

A history of the International Peace Garden

**Written by
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For the 50th anniversary of the Peace Garden in 1982

1932 - The Beginning

“The blue jewels of the west!”

“So,” exclaimed La Verendrye, the noted Canadian explorer, in 1740, at first sight of the Turtle Mountain. The name, Turtle Mountain, was given to this 40-mile hummock by the Plains Cree Indians, because it resembled the shape of that reptile.

The escarpment rises 2,500 feet above prairie level, with the “turtle’s” tail and hindquarters in North Dakota, while the forepart extends fifteen miles into Manitoba, to Turtle Head creek.

At the eastern slope of the Mountain, almost in the exact geographic centre of the North American continent is to be found the spectacular International Peace Garden.

The idea for such a garden originated with Dr. Henry Moore of Islington, Ontario, who conceived it as a place “where the people of the two countries could share the glories found in a lovely garden and the pleasures found in warm friendships.”

He made the proposal while attending a horticultural meeting in Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1928. The following year, he repeated his plan before the National Association of Gardeners of the United States meeting in Toronto.

The ambitious project met with instant approval.

Dr. Moore, a graduate of the famous Kew Gardens in London, along with Joseph R. Dunlop and Robert P. Brydon, both of Cleveland, Ohio, were appointed to choose a site somewhere along the border between the United States and Canada.

On an aerial flight westward, Dr. Moore’s binoculars focused on the Turtle Mountain. He experienced the same elation as had La Verendrye, in 1740.

“What a sight greeted the eye! Those undulating hills rising out of the limitless prairies are filled with lakes and streams. On the south of the unrecognizable boundary wheat fields everywhere; and on the north, the Manitoba Forest Reserve. What a place for a garden!”

And so, on September 17, 1930 the International Peace Garden, Inc. was established under the Membership Corporation of the State of New York, for “the creation and maintenance of a garden or gardens, approximately one half of each which shall be situated in the United States and the other half of each shall be situated in the Dominion of Canada, and contiguous thereto as a memorial to the peace that has existed between the United States and the Dominion of Canada.”

Mr. Donald J. Crighton of Convent, New Jersey, was elected the first president, and Judge John A. Stormon of Rolla, North Dakota, was appointed secretary.

The unique idea soon captured the imagination of many people and organizations. There was great enthusiasm and publicity, particularly in the eastern United States. More than thirty organizations in Canada and America volunteered co-operation.

The first contribution, from a child, came when little Dorothy Simpson of Oyster Bay, Long Island, approached a planning executive. "Here is a subscription to the Peace Garden." She held out a crisp American dollar bill.

The Province of Manitoba provided 1451.3 acres of land, and the State of North Dakota donated 888, giving the Garden an area of 2339.3 acres.

Horticulturalists and gardeners from both countries offered to "carpet 400 acres with flowers and trees." There was a strong wish that a large portion of the Garden be reserved for the preservation of wild flowers: tiger lilies, blue bells, wild roses, daisies, and many other species.

Dedication of the International Peace Garden took place on July 14, 1932, with some 50,000 persons present.

The simple boundary marker – a cairn built of stones gathered from both sides – bears a plaque, reading:

To God in His glory
We two nations dedicate this garden
And pledge ourselves that as long
As man shall live we will not take up arms
Against one another

On either side of the cairn were two flag poles, from which fluttered the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack. In 1945, the Union Jack was replaced by the Red Ensign. Twenty years later, on February 15, 1965, the present Maple Leaf flag was adopted, and has flown from the flagstaff since that date.

The crowds that attended the grand opening "choked the roads with motor and foot traffic." They were entertained by massed choirs and bands from both North Dakota and Manitoba. Amplifiers kept the people informed of the numerous activities taking place. Girl Guides and Boy Scouts from Canada, and American Eagle Scouts and Girl Scouts filled the role of guides and sources of information.

Most exciting of all, for those early days, was the fleet of airplanes engaged to take spectators up for the most advantageous and magnificent view of the Garden within the Turtle Mountain Provincial Park.

Until 1933, all members and directors of the Garden were residents of the eastern United States. It soon became evident that business meetings and plans for an area situated 2,000 miles north-west of New York, could be better served with headquarters in North Dakota, and with representatives from Manitoba participating. In this manner, control moved to its present status

and, eventually, with administrative offices within the Garden itself.

