

Appendix C:

The History of Brock University's Lands

By Alun Hughes

When construction of the University began in the 1960s the land was a mixture of woodland and farmland, and had changed little since the early days of European settlement in the late 18th Century. Originally it had been entirely wooded and inhabited solely by native people. A sizeable Neutral village stood nearby in the early 17th Century, and the Mohawk Trail (now DeCew Road) ran just to the south.

Defeat for the British in the War of American Independence necessitated a crash program of surveys to provide land for Loyalists and other refugees, and this created the framework of townships, lots and concessions that controls property lines to this day. Brock University's lands straddle two townships, Grantham and Thorold, which were surveyed in 1788 by Daniel Hazen and Augustus Jones respectively. The line between them (now St. David's Road) became the boundary between Lincoln and Welland Counties and an important route between Queenston and the Short Hills. The townships were divided into 100-acre lots, parallelograms in Grantham and rectangles in Thorold.

The two Grantham lots that contain the core of the Brock University were originally granted to Loyalist George Turney Sr., who sold them to Thomas Lane in about 1804. When the War of 1812 broke out Lane turned traitor and fled to the States – which has a certain irony, given the University's name. His property was confiscated by the Crown and later returned to private hands, but a combination of administrative failure and unscrupulous activity led to huge confusion over land titles in the post-war years.

Out of this confusion emerged two important landowners, Sir William Johnston and Samuel Theal. The former, a British general who fought with Wellington, commissioned surveyor Claudius Shaw to map his property in 1822 before returning to live in England. This hand-drawn map is now in the University's possession and is a remarkable picture of the campus as it was almost two centuries ago. Samuel Theal was of more humble stock, but was the first of several Theals to farm the University lands. The stone house that survives on the old St. David's Road was probably built by Samuel himself about 1830.

The descendants of Johnston and Theal kept their lands for several decades. Other noteworthy early landowners were Robert Hamilton, William Dickson, Jacob Ball, and the Griffiths family (who lived nearby in the DeCew House made famous by Laura Secord).

The Merrittville Highway alongside Brock University was built as a toll road in the 1850s, and the 1870s saw the opening up of the stone quarry on Theal land near the escarpment edge. In 1897 a channel was dug from the Third Welland Canal at Allanburgh to generate electricity at Power Glen. The remains of this channel, known locally as the Klondike, flank the southern boundary of Brock University's lands in Thorold. In the early 1900s Lake Moodie was created as a storage reservoir for Power Glen, and when the lake was expanded in the 1940s St. David's Road was split in two and ceased to be a thoroughfare west of the Merrittville Highway.