

Poets' Pathway Plaque – Hunt Club Riverside Community Centre

Good morning --- and thank you all for coming to the installation of this plaque marking a key site along Ottawa's Poets' Pathway. The other speakers will, I'm sure, be able to tell you more about the evolution and development of the Poets' Pathway project. For my own part, I just want to say a few words about my husband, Bill Royds, and his vision of this project.

Bill and I first moved to the Hunt Club Riverside neighbourhood over thirty years ago – in the summer of 1977. For the first ten years we lived in the Quarry Housing Co-op, just across the street from these woods. Given that we had a dog at that time and were both committed to giving her (and ourselves) some regular exercise, we walked in McCarthy Woods and across the open meadows to the west on a daily basis. As each of our three daughters arrived on the scene, our forays into these woods often became excursions for our entire family—sometimes on foot, sometimes on skis and sometimes on snowshoes. The woods and the meadows became a place to explore and learn about the natural world that was literally on our very doorstep. Bill, in particular, became very interested in the birds, the wild flowers, the trees and the small wildlife that could be found in these woods. His collection of field guides and nature books grew by leaps and bounds in proportion to his expanding interest in the world around him.

Now, there are a number of stories floating about which describe how Bill came up with the idea of the Poets' Pathway and I suspect that there is an aspect of truth in each one of these stories. Always a voracious reader, Bill was curious about all kinds of things and something sparked his memory of Archibald Lampman and his poems describing the area in and around our nation's capital city. As was common in the Victorian era, many people were avid walkers and Lampman was apparently no exception. Bill recognised that the "Winter

Uplands” as described by Lampman in one of his well-known poems was most likely referring to the area very near to where we now are. This has been called the Uplands since the first non-Aboriginal settlers began to make it their home.

About the same time as he realised that there was this connection between our neighbourhood and the work of Archibald Lampman, Bill was also quite involved in a project that was intended to map the green areas of the city. Known as a Green Map, this initiative was designed to become a community resource identifying all kinds of natural features in Ottawa’s urban landscape. Concurrent with this was his interest in Greenways, or pathways joining natural landscapes with one another.

For whatever reason, Bill linked all of these concepts together – poetry reflecting places and people in Canada’s capital city with the development of a pedestrian greenway that would stretch in a glorious semi-circle from Beechwood Cemetery in the east to Britannia Park in the west. I know that many people give credit to Bill Royds for the Poets’ Pathway concept and this may very well be the case – I can neither confirm nor deny this. What I do want to say, however, is that – like all visionary dreams and ideas – it takes a lot of effort over a long period of time by committed people to turn them into a reality.

Although he has been gone for a year and a half now, on behalf of Bill, I want to thank the small and enthusiastic group of people who have, with the support of the City, Beechwood Cemetery Foundation, various other organisations and individuals, accomplished the first phase of Bill’s dream – many thanks to you all !