Research of County Trails

Includes:
Final Report

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ERST 3840 –
Community-Based Research Project

Final Essay:

The Otonabee River: A Settler's Friend and Enemy

The Rotary Greenway Trail is a scenic multi-use pedestrian trail, running from Hunter Street East, north to Lakefield. It is approximately 19 kilometres long and is accessible all year round to avid walkers, joggers, cyclists, and skateboarders (Kitchen, 1994). At the heart of the trail is the Otonabee River. From its start to finish, the trail offers a variety of scenic views of the waterway. Yet, the river must be valued for more than its aesthetic beauty. Within its deep waters the river holds many stories about Peterborough's physical and cultural landscape. The purpose of the essay is twofold:

1) Describe the environmental history of the Otonabee River.
2) Explore the interactions between the river and early European settlers.

The relationship between the river and its early inhabitants is a unique one. The presence of the Otonabee River, in itself, shaped the behaviours of early immigrants such as locations of settlement and means of transportation. On the same note, the settlers have also changed the dynamics of the river. Through the application of technology onto the natural environment, settlers have transformed the river into a tame and calm waterway, making it a product of human manipulation and control. Ultimately, I argue that the Otonabee River, both provided opportunities and barriers to settlers. However, these challenges would be overcome through locks and dams as settlers attempted to take advantage of its fast rapids and interconnections with surrounding water channels. Such developments will be illustrated by closer examination of the local mill industries and the Trent Severn Waterway in Peterborough.

The Emergence of the Otonabee River

All of southern Ontario's landscape was formed during the last ice age (Cole, 1988). In particular, Peterborough bears the legacy of the Wisconsin glaciation (Adams and Taylor, 1985). The glacier covered this area with enormous sheets of ice that were up to three kilometres thick (Jones et al, 2002). The last ice sheet melted northward and receded approximately 12, 000 years ago (Jones et al, 2002). Soil, rocks, and till from the Canadian Shield were deposited and created unique terrains such as the Lady Eaton Drumlin on Trent University Campus (Jones et. al, 2002). Furthermore, the melting of the Wisconsin ice sheet produced a large volume of water that flowed into various wrinkles of the terrain (Bow, 2001). The Otonabee River is a prime example of one of these drainage channels and represents one of the largest glacial spillways in the Peterborough area (see figure 1) (Adams and Taylor, 1985). In fact, it is believed that the lower

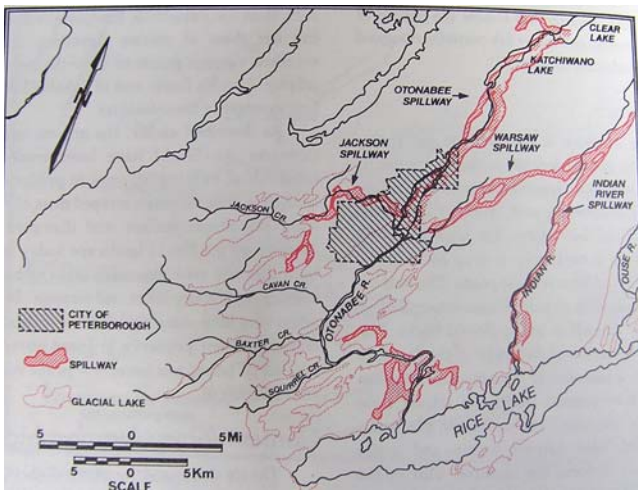

Figure 1: Spillways and Glacial Lakes of the Wisconsin, Peterborough. Source: Adams and Taylor, 1985

sections of the Otonabee spillway carried more amounts of water than the present St. Lawrence River (Adams and Taylor, 1985). As climate stabilized, the waterway became home to a variety of aquatic species including, pickerel, bass, and muskellunge (Bow,

2001). Today, it stands as a 25 mile long river, channelling water from Kawartha Lake down to Rice Lake (Jones and Dyer, 1987).

Its First Visitors

The word, *Otonabee* is attributed with the meaning, "flashing waters running fast", a name used by the first Native inhabitants of the region to describe the fast rapids along the waterway (Needler, 1958). According to a different Native legend, *Otonabee* in the Ojibway language is the name given to small mouth whitefish which were once abundant in the river (Cole, 1988). Despite these various meanings, the river provided to be a main source of sustenance and a natural means of travel for the Mississaugas, a sub-tribe of the Ojibwa of the Algonquin people (Adams and Taylor, 1985). Travelling by water was preferred by many Native peoples around the area because it was much quicker than travelling by land (Archive and Collection Society, 2007). Due to the rough conditions of the Otonabee River, canoes could only navigate as far as the place which is now the location of Peterborough (Jones and Dyer, 1987). The Mississaugas called this area *Nogojiwanong*, "the place at the end of the rapids" (Jones and Dyer, 1987). Figure 2

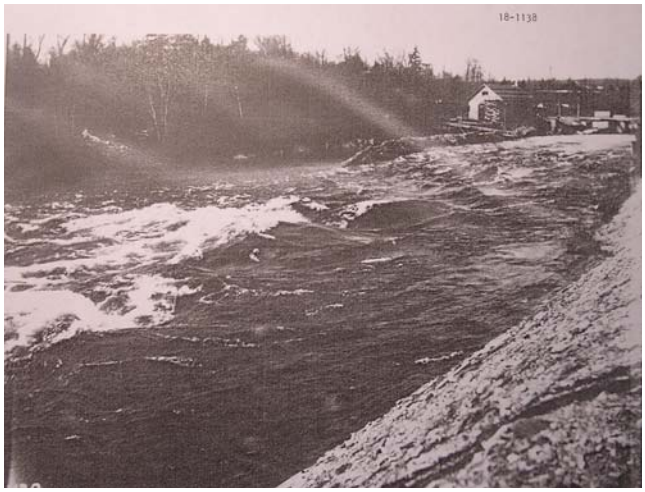

Figure 2: Otonabee River by Nassau Mills, approx. late 1800's.
Source: Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection. Vol. 20. 18-1138. Nassau Mills (Lock 22).

