

MOWAT GATE

Visitors entering the Queen Victoria Parks at the junction of Falls Avenue and Clifton Hill pass through the Mowat Gate which dates back to the opening of the Parks in 1888. The gate is named for Sir Oliver Mowat who was Premier of Ontario from 1872-1896. Sir Oliver Mowat was one of the Fathers of Confederation, and was also one of the main forces behind the formation of the Queen Victoria Parks Commission in Niagara Falls.

During the 1870's, the booming tourist industry was attracting all kinds of businesses to the Falls. Mowat saw that the uncontrolled proliferation of decrepit "tourist traps" and disreputable establishments was beginning to encroach on the natural beauty of the Falls. To protect the area, therefore, he introduced The Niagara Falls Queen Victoria Park Act in the Ontario parliament, which authorized the development of Parkland on the area beside the Falls and Niagara River. The act was passed on March 30, 1885 and a supplementary act followed in 1887. The Queen Victoria Parks opened to the public on May 24, 1888.

There were gatehouses made of cedar bark located at each of the four park entrances, large gates at the North and South entrances, and smaller gates at Robinson Street and Murray Street. At the main entrance on the North side of the Park was the Mowat Gate, named in honour of Sir Oliver Mowat, by whose efforts the Park had come into existence. This gatehouse stood at roughly the same location as the present Mowat Gate, and was opposite the first Clifton Hotel.

By 1904, the wooden gate was in need of much repair, and so the Commission decided to have a sturdier Mowat Gate rebuilt in stone. The new Mowat Gate was completed in 1907, and was located east of the position of the original gate. It was composed of four granite pillars. The two main pillars were 4 feet square and 14 feet high and were topped with a carved relief of the provincial arms, and the two smaller pillars were placed a short distance from the main ones, creating an entrance for pedestrians. An ornamental stone and iron fence, which is still a part of the present Mowat Gate, was built on either side of the new gate. An inscription commemorating Sir Oliver Mowat's role in the governance of Ontario and in the formation of the Queen Victoria Parks was added to the Mowat Gate in 1922.

In the early 1930's, increasing amounts of automobile traffic, from tourists visiting the Park or crossing the nearby Rainbow Bridge, caused great congestion at the Mowat Gate. The Parks Commission decided that relocation of the gate was necessary to ease the problem. In 1936, therefore, the Mowat Gate was dismantled and reassembled at its present location at Clifton Hill and Falls Avenue.

