Winnipeg | Indigenous Relations
Relations avec les Autochtones

JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION
LES CHEMINS DE LA RÉCONCILIATION

WELCOMING WINNIPEG – Request Summary

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Request ID: 2021-002

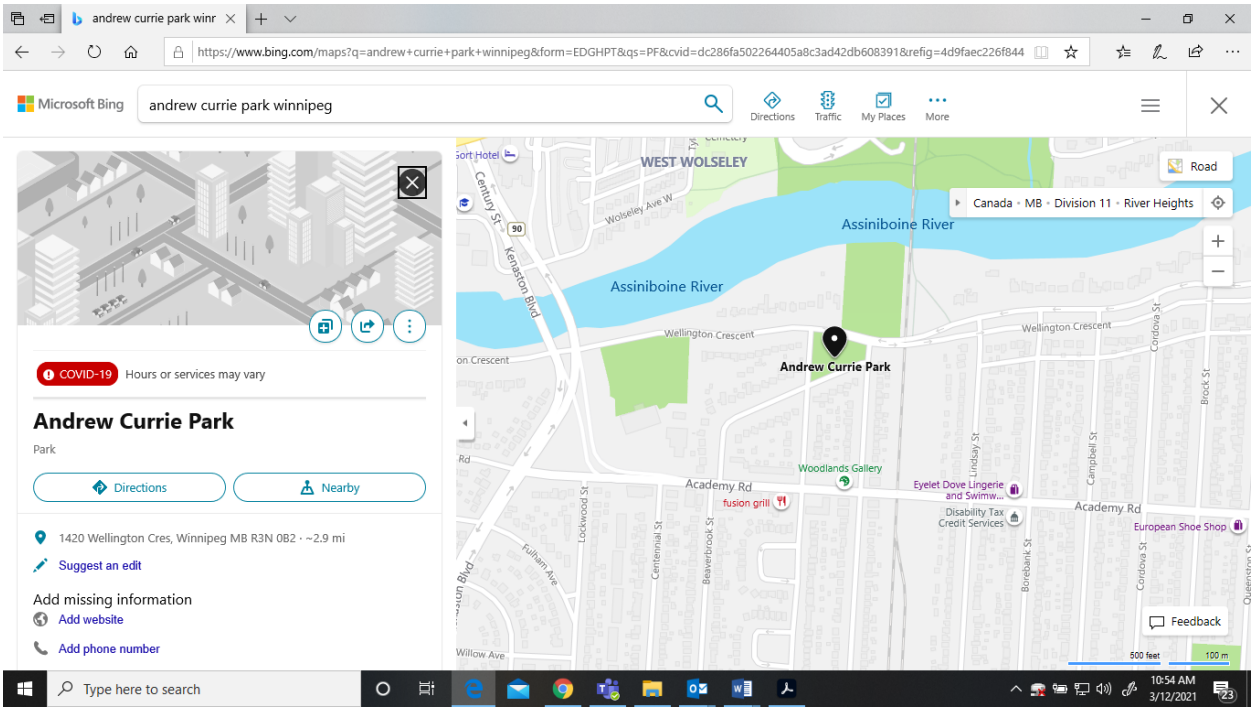
Name of Request: Renaming Andrew Currie Park to Currie Blossom Park

Address: 1420 Wellington Crescent S

Demonstrated Community Support:

- Petition submitted: No. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing precautions, the City has temporarily suspended this requirement
- Letters of support provided: 6

Project Details:



A brief history of the park is this:

In 1941 - Los Angeles CA resident, Miss Blossom Parke (age 16) and her parents visited the Charlie McFayden family in Winnipeg. At this time, Mr. McFayden was involved with the Winnipeg Parks Board and thought Blossom Parke was a unique name and named the park "Blossom Park" in commemoration of good Canadian - American relations.

In 1954 - a group of sports minded Boys (approx 14- 15 years old) began to meet regularly at Blossom Park to play touch football and sit on the ground for hours to discuss sports, school issues etc.

We had a core group of 36 guys, have lost 10 and our average age is 81 years young with 13 living in Winnipeg and others in parts of Canada and 1 in the United States.

In 1997 - a Currie family member contacted one of the Blossom Boys to ask if we had any objection to the Blossom Park name being changed to Andrew Currie Park. At the time, we had the uppermost respect for the late Mr. Currie and his contributions to the City of Winnipeg and did not object to the change. This was a misunderstanding on our part for not having considered the importance of the park name to our legacy etc.