offers a sense of the rough conditions of the Otonabee River during the late 1800's. The development of canoe portages provided an alternative means to by-pass these dangerous currents. One well-used portage route now follows Chemong Road from the northern suburbs of Peterborough to Bridgenorth on the southern shore of Chemong Lake (Adams and Taylor, 1985).

Besides providing a main route of travel for Native inhabitants, the Otonabee River served as a convenient entry for European explorers and settlers. French explorer, Samuel de Champlain is considered to be the first European to enter the river in 1615 (Needler, 1953). He and his fellow soldiers travelled with a war party of Huron Indians to attack the Onondagas, a tribe of the Five Nations Iroquois from the New York State area (Adams and Taylor, 1985). Their route followed a chain of lakes and rivers expanding from Georgian Bay to the Bay of Quinte (Adams and Taylor, 1985). While sailing, he took notice of the inherent beauty of the Otonabee River. In 1632, he wrote,

> this river is very beautiful, and passes through a number of beautiful lakes and river-meadows with which it is bordered; many islands of varying dimensions, abounding in deer and other wild animals, many good fishing spots full of excellent fish, and a great deal of very good cleared land abandoned by the Indians on account of the wars... (Jones et al., 2002).

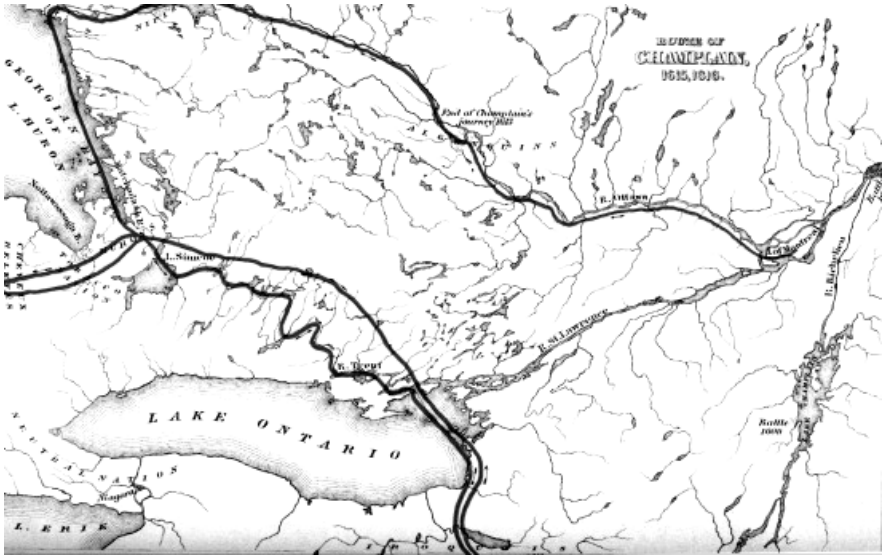

Figure 3: Route of Champlain, 1615-1616. Source: Archive and Collection, 2007.

In 1818, after the British signed treaties with Native peoples, Samuel Wilmot, the government surveyor, proposed a townsite to be set aside by *Nogojiwanong* (Jones and Dyer, 1987). According to Jones and Dyer (1987), Wilmot was impressed by the navigable river with its portage system and relatively flat landscape. The Otonabee was treated as the front and focal point of this new area. The site eventually became Peterborough and quickly developed as a commercial and administrative centre (Jones and Dyer, 1987).

In the early 1820s, the Otonabee proved once again to be a natural inlet to the frontier of pioneer settlement for Europeans. Similar to Champlain's route, the water channels of the Trent River, Rice Lake, Otonabee River and the Kawartha Lakes provided easy access from Lake Ontario (Adams and Taylor, 1985). Irish immigrants such as Robert Reid, Thomas A. Stewart and their families, sailed across the Atlantic in search for a better life (Bow, 2001). Once they reached the east shores of Canada, they followed the St. Lawrence River and through Lake Ontario to Port Hope, and finally entering the Otonabee in 1822 (Bow, 2001).The Reids settled on the east bank of the Otonabee River while the Stewarts settled on seven lots of land just south of Trent Campus (Jones et. al, 2002). Along the Rotary Greenway Trail, north of Parkhill, one can observe the remaining house foundation of the Stewart homestead, known as the Auburn House. It is here at this site that Stewart and his wife, Frances with their three daughters occupied a log cabin called Auburn I (Peterborough Historical Society, nd). Like Champlain, Frances described the beauty of the Peterborough landscape. In her journal entry of 1822, she writes,

> Beyond all expectations, and in every point equal to our wishes. The land is excellent and the country beautiful; the Otonabee, a broad, rapid river, runs along one side of the township. The air is very pure as the ground is

> constantly rising back from the river whose rapid course increases the purity. (Dunlop, 1902).

