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A Cartographic Essay

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Introduction

The built-up area of the city rarely corresponds to the municipal boundary. As the city expands, its political limits usually change more slowly, if at all. This has been especially true in the twentieth century, when the typical pattern has been for fringe districts to incorporate as separate municipalities. The result is that central city residents have come to be an ever-decreasing proportion of the total urban population. Toronto is a case in point. In 1901 the City of Toronto contained over 95 percent of the population in the Toronto urban area. By 1941 this proportion had declined to about 75 percent and by 1986 to 19 percent.

This disjuncture between physical and political boundaries creates problems for those who wish to characterize and understand the city. Statistics on population, housing, construction, industry and so forth are often gathered by, or reported for, political jurisdictions rather than for urbanized areas. The changing size and economic significance of a city is difficult to assess. In Canada this was especially true prior to 1941, when the Dominion Bureau of Statistics first reported data for 'urban areas'. For earlier years it is necessary to aggregate data to arrive at useful estimates of, say, the total urban population of a city such as Toronto. Worse, since 'suburban' jurisdictions usually contained both urban and rural populations, aggregation might not yield accurate estimates for the urban area.

Faced with these difficulties, researchers may be tempted to cut corners. Two short-cuts are possible: to ignore the suburbs or to extrapolate evidence for the city to the entire urban area. Whether these short-cuts are reasonable depends in part upon the relative size of the suburbs. Generalizations about Toronto based upon evidence for the city are likely to be more reasonable for 1901 than for 1941. However, even when suburban settlement is relatively limited in extent, short-cuts can be dangerous if the suburbs are very different from the city. Since land is much cheaper at the fringe than at the centre, one of the ways in which suburbs typically differ is in their pattern of property ownership. Since at least the 1920s, social observers in many cities have noted that levels of home ownership increase away from the centre of the city. This has certainly been true of Toronto in the twentieth century. In 1901, for example, only 27 percent of all households in the City of Toronto owned the home they lived in, but the suburban rate, at 56 percent, was more than twice as high. The composite figure for the urban area (29 percent), then, was perceptibly higher than that for the city. More important, the dynamics of suburban construction were very different. Without building regulations, many suburban residents built their own, frequently modest, homes. This self-building option was a significant element in the urban housing market, providing an alternative to living 'doubled-up' downtown. To ignore Toronto's suburbs, even in 1901, would be to ignore a distinctive and important element of the urban whole.

For this reason, as background to a recent study of trends in housing tenure in Toronto, we believed it important to establish the exact extent to which urban development spilled out beyond city limits. The study as a whole was concerned with the period from 1861 to the present and involved taking cross-sectional samples at 20 year intervals. Since census data for the Toronto urban (later 'metropolitan') area were available from 1941, we required maps showing the extent of the built-up area in relation to municipal boundaries for 1861, 1881, 1901, 1921 and 1941. The available maps showing the built-up area are few in number and rarely pertain to the specific study years. Many of those that do exist are over-generalized and probably inaccurate. Accordingly, it was necessary to create our own.

The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss the six maps that we prepared. Five of these show the extent of the built-up area, in relation to municipal boundaries, for 1861, 1881, 1901, 1921 and 1941, respectively (Figures 1,2,3,4,5). The sixth map, a composite of the other five, provides a general overview of the growth of the built-up area from 1861 to 1941 (Figure 6). These maps should be of interest to anyone doing historical research on Toronto. Moreover, since there would appear to be few equivalent map series for other North American cities, their method of construction, discussed below, should be of more general interest.

The Growth of Toronto, 1861-1941

In the eighty years that are spanned by our maps, Toronto grew from a small commercial and industrial centre of about 45,000 people into a substantial city of close to a million. Growth occurred in almost every year, and certainly every decade. As in most cities, however, there were periods when growth was exceptionally rapid, interspersed with years when the
population stagnated and even, briefly, declined. Bursts of growth occurred in the early 1870s, the early 1880s and in the 1920s. The greatest boom, however, was that which began with the turn of the twentieth century and tailed off by 1914. Between 1901 and 1911 alone, the population of the city almost doubled, from 218,000 to 409,000. Similarly, there were distinct periods of slow, or no, growth. The most notable of these were the late 1870s, much of the 1890s, the war years of 1914-1918 and the 1930s.

