Until the mid-1890s, there were large estate properties lining the entire length of the eastern shore of the Northwest Arm. There was no public access to the shoreline between South Street and Point Pleasant Park. Then, Marlborough Woods became the first subdivision, its waterfront park the first public access and shoreline.

In 1893, the future MP for Halifax and Prime Minister Robert Laird Borden bought 56 acres of the Belmont estate from Father of Confederation and Judge J. W. Ritchie. He created a plan for a “Marlborough Woods” subdivision, basing it on a “garden cities” design. Its features included curvilinear streets, public open spaces and waterfront, and a hotel.

In 1895, Borden incorporated the North West Arm Land Company (NWALC). The two other key syndicate members were B. F. Pearson, one of the founders of the People’s Light and Heat Company and the Halifax Electric Tramway Company, and Samuel M. Brookfield, of S. M. Brookfield Ltd., Contractors and Builders.

In 1905, the Company offered the City a right-of-way through the subdivision to the water from Inglis Street via the so-called Ritchie Road.

By 1907, a new subdivision plan appeared in a real estate advertisement. It used a conventional grid pattern of streets, into which it squeezed 311 lots. There was no more public waterfront; several shareholders converted their shares into waterfront lots. A remaining waterfront lot, about 1.20 feet wide by 370 feet deep (before a part was expropriated for the rail cut) was offered to the City as a public park and boat landing.

In 1909, City Council received a petition requesting the expropriation of a right-of-way to the Arm between the Theological School and Fernwood. Instead, the City accepted the Company's offer of what is today the municipal Marlborough Woods Waterfront Park.

The lots away from the park were small, unserviced and suitable only for summer cottages rather than permanent homes. The nearest tramcar ran only to the corner of Inglis and Barrington. The lots didn't sell, the scheme eventually went bankrupt, and development was stalled until a time when sewer and water services were extended after World War II.

Credit: U.S. Library of Congress Map Library

The large undeveloped area between the Belmont and Maplewood estates can be seen in the center of this extract from the 1879 aerial view map of Halifax. Also evident is the lack of public access points to the Northwest Arm between South Street and Point Pleasant Park. The area outlined is featured in the full-page advertisement for Marlborough Woods.

Credit: Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management

The original Marlborough Woods subdivision included all the area between Robie Street and the Northwest Arm, from Belmont Road – Regina Terrace in the north to today's rail cut in the south. The modern-day streets are as laid out in this 1907 advertisement, except that Hawthorne Street is today’s Marlborough Avenue and Atlantic Street – now restricted to the east of the Saint Mary’s University campus – is Roxton Road. The only part of the subdivision actually developed are the dozen homes straight ahead across the rail bridge, while the Marlborough Woods Waterfront Park is to its left.

Credit: Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management

Copyright © 2013, Halifax Urban Greenway Association

Credit: Halifax Urban Greenway Association

Marlborough Woods Subdivision & Waterfront Park

The Marlborough Woods Waterfront Park, with over 100 feet of shoreline on the Northwest Arm, is to the left of the Marlborough Woods Subdivision. It is open to the public, with a paved path for users and families. The City of Halifax Council tried to sell off the park for building lots in 1955, but was dissuaded from doing so by a 1911 stipulation that made the city a trustee for a park and which could not be altered.

Credit: Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management

The large undeveloped area between the Belmont and Maplewood estates can be seen in the center of this extract from the 1879 aerial view map of Halifax. Also evident is the lack of public access points to the Northwest Arm between South Street and Point Pleasant Park. The area outlined is featured in the full-page advertisement for Marlborough Woods.