The Force of the Rapids

From the above discussions, it is clear that the presence of the Otonabee offered a main direction of travel for Native peoples, explorers and settlers. Its existence, itself, naturally led humans to these areas of Peterborough and Kawarthas. Yet, the river also influenced the location of early industries. According to scholars, Adams and Taylor, "the choice of the site of Peterborough was related to the position of the rapids in the Otonabee" (Adams and Taylor, 1985). Due to the force and volume of the rapids, certain parts of the river prevented primitive engineering methods to succeed (Adams and Taylor, 1985). For instance, Adam Scott, one of Peterborough's first settlers, situated his mill further downstream from the main rapids, north of the Hunter Street Bridge (Adams and Taylor, 1985). In fact, most of the early mill industries were built on the much more manageable Jackson Creek, a right-bank tributary of the Otonabee River (Bow, 2001). In 1820, Scott used the power of Jackson Creek to supply power to his mill-wheel (Adams and Taylor, 1985). The mills used the water to turn the paddle wheels, transforming the creek's energy into power for the saws to cut the logs into squared timber and planks (Bow, 2001). It was not until later when technology improved that mills could be located right on the Otonabee (Adams and Taylor, 1985).

In the early 1800's the Otonabee was still mostly untouched by human activity (Bow, 2001). Shortly after the construction of Scott's Mill, the banks of the river were altered to create raceways and dams that allowed mill owners to control the channel of the water (Bow, 2001). These advancements in harnessing water power served the interest of the lumber industry. While visiting Peterborough, Lieutenant-Governor

Maitland, authorized the use of government funds to build a large saw and gristmill with an accompanied dam on the west side of the river, not far from the current site of Quaker Oats Factory (Jones and Dyer, 1987). In 1840, the mill was taken over by Samuel Dickson, an associate of John Hall, the original mill owner (Jones and Dyer, 1987). Within a few years, Dickson established mills on both sides of the Otonabee and developed a raceway on the west side from London Street to Hunter Street (Jones and Dyer, 1987).

Similarly, in 1854, Charles Perry, a former Peterborough mayor, took advantage of the river and built a saw mill known as Nassau Mills, on the current location of Trent University (Jones and Dyer, 1987). The river was dammed and used to power the mill. Together with the Irwin Mills on the west bank of the river, they were Ontario's top lumber producers in the 1860s (Cole, 1988). Nassau Mills, alone, had one hundred saws and an average production of 60,000 feet in 24 hours (Robnik, 2006).

Another prime example of how humans have influenced and manipulated the Otonabee River is the Trent-Severn Waterway. Although, the chain of lakes and rivers comprising the waterway already existed, engineer, R.B Rogers used this opportunity and redefined the natural environment to create a fully-navigable system of travelling. The complex system stretches 386 kilometres from Bay of Quinte to Georgian Bay and consists of 39 locks, two lift locks and a marine railway (Parks Canada, 2008). As much as the waterway offered possibilities for transportation of commercial goods, national defence and tourism, it was not without its challenges. The Peterborough-Lakefield division, the canalized river stretch from Little Lake to Lakefield, was considered to be "the most serious obstruction on the whole route" due to the fast rapids and falls of the river (Angus, 1988). Between Lake Katchewanooka to Little Lake, the river dropped 144

feet (Angus, 1988). In fact, within the Otonabee's first ten miles, it drops more than 100 feet, two-thirds the height of Niagara Falls (Jones and Dryer, 1987). Engineers had many disagreements on the appropriate methods to overcome these rapids. Several plans were proposed, including Baird's proposal consisting of a river canal parallel to the west bank, requiring six dams and 14 locks (Angus, 1988). In the end, Rogers chose a combination of two plans. Section I, from Lakefield to Nassau Mill, followed Baird's proposal with the construction of a series of locks and dams (Angus, 1988). Section II integrated parts of Rubdige's plan which involved the construction of an artificial waterway travelling on the east side of river to Little Lake (Angus, 1988). After 87 years of construction, the first small boat safely travelled through the entire waterway in July 1920 (Angus, 1988).

It is evident that in any particular place nature offers a flexible, but challenging set of possibilities for maintaining a living (Worster, 2006). The natural formation of the Otonabee River influenced the means of travel as it proved to be an inlet for travellers and settlers to enter the area of Peterborough. On the other hand, the rapids of the waterway presented a serious barrier. The efforts to deal with this challenge, resulted in the changes of the river imposed by humans. Advancements in locks and dams opened up the doors to tame and exploit the waterway which otherwise would have been out of reach (Worster, 2006).

The objective of this paper was to capture the environmental history of the Otonabee River. From its humble beginnings, the emergence of the river occurred during the ice age. The Wisconsin ice sheet produced a large volume of water that flowed into various wrinkles of the terrain, producing the Otonabee River, a prime drainage channel. The presence of the Mississauga tribe and Champlain would soon follow as they travelled through the river.

In the second half of the essay, I have attempted to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between early settlers and the presence of the Otonabee River. Settlers, such as Scott, Dickson, Perry and Rogers capitalized on the opportunities offered by the river as they exploited its force to power their mills. Similarly, Rogers and his fellow colleagues redefined the river to provide a safe means of navigation. However, the Otonabee River proved to be a living entity with the ability to influence the particular location of mills and the route of the Trent Severn Waterway, as well as providing a natural entry for travellers and settlers. During the early development of mills, the river proved to hinder early engineer methods where many mill industries decided to locate on the more manageable water channel of Jackson's Creek such as Scott's Mill. Furthermore, the rapids proved to be a significant obstacle for engineers of the Trent-Severn Waterway. Despite these barriers, locks and dams were able to control the flow of water and open up the possibilities to tame the harsh rapids of the river. In the end, much of Peterborough's fortunes have been linked to the Otonabee River (Jones and Dyer, 1987). The history of city is much more than a story of settlers overcoming geography and taking advantage of the natural environment. It is also a story of how nature has influenced human activities and technology. Scott's Mills, Dickson's Mills, Nassau Mills and Trent-Severn Waterway are products of technology, just as much they are products of nature. Without the Otonabee River, mills and the Trent-Severn Waterway would cease to exist.

