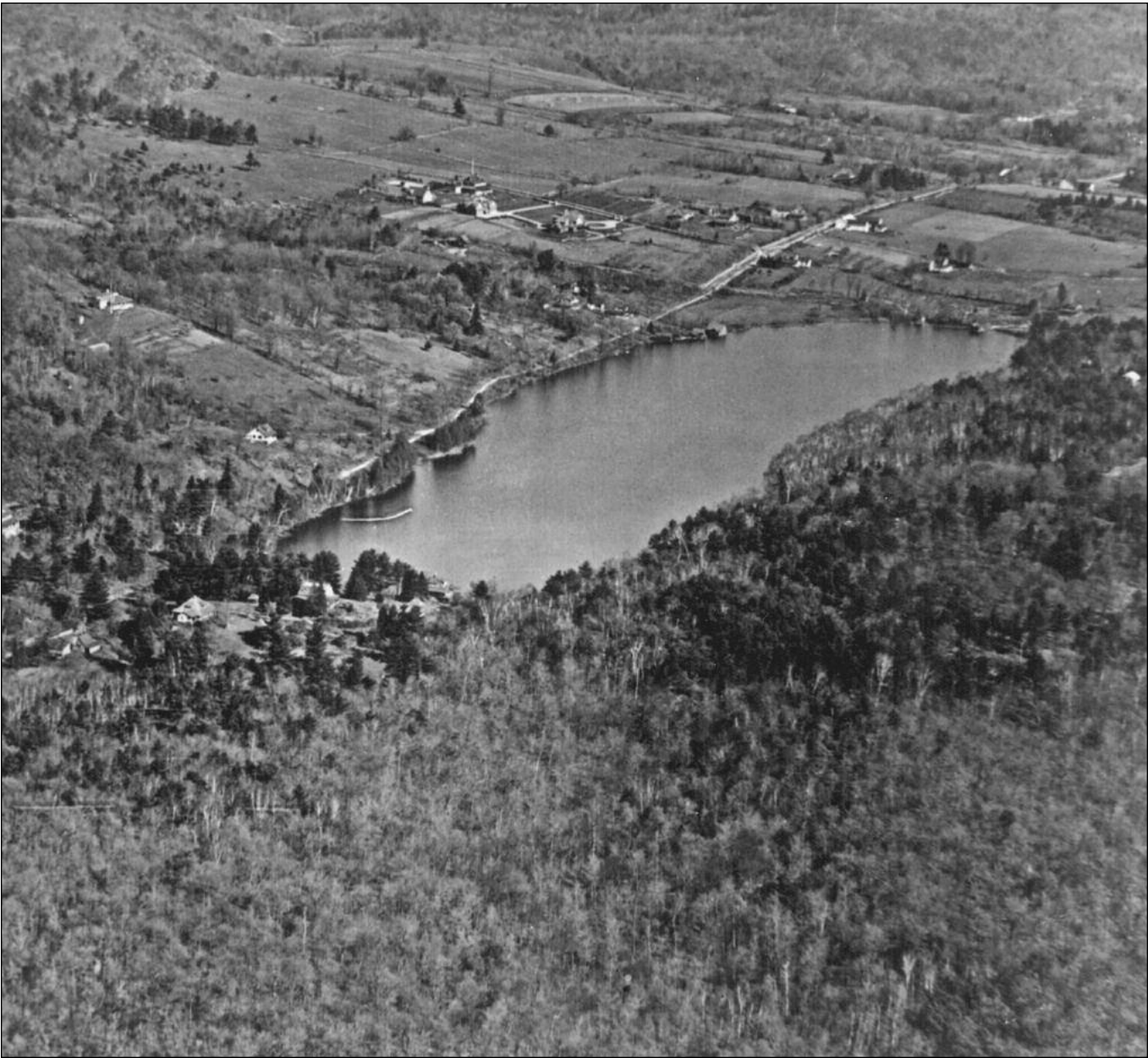
Charles Edmond Mortureux was the first president of the Ottawa Ski Club, and was active in this capacity from 1919 to 1946. Besides being a key figure in establishing skiing in the Gatineau Hills, he was also one of the tireless supporters of forest conservation in the region. To help preserve the integrity of the Ottawa Ski Club's properties in the hills, Mortureux also supported the activities of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League and its goal of creating a park in the Gatineau Hills.

