

# Surveying Lots, Concessions and Townships in Upper Canada

By Rod Fraser

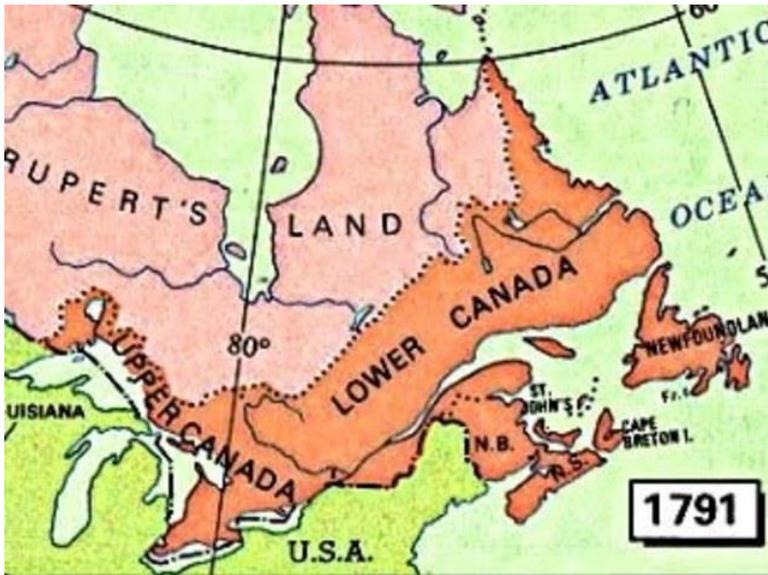
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Upper Canada – Treaties with the Indigenous Peoples.

In 1781, after the British surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown, it was clear a great number of Americans who fought for the British Army, or who were otherwise loyal to the British cause, had no wish to remain in the Thirteen Colonies (later to become the United States of America). The host population was hostile to their presence, so most were desirous of moving to Upper

Canada, a colony being established for their benefit in British North America. Over time, they became known as 'Loyalists'.



British North America - 1791

An estimated 40,000 to 50,000 former soldiers, their families and others loyal to the Crown came to Upper Canada to seek land and a promising future. Included among them were many Haudenosaunee Indians, allies of the British in the Revolutionary War, who also needed land to call home.

Ordinary soldiers who fought with the British Army were promised 100 acres of land upon their arrival. Officers were awarded larger parcels of land depending on their rank. Army rations for three years and the necessary tools and implements for farming were provided.

The plight of these refugees is nicely summarized in a letter in 1785, written by Nancy Jean Cameron, to her sister in Perthshire, Scotland.

*"At last, we are preparing to leave forever this land of our birth. The long, weary years of war ... are over. As soon as possible, we shall set foot on our travels for a new land of promise."*

*"A settlement is to be made on the northern shore of the St. Lawrence River, some 50 miles from the Town of Montreal. Our lands have been confiscated and it is hard to raise money from forced sales."*

*"We expect the journey to be long and hard and little know how long we will be on the road. We have four horses and John has made our big wagon as comfortable as he can.... The children little realize the days of hardship to come and long to start off."*

*"Our grandparents little thought ... that a flitting would be our fate, but we must follow the old flag wherever it takes us. It is again the march of the Cameron men. Wives and children must tread the hard road."*

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The first task of the British government, charged with providing land for settlers coming to Upper Canada, was to negotiate its purchase from the Native Peoples. Over a span of years, treaties were negotiated to provide sufficient land for settlement, as well as 'reserve lands'

for the Indigenous people. This was different from the history of America, where settlers often took land from the natives by force, backed up by the authority of the U.S. government.

The reason for the good relations the British had with the Native peoples was that many of them had fought with the British in the Revolutionary War. They considered the British trustworthy allies. In turn, the British looked to their Indigenous allies, to help keep the Americans out.

