

## **Interview between Nancy Pollock-Ellwand and Kate Morisset, 21 May 2015**

### ***The Secret to Scarborough Revealed?***

It has often been noted that our neighbourhood is "unique". We seem to know our neighbours well and participate in community activities. Is this uniqueness simply based on our community "battles" over the years (traffic calming, half-way house, school)? Has this myriad of events brought us closer together? or is there something else? Something in the curve of streets? in the space created by the "CP caveat set back"?

An answer might be found in Frederick Law Olmsted. Mr. Olmsted was a "landscape architect\* who helped design Central Park in New York and Mount Royal in Montreal. Through the Olmsted Firm, the practice of landscape architecture and environmental design were founded and were influential in many cities throughout North America, including Calgary. In 1909, Canadian Pacific (which owned the land that became Scarborough and Sunalta) retained the Olmsted Firm - then lead by Olmsted's sons Frederick Jr. and John Charles - to design Sunalta and "Royal Sunalta" (Scarborough's original name)

I recently met Nancy Pollock-Ellwand, Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, an expert on the Olmsted Firm. Olmsted believed that scenery and visual fields created a positive effect: "gradually and silently the charm comes over us - we know not exactly where or how". The Olmsted principals are apparent throughout our neighbourhood - no uniformity in houses, the big set back to preserve the visual streetscape, wide streets and green spaces.

Dr. Pollock-Ellwand explains that Olmsted was all about creating a feeling of generosity and gracious landscapes. "The Olmsteds sought to create the feeling of community by facilitating the intersection of people through environmental design." The 1910 letters between the Olmsted Firm and CP point to the firm's belief that developers have a "duty" to "devote a larger percentage of land than usual to "streets and park spaces" to "increase the beauty and attractiveness" of the suburb. Generations later, I believe the residents of Scarborough remain deeply indebted to this approach to community design. Scarborough has certainly "charmed me over"!

Ed Note: I was delighted to discover this part of Scarborough history and am grateful to Dr. Pollock-Ellwand for spending time with me. If you would like more information, please contact me as Dr. Pollock-Ellwand has been kind enough to provide the community with copies of her research documents regarding Scarborough/Sunalta.

\* Olmsted coined the term "landscape architecture"