

2.0 Campus Context

Trent University, specifically the Symons Campus, is located at the periphery of the City of Peterborough. Peterborough and the Kawarthas are known for their scenic natural setting, with deep forests, open fields, plentiful waters, and wilderness areas that make this region a draw for nature lovers.

The Symons Campus has a rich history of natural succession and geophysical formations that shaped the landscape that exists today; First Nations presence on the lands and waters of their traditional territory from a *time immemorial*; European settlement and agricultural practices, many of which continue today; and the founding and evolution of the University, which materialized from a grassroots dream of the community and has quickly grown to become a leading institutional, nationally. This story sets the foundation for the Symons Campus lands and their evolution.

2.1 The Story of the Land

The following is a summary of the history of succession of the Symons Campus with input from Elder Doug Williams. The Phase 1 Background Report describes this story in more detail.

A billion years ago, many geophysical formations shaped the landscape that exists today. Subterranean rock folded upward and created a mountain range and an inland sea called the Ordovician Sea. Over the subsequent 450 million years mountains then became undulating hills and the sea retreated. There have also been four periods of glaciation, with the most recent retreating 12,000 years ago. These geological processes resulted in geologic strata comprising limestone over metamorphic rock, which is the predominant geological formation in the Trent lands at the present time. The latest glaciation left the recognizable drumlin formations that are evident on the landscape today. After the latest glaciation, vegetation had a new environment to colonize and animals had more habitat to populate. This new ecosystem would eventually attract bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers (Paleo-Indian).

Evidence of populations in Ontario date back to the Archaic Period (8000 BCE - 950 BCE), where populations used large base camps on islands, near river mouths and on the shores of embayments where a variety of flora, fish, and wild fowl resources could be obtained during the spring, summer and fall seasons.

Fur trading activities were underway in the eastern woodlands, but it wasn't until the 17th century when Samuel de Champlain arrived in the region and established the first direct contact between Europeans and Indigenous populations. In 1632, Champlain, described the Kawarthas as a beautiful area with bountiful flora and fauna. He also described the abundance of good, cleared land, abandoned by the Indigenous peoples due to wars.

According to the Elders, the Michi Saagiig have always existed in this territory. They would often travel either seasonally or for a number of seasons to lands and waters where game, food, and medicines were plentiful.

By the 1800s, European settlers moved north from Lake Ontario. Quickly, populations of animals diminished to supply the fur-trade and fishing became a significant resource for food and profit. The fertile soil created by the geomorphic processes promoted tree and vegetation growth, which resulted in the removal of trees for lumber and removal of vegetation for farming the fertile soils. Tracts of land were cleared of trees and vegetation for farming, and lumber mills were established along the river, one of which founded what is now the location of Nassau Mills Road, south of the Symons Campus. Lumber mills were the first instance of pollution in the Otonabee River, as the mills would dump sawdust and other pollutants directly into the river. Oral stories reflect that at the mouth of the Otonabee River at Rice Lake, boats would

only have a few inches of water to float as the river was so full of sawdust and debris.

From the geological processes to first land use to European colonization, this history tells the story of how the landscape that exists today took shape.

2.2 History of the Campus

The Trent University Act received Royal Assent in April 1963, and Trent University first opened its doors to students for the 1964-65 academic period at a temporary location in downtown Peterborough. Trent University was a grassroots dream of the community who desired a post-secondary institution in Peterborough, allowing their children to get a high-quality education at home. To support the creation of this new university, General Electric employees helped fund raise through a pay stipend, and the company donated 100 acres (40 hectares) of land in the north end of the City. Thomas H.B. Symons, Trent's founding president, and the first Board of Governors purchased or appropriated the land surrounding General Electric's gift, eventually growing the campus to approximately 1,440 acres (583 hectares) on both sides of the Otonabee River, to support the unforeseen future needs of the young university.

Professor Symons championed architect Ron Thom to design or oversee all matters relating to the physical presence of the University. The 1964 vision for Trent University was that of *"a residential university, based on the college system, designed to encourage the mixing together of many kinds of scholars and to avoid as far as possible the stratification of people in different disciplines."*¹

¹ Trent University. "Ron Thom's Master Plan for Trent". <https://www.trentu.ca/trentlandsplan/plan/1964-master-plan>. Accessed 04 October 2020.

The 1964 Ron Thom Master Plan

The 1964 Master Plan identifies the following key elements for the Trent University Campus:

- The Otonabee River as the main feature;
- The integration of the new university campus within the natural environment without compromise for either;
- The principle of a walking campus with no intrusion of vehicles;
- A consistent University character and building palette that reflects regional qualities;
- The library and academic square as the central and uniting space of the campus;
- An even distribution of colleges that enables each to distinguish itself from the rest;
- A grouping of the three basic science disciplines to allow for the ever-changing nature of their boundaries and collaborative faculties;
- A “meeting place of town and gown” and a natural attraction in the City of Peterborough, with a village at the end of the campus, planned to primarily serve the basic and recreational needs of staff and students, and the wider community;
- Opportunities for athletics, which are to contribute to the wellbeing of everybody throughout their university career;
- A public picnic site (developed by the Otonabee Conservation Authority) on the Trent Canal land to the south of the University, which may be paired with an inn;
- A scattering of the various faculties to encourage the infusion of disciplines;
- A flexible and adaptable electrical distribution system; and
- A framework that will allow for change and development, as opposed to a single definitive design for the entire university; a method of harmony without rigidity.

Evolution of the Symons Campus²

Once the renovations of the downtown Peterborough buildings were complete, Ron Thom designed the university’s flagship building, Champlain College, in close collaboration with founding president Thomas H.B. Symons, vice-president Denis Smith, and an advisory group of Trent’s board members, future professors, and students. The construction process was a mixture of craft and science, and unique at the time.

The design and construction of Champlain College was followed by Lady Eaton College, the Thomas H. Bata Library, and the Reginald Faryon Bridge.

The original design vision of the college buildings reflected an intimate approach to higher education, as opposed to the traditional large classrooms and lecture halls, with distinct buildings for student residences. Integration was a driving principles of the design of much of the campus, and a small student-to-teacher ratio a driver of classroom, common room, and even furniture design.

² Trent University. “Heritage Stewardship: The Architectural Vision”. <https://www.trentu.ca/heritage/architectural-vision>. Accessed 04 October 2020.