Public Space

- Very complex
- Comes in varied forms
- Streets, parks, libraries, space shared in public
- Space occupied by the urban public
Public Space

• The city’s most characteristic type of space
• Accommodates the public
• May be intended to shape public behaviour, promote ideals (whose?) of public behaviour
• May exclude minorities, those with less power
  – And the ways they like to behave
Environmental Determinism

• The idea that environments shape human behaviour, shape human outcomes
Victorian & Edwardian Public Space

• Strongly determinist in philosophy
• Space engineered, managed to shape behaviour
  – To suit middle-class civility
• Some groups dominated the culture and expected to dominate its public space too
Shade Trees

• Before 1860 Toronto had very few shade trees planted in public space
  – On streets, parks & squares
  – Double avenue of chestnuts planted on Queen’s Park 1847
  – Some shade trees in semi-public space (St James churchyard)
The Middle Class Liked Shade Trees

- Seemed to offer summer shade
- Beautified the city, attracted songbirds
- Need to compete with US cities, Montreal
Toronto’s Working Classes

- Children liked to climb trees, collect nuts, bird nests
- Allowed animals to wander, damaging trees
- Tied animals to trees
- All tended to inflict damage to trees
Toronto’s Modernity

• Utility companies trimmed trees to suit company needs, not tree survival, beauty
• Trees became convenient hitching posts
• Installing concrete sidewalks, curbs, asphalt roads killed shade trees
Middle class shade tree advocates

- Wanted city, police to protect trees against vandals, wandering animals, utility companies
- Wanted city to provide, pay for shade trees
  - Too many gaps if left in private hands, wrong types planted
  - Need to trim around lamps etc.,
LAWREN HARRIS  House, Richmond Street, 1911  oil on canvas  76.2 x 81.2 cm.  The Arts and Letters Club, Toronto
Shade tree problems

• Middle class aesthetic tendency to plant chestnuts before 1870 led to unhealthy trees by 1890s
  – Decimated by age, disease, insects, [air pollution?]
  – Had to be replanted with elms, maples
Jarvis St 1900s
Shade Tree Problems

• Expanding traffic demands wider streets
  – Shade trees eliminated downtown
Palmerston Ave from Harbord St looking S (new street) 1908?

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, f1244_it7200
Shade Trees as a Public Space Issue

- Practical and ornamental value of shade trees recognized by middle class
- Working class appreciates the shade but enjoys climbing trees, collecting nuts, birds nests, branches
- Class conflict over the purpose of trees?
Shade Trees as a Public Space Issue

• The streets were a harsh environment for trees
  – Modernity made it harsher still
• City had trouble keeping them in public space
• Trees eventually removed from the public space of the major street
• City gets hotter, more hostile to wildlife