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Our five snapshots of the city define four 20 year periods, each of which saw at least one period of rapid growth, as well as one of relative stagnation. As a result, each period, and especially the one between 1901 and 1921, saw significant expansion of the built-up area.

In the first half of our period, suburban development was incorporated, sooner or later, into the city. Nineteenth century suburbs, such as Yorkville to the north and Parkdale to the west, were annexed so that the city contained almost as high a proportion of the total urban population in 1901 (95.2 percent) as it did in 1871 (96.2 percent). An initial wave of annexations between 1883 and 1893 virtually doubled the area extent of the city. This containment trend continued into the first decade of this century when the city again doubled its territorial size between 1903 and 1914. After 1910, however, except for the annexation of West Toronto Junction and North Toronto, the more typical pattern was for new suburban districts to incorporate as separate political entities. By 1941 the western suburbs included the Village of Swansea (1925) and the late nineteenth-century industrial satellites of Long Branch, Mimico and New Toronto in the Township of Etobicoke (Figure 7). To the north lay the Townships of York, North York (1922) and East York (1923), together with the Villages of Forest Hill (1923) and Leaside (1919), taking in a large area that had once been York Township. To the east, Scarborough Township remained largely rural. By 1941 the city still dominated the urban area but, with over one quarter of the urban population, the suburbs had become a significant presence.

Sources

Existing maps do not offer a clear or precise impression of the timing and extent of Toronto's settlement and growth prior to the Second World War. Historical maps showing the built-up area were created at different times for diverse purposes, at different scales and with varying degrees of accuracy. No attempt had been made to record sequentially, and consistently, the growth of the built-up area. The only exception is a map produced for the Report of the Civic Transportation Committee in 1915, which shows the limits of the built-up area for the years 1889, 1899, 1904, 1909 and 1914. Unfortunately, these maps cover only a 25 year period, and the dates do not correspond very closely with those required for our study. More recently (in the early 1970s) an historical map showing the expansion of the urbanized area in 20 year increments, from 1830 to 1970, was prepared by the City Planning Board; but this map is highly generalized and largely based on early historic maps of questionable or unknown accuracy.

There are two ways of creating a fairly reliable series of maps for Toronto. The first, involving the mapping of city directory and assessment roll information for specific properties, would have yielded the most precise, and arguably the most accurate results. This procedure would, however, have been far too labour-intensive for the available resources. Instead, we decided to follow the alternative method of working with existing maps. Three main types of sources were employed: fire insurance atlases, topographic surveys, and historical maps. While only a few maps and atlases adequately matched our requirements, a number of others were found to be useful as secondary references (for checking other sources) and/or interesting in their own right. Space does not permit a full description of these sources, but for the benefit of other researchers in this area, a list of potentially useful sources for this period is provided below (Appendix 1).

When selecting the most appropriate information sources among these, three basic criteria were employed: date, accuracy and coverage. With respect to the dates of sources, it was necessary to look for sources that coincided with the dates used in the larger study. This was not easily accomplished: only rarely were exact matches found, hence for some maps there may be an inaccuracy factor of up to three years and possibly more. The 1861 map, for example, is based largely on the fire insurance maps in the Boulton atlas, dated 1858. Allowing for some further discrepancy between the date of survey and the date of publication (typically only a few months) makes it even more probable that the resultant map understates the full extent of development in 1861. Where possible, these discrepancies were noted and corrected by cross-
The accuracy of sources was a second concern. The reliability of historical maps must be questioned, since few provide adequate information concerning survey methods used and some may have even been created with an eye towards exaggerating the size of the built up area in the name of civic pride or boosterism. Fire insurance atlases are generally more trustworthy, since their publishers were more explicitly concerned with providing detailed and accurate information on existing buildings. Based on special surveys and Registered Plans, these maps and any subsequent revisions to them were scrupulously verified not only by surveyors but by interested property owners. Still, there may be some question about the accuracy of their coverage of residential properties at the margins of development. The topographic survey maps compiled by the Army Survey Establishment may also be considered quite accurate; these were most useful for showing the extent of development beyond the areas covered by the insurance atlases. The survey did not begin until 1904, however, and the dates of subsequent surveys unfortunately do not correspond very well with the dates for which information was desired.