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ERST 3840 – Trail Narratives

Quaker Oats Mill

Quaker Oats is one of largest flour mill ever built in Canada (Robnik, 2006, p. 15). It manufactures well known breakfast foods such as oatmeal, granola bars, cookies, baking mixes, etc. (Robnik, 2006, p. 16). In 1901, tariffs on imports of cereal products into Great Britain from the United States led Quaker Qats to consider building one of its major manufacturing units in Canada (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 128). During this time, Peterborough had many persuasive reasons for why the plant should be built here. The construction of the Trent-Seven Canal would serve to connect the city with St. Lawrence River seaboard and two further railroad systems could offer freight services to all points, as far east as Montreal with no extra transportation cost (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 128.). With such opportunities, Quaker Qats was encouraged to build its factory in Peterborough and was established in 1902 (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 128). Today, the plant continues to strive as one of the most largest and important industries in the city. Currently, it receives and ships out 40 carloads daily, and employs 500 people (Robnik, 2007, p. 16).

The Otonabee River

The word *Otonabee* means "flashing waters running fast", a name used by the first Native inhabitants of this region to describe romping rapids along the waterway (Needler, 1958, p. 1). According to a Native legend, *Otonabee* in the Ojibway language is the name given to a small mouth whitefish which once were abundant in the river (A.O.C Cole, 1988, p. 62) The river channels waters through the Kawartha Lakes down to Rice Lake and via Trent River, to Lake Ontario (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 11). In its first ten miles, it drops more 100 feet (two-thirds the height of Niagara Falls) (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 11).

Before roads or railways were established, the river was a major route of navigation for hunters and travellers (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p.11). Early explorers and settlers could only navigate only as far as the place which is now as the town of Peterborough (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 11). The Native people called this site *Nogojiwanong*, "the place at the end of the rapids" (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 11).

However, these fast rapids would be tamed as the river was recognized as a major asset for progress and industrial growth by European settlers. As early as 1827, water power from the river had been harnessed by the government mill (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 37). Locks and dams were built in along the river, improving it's potential capacity for electricity and navigation (Jones & Dyer, 1987, p. 37). Within 50 years, major industries lined up along the river by damns, taking advantage of this new technology. Today, the Otonabee River is no longer a site of "flashing waters running fast", but a river tamed by the manipulation of human force and technology.

Trent-Severn Waterway

The Rotary Greenway Trail is a prime spot to observe the development and history of the Trent-Severn Waterway. The Trent-Severn Waterway is a navigable chain of interconnected lakes and rivers, linked by a system of 39 locks, two lift locks and a marine railway (Murray, 1987, p. 5). The waterway stretches 386 km from Lake Ontario's Bay of Quinte to Georgian Bay (Parks Canada, 2008).

Between 1780 to 1815, British authorities commissioned a series of explorations to find a water route to move men and supplies from Lower Canada to the Upper Great Lakes (Angus, 2000, p. vi). From the late 1820's to the early 1830's, interest and demands grew for a navigation, farmers wanted a route to get their produce to markers to the south and the growing lumber industry put further pressure on the government to provide a canal system to carry their giant cribs (Cole, 1987, p. 5). The development of the Trent-Severn Waterway proved to be slow with many interruptions such as the 1837 Rebellion and funding shortages (Panel on The Future of the Trent Severn Waterway, 2007). Bobcaygeon lock was the first construction started in 1833 and after almost a century of construction, the first small boat safely travelled through the entire waterway in July 1920 (Angus, 1998, p. xi.)

Peterbrough-Lakefield Division of the Trent Canal

Seen before you is the canalized 9 mile stretch of the Otonabee River, known as the Peterborough-Lakefield Division (Angus, 1998, p. 221). The canal division was built into two sections. Construction on Section I, from Lakefield to Nassau Mills, began on August 1895 (Angus, 1998, p. 224). The construction work consisted of digging five cuts across the bends in the river where each lock was placed inside (Angus, 1998, p. 224). The canal cuts remain unchanged since they were excavated over more than 100 years ago. (Angus, 1998, p. 224). These locks were unique innovation of the time and are considered to be the first concrete locks ever built in Canada (Angus, 1998, p. 222). From the beginning to the very end of the trail, seven locks can be observed, including:

- Ashburnham Lock 20
- Peterborough Lock 21
- Nassau Mills Lock 22
- Otonabee Lock 23
- Douro Lock 24
- Sawer Creek Lock 25
- Lakefield Lock 26

Trail Head of Rotary Greenway Trail

The Rotary Greenway Trail is a scenic multi-use pedestrian trail from Hunter Street East, north to Lakefield. The trail runs 19 kilometres along the shoreline of Otonabee River (Kitchen, 1994). It is accessible all year round and supports a wide range of recreational activities such as, walking, jogging, cycling, rollerblading and skateboarding.
The trail is embedded in Peterborough's history as it follows on an old CN railway line. Officially abandoned on July 12th 1989, the railway track was constructed in 1868 (Marsh

and Rodie, 2000). It served to carry manufacturing good and raw materials to local industries along the Otonabee River (City of Peterborough, 2010). Today, the foundation of the railway serves to promote good health and appreciation for the city's natural environment. In 1993, the Peterborough Rotary Club approached city council with the idea of paving a stretch of the railway line (McCormick, 2008). City council agreed to donate the land and the Rotary Club began to raise about $150, 000 for the job (McCormick, 2008). Paving of the trail began in 1994 (McCormick, 2008).