Management is governed by a Board of Directors and Officers. The Chairman and eight directors serve a three-year term, and are equally divided between American and Canadian citizens. In addition, there are 75 voting members, all on a voluntary basis.

The Officers and Board members, over the years, are to be praised for their untiring efforts, and for accepting the responsibility bestowed upon them. They have unceasingly sacrificed their time, energy, and money. It is because of these sacrifices that the International Peace Garden is what it is today.

One of the first steps taken was to select Hugh Vincent Feehan, a Minneapolis landscape architect, to plan a formal garden area. This was further developed by personnel of the National Park Service of the United States, with approval of the National Parks Board of Canada.

Mr. Jack Stanfield of Boissevain, Manitoba, was the first full-time employee engaged in 1931. “It was chiefly axe and shovel work then,” he recalled. “That was before thousands of trees and flowers were seeded and planted.”

Just at this time, of course, North America was caught up in the bitter grip of the great depression. But while funds were short, labor was not, and, in 1934, the U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps, under the supervision of the National Park Service was engaged. They fenced the United States acreage, cleared bush land, built lagoons, and constructed the first building, the Lodge, made of native stone from North Dakota and logs from the Riding Mountain area in Manitoba.

The Corps also built a crescent-shaped lake named Lake Udall, in honor of the publisher of the Boissevain Record, W. V. Udall, an ardent promoter of the Garden.

A larger body of water, known as Lake Stormon, was built on the Canadian side to honor the American supporter John A. Stormon. Judge Stormon gave over forty years of devoted service to the International Peace Garden, as Secretary and then President. He died in 1981 but, happily, lived to see his efforts and the work of many early enthusiasts, raise the Garden to its present stage of beauty and popularity.

Evidence, of the true unity between the two countries, lies in the placement and naming of these two little lakes. Each nation honored a citizen of the other in recognition of their work.

The handsome stone Lodge provided the only meeting room and banquet space for many years. On the monolith in front of the building the Ten Commandments are inscribed – a gift from the Fraternal Order of Eagles in South and North Dakota and Manitoba. Following that presentation, there was a dedication of the Young Citizens League marker, with the touching inscription

Under God let Child love Child and strife will cease.
Dedicated to the Young Citizens of Canada
and the United States.

A memorable event took place in the summer of 1936, when the Brandon branch of the St. Andrew’s Society held a three-day fitness camp for school children. The chief aim of this gathering was to introduce young people to the great opportunity for peaceful relations with their neighbors.

Each child was asked to carry a pebble or small stone from his or her own home ground. It was hoped these would become part of the majestic Peace Tower planned for the Garden. In this manner, each boy and girl would be building towards peace.

During the same year, 1936, two women's groups, the National Home Demonstration Council of the United States and the Canadian Federation of Women's Institutes, received garden plot near the stone cairn. Masses of roses were planted, and both organizations have assumed responsibility for the continual maintenance of these beauty spots.

In 1938, Lady Aberdeen, wife of a former Governor General in Ottawa, displayed a replica of the International Peace Garden at the Glasgow Exhibition, which created a good deal of curiosity and interest.

By 1939, thousands of dollars had been spent on reforestation, roads and waterworks. Yet the early 1940's was a period of near stagnation. A world at war took everyone's energy and finances. Still, Dr. Moore and other early founders maintained constant optimism, and never ceased to work toward the fruition of their grand dream.

1945 – Its Growth

After the war, in the late 1940's, interest and activity was revitalized as various organizations, and many individuals, made generous contributions. To a war-weary generation, this area and the glorious ideals that had prompted its beginning appeared infinitely more significant and important than ever.

Annual Federal, State and Provincial funds were made available. Horticulturalists, floriculturists, tree nurseries, and garden architects brought the Garden alive with color and beauty. The Morden Experimental Farm donated chrysanthemums by the truckload. Dropmore Nurseries of Manitoba gave countless shrubs and trees; seed companies and rose specialists in the United States made repeated gifts, and many memorial trees were planted to honor the war dead of both nations. The best known tree, a 15 foot Black Hills Spruce, was planted by the National Assn. of Gardeners, who originally designed and sponsored the Garden. A plaque was placed at the base in 1964 in memory of the late President John E Kennedy.