The third important consideration was the extent of territorial coverage provided by the various sources. It was especially important to get accurate information for areas on the advancing edge of development. For the most part, the insurance atlases provided adequate coverage, but in some cases additional information on outlying areas had to be culled from other sources. It was found, for example, that the Goad's Atlas for 1923-4 did not extend far enough to capture the extent of development in some suburban areas; these could only be 'filled in' by referring to the 1918 topographic survey.

**Constructing the Maps**

In light of these considerations, the strategy used in compiling information for the map series was to rely principally on insurance atlases, while supplementing with information drawn from topographic surveys and relevant historical maps.

The exception to this is the 1941 map, which is based largely on the results of comprehensive land use survey undertaken for that year.

It was necessary, of course, to generalize considerably from the large-scale maps found in the insurance atlases. For the 1861 map, it was possible to retain much of the detail, but for the 1881-1921 maps, it was decided to classify the built-up area (mostly on a block-by-block basis) into one of two classes: fully developed (more than 75 percent) and partially developed (less than 75 percent). Areas less than 10 percent developed or so were not considered significant enough to be mapped. This breakdown was intended to provide a clearer picture of which areas were more or less fully built up at any given time and in which directions new development was occurring. This classification, of course, could not be used for the 1941 map, which was based on an existing, already generalized, secondary map. For the composite map no breakdown was provided either; it shows all areas at least partially developed for each period in sequence.

The base maps used to plot the accumulated information were chosen to reflect as accurately as possible the changing configuration of city boundaries, shorelines, rivers, street patterns and physical contours for the different periods in question. A potential problem that arises in the selection of base maps is that "most maps created largely from survey plans tend to include some features proposed but not on the ground". Since these 'features' refer principally to planned subdivisions and since our emphasis is on areas that have actually been built upon, this problem may be of no great consequence. It should be noted, however, that certain inaccuracies, in the street pattern or shoreline for example, may have been inadvertently reproduced. We considered that the official city plans would be the most accurate and used them where possible. In some cases other requirements, such as broader areal coverage, necessitated the use of different, and possibly less reliable, sources. The sources used as base maps are listed below.

The actual mechanics involved in producing the map series are fairly straightforward and can perhaps be best described by reference to a single example. We will take the 1861 map as our illustration. As mentioned above, the main source of information for the first map in the series was the Boulton fire insurance atlas of 1858. The plates in this atlas, constructed for fire insurance purposes, are very detailed (1:1200), allowing for the representation of both specific streets and buildings (Figure 8). In proceeding from this source to the
final map, a two-stage procedure was employed. First, information was transferred onto Chewett's (1866) 1:12,000 base map. In this case, the reduction in scale did not demand a great omission of detail. Developed lots were shaded in on a property-by-property basis. Where only a portion of a large lot was developed, the building area alone was shaded. In some cases clusters of adjacent properties containing only one or two undeveloped lots would be fully shaded in.

The resulting (intermediate) map was checked against, and found to be relatively consistent with, historical maps of roughly the same period and scale, in this case maps by J. Ellis (1857-58) and James Bain (1859). Unfortunately, these maps were all limited in their coverage to territory within the city boundaries of the time. Additional sources were therefore consulted to provide a picture of the extent of development outside the city. These maps included Tremaine’s (1860) map of the County of York (Figure 9) as well as some highly accurate army reconnaissance maps (Fawkes, 1868a, 1868b, 1869; Gehle, 1868a, 1868b). The information compiled from these sources was plotted, along with that of the intermediate map, onto the final map. The final map used as its base Goad’s map of the City of Toronto and Suburbs, with street pattern and shoreline suitably revised by cross-referencing against earlier maps such as Tremaine’s. Once again, in transcribing information from the intermediate map to the final product it was possible to retain a fair amount of detail. Where generalization was necessary, it was done mainly by block face.

The other maps were all constructed in more-or-less the same fashion, via a two-step process of generalization and verification. As the city grew, the intermediate maps became larger and the final maps more generalized. Even the 1921 map, however, is based on a block-by-block analysis. For those who are interested, the more detailed (intermediate) maps may be consulted in the Map Room of Robarts Library at the University of Toronto.

Appendix 1
A Chronological Listing of Selected Maps and Atlases of Toronto, 1840-1941.