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ERST 3840 – Trail Narratives

The Otonabee River #1
(By London Dam)

The word *Otonabee* is most commonly understood as "flashing waters running fast", a name used by the first Native inhabitants of this region to describe the rapids along the waterway. The river begins at Lakefield and travels down to Rice Lake where it ultimately flows to Lake Ontario. In its first ten miles, it drops more 100 feet, two-thirds the height of the Niagara Falls.

The Otonabee River #2
(Rotary Park)

Before roads or railways were constructed, the Otonabee River was a major route of navigation for hunters and travellers. Early explorers and settlers could navigate only as far as the place which is now the town of Peterborough. The river was recognized as a major asset for progress and industrial growth by European settlers. As early as 1827, water power from the Otonabee had been harnessed by mills. In addition, locks and dams were built in along the river, improving it's potential capacity for electricity and navigation. Within 50 years, major industries lined up along the river by damns, taking advantage of this new technology. Today, the Otonabee River is no longer a site of fast rushing rapids, but a river tamed by the manipulation of human force and technology.

Trent-Severn Waterway
(Ashburnham Lock 20)

The Trent-Severn Waterway is a navigable chain of interconnected lakes and rivers, linked by a system of 39 locks, two lift locks and a marine railway. The waterway stretches 386 km from Lake Ontario's Bay of Quinte to Georgian Bay. The development of this waterway proved to be slow with many interruptions such as the 1837 Rebellion and funding shortages. Bobcaygeon lock was the first construction started in 1833 and after almost a century of construction, the first small boat safely travelled through the entire waterway in July 1920.

Peterbrough-Lakefield Division of the Trent Canal
(Nassau Bridge by Trent University or Ashburnham Lock 20)

Seen before you is the canalized 9 mile stretch of the Otonabee River, known as the Peterborough-Lakefield Division of the Trent Severn Waterway. The canal division was built into two sections. The construction work consisted of digging five cuts across the bends in the river where each lock was placed inside. The canal cuts remain unchanged since they were excavated over more than 100 years ago. These locks were unique innovation of the time and are considered to be the first concrete locks ever built in Canada.

Trail Head of Rotary Greenway Trail
(Beginning of Trail by Ecology Park)

The Rotary Greenway Trail is a scenic multi-use pedestrian trail from Hunter Street East, north to Lakefield. The trail runs 19 kilometers along the shoreline of the Otonabee River. The trail is embedded in Peterborough's history as it follows an old CN railway line. Officially abandoned on July 12th 1989, the railway track was constructed in 1868. It served to carry manufacturing good and raw materials to local industries along the river. Today, the foundation of the railway serves to promote good health and appreciation for the city's natural environment.

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ERST 3840 – Community Research Project
Research of County Trails

Supporting Primary Documentation

Online Archives:

Trent Severn Waterway

Trent University Archives. (nd). *Trent Canal and the Peterborough Lift Lock* [Online]. Retrieved Feb. 9 2010, from <http://www.trentu.ca/admin/library/archives/canalphoto.htm>.

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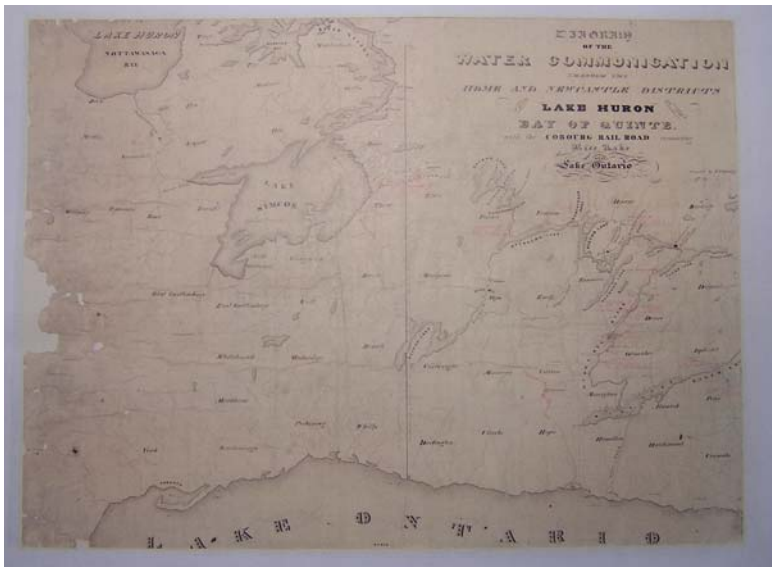
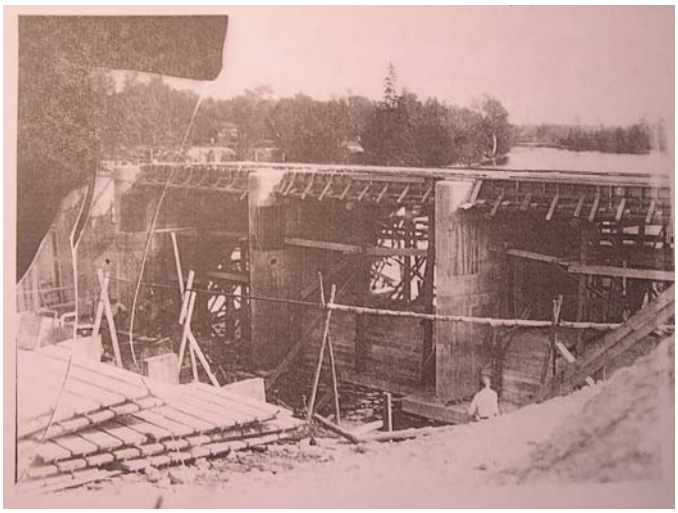
Trent University Archives. (nd). *Our Forest Home* [Online]. Retrieved March 11 2010, from <http://www.trentu.ca/admin/library/archives/ofhpages%200%20to%20118.htm>.

