

The Association of Ontario Land Surveyors

AN HISTORICAL LOOK — by John Ward

“THE FORMATION”

Ed. Note: Marginal numbers refer to sources. See “Footnotes”.

The year is 1886. Canada is approaching her nineteenth birthday. The Canadian National Railway has been a working reality for more than a year and John A. MacDonald still commands Canada's ship of state. Photography is in its infancy but its potential as a mapping tool is already being exploited. It will be three years before Dr. Deville publishes his book on “Photographic Surveying”. Nevertheless Italy has already used it for mapping and J. J. McArthur has been issued a camera to aid him in his topographical survey of the Rocky Mountains.

Other new technologies are also just coming into their own. The Bell Telephone Company has been federally incorporated since 1880 and now has around one thousand subscribers. In Toronto they have been able to call by number since 1884. Toronto corporations are also promoting and wrestling for rights to electric lighting franchises. Gas lights are on their way out and W. Howland is on his way in as Mayor of Toronto in 1886.

The city that Howland was to manage was socially and physically markedly different from the Toronto we know today. Since 1834 when York was incorporated as the City of Toronto it had acquired a population of around one hundred thousand. This brought both prosperity and poverty. Politicians and churchmen were pleased with the former and concerned about the latter. The two hierarchies are mentioned here together because they were the two most socially active institutions. Toronto's citizenry was generally Protestant or Catholic, Whig or Tory. Sunday was revered to the point that boys were arrested for playing on the “Lord's Day”. Although temperance was fashionable, four hundred liquor licences were issued with over three hundred cases of illegal sales being prosecuted in 1885. Toronto was a city growing in an age of change. What more appropriate setting could there be for the first meeting of Ontario Association of Provincial Land Surveyors.

Thirty-six of the sixty-nine members travelled over February roads to meet in the Parliament buildings in Toronto. They came from as far north as Gravenhurst, as far west as Collingwood and as far east as Brockville. As Willis Chipman reported:

The Meeting was a very enthusiastic one and thoroughly representative. 12

While the meeting on February 23rd 1886 was the first meeting of Provincial Land Surveyors it was not the first attempt at organisation. On October 21st 1878 a circular was sent to land surveyors in the Province seeking their support for the incorporation of Ontario surveyors. The response of one eminent surveyor, Lindsay Russel, the Surveyor-General of Ontario was not encouraging: He wrote that he could not envisage the legislation since its only merit would be to protect the public from unqualified persons and that

... the only legitimate means of raising the status of the profession consists in the effort of each individual thereof, by the evidence of conduct, acquirements, and ability, to win for himself the good opinion of those of his fellow-citizens with whom he comes in contact. The more as individuals the members of any profession succeed in this, the higher as a class they will stand. If as a class they are held in slight esteem by the public, it is because they do not merit more . . . 13

In his 1886 Secretary Treasurer's Report Chipman alluded to these past attempts: Such attempts had always been directed in the wrong course, i.e. seeking incorporation and obtaining rights now vested in the Crown. In fact incorporation had up to the present time been looked upon as the sole panacea of the Provincial Land Surveyor. Organisation and unity of purpose is the first step towards success. As an Association, as individuals, our success is dependent upon ourselves. There is the material among the Provincial Land Surveyors of Ontario to form an Association creditable to themselves and to the country and which will ever bear, “Progress”, the watchward of the nineteenth century, on its banner. 14

Indeed the future would hold that Mr. Chipman was correct; incorporation was not “the sole panacea of the Provincial Land Surveyor”. It was however soon to be realised!

The statutory incorporation of a professional body is a difficult and a sensitive political undertaking. Ontario's Professional Engineers, for example, sought it for more than twenty years. Ontario's surveyors succeeded largely because of the quality of their leadership. Every arena was well represented. G. B. Kirkpatrick was a P.L.S. with the Crown Lands Department. As President of A.P.-

L.S. he could make political inroads on his association's behalf. In addition he was supported by numerous hard-working, well-credentialed practitioners such as W. Chipman, P. S. Gibson, V. Sankey, A. Niven and T. B. Speight. Professor J. Galbraith from Toronto's School of Practical Science admirably carried the Association's academic banner. They were the right men undoubtedly at the right time.