In June 2020, the City designated Wellington Crescent South between Academy Road and Renfrew Street with an honourary street name: “Blossom Boys Way”.

A number of “Blossom Boys” articles are attached below.

How does this renaming contribute to a ‘Welcoming Winnipeg’, as defined in the policy and what kind of evidence/research can be provided to support this state

The Blossom Boys "story" has been told in the local newspapers by some of Winnipeg's best reporters. They adequately covered "the Brotherhood" known as the "Blossom Boys" and how/why the friendships have lasted to this day.

We are pursuing this park name change because:

a) we have matured as Blossom Boys at this park and maintained close friendships to this day (66 yrs.)
b) the City has installed Honourary Street Topper Signs designated "Blossom Boys Way" on Wellington Crescent S.
c) we want to correct for the lack of forethought in 1997 when we did not object to the renaming of the park at that time.

d) the connection with Blossom Parke now Mrs. Blossom Parke McBrier at age 96 and her desire to connect with her "Blossom Boys"

Does this site have historical significance to the Indigenous community?
Research Support:

No. Research was done by consulting with the Winnipeg Archives and Records Control Branch and the site was not identified in those records as having particular historical significance to Indigenous communities in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg Free Press: Blossom Park namesake remembers 1941 visit



By: **Susie Strachan**

Posted: **3:16 PM CST Friday, Nov. 13, 2020**

The year was 1941, and Winnipeg certainly was making an impression on a young woman who was visiting for the first time. And in return, she made an impression on this city.

"I remember driving into Winnipeg. There was a long, wide road, with an open field to the north, and a big, beautiful stone building to the south," Blossom D. Parke McBrier remembers about that day. "A bunch of young men wearing kilts were marching and playing the bagpipes. I was so taken with that sight, I almost drove the car right off the road."



SOU'WESTER

The Parke and McFadyen families in 1941 in Winnipeg, where Blossom Parke had a park in River Heights named after her. From left: Dale Parke, Blossom, Charles McFadyen, May Parke, Hazel McFadyen and Blossom’s sister Patricia.

Chances are, the Parke family was driving on Broadway, past the Manitoba Legislative building. The young men whose bare knees attracted young Blossom might have been drilling or parading during the war years.

That visit marked the first time for the Parke family, who drove up from California at the invitation of Winnipegger Charles McFadyen and his family. The year was prior to when the USA entered the Second World War, and the Parkes were on their annual roadtrip. Her sister, Patricia, was dating a young man who was training to fly in Manitoba at the time.

During that trip, Blossom and her father Dale attended a Winnipeg Parks Board golf tournament with McFadyen, prior to departing on July 11, 1941.

At the time, McFadyen was on that board, and working to establish a system of children’s playgrounds in Winnipeg. A hockey and rugby enthusiast in his youth, he also organized the Westminster Soccer Club and was one of a group of businessmen who reorganized the Maroons baseball team.



SOU'WESTER
Blossom Parke McBrier in 2018 with her dog.

"He thought I had a great name, and asked me if I would like a park dedicated in my name," she remembers. "It would be a symbol of the friendship between our countries."

Five days later, the Winnipeg Parks Board named a little park at 1420 Wellington Crescent "Blossom Park" in commemoration of good Canadian-American relations. In 1997, the site was renamed Andrew Currie Park.

McBrier is very interested in the history of her namesake park, given the number of teenage boys who played sports there in the 1950s, taking on the moniker of Blossom's Boys for their group. She spoke with the *Sou'wester* via a Zoom call from Pennsylvania recently.

"I was thrilled to read that a group of boys who had gathered at Blossom Park became lifelong friends known as the Blossom Boys," she said about an article that appeared in the *Sou'wester* about the honorary sign erected at the park this past spring.

She was born in Utah, the daughter of Dale and May Parke, and her family moved to Los Angeles prior to 1930. She attended law school at Stanford University, where she met her future husband James McBrier, and went on to join him at his family's home in Pennsylvania.

"I had gone to law school, and here I was in this little provincial town. I had to do something, so I thought the town needed a planetarium," she said, adding she went on to be the first female president of her local symphony. She was also involved in setting up a day school for children, and on the first state arts council. "I always ended up being the president of whatever I joined," she said, with a laugh.

She and her husband participated in golfing tours around the world, as part of an American ambassadorial tour prior to the Second World War. "My husband bought me a charm from everywhere we went, and I wear that necklace of charms today," she said, remembering a time when she stood on the edge of Shanghai territory and, "hooked a ball into China."

She's returned a few times to Canada, visiting Mont Tremblant, Que. for alpine skiing, and more recently to Newfoundland, where she saw icebergs and the spot in L'Anse aux Meadows where Norse explorer Leif Erikson had a Viking settlement, and also met

fifth-generation Newfoundlanders. "They cooked me cream cod soup. I remember it was very good," she said. "If I ever come to Winnipeg, I'll show you how to cook that soup."

McBrier is now 96 years of age, living along the shores of Lake Erie in Fairview, Pa. She has eight grandsons and eight great-grandsons, as well as five granddaughters. "As you can see, I have Blossom's Boys of my own, happening right here in the USA," she said.

Her bucket list includes a return trip to Winnipeg, and further north to Churchill. "I do want to see the northern lights," she said. "They're one of the greatest shows in the universe, that energy of the northern lights. My number two on that list is playing golf in California, and number three is going back to Sea Island, Ga., where we used to have a summer place."

Dave Curry, one of the Winnipeg's Blossom Boys, said their group has been in touch with McBrier and welcomes her recollections of her time visiting Winnipeg.

"I called her to say hello," Curry said. "She remembers how, back in 1941, she and her family drove up from California. She remembers being 16 years old, and wearing a plaid dress, when she was presented with the keys to the city."

Curry said the Blossom Boys have been thinking of writing a history of the park, and would welcome McBrier's memories of her time here in the city.

"She sparked such emotion. The guys have been writing to each other about this," Curry said, adding that she's welcome to any future Blossom Boys reunion, after the pandemic restrictions are lifted and Americans can visit Canada again.

These days, McBrier is observing the pandemic protocols, and staying home on the 4.9-hectare garden she has spent almost 50 years filling with rhododendrons and azaleas, called Brier Hill Garden Parke. "It's such a beautiful place to live, with huge old trees, and a natural spring," she said.

A 2013 interview with Blossom Parke McBrier is available on YouTube. Her video tour of Brier Hill Garden Parke gives a glimpse of her life and her private gardens, which she opens to the public every American Memorial Day.

To watch the interview, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXEEOF2_8oo or see more on Facebook at www.facebook.com/brierhillgarden/

Blossom Boys back

1982



VIC GRANT

Protect the women, hide the children, batten down the hatches.

The Blossom Boys are back in town — at least they all will be by the weekend.

It's the Blossom Boys' reunion and which means they'll be trying to relive their youth and that in turn means it'll be a wild weekend with lots of fun.

The Blossom Boys are the ones who grew to maturity in Blossom Park — under the blossom tree, of course. The park was located on Wellington Crescent betwen Renfrew and Lanark and the boys have all been gone for some time now but Blossom Park remains, a tribute to the legends they left behind.

There were 33 Blossom Boys and one Blossom Girl. They were a barnstorming group from which evolved a number of pretty fair athletes, not to mention some astute businessmen, and some not so astute ones, too.

Names, you want names? Most of them prefer to remain anonymous. Most of their ex-wives prefer that they remain anonymous, too. They were thinking of a transit bus to transport the ex-wives to and fro until they discovered there were 16 of them who could account for more than one wife but less than four. They need the British bus, the doubledecker.

Cliff Pennington was a Blossom Boy and probably had more athletic ability than any of them but didn't do anything with it. Pennington went from the Montreal Canadiens to the Boston Bruins, to the minors, to the race track, to the dog track, and from there to where no one really knows for sure. If he can get back into the country he'll be here for the reunion.

The Braunstein Brothers were Blossom Boys. Terry became a curler, a Canadian champion at that, and the other, Ron, became an adolescent psychiatrist because he's always wondered what made the adolescent Blossom Boys tick.

Then, of course, there was Ray Turnbull, The Moose, who takes full credit for having the Blossom Boys banned from all organized minor sports.

Woodbine Billy was a Blossom Boy, too, as was Billy Gilbert, who went on to fame and fortune at Woodbine in Toronto as a tout and handicapper.

Gerry Bolin went on to become a conference all-star baseball player at the University of North Dakota, one of the very few Canadians to get baseball scholarships in those days. That led to a third base position with Bronco's Road Show.

There were numerous jocks among the Blossom Boys: Les Allen, the tooth fairy, Iron Arm Al Cameron, John Cameron, the old St. Vital Bulldog halfback, Dan Allen, who they say used to be a track star, and Dutch Holland, who was always voted the Least Valuable Player in any game they played.