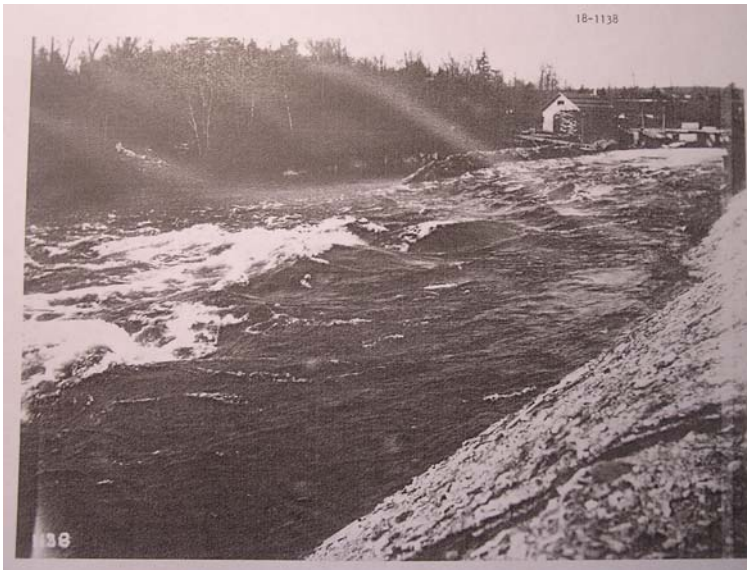
Original Images:



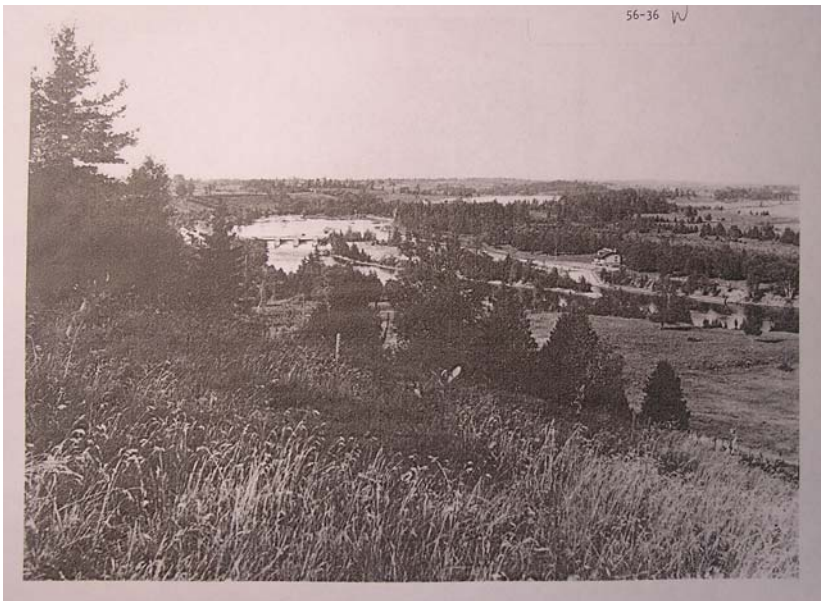
Biard Survey Map circa. 1835. Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection.



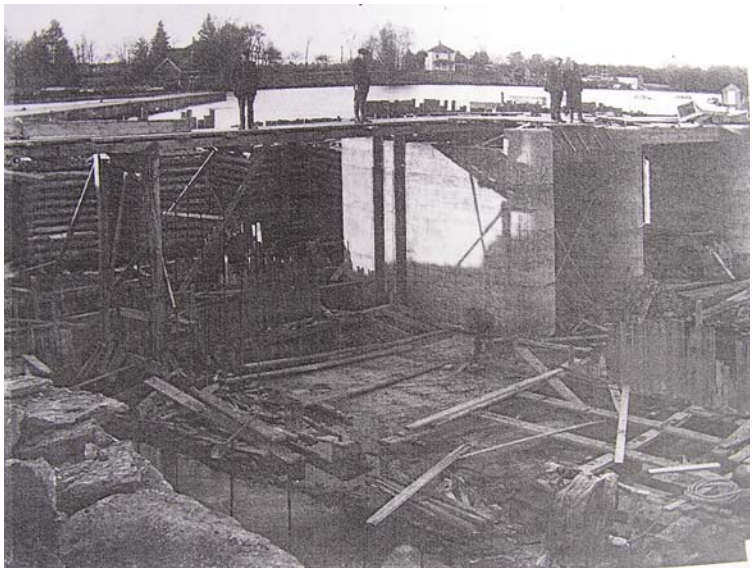
Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection. Vol. 20. 56-113. Nassau Dam (Lock 22).