Apart from the well-known cottagers and the institutions that marked this period, dozens of other more modest citizens, who remain anonymous, contributed to the specific orientation of activities in the Gatineau Hills. The descendants of many of them can still be found around Meech and Kingsmere lakes, and they account for the majority of the private residences that can still be found in the Park today.



Skiers in Chelsea, Quebec, 1922

Fresh Air Seekers



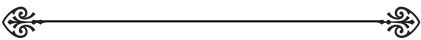
Aerial view of Kingsmere Lake

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, E002505835

The Train to the Hills

It was not until the arrival of the train — that wonderful invention of the Industrial Revolution — and the construction of the rail line between Ottawa and Maniwaki, which began in 1885, that vacationers were introduced on a large scale to the Gatineau Hills. The trip between Ottawa and Chelsea had been a difficult, one-day journey by horse-drawn carriage on toll roads in poor condition. By train, it became a pleasant excursion that took a few hours, cost relatively little, could accommodate the whole family and luggage, and took passengers into the heart of the hills.

It was for this reason that the last decade of the 19th century saw the construction of hotels, inns, golf courses, tennis courts and other recreational spaces in the region that would become Gatineau Park. Dozens of city dwellers moved to Chelsea and around Meech and Kingsmere lakes. The area abounded with activity. Swimming, canoeing, hiking in the forests, hunting and fishing were popular pursuits for wealthy citizens during their spare time. These recreation seekers became an important source of income for the descendants of the area’s pioneers, who provided transportation, agricultural products and much-needed labour, thus becoming among the first Canadians to experience the tourist industry.



An Idea Whose Time Had Come

The concept of a “national park” was born 1872 in the United States, with the creation of Yellowstone Park. In 1885, Canada designated Banff as our first national park. Closer to Canada’s Capital, Algonquin Park in Ontario was created in 1893, and Mont-Tremblant in Quebec was established in 1895, both according to the same model.

The idea of a park in the Gatineau Hills dates back to the same time period. This idea was also influenced by the reformist ideology of philanthropists under the City Beautiful movement, which advocated the cleaning up and beautification of cities to solve social problems. It was in the spirit of the City Beautiful movement that Sir Wilfrid Laurier created the Ottawa Improvement Commission (OIC) in 1899.

In the early 20th century, the OIC, the forerunner of the National Capital Commission (NCC), expressed an interest in preserving the natural beauty of the Gatineau Hills. The Todd Report of 1903 and Holt Commission Report of 1915 recommended that the Canadian government create a park in the hills. However, the OIC had neither the power nor the means to undertake this project, and the Government of Canada was focused on other priorities related to its involvement in the First World War.

The fire of 1900, which destroyed a large part of the City of Hull (today Gatineau) and parts of Ottawa, made the situation worse for a city that Canada’s prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, described as “the ugliest capital in the world.” More and more, well-to-do citizens were eying the hills of the Outaouais region and dreaming of moving there.

Such was the case with Thomas “Carbide” Willson, engineer, inventor and successful entrepreneur, who, in 1907, built an estate of 185 hectares with a large, rustic two-storey house on a promontory on the eastern end of Meech Lake. The Willson family became the focal point of a vibrant social circle. It was in this very house that, some 80 years later, the famous Meech Lake Accord was negotiated.

Thomas Willson was not the only well-off city dweller to migrate to the hills. J.R. Booth, the king of the lumber barons and one of the wealthiest men in the Commonwealth, who William Lyon Mackenzie King described as “one of the Fathers of Canada,” had a huge summer home (which no longer exists), overlooking the north shore of Kingsmere Lake. Further north was William Duncan Herridge, son of the Reverend Dr. William Thomas Herridge of Kingsmere, and married to the granddaughter of J.R. Booth. W.D. Herridge was also the brother-in-law and close adviser of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, who appointed him as ambassador to Washington in the 1930s. His house was built on the shore of Mousseau (Harrington) Lake. Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron Macpherson Edwards, a well-known military officer and one of the last lumber barons, also had a house on Mousseau Lake, which later became

the prime minister’s official summer residence in the Park.

Thomas Ahearn — an associate of J.R. Booth, industrial inventor, and owner of the Ottawa Electric Company and Ottawa’s electric streetcar system — was also attracted by the open green space of the Park area, and established a house (which no longer exists). Ahearn was appointed the first chairman of the Federal District Commission by Mackenzie King in 1927. Frederic E. Bronson, also a chairman of the Federal District Commission, from 1936 to 1951, owned a large estate which he bequeathed to the Canadian government.

Another important figure was Ambrose O’Brien, from Renfrew, Ontario, an extremely wealthy industrial entrepreneur whose family owned no less than 175 companies in almost every sector of the Canadian economy. In 1930, he built Kincora Lodge, an impressive three-storey summer residence, which still exists on the eastern point of Meech Lake, a neighbour of the Willsons. Ambrose O’Brien and his father were instrumental in establishing the National Hockey League and the legendary Montréal Canadiens hockey team. Thus, the most beautiful panoramas of the Gatineau Hills were divided primarily among members of Ottawa’s high society.

Even religious organizations, such as the Capuchin friars, established themselves on the shores of Meech Lake around 1900, building a place for members’ retreats and for meditation far from the noise of the city.

Of course, former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King is the most well-known of the cottagers who owned a residence in the hills. He moved to Ottawa in 1900, the same year of the terrible fire in Hull. In the fall of that year, King visited the hills and decided to settle at Kingsmere, where he eventually developed an estate of more than 230 hectares. After his death, the property was bequeathed to the Canadian government. Today, the Mackenzie King Estate is the jewel of Gatineau Park and a heritage treasure.

With the exception of Meech Valley, whose agricultural past has shaped the landscape, it was primarily the cottagers who imposed a recreational function on the area of present-day Gatineau Park, which would henceforth characterize the Park’s cultural landscape. The influence of this period and these people have shaped the character of the nationally important heritage areas in Gatineau Park.

Harry Baldwin

Grandson of Robert Baldwin (who was co-prime minister of the Province of Canada before Confederation), **Harry Baldwin** was Prime Minister King's private secretary from 1929 to 1930. After King's defeat in 1930, Baldwin found himself outside of the public service. However, he remained a close friend of King's. He was often invited to dinner at Kingsmere, given vegetables from King's gardens, and was visited by King at his cottage at Meech Lake. It was in 1933, during one of these dinners at Moorside, that the idea of creating the Federal Woodlands Preservation League was first discussed. The League was established in 1934, and Harry Baldwin filled the role of president from 1934 to 1937, years that were crucial in the creation of the Park.



Harry Baldwin

Baldwin fought tirelessly to fulfill the dream of a park in the Gatineau Hills, which he knew was the project closest to his friend King's heart. When King returned to power in 1935, Harry Baldwin was appointed to the National Employment Commission, and participated in drafting the plan to create Gatineau Park. He was insistent with the Prime Minister that this opportunity should not be missed. It was not until he was convinced that King was finally resolved to take action, in late 1937, that he passed on the role of League president to Roderick Percy Sparks. Years later, once the creation of the Park had become a reality, Baldwin continued to make representations to King to increase the Park's territory, but King was then occupied with an even larger project: the planning of Canada's Capital.



For more information
on Gatineau Park,
visit
canadascapital.gc.ca.



The Prime Minister Is on “Our Side”!

On May 23, 1926, in reference to the forests surrounding his estate at Kingsmere, William Lyon Mackenzie King wrote in his diary:

...took a long walk out on the moor and through the woods. It breaks one's heart the way the forests round about are being thinned out and cut down. Were I a wealthy man I would purchase them outright. Had I a majority in Parliament, I would expropriate them for the State.

This quote illustrates that logging in the hills was not a phenomenon linked essentially to the Depression of the 1930s, as many have claimed, but rather that it seemed to be a continuation of the logging operations that had begun a century earlier. This quote also clearly reveals that King was one of the first cottage residents to take up the cause of preserving the forests of the Gatineau Hills and creating a park.



The Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King

That same year (1926), another event clearly illustrated King's vision and personal commitment to creating a park in the Gatineau Hills. At that time, a plan to build a dam on the Gatineau River required that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) lines be relocated away from the banks of the river. King stressed to the president of the CPR, as well as to other government officials, that the railway company should free up and reserve a large enough strip of land between the river and the railway line to build a scenic route, which was linked to the plan for a federal park that King was already considering.

I spent some time writing the Chairman of the Railroad Commission re not permitting C.P.R. in reconstructing [the] railroad to take the shoreline by the river and dams, but rather to require the road to go inland so as to preserve water front for summer residences and motor driveway, outlining the possibility of a Federal Park along the Gatineau route. My feeling is this is the time to prevent an impediment to the later development and to begin the National Park idea. I wrote all the Commissioners, also Beatty C.P.R. President, Premier Taschereau, Mr. Perron, [the] Minister of Roads of [the] Quebec Government.