Abbreviations
CTA City of Toronto Archives
MTL Metro Toronto Public Reference Library
UT Map Collection, Robarts Library, University of Toronto
JRRRC John Ross Robertson Collection; ‘a catalogue of the maps and plans of the Town of York, Upper Canada, 1788-1834 and of York after being incorporated as the City of Toronto from 1834-1908’ (UT, MTL)

Historical Maps Showing the Built Up Area.
Cane, James Topographical plan of the city and liberties of Toronto. Surveyed, drawn and published by James Cane, Eng. and printed by Sherman Smith, New York. Scale (ca. 1:5,500) (Toronto), 1842. (JRRRC, UT, MTL)
No Author. City of Toronto, C.W. (Toronto), 1857. (MTL)
Ellis, J. Map of the City of Toronto, C.W. (Toronto), 1857-58. (CTA)
Fawkes, F.H. Sketch sheet of a reconnaissance of ground in the neighbourhood of Toronto lying in the 2nd and 3rd concession from the Bay, east and west of Yonge Street, December quarter, 1868. (Signed) F.H. Fawkes, Lieutenant R.E.; F.C. Hassard, Col. R.E. Scale (ca. 1:14,500) 1868(a). (UT)
Fawkes, F.H. Sketch sheet of a reconnaissance of ground in the neighbourhood of Toronto lying principally in the third concession from the Bay, and extending from the Humber eastwards, September quarter, 1868. (Signed) F.C. Hassard, Col. R.E.; F.H. Fawkes, Lieutenant R.E. Scale (ca. 1:11,800) 1868(b). (UT)
Gehle, Henry John Wolsteyn. Sketch sheets of winter reconnaissance of the country east of Toronto, between the Don River and the Townships of Scarbourough on the E. and the Don and Danforth Road on the N. to the Lake Shore. (Signed) H.J.W. Gehle Royal Engineers. Scale [ca. 1:14,500] 1868(a). (UT)
Gehle, Henry John Wolsteyn. Sketch sheets of winter reconnaissance of the country W. of Toronto to the Humber River and N. to the Davenport Road. (Signed) H.J.W. Gehle, Lieutenant R.E.; F.C. Hassard ... R.E. Scale [ca. 1:16,300] 1868(b). (UT)
Fawkes, F.H. Sketch of a reconnaissance of ground in the neighbourhood of Toronto, being the eastern extremity of the 2nd and 3rd concessions from the Bay. (Signed) H.C. Hassard. Scale (1:10,560) 1869. (UT)
Illustrated historical atlas of the county of York; selected and reprinted from the original 1879 edition. (Toronto): Peter Martin Associates, 1969. (UT)
Canniff, William. Original Settlements, 1878. Surveyed by John O. Browne, in Historical Atlas of York... (Hooper, 1941)
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Toronto Transportation Commission. Toronto Metropolitan Area showing transportation services and distribution of population. (Toronto: T.T.C., 1921). (MTL, UT)

Toronto Transportation Commission. Population Distribution, City of Toronto. (Toronto: T.T.C.), 1930. (MTL)


Toronto Transportation Commission. Population Distribution, City of Toronto. (Toronto: T.T.C.), 1938. (MTL)

Toronto Transportation Commission. Normal routes: street car, bus and coach services. (Toronto: T.T.C.), 1941 (UT, Hooper)

Hooper, Nadine A. Toronto Metropolitan Area and The Umland of Toronto in 'Toronto: A Study in Urban Geography.' Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 1941. (UT)

Advisory Committee on Housing Vacancies (Houses). Map showing extent of unused land by ward districts. [Toronto]: 1942. (CTA)

Insurance Atlases.

Boulton, W.S., 1858. Atlas of the City of Toronto and Environs. Toronto: W.S. Boulton and Co. (MTL)

Goad, Charles E., 1884. Atlas of the City of Toronto and Vicinity. From a Special Survey Founded on Registered Plans and Showing all Buildings and Lot Numbers. (Surveyed between 1879 and 1883; verified and revised November and December 1883.) Toronto: Charles E. Goad, Civil Engineer. (CTA, MTL, UT)


Plans of the City of Toronto (reference maps).