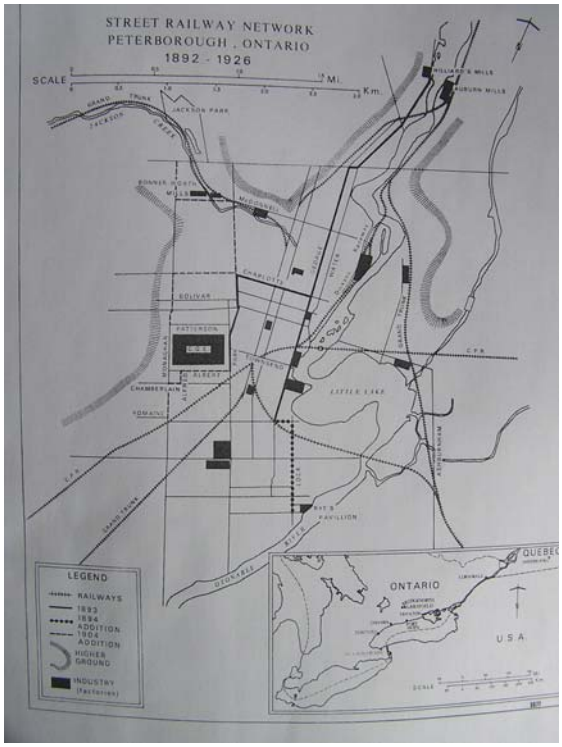
Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection. Vol. 20. 18-1138. Nassau Mills (Lock 22).



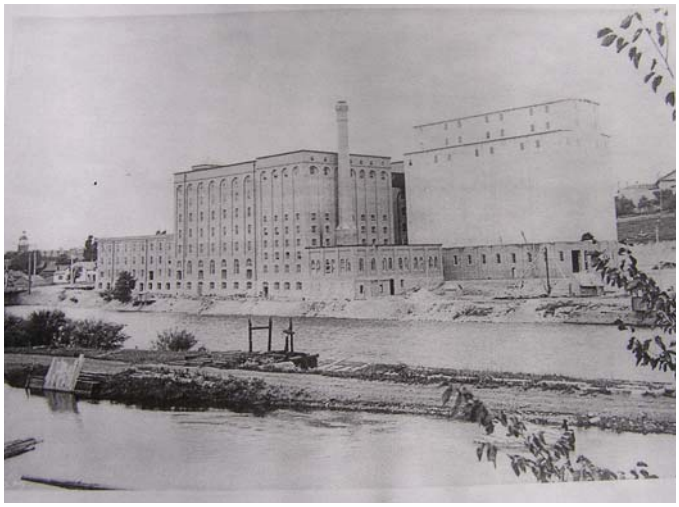
Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection. Vol. 20 56-36. Nassau Mills (Lock 22).



Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection. Vol. 22 39-1072. Lakefield (Lock 26).



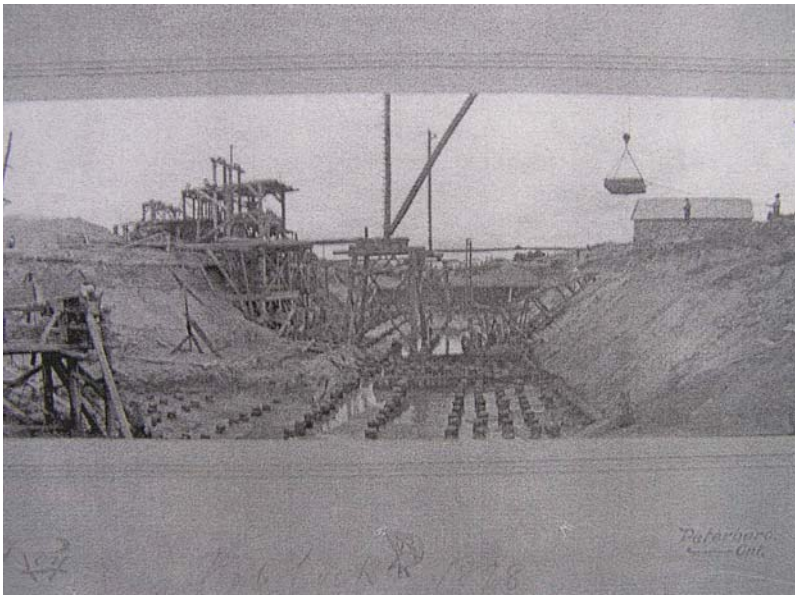
Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F50 4.033. Map of Peterborough Street Railway Networks (1892 – 1926).



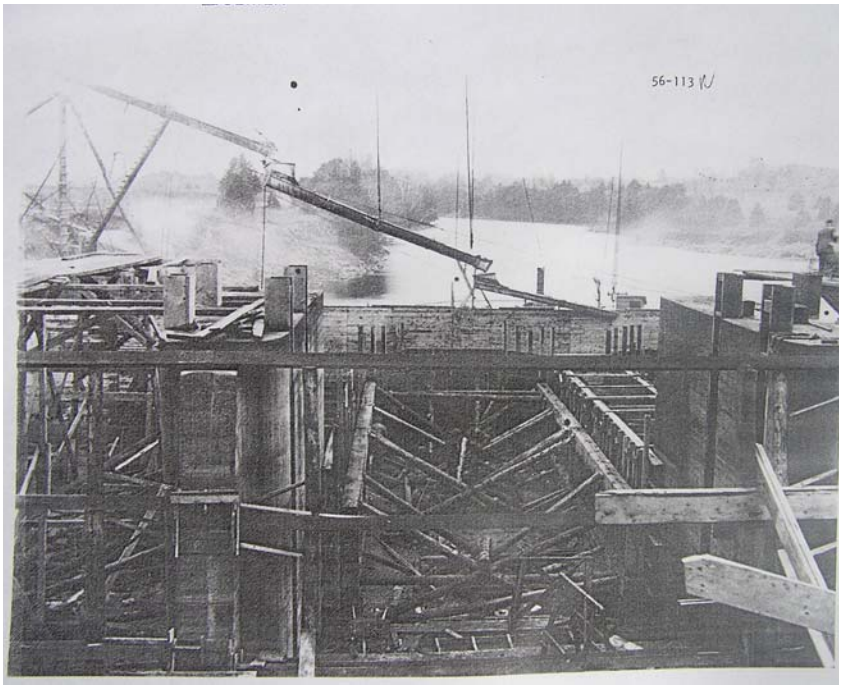
Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F50 2.102. Quaker Oats Company Plant (Peterborough) c. 1905

Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F50 2.028. Quaker Oats Company products, 1920.

Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F 50 2.254. Aerial View of Auburn Dam & Otonabee c. 1919.

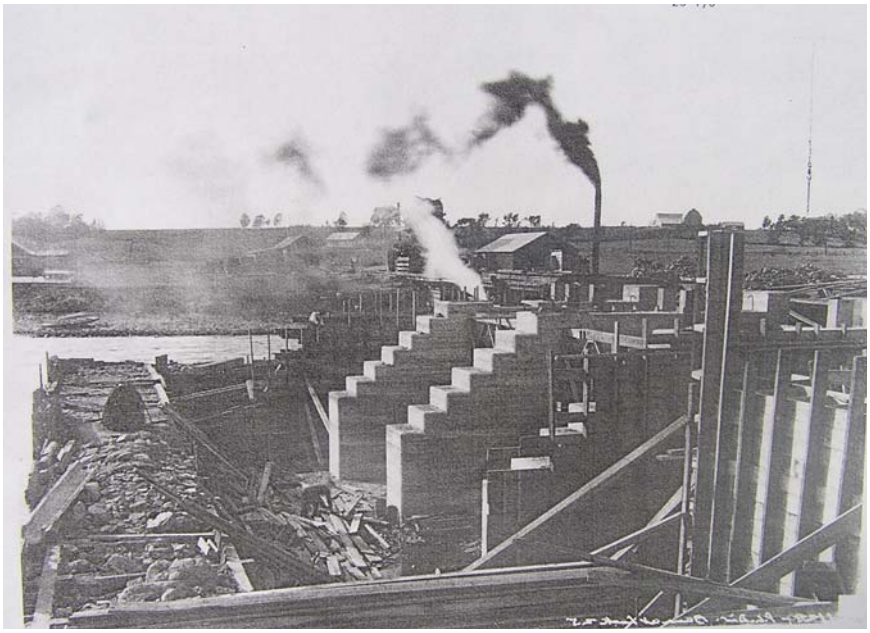


Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F50. 2.096.
Construction at Ashburnham Lock 6, 1898.

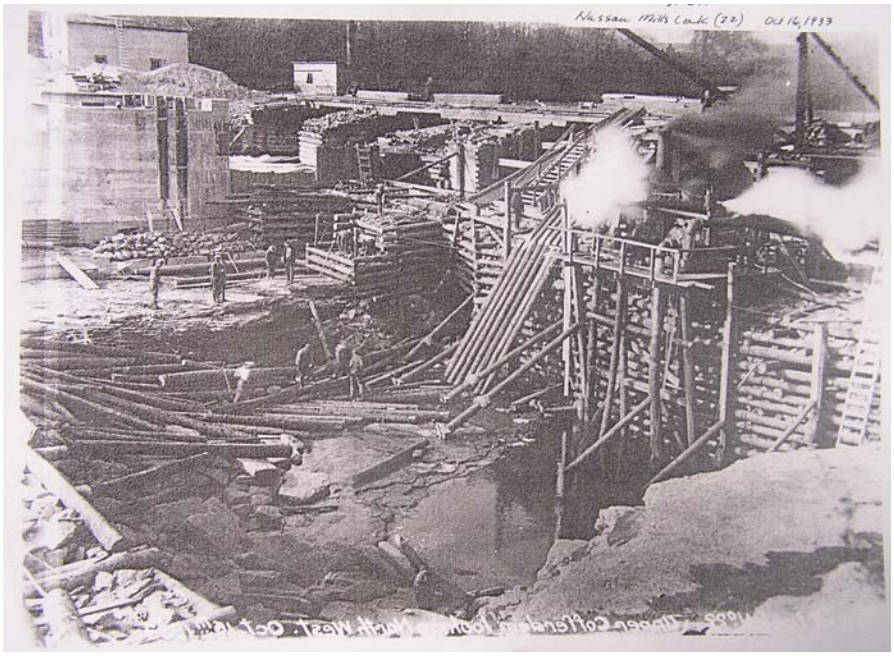


Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection.
Vol. 21 26-170. Sawyer Creek (Lock 25)

Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection.
Vol. 20 39-1059. Nassau Mills (Lock 22)



Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection.
Vol. 20 56-113. Nassau Dam (Lock 22)



Trent Severn Waterway. Historical Photographic Collection.
Vol. 20 31-244. Nassau Mills (Lock 22).

Trent Valley Archives. Electric City Collection. F50 2.098. Auburn Woolen Mills & Auburn dam, c. 1900.