

THE RATTRAY MARSH PURCHASE

The first Council of the newly created City of Mississauga was elected on October 1, 1973. The "reform" Council enjoyed a 3 year term - the most productive term since the creation of the City almost 40 years ago. Among its many achievements was the purchase of many historical and environmentally pristine properties. The crown jewel of these acquisitions was the Rattray Marsh.

In 1959, Major James Rattray passed away. The struggle for the 148 acre estate began in earnest. The property consisted of forest, farmland, beachfront and marsh – an ecological gem unparalleled anywhere on Lake Ontario. Efforts to purchase Rattray Estate began in 1959 and until 1974, ended in failure. The local resident's committee steered by Ruth Hussey and others, were denied by the Province and the Council. In March 1963, the property was purchased by a development group headed by lawyer Clem Neiman for \$425,000. In 1967, the Council approved development of 60 acres of the Estate and the bulldozers moved in.

In 1971, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority(CVCA) purchased 24 acres of marsh for \$250,000, but refused to purchase the remaining 57 acres of higher ground. The highlands were deemed essential for the viability of the wetlands, and it was slated for development. The Rattray marsh Preservation Committee again tried in vain to convince Council to purchase the surviving 57 acres.

With the election of the conservation-minded, reform Council in October 1973, everything changed. Mary Helen Spence, the local Councillor, Hazel McCallion and myself met shortly after the election with the Rattray Conservation Committee and promised them that one of our first actions would be the purchase of the property. Early in 1974, the reform Council approved a motion to recommend to the CVCA that they purchase the remaining 57 acres, by expropriation, if necessary.

I will never forget what happened next. I attended a meeting of the CVCA board – composed of reps from the 13 municipalities that made up the CVCA – and they voted not to acquire the property. The excuse used was that the reps from far-flung northern areas were not interested in spending money that would benefit Mississauga residents. The real reason for the face slap was that the Conservative Party establishment, still in shock over their Mississauga election loss, were programmed to thwart any positive action of the reform Council. They were eager for us to fail.

What to do now? On the way home, in my car, I was grappling with the shocking decision of the CVCA. Then I had a brilliant idea – I would recommend to Council that Mississauga would offer to pay 100% of CVCA portion of the cost. Council did just that. And the CVCA now had no choice but to purchase the Rattray Marsh. The CVCA expropriated the property for \$1,050,000. The Province paid half, as was their policy, and the local Preservation Committee raised \$93,000. Mississauga contributed \$432,000.

On October 5, 1975, the Rattray Marsh Conservation Area was officially opened at a ceremony led by myself and Grant Clarkson, chairman of the CVCA.

A heritage for future generations.