

## SOUTHAM PARK UNDER-UTILIZED

By Robert Williamson

Recently described by a landscape architect firm as lacking in amenities, Southam Park, on the very edge of the Niagara Escarpment at the top of the Claremont Access, once known for its magnificent city views, now has very little scenic visibility. Accessibility of any kind is limited and made unsafe by five lanes of high speed traffic. Is it any wonder that to observers it gives the impression of a passive under-utilized neighborhood park!

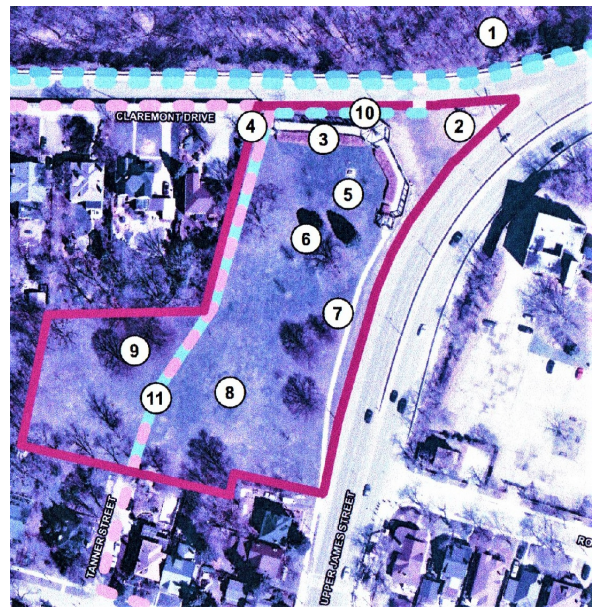
Southam Park was initially intended by the Parks Board to be a Southern entrance showpiece to the city along Upper James, just like Gage Park in the East end, University Gardens in the West end and Royal Botanical Gardens at the Northwest entrance. The park certainly had great potential. In addition to its splendid geography, the site had a significant cultural heritage landscape. Where else could you ride from downtown on a unique incline railway to the top of a three hundred foot high escarpment to enjoy the wonders of the Mountain View Hotel in what was called Mountain View Park. The hotel offered fine dining and a grand enclosed observation rotunda on the sixth floor. Attached to the west end of the hotel was a large covered floor offering roller-skating and dancing to big band music and the largest pipe organ in Hamilton as well as a stage for high class vaudeville acts. The surrounding amusement grounds had sports and picnic facilities, a riding stable, a merry-go-round and staging for high wire acts, Punch and Judy marionettes and vocal groups. Across the street, perched on the very edge of the escarpment was an ice cream parlor. It grew in time to a lunch counter which developed into the famous Lookout Inn with large city-view dining rooms. Eventually it became a one-of-a-kind Chinese restaurant called Kuo Kau Kau.

All of that came to an end when the incline railway closed down in 1932 and the hotel site cleared for a housing subdivision in 1937. Encouraged by the Parks Board, the Southam family, of newspaper fame, gifted the site to the city in 1943 to be used in perpetuity as a recreational park honoring Major Gordon Southam, who was killed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. A large engraved stone drinking fountain was placed in the park in his memory.

On July 15, 2020, a group of landscape architect experts met with Jonathan Michael, Project Manager, City of Hamilton Landscape Architectural Services <[Jonathan.Michael@hamilton.ca](mailto:Jonathan.Michael@hamilton.ca)> and it was determined that the following observations should be addressed to remove the passive neighborhood park stigma of Southam Park:

1. The James Street escarpment stairs now closed, provide no access to the park or the Bruce Hiking Trail (medium blue).
2. The stone observation deck made of hotel rubble over-looking Claremont Access is unsightly and the landscape is weed-grown.
3. There is incompatibility of building and repair materials and poor structural integrity of stone and wood structures.
4. Need to link the site to bicycle and hiking trails with safe crossing of Claremont Access. ( light blue Bike) ( pink Walking)
5. More site historical and cultural interpretation signs needed. Repair the stone memorial fountain originally located at site # 2.
6. There are no creative play features or landscaped gardens.
7. Lighting needed to discourage illicit park night activities, graffiti and vandalism .
8. Consider a possible site for a children's sport field.
9. No formal parking available.
10. Escarpment views are obstructed by overgrown trees.
11. Lack of site furnishings and amenities (seating, picnic tables and trash receptacles) along walkways.

City of Hamilton photo



*Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Mountain Heritage . Story source: Robin McKee.*