

Some rare gifts to the city

Winnipeggers have a great feeling for their city and expatriates particularly regard their former home with warmth and affection, a place without peer. Despite this emotional attachment, Winnipeggers have not been noted for bestowing gifts upon the city. It is unusual for an individual to express his or her appreciation in an act of beneficence. It has not been the mode to say thank you to the city through some good works or bequest in a will.

Fountains

Because it is so rare, I have been struck by the strange and unusual story of two fountains donated to city parks, so different in their nature and their inspiration. One is a drinking fountain to perpetuate the memory of a woman who loved Kildonan Park, another a decorative water fountain bequeathed to Central Park by a woman as a censure of her husband from the grave.

The drinking fountain, at a cost of \$1,500, is being given to Kildonan Park by the children of Lily Coodin, a woman who deeply loved the magnificent trees and rolling swards of this retreat. For about 15 years before she died at the age of 72 last year, Mrs. Coodin walked around the park daily.

She was no ordinary, fair-weather walker. No matter what the temperature, she was at the park before 8 a.m., embarking at a pace that would delight the eye of a sergeant major. Mrs. Coodin's daily walk was three times around the park, a distance of four miles, as clocked by her daughter, Freda Posner.

If the temperature plunged to 30 or 35 below, that did not faze Mrs. Coodin. She wore men's long, woollen underwear, stacks, boots, down jacket, a wool toque and a scarf over her face.

"She looked like a snowman," recalls her daughter. "She had frost on her eyebrows, frost on her eyelashes, frost on her scarf."

The brisk walk toned her up for the day. But it was not the exercise alone that drew her to the park, but also the solace and peace and loveliness of the place. She was one of the park regu-



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lars, who took it upon herself to act as a guardian, reporting a fallen tree or an act of vandalism.

Many knew her only by sight, including Martin Benum, director of regional parks, who found the best time to make tours of inspection was early in the morning. A friend, Fanny Perlmutter, who sometimes joined her, says: "She was really addicted to the park. And she was such an interesting person."

"When she went on holidays, people would call to ask if anything had happened to her," recalls her daughter Freda. "She loved the park so much that she would go there on weekends too, and sit on a lounge chair she brought along."

Buckwheat King

Mrs. Coodin died three months before her husband Max, who too was stricken by cancer at the age of 85. Mr. Coodin was an unusual individual, the Buckwheat King of Western Canada, so called because he was the only one remaining in the West who ground buckwheat.

He maintained the old family craft and worked and managed the mill until a few months before he died, knowledgeable in the peculiar habits of the aged machinery. The plant has now been levelled for development, the end of a chapter in Winnipeg's polyglot character.

Mrs. Coodin always drove her husband to work on Logan Avenue before she went to Kildonan Park. She parked her car by the pavilion and nearby is where the drinking fountain will be located. A bronze plaque will be unveiled on August 2, with all her seven children present from Vancouver to Montreal. The plaque will carry this script: "This fountain is dedicated to the memory of our mother, Lily Coodin, 1900-1982, who for many years

enjoyed this beautiful park."

The other fountain was bequeathed to the city by Mrs. Emily Margaret Waddell in a most unusual will she devised in 1904. She left her estate of about \$58,000 to her husband, Thomas. But there was a strange provision. "In the case of him marrying again," she wrote in her neat script, "ten thousand dollars is to be expended for a public fountain in Central Park."

Temperance leader

Mrs. Waddell died in Rochester, Minnesota, after an operation in 1908. Mr. Waddell described as a "temperance leader and all-round solemn citizen," married again three years later.

City council was happy to accept a fountain when the will came to its attention in 1911, but Mr. Waddell could not produce the money immediately. The estate had debts of \$14,000.

City records indicate that Mr. Waddell needed some prodding to settle his affairs in accordance with the will. Finally, in 1913, he handed over the money to the city. It took many meetings before a "design satisfactory to all parties was agreed upon." The fountain was constructed in 1914, the final choice of "numerous designs and models." The cost was within the budget: \$9,722.19.

Said the Winnipeg parks board annual report in 1914: "The design is novel, with an extremely artistic effect and withal is unique in addition to being ornamental."

Most novel too was the strange will. Was it spite or whimsy that moved Mrs. Waddell to have her husband fork over \$10,000 for a fountain if he married again?

Today, the fountain is a feature of Central Park, still performing after some repairs and now into its 70th year. The name Waddell is on one side of the fountain, but nothing to indicate how it came into being.

Like the Coodin fountain, there should be a plaque telling something of the story of the Waddell fountain, surely one of the oddest bequests made to the city. Perhaps such notices would impel other citizens to do something nice for Winnipeg.