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[See table of contents](#)

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"BOOSTERISM" AND LOCATIONAL ANALYSIS OR
ONE MAN'S SWAN IS ANOTHER MAN'S GOOSE

Why is "something" (be it a railway, government office, factory, housing development, or whatever else) located where it is? This simple question can be explored numerous ways although Geographers generally approach it from the standpoint of location theory in which emphasis is placed on economic factors. Non-economic factors not heretofore given adequate consideration include what I call "boosterism", or the exaggerated proclamation of worth of a particular place over all others.¹ The development of "boosterism" probably begins with one or two individuals but then may grow, especially if newspapers are involved. Of course, the aggressive proclamation of worth of one place over all others is not universally accepted, hence the subtitle of this paper - "one man's swan is another man's goose".

The purpose of this brief paper is to outline something of the role of "boosterism" in the seat of government issue in Nineteenth Century Canada. While the ultimate selection of Ottawa as capital was made in Britain and then accepted by the Legislative Assembly in Canada, some inhabitants of the various cities under consideration were involved in putting forth the relative merits of their city. Such certainly was the case in Ottawa during the crucial 1857-1859 period,² but for the moment this paper will concentrate only on the pre-union period, that is, prior to the selection of Kingston as the new capital of the united Canadas.

Bytown (as Ottawa was called until 1855) came into existence in 1826 on a forest and swamp site near the confluence of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers, and was laid out by, and named after, Colonel John By, chief officer of the Royal Engineers who were responsible for constructing the Rideau Canal.

Several years before settlement began in Bytown itself, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor in Chief of British North America, planned for a fortified town, so what is now Parliament Hill may well have become the site of a military fortress. Colonel By also considered constructing

a fortress on the site and the Royal Engineers even went so far as to develop a plan for it. Barracks were built on part of the land which Dalhousie earlier had reserved for Crown use. It is also believed that while visiting the site in 1822 Dalhousie said: "I may not live so long, but whoever lives to see the Canadas united, will, from this eminence, see the seat of the United Legislature."³ Several other persons, including Colonel By also are reputed to have made similar comments.⁴

Bytown grew rapidly and was described by Bouchette in 1828 as having houses "of neatness and taste and streets laid out with much regularity, and of a liberal width that will hereafter contribute to the convenience, solubriety and elegance of the place."⁵ The population of Bytown in 1830 was said by the Perth *Examiner* to fluctuate because of "the greater or less demand for labour originating in the slowness or rapidity which the public works (principally the canal) are carried on."⁶ Another influence was the lumber trade, for, by 1830, Bytown had become the centre of the Ottawa Valley forest industry.⁷ Perhaps it was principally because of these two factors, that is the canal and the timber industry plus the perceived strategic importance of the site, that in 1830 the representative for Carleton presented to the Upper Canada House of Assembly the idea that Bytown was "the proper place for the seat of government",⁸ even though the town then had less than 1,000 permanent residents.

In 1835, in a letter between two prominent citizens of the Bytown region, it was suggested that for the capital of a united Canada:

Quebec [was] too distant from the west - Montreal indefensible - any place on the St. Lawrence too near the Enemy - and wherever it [the capital] may, it must in the first instance be attended by a heavy expense...⁹

The letter went on: "no part of Canada is so well fitted for the purpose [of capital] as Bytown", because it was equidistant between the two extremes of the country, a "reasonable distance from the frontier", there was "nearly enough of building stone about it", and, it was added, "with respect also to solubriety it is not exceeded by any place in the world".¹⁰

The survival of the above letter tells us that the idea was being generated, at least among the local elite, for proposing Bytown as the capital of an anticipated union. But while local private discussion was undoubtedly continued, the public airing of the idea began in earnest when Dr. A.J. Christie¹¹ started publishing the *Bytown Gazette* on June 9, 1836, for, until his death in 1843, the newspaper carried numerous editorials by Christie on why Bytown should be capital. The editorials stimulated others to respond, either in "letters to the editor" section of the *Bytown Gazette* or in editorials in newspapers in other cities, including Quebec, Montreal, Kingston, and Toronto.¹²

