

# “Ontario-On the Map” the inaugural exhibit for the Archives of Ontario’s new public service facility

By Joan Winearls

In April 2009 The Archives of Ontario opened its new public service facility in the heart of York University’s Keele campus. With considerably increased space and improved facilities, the Archives now has a state of the art facility to serve the Ontario public. The new public space consists of a much larger reading room (which amalgamates three former reading rooms), additional audio-visual booths, computer stations, and micro-film readers. A classroom space will facilitate a variety of educational initiatives. Also included is a new exhibit gallery which for the first time will allow the Archives of Ontario to display many of its original materials.

The inaugural exhibit for this new gallery is “Ontario - On the Map” which opened on September 15th and will run for several months into early 2010. The Exhibit includes 46 maps, approximately 20 objects and documents, some of which have been borrowed and a large number of auxiliary images all beautifully displayed in three purpose-built vertical and twenty-one horizontal cases.

The main theme of the exhibit is the development of Ontario through maps. The maps are visual representations of how people saw our province at different stages of its development or how they or others helped to create changes in the use of the land — from the initial, partial record of its landscape; through use of the land for its resources and for settlement; to the growth and expansion of urban centres and transportation routes. The maps date from 1650 to 2009 and are displayed in a series of sections: **Mapping the Land** including exploration and the early period of mapping, **Occupying the Land** – surveying for settlement, patterns of settlement, and physical resources, and **The Growing Province** which looks at the growth of urban areas, making connections by water, road & railways, and special purpose mapping such as fire insurance plans, birds-eye views and county mapping.

Many sections of the exhibit will be of interest to surveyors. The early maps in the first vertical case Mapping the Land /Exploring the Land suggest how difficult it was to create accurate maps and plan for settlement before detailed surveying and mapping could be done. Besides explorers and surveyors, others such as Lieutenant Governor Simcoe’s wife, Elizabeth Simcoe, also participated in map compilation at the end of the eighteenth century in an attempt to make sense of the geography and to record Simcoe’s trips and plans for the province. Two of her small sketch maps are on display and one of them has only recently been received as a donation to the Archives. Two magnificent maps by the early surveyors, William Chewett (*A Map of the Located Districts in the Province of Upper Canada* (1813)) (see portrait Figure 1) and his son James Grant Chewett (*A Map of the Province of Upper Canada and the Adjacent Territories* (1830)), round out this first case. The latter was compiled for the Canada Company which had just received thousands of acres of land to settle in southern Ontario.

Surveyors may be particularly interested in the middle section of the exhibit —Occupying the Land/ Surveying for Settlement. Early maps from different areas of southern Ontario show the nature of the first township surveys along the St. Lawrence River, and from there west-

ward to southwestern Ontario by such surveyors as Patrick McNiff, and Lieut. John F. Holland; some of the different survey systems and the areas and periods in which they were in use are briefly explained with the help of a modern map. Two objects, a circumferentor and a Gunter’s chain, are on loan from the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors and these together with surveyors’ diaries and various early drawing instruments loaned by Black Creek Pioneer Village help to give the flavour of early surveying and mapping.

This is followed by a section on Taking up Land

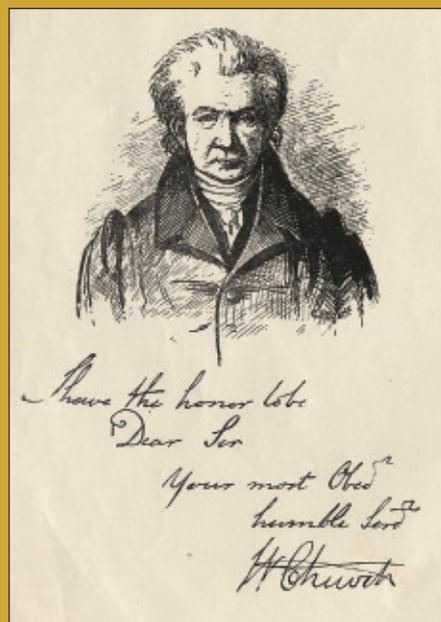


Figure 1: William Chewett (or Chewitt), Senior Surveyor and Draughtsman, undertook more surveys and drew more maps than any other surveyor in Upper Canada during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Portrait of William Chewett from Association of Ontario Land Surveyors Proceedings (1890) Library pamphlet 1890 # 61 ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

showing the various legal documents required in the process of land granting: the Patent Plan, (a township map on which the names of those receiving a grant of land from the Crown are written), an example of a Crown patent and other documents showing the transfer of title from one person to the other. The example shown, interestingly enough, is for York Township Lot 25 Concession IV (West of Yonge Street) the lot on which York University now stands. It shows the interesting story of how the land ended up in the possession of the Daniel and Elizabeth and Jacob Stong families from whose descendants the land was purchased for the university.

Other cases note the surveyor's role in assessing the land for various uses - most dramatically shown on the Shield. In this case surveyors' field notes were used by the Crown lands office in 1863-64 to determine the land capability for settlement in the area north of Peterborough in southern Ontario. Although much of the land was thought to be "excellent farming land", it was not understood at the time that the soils formed only a thin layer over bedrock and the land had almost no capability to support agriculture - as has been shown on the modern soil capability map in the case.