I got consent of our Cabinet as a whole to make headway in the matter.
(April 26, 1926)

The opportunity to gain a majority — although a narrow one — came a few months later, when his party won the general elections in September 1926. The following year, King established the Federal District Commission, with the mandate of developing federal lands on both sides of the Ottawa River. As chair of this commission, he appointed Thomas Ahearn, one of the wealthiest and most influential industrial entrepreneurs in Ottawa.

On April 6, 1927, during the House of Commons debates on the subject, Prime Minister King, in denying that he was using the opportunity of establishing the Federal District Commission to create a national park in the Gatineau Hills, also unequivocally stated his view on the issue of establishing a park.

I have seen some mention in the press that this bill would include provision for a national park. That is an idea entirely separate; it has nothing to do with the present measure at all. I want to make that clear. I should like to say, however, that I do think a national park in the vicinity of Ottawa

is something that is very much in the public interest, and that provision should be made for it at once, but that has nothing to do with this particular measure.

Following the example of the founding of Prince Albert National Park, which was established in 1927 in the constituency King represented in the House of Commons (7 out of 38 national parks in Canada were created under the governments led by William Lyon Mackenzie King), the Prime Minister became an avid promoter of the creation of a park in the hills of the Outaouais, where he himself owned a substantial area of land and where he had been spending all of his summers since 1900. However, the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and devastated the economy, pushed King out of power and delayed the completion of several projects.

From 1930 to 1935, King was leader of the opposition, and he spent a great deal of his time developing his estate at Kingsmere. Like many other cottagers in the Gatineau Hills, he felt anxious about the increased logging taking place around the lakes. On September 20, 1933, during a dinner at Moorside with his former chief private secretary, **Harry Baldwin** (grandson of Robert Baldwin, reform prime minister during the union of Upper and Lower Canada), who also owned a cottage in the hills, the idea came up to create a pressure group for the preservation of nature around the Capital region.

Harry Baldwin came out to dinner — we talked of starting a Society 'to preserve the Natural Beauty of the environs of Ottawa' — that was the suggested title I gave it, growing out of his wish to bring pressure on Quebec and federal governments to save the roadsides, their fringe of trees, etc. It is a splendid idea.

Thus was born the idea for the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, which was created in 1934. Harry Baldwin became its first president — a role he fulfilled from 1934 to September 1937. At the League's first meeting on May 8, 1935, at the Château Laurier, then-prime minister R.B. Bennett and William Lyon Mackenzie King, leader of the opposition, were named as patrons of the League.

Save the Hills!

During the Depression, farmers and local entrepreneurs had stepped up the felling of trees in the forests of the Gatineau. The Federal Woodlands Preservation League was established in 1934 as a means of countering the widespread cutting of trees around Kingsmere, Meech and Mousseau lakes. Influential citizens — such as Roderick Percy Sparks, Harry Baldwin, Charles Edmond Mortureux (president of the Ottawa Ski Club), Colonel J.T.C. Thompson, W.D. Herridge (future ambassador to the United States), Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron Macpherson Edwards and Mackenzie King himself — called for action on the part of the government.



The Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King

In October 1935, **Mackenzie King** was returned to power and got to work reviving his various projects, albeit on the relatively shaky foundations of the Depression years. Clearly, the volatile world situation and the continuing depression were his priorities, but the idea of a park had not been forgotten.

In 1936, the Federal District Commission, in collaboration with the National Employment Commission, developed a plan with the twin objectives of establishing a park in the Gatineau Hills while creating dozens of unskilled jobs to help reduce the chronic unemployment caused by the Great Depression.

But why did it take two years before this plan was implemented? It seems that the election of Maurice Duplessis' Union nationale in the province of Quebec, on August 17, 1936, by an overwhelming majority, was of great concern to King, whose electoral base was in Quebec. Duplessis, a Conservative, was one of the main adversaries of the King Liberals. The plan for a park in the Gatineau Hills was therefore delayed. Long, unproductive negotiations continued for many months.

In 1937, Sparks, then the new president of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League, proposed a detailed plan to Prime Minister King for the creation of a park in the hills. The plan was largely based on the 1936 plan produced by the National Employment Commission. King, who had previously hesitated in the face of potential negative public opinion regarding the creation of a park around his own estate, decided to disregard these hesitations and the concerns about Duplessis and to take action. He worked with his Finance Minister, Charles Avery Dunning, in December 1937.

