

MOUNTAIN SCHOOL SETS A CITY PRECEDENT

By Robert Williamson

The building of the mountain's first High School, Hill Park Secondary School began as an educational experiment in 1953. Two years before the school opened, Ernie Hutton was appointed principal. This unprecedented action granted him the opportunity to work with the architects on the school design. It had been a quarter of a century since the last Hamilton secondary school had been built in 1930 and Hill Park was to be on the cutting edge of modern education philosophy and curriculum design.

Hutton, a former physical education teacher and Chairman of the Recreation Association, felt that the Board of Education should select school sites contiguous to parks and playing fields rather than on busy main streets where space was limited. Thus with the support of mountain trustee, Don Muir, the Hill Park site was purchased beside a twenty acre parcel of land on the central mountain, donated to the city by Sackville Harry Hill in 1950. It was to be named Sackville Hill Memorial Park. The donation included \$75,000.00 for developing recreational facilities. Thus a precedent was established by the Board of Education. All future secondary schools and many elementary schools would be built adjacent to recreation property and parks.



Sackville Hill, wife Sophy (Kittleman) & family ca. 1912.

Source: Hamilton Spectator 2002

Hill Park Secondary School also introduced a new concept in learning by dividing students into Basic, General and Advanced programs. Putting students of comparable abilities in the same group allowed standards to be set that were attainable by every student in that group. The Ministry of Education extolled the virtues of this Hamilton program and adapted it for the province under the title of the Premier's name calling it the "Robarts' Plan".

Thus Sackville Hill's generous parkland grant on the central mountain created a new relationship between recreational and educational land use in the city. As for Ernie Hutton, when he died in 1999, the Hamilton Spectator noted that although he spent most of his adult life blind in one eye, he was a great visionary whose progressive views transformed education in Hamilton and across the province. When the mountain's first high school opened in 1955, it was dubbed "Heaven on the Hill" and set the standard for the placement and design of all future high schools.

(370 words)



Ernie Hutton 1975 Spectator photo

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