Browne, Harry John. Plan of the city of Toronto showing the government survey and the registered subdivision into lots according to plan filed in the Office of the City Registrar.Compiled and drawn by H.J. Browne under the direction of J.O. Browne, Provincial Land Surveyor. Scale (ca. 1:4,000) Toronto: Fuller & Bencke, 1862. (CTA, MTL, UT)

Chewett, W.C. and Company. City of Toronto compiled from surveys made to the present date, 1866. Toronto: W.C. Chewett & Co., 1866. (CTA, UT)

Copp Clark & Co., Toronto. City of Toronto compiled from surveys made to the present date. 1874. Scale 1:9,700. Toronto: Hart & Rawlinson, 1879. (UT)

Goad, Charles E. City of Toronto and Suburbs. Scale (ca. 1:28,000) from Atlas... Toronto: Charles E. Goad, 1884. (UT, MTL)


Toronto, City Engineer. Plan of the City of Toronto. Scale (ca 1:20,000). Toronto: Copp Clark, 1898. (UT, CTA)

Toronto, City Engineer. Plan of the City of Toronto. Scale (ca 1:20,000). Toronto: Copp Clark, 1899. (UT, CTA)

Toronto, City Engineer. Plan of the City of Toronto. Scale (ca 1:20,000). Toronto: Copp Clark, 1902. (UT, CTA)

Copp Clark & Company, Toronto. Plan of the City of Toronto. Scale (ca 1:21,120). Toronto: Copp Clark, 1903. (UT, CTA)

Toronto, City Engineer. Plan of the City of Toronto. Scale (1:24,000). Toronto: Toronto Litho. Company, Ltd., 1907. (UT, CTA)

Toronto, City Surveyor. Plan of the City of Toronto. Compiled by City Surveyor and City Engineer; Alexander & Cable Lithographing Co. Ltd. Scale (1:24,000) Toronto: City Engineer, 1912. (CTA, UT)

Map Company. Map of Greater Toronto and suburbs. Compiled, drawn and published by the Map Company... Toronto. Scale 1:24,000. Toronto, 1914. (UT, MTL)

Map Company. Map of Greater Toronto and suburbs. Compiled, drawn and published by the Map Company... Toronto. Scale 1:24,000. Toronto, 1914. (UT, MTL)


Toronto, City Surveyor. Plan of the City of Toronto. Tracey D. LeMay. Toronto: City Engineer, 1921. (CTA)

Toronto, City Surveyor. Plan of the City of Toronto. Tracey D. LeMay. Toronto: City Engineer, 1923. (CTA)

The Map Company. Lloyd's Map of Greater Toronto and Suburbs. Compiled, drawn and published by the
Map Company. Scale (ca. 1:18,000) Toronto: The Map Company, 1925. (CTA, MTL)


Toronto, City Surveyor. Plan of the City of Toronto. Tracey D. LeMay. Toronto: City Engineer, 1941. (CTA, MTL)


Notes

1 J.C. Teaford, City and Suburb. The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970 (Baltimore, 1979).


3 Ibid.


5 The project as a whole was concerned with documenting trends in housing tenure in Toronto and Montreal. See R.Harris and M.Choko, The Evolution of Housing Tenure in Montreal and Toronto since the Mid-Nineteenth Century, Research Paper No.186 (Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, August, 1988). The support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Grant No. 410-87-1393) is gratefully acknowledged.

6 J.M.S.Careless, Toronto to 1918. An Illustrated History (Toronto, 1984); P.G.Goheen, Victorian Toronto, 1850-1900 (Research Paper No.127, Department of Geography, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1970); J.T.Lemon, Toronto since 1918. An Illustrated History (Toronto, 1985).


9 Ibid.


12 For discussion of the use of assessments for this purpose see Gad, "Methodological Problems..."

13 It is worth noting that this procedure did not cause us to ignore especially accurate and comprehensive maps for intermediate years: there are none!


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Figure 2 (c1881): Canniff, 1878; Goad, 1884; Harris, et.al., 1915; Hooper, 1941; Toronto, City Engineer, 1902.
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Figure 3 (c1901): Canada, Army Survey Establishment, 1904; Goad, 1903; Harris, et.al., 1915; Toronto, City Engineer, 1907.
The Growth of Toronto, 1861-1941

Figure 4 (c.1921): Canada, Army Survey Establishment, 1918; Goad, 1923/24; Harris, et.al., 1915; The Map company, 1925; Toronto Transportation Commission, 1921.
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Figure 5 (c 1941): Hooper, 1941; Toronto Transportation Commission, 1938, 1941.