Though foremost, incorporation was not the only concern of the infant Association. Article 2 of the 1886 Constitution stated that

The objects of this Association shall be the promotion of the general interests, and elevation of the standard of the profession.

The latter is raised again in the 1886 Report of the Provisional Executive Committee. It states:

The fact is, while the other professions have been advancing and keeping up with the times, we have, in comparison, been in a state of lethargic indifference since the time when the recognised fee of a Surveyor was £1 per day. 15

If this was true of surveyors as a body it was certainly inapplicable to them as individuals. Survey-related legislation and the need for its reform was well-noted. With reference to the Surveys Act of the time Mr. Sankey writes

This is the Act with which we are all familiar, and which I might almost say we could willingly see committed to the flames, with all reverence and respect, however, for out of its venerable ashes it should be the aim and determination of every surveyor in the Province, to assist in the production of such an Act, as would at the same time be concise simple and effective . . . so that (metaphorically speaking) our young Association may have no fear of planting a post, with even the brass nail in the head, so true that, in the future, surveyors may range from it with accuracy and precision to the satisfaction of themselves and the public at large, whose servants we are. 16

Concerning drainage legislation H. W. Campbell shared Mr. Sankey's concern but was somewhat less committal, stating simply that

The Ditches and Watercourses Act of 1883 has opened up to us a new field of labour and a new class of work under its provisions, the great necessity of certain amendments is evident . . . 17

In addition to opportunities to help

effect changes in legislation there were political motivations for membership. The future would reveal that some members were convinced that Land Surveying's new found Association could diversify and accommodate more municipal engineering and in time represent the interests of both the land surveyors and the survey engineers. Any member in 1886 who held this as his primary objective would be faced with decades of disappointment. 18

These are some of the reasons that motivated the enlisted but what about those brothers that need motivation? The 1886 Provisional Committee offered the following:

1. By becoming a Member you will have through the Association and its Committees a channel by means of which you can convey to the profession your views on anything affecting said profession and become acquainted with the opinions of other Members.

2. The volume of Proceedings published annually will alone be worth to you more than your yearly fee, which is placed at such a figure as merely to cover cost of publication of Report and necessary expenses of Association.

3. You will receive through our As-

sociation copies of Proceedings of several State societies of surveyors and civil engineers, making in all several hundred pages of the cream of professional literature.

4. To the very clever surveyor we would say that you will undoubtedly become a "crank" unless you occasionally rub up against your professional brethren and get the "corners" polished off. To the "rusty" brother, we think there is probably no better way of brightening you up than by joining what we are confident is the permanent organisation of the "Association of Provincial Land Surveyors 19 of Ontario".

For two dollars per annum how could they lose? The next six years would demonstrate that they could not.

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2. *Don W. Thomson; Skyview Canada, A story of Aerial Photography in Canada: Information Canada Ottawa 1975.*

3. *Proceedings of the Association of*

Provincial Land Surveyors of Ontario: 1886.

4. *K. W. McNaught, R. Cook; Canada and the United States, A modern study: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd.: Toronto 1963*

FOOTNOTES

1. Canada and U.S., P. 368
2. Skyview Canada, P. 11
3. *ibid.*, P. 11
4. *ibid.*, P. 13
5. The story of Toronto, P. 155
6. *ibid.*, P. 155
7. *ibid.*, P. 176
8. *ibid.*, P. 146
9. *ibid.*, P. 146
10. *ibid.*, P. 169
11. *ibid.*, P. 146
12. Proceedings 1886, Preface
13. Proceedings 1886, Secretary Treasurer Report, P. 14
14. *ibid.*
15. Proceedings 1886, P. 21
16. Proceedings 1886, The Surveyors Act by Villiers Sankey, P. 28
17. Proceedings 1886, Minutes P. 16
18. This will be developed and elaborated upon in later papers on the history of the A.O.L.S..
19. Proceedings 1886, Report of the Provisional Committee, P. 23