If you cast your eyes to the map at the top of this article, you will see two large pieces of land along the north shore of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, referred to as the '*Upper Canada Land Surrenders*' (a term describing two '*land treaties*' negotiated with the Indigenous peoples).

While both land surrenders happened about the same time, I'd like to discuss the easterly land surrender (and in particular, the land later known as 'Glengarry County' in the eastern part of Upper Canada, adjacent to Lower Canada).

In October 1783, William Crawford, acting on behalf of the Colonial government, arranged for the purchase of this land for settlement from the Mississauga Indians. It eventually became the counties of Frontenac, Prince Edward, Lennox and Addington, Hastings, Glengarry, Stormont, Dundas and Leeds, all currently counties in Eastern Ontario.



Glengarry County in Upper Canada

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As you can see from the above map of Glengarry County, it is made up of four townships called, Lancaster, Lochiel, Charlottenburgh and Kenyon respectfully. It is the purpose of this article to show how these townships were surveyed and made ready for settlement.

I will speak mostly of Lochiel Township (also

identified on this map), the original home of the Fraser family who immigrated to Upper Canada circa 1818 and took up residence in Lochiel Twp in 1824. This was approximately thirty years after one of the first British families took up residence in this township.

When I visited Lochiel Township in 2006. I found it measured approximately 14 miles from north to south, and eleven miles from east to west. This was typical of townships in Upper Canada. Most near Lake Ontario measured 12 miles by 9 miles, and interior townships (like Lochiel) usually measured 10 square miles.

Concessions that ran the full distance from the western to the eastern borders of Lochiel Township number 38 lots each. Other concessions that did not run the length or width of the township (usually called Gores) had unusual sizes. There are five or more Gore townships in Lochiel.

The original surveyors started at Lake St. Francis (a part of the St. Lawrence River) and measured the first concession  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles north from the lake front. Then the second concession was measured  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles from the first concession, and so on. Since Lancaster Township was closest to the lake, the concessions of Lochiel Township started where Lancaster's ended.

Once each concession line was determined, perpendicular lot lines from one concession to another were measured every  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile, such that each lot enclosed a space that was  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile wide by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles long.

If you have a mathematical bent, consider this.

Concessions and lots were measured using chains 22 yards in length. A concession of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles in length amounted to 100 chains (or 2200 yards). A lot line of  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile amounted to 20 chains (or 440 yards). If you compute the area of each lot (multiply 440 yards by 2200 yards), you get 968,000 square yards. Since an acre amounts to 4,840 square yards, each lot therefore contained 200 acres. The Gore concessions were measured differently, given they did not run the full length or width of the concession.

Although each lot was identified in the Registry Office in the County, using the Township name, Concession and Lot number, many lots were further subdivided into 100-acre parcels. For example, my g-g-g grandfather's lot of 100 acres was described as N  $\frac{1}{2}$ , Lot 2, Concession V, Lochiel Township.

It is worth noting that roads were considered when these lots, concessions and Townships were surveyed. Each concession had a road allowance at its front, and each land owner was responsible for its maintenance. This meant each settler had access to a road at the front or rear of his property. Side roads running perpendicular to the concession roads were constructed at three-mile intervals.

Alert readers will recall that many roads in this province are still identified in this manner. For example, we often see roads described as the Second Concession

or the Ninth Sideroad: A charming legacy left to us by the early surveyors of Upper Canada.

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It is clear the early prosperity of Upper Canada was based on the promise of private property rights. In the fourth session of Upper Canada's first parliament in 1795, the Lieutenant-Governor, Legislative Council and the House of Assembly passed the Registry Act. It established a registry office for each county, paving the way for the registration of deeds, mortgages, wills and transfers. Without which, the concept of private property would have been difficult.

When we look back at the British government in the early days of Upper Canada, it is clear they built solid institutions based on intelligent policies. Chief among them was the decision to survey the province of Upper Canada in advance of its settlement. We should all be grateful.

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