I had a short talk with Dunning, who seemed pleased with his Toronto visit, and who spoke to me about the Improvement Commission's desire



Roderick Percy Sparks

to go on with preserving some of the Gatineau wood toward Meach [sic] Lake for National Park purposes, etc. He wanted to know what I wished to have done. I told him that the matter had stood over last year because of my feeling that people might think I was seeking to improve property around Kingsmere. I have come to the conclusion this year that I should not let possible misunderstanding of my ownership at Kingsmere stand in the way of a much needed preservation of the forest. I told him I wished them to go ahead with the work, though personally it meant less in the way of seclusion for myself on the way to and from Kingsmere to have even the Meach [sic] Lake district opened up to tourists. I believe that we owe it to the Capital of Canada to save that part of its environment. I think he will agree to the \$100,000 being appropriated for that purpose.



Mackenzie King at Camp Fortune

As one of the initiators behind the League's creation and a supporter of its activities, King introduced a budget of \$100,000 in June 1938 for the purchase of land. Chapter 54 of 2 George VI was passed on July 1, 1938

to provide for acquisition of land and surveys in connection with the National Parkway in the Gatineau Valley adjacent to Ottawa: \$100,000. Thus, on July 1 began the creation of Gatineau Park.

As was done in many other large public works projects, King's government employed dozens of jobless workers affected by the continuing depression to work on establishing the first amenities in Gatineau Park. Trails, picnic areas, parking lots, beaches and campgrounds were constructed by these impoverished citizens who were happy to find paid work. King cleverly used this initiative to sell his opponents on the idea of creating a park, situated around his own private estate, in the middle of an economic depression.

Roderick Percy Sparks

A relative of Nicholas Sparks, one of the pioneers of Canada's Capital, Roderick Percy Sparks was born in Ottawa in 1880. Lawyer, businessman and lobbyist, Sparks was known as a passionate supporter of nature conservation and a protector of the Gatineau Hills. As a cottager and then a resident of the Park territory, he was a figurehead for pressure groups arguing for the creation of a park in the Gatineau Hills. Vice-president of the Federal Woodlands Preservation League from 1934 to 1937, Sparks became the League's president in 1937, a position he held until 1947. Then, from 1947 to 1954, he served as chairman of the Advisory Committee on Gatineau Park. In this capacity, as part of the capital planning committee established by Mackenzie King and led by the Federal District Commission, he co-signed one of the first planning documents for the Park.

Jacques Gréber, 1882–1962

Son of a French sculptor, Jacques Gréber studied architecture at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. From 1908 to 1917, he was involved in several large projects and headed a number of others, in the United States.

In October 1936, during a trip to Paris, William Lyon Mackenzie King met Jacques Gréber, the architect and urban planner responsible for the world

exposition being held there. Gréber had a solid reputation for his work in France as well as in many U.S. cities. This meeting marked a turning point in the development of Canada's Capital.

Gréber's first task was to advise the government on the planning and development of Ottawa's downtown area. When the Second World War broke out, Gréber went home to France. However, just a few months after the end of the war, King invited Gréber to return to Ottawa to undertake a comprehensive study for the planning and development of the National Capital Region.

On March 8, 1946, the Canadian government established the National Capital Planning Committee, chaired by the Minister of Public Works, headed by the Federal District Commission and to which Jacques Gréber was the senior consultant. Tabled in 1950, the Gréber Plan, entitled *General Report on the Plan for the National Capital*, was the planning committee's final report. Recognized as a key planning document in Canada's history, the plan proposed a series of measures to create the "Washington of the North" that Sir Wilfrid Laurier had envisioned for Canada's Capital. The report also included general recommendations for the enlargement of Gatineau Park. Although the Gréber Plan did not create Gatineau Park, it integrated the Park into its plan for the improvement of the Capital. In just a few decades, the Park grew from 6,475 hectares to its current area of 36,100 hectares.

In the personal acknowledgements section of his report, Jacques Gréber presented an eloquent description of the role that King played in the planning of the Capital:

We sincerely hope that the National Capital plan will materialize, and, if in some measure, our contribution brings closer to the Canadian people the fulfilment of its aspirations, and some reason for pride, their gratitude, as well as ours, ought to go first to the great figures of Canadian history who foresaw the future destiny of this Capital: [...] and the Right Honourable William L. Mackenzie King, who, with the broadest vision and foresight, initiated the present work and whose name will be associated in perpetuity with the development of the National Capital.

It is thus quite evident that the former prime minister played an equally important role in the creation of Gatineau Park.



Jacques Gréber at Moorside