In **Mapping North and South** two very large and magnificent maps contrast the state of development of the province in the middle and end of the nineteenth century. *Tremaine's Map of Upper Canada* produced in 1862 (Figure 2) shows that by that date much of southern Ontario had been surveyed and occupied for settlement. However it was not until 1900 that Ontario's Department of Crown Lands attempted a comprehensive exploration survey of northern Ontario, which led to the identification of such resources as minerals, timber and possible agricultural or settlement

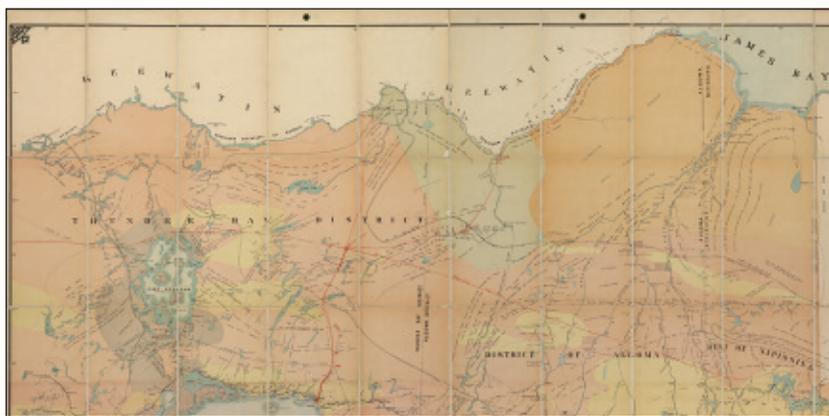


**Figure 2: The map with its wealth of detail indicates healthy settlements and a prosperous province. Although some parts had not yet been settled, most of it had been comprehensively surveyed with townships and roads.**

*Tremaine's Map of Upper Canada Published by George C. Tremaine, Toronto, 1862 A-11, N 5055, 10030774, ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO*

land. To complete this great survey, ten different survey parties were sent out and their general results and survey base lines are shown on the large map that was printed in 1901 (Figure 3). The exhibit also includes samples of documents from one survey party —that of T.B. Speight's party to the northern part of Nipissing District near the Abitibi River. Samples from his diary, field notes, pay lists, lists of supplies, etc. are also reproduced here. The 1901 surveyors' reports for the north overestimated the "millions of acres of good agricultural land" but accurately concluded that the exploration had found a "great pulpwood forest".

Surveyors were involved with many areas of the surveying and mapping of Ontario as demonstrated in the exhibit. This includes mineral & timber surveys, cadastral and subdivision surveys in towns, and surveys for transportation systems- canals, railways, roads and eventually highways. Many prominent surveyors compiled important maps of parts of the province for the government or to sell commercially. One example is the map of Toronto of 1851 originally surveyed by J.Stoughton Dennis but carefully compiled, drawn and engraved with its views of prominent buildings shown in exquisite detail by the young Sandford Fleming (see Figure 4). Another is the first subdivision plan for Rosedale in Toronto also surveyed by J.S. Dennis, and of which the Archives of Ontario owns the only known printed copy. G.S. Abrey surveyed and compiled the subdivision plan for North Cobalt in 1906 which anticipated a



**Figure 3: The "Clay Belt", recently discovered at that time, marked the limits of agricultural land; the Cambrian, Huronian, and Laurentian geological formations held important mineral resources. Until 1912 the Albany River was the northern boundary of Ontario.**

*Map of Part of Northern Ontario ... Part of the Districts of Nipissing, Algoma and Thunder Bay By the Department of Crown Lands, Toronto, 1901 RG 1 ACC. 13243, 10030806, ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO*



**Figure 4:** The young Sandford Fleming drew and engraved this map, including the views and Victorian framework, in exquisite detail and tiny size. This is the last of the single-sheet plans of Toronto showing all the buildings as well as large treed areas.

*Topographical Plan of the City of Toronto Drawn by Sandford Fleming Published by Hugh Scobie, Toronto, 1851 C 295-1-163-0-14, 10003073, ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO*

rush for lots after the recent discovery of silver in the area.

To meet the needs and desires of businessmen and individuals, new types of maps began to be developed and published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hand drawn bird's eye views (such as the example shown for Ottawa in 1908; Figure 5) conveyed the bustling economy and prosperity of a town or city, but by the end of the first third of the twentieth century would give way to the greater accuracy of aerial photography. Large scale fire insurance plans of cities and towns were prepared for the insurance companies to give detailed information on the construction material, use of buildings and locations of fire hydrants, etc. to suggest levels of fire risk. These now provide valuable historic building and land use information for researchers. One phenomenon that had a more popular origin is that of the county map and atlas making business, which was at its height from the 1850s to 1880s in Ontario. The magnificent *Map of the County of Waterloo, Canada West* (1861) reveals a

lot about this rural area in mid-century—it shows roads and various types of buildings with insets of several town plans and names of owners in the lots. More of course could be shown in an atlas format and atlas-making gradually took over; here subscribers were encouraged to pay for drawings of their house and sometimes portraits of themselves. These maps and atlases very much appealed to the pride of local farmers and merchants.

It is hoped that many surveyors will visit this interesting historical exhibit and reflect on the important role of their profession in the early surveying and mapping of Ontario. The Archives of Ontario is located at 134 Ian Macdonald Boulevard, Toronto, which is west of Keele St., just south of Steeles Ave. The Archives is open from Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. See

website for further details on access and parking  [www.ontario.ca/archives](http://www.ontario.ca/archives).

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**Figure 5:** This view looks south over Ottawa from the Ottawa River, showing industry near the source of waterpower and major companies south of the Parliament Buildings. The Chateau Laurier and Central Passenger Station are shown several years before they were built, as was sometimes the case with bird's-eye views.

*Ottawa, 1908 Drawn and Published by James Lovell Wiseman, 1908 F 4491, N 6045, 10030772, ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO*