

Near West Gazette August 2007

Park likely to be named for Black Partridge

The park at 18th Street and Calumet Avenue is closer to being named after Black Partridge, a Potawatomi chief who in 1812 came to the aid of some settlers in a fight between the settlers and local American Indians. The Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance (PDNA) has led the effort to name the park after Black Partridge and bring back a statue commemorating the chief that once stood near the site. Second Ward Alderman Bob Fioretti supports naming the park after the chief and will recommend the name once he has received the written opinion of the American Indian Center (AIC).

“Native American historical entities must be revered and honored,” he explained. Fioretti also said he would like to get feedback from the community to gauge what people think of the name.

AIC Executive Director Joseph Podlasek said the organization intends to send Fioretti a letter in favor of naming the park after the chief. “The honor and recognition of the park would be great,” Podlasek said.

After receiving Fioretti’s written endorsement of the name, the Park District’s Department of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs will recommend that the Park District’s Board of Commissioners approve the required 45-day public notice. If residents make no strong objection during that time, the name Black Partridge will go back to the Board of Commissioners for final approval.

The PDNA also hopes to bring back *The Fort Dearborn Massacre: Black Partridge Saving Mrs. Helm*, a statue depicting the Potawatomi chief saving a settler on one side and an American Indian driving a spear through a second settler on the other. In the 1970s, the Chicago Historical Society (since renamed the Chicago History Museum) stopped displaying the statue after area Indians lobbied for its removal; the Office of Public Art of the City’s Department of Cultural Affairs later put the piece in storage. Fioretti said the statue is a separate issue that will be dealt with after the park’s name has been approved.

Podlasek opposes putting the controversial statue back on public display, and the AIC will not support the statue “in any way, shape, or form,” he said. “That would be a major mistake from the Indian perspective.”

--*Miriam Cintron*



Dearborn Massacre: Black Partrdige Saving Mrs. Helm, to 18th Street and Calumet Avenue. Railroad tycoon George Pullman (not the most culturally sensitive individual himself) put it at that location in the 19th century, and it is piece of art definitely of its time.

The statue, as Brian Hosmer, director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History, said, "re-confirms the stereotype of the savage Indian." It shows barely clothed Native Americans trying to kill a defenseless settler, Margaret Heim, and spearing another settler who already is on the ground. Black Partridge, a Native American chief, is attempting to save Heim.

As Governor Jim Thompson said about old Comiskey Park, "Just because something is old doesn't mean it should be saved." The statue is a horrible piece of 19th century art that depicts whites' conception of Native Americans at their worst. Yes, there was a battle near the 18th and Calumet site between Native Americans and settlers. Who was in the right and who was in the wrong depends upon your reading of history, and history is rarely as simple as the 19th century's view of it.

Only recently, the University of Illinois dropped Chief Illiniwek as a symbol because it was offensive to some Native Americans, and teams around the country that have used Indian names or mascots are doing the same. It's not "political correctness," as some say¾it's common courtesy that shows an understanding of ethnic sensitivities and different points of view.

It also would be a common courtesy not to have this statue out on the street. Much as throughout the South municipalities have quietly retired monuments that touted the "glory" days of slavery, this statue has quietly been retired for many years and should stay that way. It is more appropriate for a venue like the Chicago History Museum, where it could be explained, by historians, in context. Out on the street, it would be a target for vandals who do not like its 19th century message, just as the old statue of the Haymarket

19th century statue should not be in 21st century park

There's a relatively new community group in the Near South area, the Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance (PDNA), and we welcome them. The more people are active in their communities, the better it is for those communities. When organized people are paying attention, it is harder for government or private business to do something in a community that the people do not want.

PDNA already has taken important action by looking into the X/O luxury highrise development at 1700 S. Prairie Ave., which will tower over the Prairie Avenue Historic District. They may not be able to stop it, but they are likely to exact some concessions from the developer that will benefit the community.

We have to disagree with the PDNA, however, in their efforts to return a statue, The Fort

policeman was when it was out on the street for many years. That statue finally was moved to an indoor venue, as this one should be.

The PDNA wants to name the park there for Black Partridge, and even American Indian Center Executive Director Joseph Podlasek supports that, although Black Partridge himself is a polarizing figure. Should he have helped the settlers or his own people? Views differ on that as well. The Chicago Park District wants to name the park for Chicago poet Harriet Monroe, citing the need for more parks named for women.

Either name would be adequate, but we would like to suggest a third alternative.

The late Ingrid Washinawok was a modern day Menominee Indian who lived from 1957 to 1999. She grew up in Chicago near West Town and as an adult became an internationally known humanitarian who worked for indigenous people's rights, indigenous women's issues, indigenous people's sovereignty, and human rights throughout the world.

Washinawok was executive director of the Fund for the Four Directions, which provided grants to revitalize indigenous languages and cultures, and at various times was Indian of the Year, a Frederick Douglass Award recipient, a founding member of the Native American Council, co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Network, and International Women's Leadership Award recipient.

Visiting Colombia in 1999 as part of an international delegation to assist the U'wa people there, Washinawok and her compatriots were kidnapped and murdered.

There is nothing controversial about the late Ingrid Washinawok: she was a true Chicagoan, a true international hero, and a modern figure to whom young people can relate and of whom all can be proud of. Her story can inspire people to make a difference of their own. The \$150,000 it would take to restore Pullman's old statue could be even better spent creating a new artwork by a modern artist to commemorate Washinawok's positive contributions to the city and the world.