These are the Blossom Boys who closed off Kingsway with some 'Men Working' signs they'd swiped and played ball hockey on the street for a week while the residents waited for road construction to begin. It never did.

These are the Blossom Boys who played the original Toilet Bowl football game on Jan. 1, 1957. They played the Japanese Orange Bowl every Dec. 6.

The Blossom Boys were so good that when Paul Robson came wandering by hoping to play he was put on the bench as a backup.

Andy Currie, the former Canadian Football League official, used to live right across from the park and could rarely believe what he was seeing.

These are the Blossom Boys who once invaded a hotel pool and upon being directed to vacate the premises, deposited all the deck chairs in the pool and carried on their party at the bottom of the pool.

These guys used to travel around with the tools of their trade, first on their bicycles and then in the trunks of their cars. All they ever required to have a good time were running shoes, a hockey stick, and a ball glove.

They're a little older, make that a lot older, a little heavier (fat), and they now qualify as reprobates.

They're planning a reunion replay of the original Toilet Bowl and they may make their own snow because they still think they can do anything. They were hoping to take on striking Safeway workers in a game of ball hockey on a defunct Safeway lot because $13 an hour was a king's ransom in their day.

They think they're best known for the Toilet Bowl but in reality they're best known because 'Armo' was one of them. 'Armo' is one of Winnipeg's characters. He may even have been the original.

Judy Gunn was the only girl ever allowed to sit under the blossom tree with the Blossom Boys and the honor of throwing out the first ball for the reunion slopitch game is hers.

She was absolutely georgeous but in Blossom Park she was just one of the boys and it was only after she'd gone that they started to ask each other why she was allowed to escape.

They were quite a crew, the Blossom Boys were, and they're back for one, last fling. At their ages they need something such as the reunion to stave off the change of life.

There'll be some great exaggerated lies told by those who will be allowed to attend the social Tuesday at the Vasa Lund.

They're all a part of what Winnipeg once was and still is.

And they weren't bad athletes, either.

Blossom Boys to celebrate Homecoming

2010

Manitoba Homecoming 2010 will see the return of the **Blossom Boys**, June 16, for a noon tree planting and bench dedication.

No, they're not a musical group — if anything they represent unorganized sport.

It began with a cross section of would-be athletes from the Sir John Franklin-River Heights area tossing a football around and grew to include a variety of sports including a New Year's Day football game known as the Toilet Bowl.

The football was always played at Blossom Park, a stretch of land on Wellington Crescent. The park was named after "Blossom", the daughter of the Winnipeg Parks Superintendent in the 1920s. In 1997, it was changed to "Andrew Currie Park" to honour the former parks and recreation director and Daniel McIntyre football coach. This would have enraged the Blossom Boys if almost any other name had been substituted, but they all knew Currie, who lived across from the park and donated a football to the group about fifty years ago.

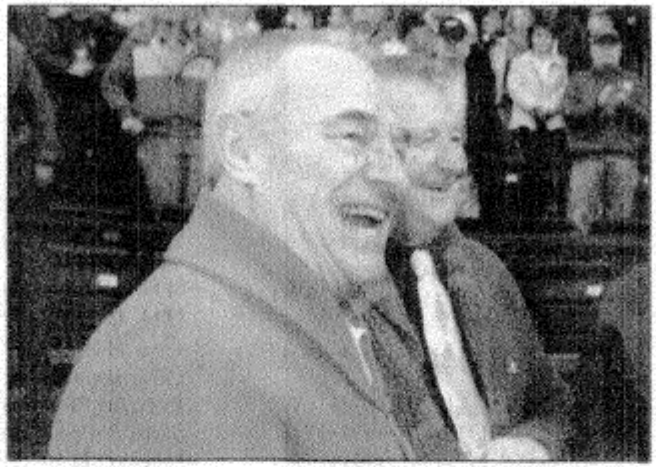


Photo by Mike Aportius/Winnipeg Free Press archives

Curling champs Terry Braunstein (front) and Ray Turnbull are two of the many Blossom Boys who went on to big things in sports.

What had been designated the Blossom Tree for group photographs fell ill and had to be removed last year. A fourth Blossom reunion was in the planning stages and it was a natural to replace the tree and add a bench to the park.

Some of the would-be athletes turned out to be pretty good ones in many sports. **Cliff Pennington** had a long hockey career including playing with Montreal and Boston in the NHL; **Glen Torgerson** is a member of the Manitoba Basketball Hall of Fame; **Gerry Bolin** was an All-Conference baseball player at the University of North Dakota; **Don White** played hockey at UND and senior for eight years; **Bruce White** played junior hockey for the Winnipeg Braves and **Dr. Mark Young** was with the Monarchs.

