

Sorry, Harriet

Prairie District historian wants park named after massacre, not poetry matriarch

By LAURA PUTRE
Editor

The name "Fort Dearborn Massacre" doesn't exactly conjure up pastoral images of cavorting squirrels and couples strolling hand in hand along leafy paths. Still, Mark Kieras of the Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance would like to see the new passive park at 18th and Calumet named after the bloody 1812 battle at that location between Pottawattomie Indians and U.S. soldiers and their families.

"It's the first recordable event in this area," says Kieras, who lives in the Prairie District neighborhood and was one of the founders of Preservation Chicago, an independent landmarks preservation group. "Though I can certainly understand it has negative undertones."

Kieras says Park District representatives have told him that they would rather see the park named after **Harriet** Monroe, the founder of Poetry Magazine, who lived at 22nd and Michigan.

"No one over here really likes that name," says Kieras. "The site has more history than that. I sent a couple letters saying I think they're absolutely wrong." Park District Historian Julia Bachrach said that Park District is considering several sites for a park named after Monroe. Bachrach would not say whether 18th and Calumet was one of the parks under consideration for the name, and Park District spokeswoman Jessica Maxey Faulkner did not return a call seeking comment.

Kieras said he can understand why the Park District might not want to name the park after the massacre, considering the "negative undertones" and the fact that the Park District has a policy of late to name parks after women, to make up for the dearth of women's names on such sites. So he and fellow members of the PDNA are looking at other ideas, like perhaps naming the park after Frances Glessner, namesake of the historic Glessner mansion at 18th and Prairie, or Nellie McCormick, the wife of tractor magnate Cyrus McCormick.

He also proposes naming the park after Chief Black Partridge, a Pottawattomie who rescued a woman and child from being hatcheted to death during the massacre. He would also like to see a mothballed statue of Chief Partridge and the rescue re-installed at the site. Restoring the statue would take some \$80,000 to \$100,000, Kieras estimates.

The city already has a Pottawattomie Park, so that's out for a name, Kieras says.

He says his group plans to consider some of the other names at a community meeting in March—the exact date has not been determined—then present their choices to the Park District. "We're trying to let them know what we feel," he says. "We'll be very disappointed if it's not named after the history of the area."