

# History of Mississauga

Humble names they are indeed, even today; Streetsville, Clarkson, Port Credit. In 1800 they didn't even exist. One by one they struggled into existence as tiny, isolated hamlets in the woods, separated by stretches of rolling, thickly forested country, connected only by muddy and bumpy wagon tracks, depending on the season.

Who would have thought in 1798, when one of the region's first settlers built an inn near the mouth of the Credit River, that later these fledgling settlements would coalesce in reality and in spirit to form the dynamic and progressive City of Mississauga, sixth largest city in Canada.

But constant change has always characterized the land that is now Mississauga. The last great glaciation, almost two kilometers thick, retreated in a vast sweep over the region some 9,000 years ago, leaving behind a swampy, scarred wasteland. Slowly the great forest rose, and with it came an abundance of animal life and then Canada's first people. Bands of Mississaugas occupied the land – present day site of the city. This land was purchased by the British Government in 1806 and 1818. Here the Mississaugas lived in villages growing corn, and other vegetables. They hunted and fished creating trails in the forest.

## ***Trails became super highways!***

French traders later found the Mississaugas willing providers of wolf, fox, bear, muskrat and other pelts in exchange for tools, guns, clothing and liquor, and so began commerce and increasing movement over the land. The Indian trails soon became tracks between Muddy York (Toronto) and Niagara-on-the-Lake, one of which would run parallel to the first super highway in Canada, with the nation's first cloverleaf interchange – Queen Elizabeth Way.

Hardly pioneer settlers, with names such as Cook, Cody, Silverthorn, Wilcox and Marigold came to clear the land and brave enormous hardships in creating a life out of the wilderness, for a true wilderness it was. Unless a family was wealthy, the first homes were typically small, crude and drafty log structures, scarcely capable of keeping at bay the relentless blasts of the long winters. But these settlers cut from the finest moulds, kept on.

Most persevered through these harsh times, eventually building substantial homes and businesses for themselves and their children's future, indeed for the future of a city itself. From the strength of their efforts, and that of others like them, arose a handful of scattered settlements, in turn forging the sturdy backbone of a modern city with perhaps the strongest most diverse economy for a city its size in the entire nation. Of such grit were these early settlers made.

## ***Streetsville***

Streetsville, one of the earliest villages, by 1820 had only a humble house or two surrounded by lofty trees. But within four years there were two taverns, two stores, Timothy Street's gristmill and sawmill, a tannery, distillery, two smiths, several other businesses, a church, and even a school.

Later, in the 1840's brothers Robert and William Barber built an exclusive woolen mill operation in the village, the first large industry in the township and a forerunner of the incredible economic base that would develop in the City of Mississauga. The Barbers would be astounded to know that the city they helped to found ranks today as the fourth largest office headquarters centre in all of Canada.

Until the late 1820's Port Credit existed only as the site of the way station, Government Inn, and an Indian settlement at the mouth of the Credit River. In their birchbark canoes the Mississaugas fished the local waters for salmon in late summer, just as today's anglers are drawn to the waterfront by the excitement of the Great Salmon Hunt, the city's world famous fishing tournament – and the world's largest fishing derby.

A warehouse and two wharves, built by 1836 on the east bank of the Credit held lumber and grain for export, and shipbuilding became an important industry. Today exports from Port Credit no longer take place. Here instead is a yachtsman's paradise, the Port Credit Harbour Marina and Yacht Club, boasting every conceivable amenity, with more than fifty-five acres and 1,100 ships.

## ***Malton***

In the region's northeastern corner, a little hamlet was named Malton after an early settler's Yorkshire birthplace. The surrounding acreage was found to be particularly well suited for growing wheat. During this time, well before the opening of the great Canadian prairies, Malton became a wheat handling station, serving the needs of eastern city-dweller.

As western wheat fields gradually expanded, the demand for Ontario wheat declined, and in the 1930's the Toronto Harbour Commission bought thirteen of those farms for land to build an airport, Lester B. Pearson International, with direct connections all over the world for more than 31 million passengers in 2010 alone.

## ***Cooksville***

Another of the township's oldest villages is Cooksville, located near the region's centre. From the earliest days Cooksville has always aimed toward tomorrow. Daniel Harris, perhaps the area's first settler in 1807, had his carpenter's eye on the future when he staked his claim, built a sawmill and started turning out wood.

In 1819 he sold part of his land to Jacob Cook, who turned a local horseback mail route into a full-blown operation from Kingston to Goderich to Niagara-on-the-Lake, in addition to building a stagecoach service from Hamilton to Toronto.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Cooksville had become a bustling commercial and service centre with many businesses and more than 250 people, when disaster struck. In 1852 a fire swept through the town, destroying most of the buildings. Undefeated and resolute, the village began to rebuild and remained an important administrative and commercial centre and later to become part of Mississauga.

## ***Mississauga City - born***

The formation of the present day City of Mississauga began January 1, 1952, when the lower half of Toronto Gore Township (all the land south of Steeles Avenue) was annexed by Toronto Township.

In 1968, the town of Mississauga was born. Six years later the town absorbed its two incorporated villages, Streetsville and Port Credit to become the City of Mississauga.

Just north of the site of early Cooksville is the Mississauga Civic Centre, energetic and thriving focal point of transportation, retail, office, recreational, cultural and administrative facilities, and Square One, Canada's fourth largest shopping mall, with 360 stores. Just imagine today what Harris and Cook would say if they could see what they had started.

## ***City with vision***

With a view always to the future, Mississauga is planning new facilities at the City Centre, and Square One is always being expanded and enhanced. Though modern Mississauga sparkles with newness and an energetic dynamism that's ready to leap into tomorrow, there is always an eye on the past, on the city's roots.

The fabulous City Hall, designed by architects Jones and Kirkland of Toronto, is strongly reminiscent of farmsteads that once occupied much of Mississauga, with shadows of farm houses, barns, silos, and perhaps a windmill appearing in the design. The past in Mississauga is indeed a reflection of the future.

## **Case Study Questions:**

1. Where did the first settlers arrive in the area? In what year did this occur?
2. Mississauga is the \_\_\_\_\_ largest city in Canada.
3. Who were the people who first occupied the land known as Mississauga?
4. What did the French trade with the Mississaugas?
5. What was Toronto known as in the past? Describe.
6. Describe what the homes of the area looked like during the pioneer period.
7. What industry was the forerunner to the economic base that would develop into the city of Mississauga?
8. What were the three important activities at the Credit in 1836?
9. Where does Mississauga rank in terms of office headquarters in Canada?
10. What was Malton known for? Why did this change?
11. What was Streetsville known for? Why did this change?
12. a) When did Mississauga become a town?  
b) When did Mississauga become a city?
13. a) In which region is City Hall located?  
b) What are some of the activities and buildings in the area?  
c) Explain the special design features of City Hall.