Several Blossom Boys played junior baseball for Columbus Club and football for Elmwood Colts; **Ray Turnbull** and **Terry Braunstein** are world class curlers, but Turnbull was also an all-star linebacker for Elmwood and Bronco had a track scholarship at Houston University; **Dr. Les Allen** played briefly with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers; **John Paterson** was a star half-back with St. Vital Bulldogs national senior champs and **Dan Allen** was a sprinter at McNeese State University.

Members of the group often ask if there are informal groups like this today or is everything so super organized that there is no time for the corner lot games.

2015

The Toilet Bowl memories overflow

BY **TED HOLLAND**

MEMORIES OF SPORT COLUMNIST

In the mid-1950s, college football had four major bowl games. The Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Cal. was played before 100,000 fans. Miami hosted the Orange Bowl, Dallas the Cotton Bowl and New Orleans had the Sugar Bowl.

In 1956, the Blossom Boys from River Heights added the Toilet Bowl to beef up the schedule.

The matchup featured the Flushers against the Plungers, and several of the original group continued to play in the annual New Year's Day game at Blossom Park on Wellington Crescent until the late 1970s.

Like skiers, the participants prayed for snow, since no equipment was used. The players counted on deep snow to cut down the speed and provide a soft landing pad. Few injuries were recorded other than occasional bloody noses, chipped teeth and one broken arm. The many headaches were often the result of the previous night's festivities rather than the football game.

Over the years, the conditions ranged from a light snow-covering, which resulted in Commissioner **Larry Giffin** declaring that the game would be touch football that year, to 43 degrees below zero. Fahrenheit.

With little local sports news on New Year's Day, Winnipeg media — in particular CKY-TV's **Johnny Esaw** and **Cactus Jack Wells** and the two daily newspapers —wanted a report.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* once reported that, "while competition from televised games kept the crowd down, those who were in attendance were both rabid fans."

Another year, *Free Press* reporter **Reyn Davis** was told the crowd was estimated between five and seven.

"You mean there were between five and seven hundred people at the game?" he asked.

"No, we already told you — the crowd was estimated between five and seven," a Toilet Bowl official replied.

Glen (Rabbit) Reid, onetime Winnipeg Blue Bomber water boy and St. Vital juvenile all-star, played in 22 Toilet Bowls before retiring as the last of the originals. Among the many players were curler and broadcaster **Ray Turnbull**, future NHLer **Cliff Pennington**, former St. Paul's High School quarterback and coach **Gerry Bolin**, **John Paterson**, a football hall-of-famer with the St. Vital Bulldogs, and basketball star **Glen Torgerson**. The Blossom stalwarts included **Mike Burstow**, **Dave Curry**, **Marty Dawson**, **Barrie Plews**, **Doug Reid**, **Scott Reid** and **John Sexsmith**. (Editor's note: Columnist **Ted Holland** played in 21 games.)

Future Blue Bombers president **Jan Brown** was named rookie-of-the-year in the 16th game. The game story read that despite a "tooth-rattling ground attack led by their twin dentist fullbacks, **Dr. Les Allen** and **Dr. Jan Brown**," Plungers lost 36-28. Quarterback Torgerson led Flushers with three touchdown passes and ran for two more.

In 1975, the *Free Press* headline read "Metre for Metre, Plungers Prevail." The 14-7 victory over the Flushers was the first game anywhere to use the metric system. Bolin threw two TD passes to Brown and led the rushers with 105 metres. Losing playing-coach Giffin gave credit to the victor's front four of veterans Turnbull and **Gord McInnes** and co-rookies-of-the-year **Dean Woolley** and **Ken Skinner**.



Photo by Phil Hossack / Winnipeg Free Press Photo Archives

Some of the Blossom Boys, who regularly played in the "Toilet Bowl" game on New Year's Day at Blossom Park, are seen in this 2012 photo. (Clockwise from front left:) Barrie (Bar) Plews; John (Jack) Hutton; David (Cece) Curry; Gerry (Frank) Bolin (seated); and Don (Whitey) White, (holding older reunion photo.) They're standing in the park which has been renamed Andrew Currie Park.

Memories of Sport *appears every second week in the Canstar Community News weeklies. Kent Morgan can be contacted at 204-489-6641 or email: sportsmemories@canstarnews.com*

APPENDIX "B" –HONOURARY STREET NAME DESIGNATION BOUNDARY