It is worthwhile noting that the many arguments advanced by Christie, and also by the authors of some of the letters printed in the newspaper, were essentially the reasons which ultimately led to the site being selected as seat of government.¹³ To summarize from the many editorials: Christie questioned the defensiveness of the towns along the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario and he suggested also that they were vulnerable to republican ideas and principles. Bytown, of course, would, he thought, be free from such dangers since it was away from the border and the site was militarily strong as well as being in the centre of the proposed united provinces and yet surrounded by a "loyal population". Interestingly, he further suggested that Bytown might be:

selected as the Capital of the united Canadas
without exciting those jealousies which could
arise from the choice of any other place.¹⁴

Other reasons he discussed included the inducement to new settlement in the Ottawa Valley that the seat of government in Bytown would give, new revenues would be generated for the Rideau Canal which provided easy communication between the St. Lawrence and the west, the presence of government owned property in Bytown, and the grandeur and beauty of the scenery. To criticism that Bytown was but an "embryo city consisting of a few houses huddled together" he asked if there was "the capital of any country under the sun which was not at one time in this condition."¹⁵

So convinced was Christie of Bytown's advantages for the site of the seat of government, that he seems to have assumed that his town was

the only logically possible location and therefore would be selected.¹⁶ Although he was ahead of his time in his conviction and Kingston was selected as the new capital of the united Canadas,¹⁷ Christie's writings spurred and also echoed "boosterism" in Bytown. The residents of the town thus demonstrated and voiced, sentiments not unusual to any one place or time.

Some residents of Bytown hated the name, so others were suggested. In 1835, for instance, Baker expressed the belief that a "more classical name" was needed and he suggested "'Aberdeen' in gratitude to the present Colonial Minister despite my reluctance to the Scottish sound of the name."¹⁸ Several years later, shortly before Governor Sydenham was to announce his selection for the seat of government, Christie and Derbshire (who was to be Bytown's first representative to the new Legislative Assembly) discussed the idea of changing the name from Bytown to Sydenham.¹⁹ Derbshire wrote of mentioning the "delicate matter" to Sydenham,²⁰ but the Governor seems not to have been swayed by this generous suggestion for he chose not to select Bytown - or Sydenham! - as his capital. Indeed, but unbeknown to Canadians, he had already ruled out Bytown as the location for the seat of government.²¹

Residents of Bytown and the town's other supporters have left us evidence in the form of letters, memoirs, and material contributed to the local newspaper, which tells us that a sort of campaign was mounted in an attempt to "boost" Bytown into being considered for the seat of government. In the years following 1841 pressures continued, finding a new forum in the Legislative Assembly.²² All through the period, that is, from the 1830's until 1859 when the site of Ottawa was finally accepted by the Legislative Assembly,²³ Bytown/Ottawa "boosters" were active in furthering their claims over the claims for all other places. Clearly, the idea for Bytown/Ottawa to be capital of the Canadas was not a new one in the 1850's but rather had been generated from the earliest days of its founding. The "boosterism" factor thus cannot be ignored when one turns to an analysis of Canada's seat of government issue.

Not all of the ramifications of the concept - and process - of "boosterism" have been made explicit in this brief paper and, indeed, I have focussed on only part of the first of several episodes of "boosterism" in Bytown/Ottawa as it related to the seat of government issue. Also, it is quickly acknowledged that other factors were also involved in the decision making process. However, it is hoped that the thoughts presented here in this case study will interest other researchers enough so that they too will search for and analyze non-economic factors, in addition to the usual economic factors now used, in their work on locational analysis. Obviously "boosterism" is only one facet of locational analysis, but its role should not be ignored.