After Dr. Moore's death in 1946, his family visited the Garden, and was delighted at the progress being made. Mrs. Moore made the Lodge a gift of the binoculars which were used on her husband's flight when he selected the site. These were kept under glass in the Lodge for security. This did not prevent their disappearance a few years later. To date, they have not been recovered.

When the Canadian federal government announced, in 1951, that it could not revive the annual \$15,000 grant, "because of defense spending," there was a public outcry. Such a blatant betrayal of nineteen years of public endeavor for defense spending was not acceptable to the people of Canada. Manitoba politicians, in particular, fearful that the United States would withdraw their financial support, protested vigorously to Ottawa.

The publicity focused attention on the Garden as never before. The result was that funds poured in from innumerable social and fraternal organizations, and private citizens. The Federal grant was also restored; in fact, it has been increased since that date.

The boundary cairn, dedicated in 1932, remained flat-topped until 1960, when a red granite globe, marked with meridian lines, was placed there by the Great Northern Railway Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. Mt J. J. Budd, president of the Company, recalled that the original builder of the steel line between St. Paul and Winnipeg, was the well-known Canadian, J. J. Hill.

In his dedication speech, Mc Budd said, "I ask that this globe be received as a memorial to one of North America's all-time men of vision, action and peaceful achievement, James Jerome Hill."

The Arboretum, the botanical heart of the Garden, is maintained by the Manitoba Horticultural Association, and over the years many exotic plants and unusual trees have been introduced. It is located in a very sheltered area and, for this reason, is one of the more "hidden" beauty spots.

Although evergreens are not indigenous to the Turtle Mountain, groves of stately spruce and other conifers delight the eye. These have been generously donated by both American and Canadian commercial and private tree growers. Two hundred Colorado spruce were given by W. Volker of Bottineau in 1968. Blue spruce groves were made possible by funds received from the Canadian General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Thousands of roses, of every variety, are to be seen. The scarlet beauty, Adelaide Hoodless, named for the founder of the Women's Institute of Canada, especially developed by Henry Marshall of Morden, Manitoba, stretch like a glorious mural.

Two thousand roses have been donated by the National Association of Gardeners and thousands more from the Jackson R Perkins Company, one of the world's largest growers of award-winning varieties. These gifts number thousands of blooms, perhaps the only place possible to find such a matchless display. South Africa sent a variety of flower seeds. Holland offered "As many bulbs as the gardeners can handle."

Beautiful lilies arrived from the University of Saskatchewan in memory of Dr. G. Patterson, the botanist who developed numerous hardy species of lilies. The iris garden was made possible by a contribution from H. R. Dunlop, a member of the original three-man committee that had selected the International Peace Garden site.

The planting of hundreds of colorful plants to cover the face of the 18-foot Bulova clock is a challenge to the chief gardener, Orvin Hagen and his staff. The floral pattern is changed annually, and is one of the Garden's most photographed features.

The Bulova Watch Company assumes responsibility for the mechanical operation of this huge time-piece – a replica of the floral Bulova Clock in Berne, Switzerland.

In 1970, a large greenhouse 18' x 60' was presented jointly by Professor R. Askew of Fargo University and the North Dakota Garden Club, for the nurture of rare plants and shrubs.

Another donor was R. O. Lissaman, a native of Brandon, and long time promoter of the Garden. Prior to his death he gave all his construction tools and funds for a building in which to house them. He not only designed the tool house, but indicated the proper position for each tool. His final act was to accompany the last load of equipment by truck from Brandon.

The absence of tulips and other succulent blooms may be due to the fact that they constitute the wild deer's favorite dessert. Along with bright asters and late blooming flowers, perhaps the dazzling beauty of the Amur Maple leaves create the richest display of brilliant color at summer's end. The Music camp may be silent, the Athletic camp deserted, yet autumn is one of the most spiritually satisfying time to visit the Garden.

The policy of no hunting here has given the beaver, fox, deer, rabbit and all manner of birds, freedom to move about the whole district without fear. There are no large predators now. The last bear to be sighted in 1920 was destroyed.

Picnics are so popular that it would be difficult to name a group that has not, at one time or another held an annual or a special gathering in the Garden.

The Hands-Across-the-Border picnic was introduced by the Order of the Eastern Star, in 1972, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Grand Chapter. Since then it annually attracts hundreds from all parts of the continent.