David Knight

FOOTNOTES

1. It is acknowledged that "booster" sentiment may be at least partially based on economic considerations.
2. R.W. Scott, *The Choice of the Capital* (Ottawa: The Mortimer Company, 1907).
3. *Bytown Gazette*, January 14, 1844. A different version of Dalhousie's vision was "would you not be startled were I to add, that on that eminence may one day be the seat of Government?" Hamnet K. Pinhey to A.J. Christie, n.d., P.A.C., Hill Collection, M.G. 24, 19, Vol. I, p.44, and see letter in *Bytown Gazette*, March 7, 1844.
4. As recalled in the *Bytown Gazette*, August 28, 1840, and also mentioned in Lucien Brault, *Ottawa Old and New* (Ottawa: Ottawa Historical Information Institute, 1946), p.145.
5. J. Bouchette, *A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada with Remarks upon Upper Canada* (London: Longman, Rees, 1832).
6. *The Examiner* (Perth), November 26, 1830.
7. For the best social history of Carleton County and Bytown to 1854 see M.S. Cross, *Dark Druidical Groves: The Lumber Community and the Commercial Frontier in British North America, to 1854*, unpublished dissertation, University of Toronto, 1968.

8. The debate was recorded by the *York Observer*, March 1, 1830, and is reprinted in Edith G. Firth (ed.), *The Town of York 1815-1834: A Further Collection of Documents of Early Toronto*, Publications of the Champlain Society: Ontario Series, Vol. VIII (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1966), pp.23-30.
9. George W. Baker to Hamnett Pinhey, April 3, 1835, P.A.C., Hill Collection, Pinhey Papers, M.G. 24, I9, Vol. 10, p.2857.
10. *Ibid.*, pp.2857-2858.
11. See Courtney C.J. Bond, "Alexander James Christie, Bytown Pioneer: His Life and Times 1787-1843", *Ontario History*, Vol. LVI, No. 1 (March, 1964), pp.16-36, and Hamnett P. Hill, "The Bytown Gazette: A Pioneer Newspaper", Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records*, Vol. XXVII (1931), pp.407-423.
12. The fact that editors in other cities jested about Bytown as a potential location for the seat of government serves to indicate that they viewed Christie's "swan" as a "goose"! Not unexpectedly, they generally viewed *their* own cities as being the best location for the capital functions.
13. Two practically identical articles which concentrate on the 1857-1859 period are James A. Gibson, "The Choosing of the Capital of Canada", *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, Nos. 1 and 2 (1953), pp.78-85, *Idem*, "How Ottawa Became the Capital of Canada", *Ontario History*, Vol. XLVI, No. 4 (1954), pp.213-222.
14. *Bytown Gazette*, March 2, 1837.
15. *Bytown Gazette*, September 4, 1839.
16. Christie had long favoured union of the provinces and as editor of both the *Montreal Herald* in 1822 and later the *Bytown Gazette*, he wrote numerous columns in of the proposal. Once he moved to Bytown he became convinced that it would be the logical place for the capital of a union.
17. D.J. Pierce and J.P. Pritchett, "The Choice of Kingston as the Capital of Canada", Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1929, pp.57-63.
18. Baker to Pinhey, *op. cit.*, p.2858.
19. See Stewart Derbishire to Christie, October 6, 1840, P.A.C., Hill Collection, M.G. 24, I9, Vol. 4, pp.1009-1010, and Derbishire to Christie, December 30, 1840, P.A.C., Hill Collection, M.G. 24, I9, Vol. 4, p.1058.

20. Derbishire to Christie, October 6, 1840, *op. cit.*, p.1009.
21. C. Poulett Thomson to Lord John Russell, May 22, 1840, P.A.C., M.G. 11 Q, 272, pt. 1, pp.145-146.
22. One of the later chief political spokesmen for Ottawa's claims was Richard Scott. See his recollections, Scott, *op. cit.*
23. Province of Canada, *Journal of the Legislative Assembly 1859*, February 14, 1859, p.57. The Government was not moved to Ottawa until 1865. See C.C.J. Bond, "The Canadian Government Comes to Ottawa, 1865-1866", *Ontario History*, Vol. LV, No. 1 (1963), pp.23-34.