The entrance fee is minimal – \$2.00 per vehicle at this writing (\$10.00 in 2004); facilities are the finest, with no less than six picnic grounds and spacious camping areas on both sides of the border. Campers select their own particular spot. Each evening the camp supervisor collects a small fee for use of the Facilities. There are no restrictions on time spent in any one site.

These grounds are maintained by organizations such as The Good Neighbors, the Oak Leaf, Order of the Eastern Star, the Women's Institute, Business and Professional Women of the United States and Canada. Everyone using the picnic and camp grounds should be grateful to these organizations for their continual maintenance of them.

One of the least publicized events, established in 1974, is the annual International Bicycle race. The sponsors – the Bicycle Club of Minot, North Dakota – claim the track "is easily the most beautiful in the Midwest." It runs three miles on the south side and three miles on the north. Contestants start and finish at the Garden entrance. Men, women, and children participate. Following the race, a banquet is held at the Errick F. Willis Memorial Pavilion.

A beautiful film entitled "The International Peace Garden, a Living Monument," has been produced by the North Dakota Travel Department, and is available to interested parties.

While the Highway departments of both countries work to improve and extend tourist roads and trails within the Garden, they must adhere rigidly to the resolve that any alterations do not disturb its natural beauty.

On a number of occasions in recent years, the North Dakota Guardsmen have bivouacked in the Garden for several weeks, and on each occasion have accomplished a tremendous amount of maintenance work. Lagoons have been built, garbage dumps filled in, fences repaired, brush cleared and dead trees removed. In general, their work has greatly improved the landscape on the south side.

Canadian militia, cadets and military forces might consider a similar program, and experience the pride of having spent time in the only Garden of its proportions in the world, and the envy of many nations.

An excellent water-treatment station was installed in 1981 on the south side and financed at a cost of more than a million dollars, paid by both Manitoba and North Dakota. The water that flows from the numerous small lakes and streams contains such a high mineral count that it quickly erodes pipes and metallic sculptures.

Prior to the operation of this plant, water was daily trucked sixteen miles from the town of Boissevain.

Changes are forever taking place; new plans unfolding. At the annual Peace Garden meeting in 1966, however, a comprehensive master plan of development was outlined and approved. Since then, the plan has been the guideline for all additions.

One such project was the fine new Superintendent's residence, funded by the State of North Dakota, which was opened in December 1981.

The seven-year tenure of the Garden Superintendent alternates between qualified men from North Dakota and Manitoba.

1956 – International Music Camp

Thousands of boys and girls from all parts of the continent and many parts of Europe and Asia are attracted to the International Music Camp, the largest summer youth centre in North America.

This unique site of instruction originated because an Eagle Scout bugler, at the 1932 opening ceremonies, never forgot the idealism that permeated that great event. Years later, when Dr. Merton Utgaard returned to the Garden for a vacation, he envisioned a camp where high school students interested in music could obtain excellent instruction in a conducive atmosphere.

The Music Camp was opened in 1956, with 113 students and eighteen instructors. They occupied the bunkhouses and barracks built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1934.

In those early years, Dr. Utgaard and his colleague, Professor Marvin Field, and many of the volunteer teachers, often found it necessary after eight to ten hours of instruction, to turn their attention to housekeeping and cooking.

Today, the Music Camp is the busiest area in the Garden during June, July and August. Approximately 450 students register for one of either eleven weekly sessions. They select the branch of artistic and creative endeavor they wish to study: band, orchestra, ballet, piano and organ – roughly, a dozen different categories.

In 1968, Dr. Utgaard invited Mr. Fred Merrett of Edmonton, well-known for his artistry with hand-bells, to offer a course in this unusual field. With the gift of a three-octave set of hand-bells donated by the Schulmorich Carillon, Incorporated, of Sellersville, Pa., Mr. Merrett was

more than enthusiastic with the opportunity to teach the techniques of hand-bell ringing to beginners and band directors.

By 1980, the number of students involved in church and school hand-bell ringing warranted full-time instruction. No less than 50 adults and students register for this particular class each year. The Peace Garden will see in their 50th anniversary 1982, the first annual Hand-bell Festival in Western Canada.

While the Music Camp is sponsored by the University of North Dakota, it receives considerable contributions from private donations and funds from various societies. Student fees also aid in meeting operating costs.

It is not uncommon to see as many as two dozen flags, representing the homeland of visiting students, flying side by side with the Stars and Stripes and the Maple Leaf.