

on the WATERFRONT

DAY TWO

ON THE WATERFRONT PART TWO OF A SIX PART SERIES | BY MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Photography by BRIAN THOMPSON Brantford Expositor/QMI Agency

Tracing the legacy of the Grand River settlements

MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Expositor Staff

In their determination to present a dual legacy of native and non-native settlement and development along the Grand River, the writers of the Waterfront Master Plan present a radically different interpretation of the Brantford area's cultural heritage as one 11,000-year sweep of history.

They use a vast archaeological record that places a strong emphasis on recurring patterns of settlement of the area by aboriginal groups over thousands of years, and the first century of industrial and commercial development and settlement after Europeans began arriving in the 1780s.

That view is very different from what local schoolchildren have been taught for decades. In the official text, the city's history begins at a point when Thayendanegea, or Chief Joseph Brant, arrived at Brant's Crossing in 1784 while leading the Mohawks to a mainly vacant area from upstate New York to assume occupation of the Haldimand Tract.

Soon after, he handed out leases for tracts of land to be taken up by British settlers around what was first called Mohawk Village, and set off the dual relationship that endures.

But the writers of the master plan contend the area's real cultural history and settlement along the waterfront are much longer, and should be traced back to the first communities known to the archaeological record, which dates back



Brantford's Bell Homestead is a National Historic Site and a Heritage Archaeological Site.



A view of the Grand River, with Brant Park to the left, and a portion of Brantford Golf and Country Club at lower right.



A placard near the Brantford Armouries denotes the Grand as a Canadian Heritage River.

to 9,000 B.C.

They further recommend that the record be better publicly interpreted and promoted as a heritage resource for education, culture, tourism and other purposes, in consultation with Six Nations.

But those proposals are encountering early resistance from Six Nations quarters.

When the master plan was being approved in principle in June, Chief Coun. Bill Montour sent Mayor Mike Hancock a letter and issued a news release raising concerns about the process used to write the document.

Montour said he was "discouraged and frustrated" at what he called the city's reluctance to acknowledge Six Nations land rights and interests within the watershed, or to undertake what he considered proper consultation with a neighbour.

"All references to centuries of Six Nations history and to land claims were left out of the draft waterfront master plan," Montour wrote.

He notified Hancock that the



ON THE WATERFRONT

Brantford is undertaking a massive reconsideration of its waterfront, a stretch of more than 25 kilometres of the Grand River and with more than 70 kilometres of trails from where it enters the city in the northwest to where it leaves in the Oxbow.

The city recently approved the Waterfront Master Plan after a year of study, numerous public consultation meetings, workshop sessions with stakeholders and experts, and hours of debate at meetings of council.

Ready for implementation in the next term of council, the master plan holds a multitude of ideas that would greatly transform key areas of the city along the waterfront.

Over the past year, Expositor reporter Michael-Allan Marion attended most of the sessions, conducted many separate interviews, and did his own research on important issues in the writing of the master plan.

On The Waterfront, a six-day series, is the result of his coverage.

SATURDAY – 20 Years, 43 Recommendations, \$8 million, One Waterfront Master Plan: Priceless

MONDAY – Tracing the Legacy of the Grand River Settlements

TUESDAY – The Northwest: An Eco-Haven to be Guarded

WEDNESDAY – Rediscovering Holmedale's Charm

THURSDAY – Going Lower Downtown

FRIDAY – Eagle Place: A New Southern Gateway



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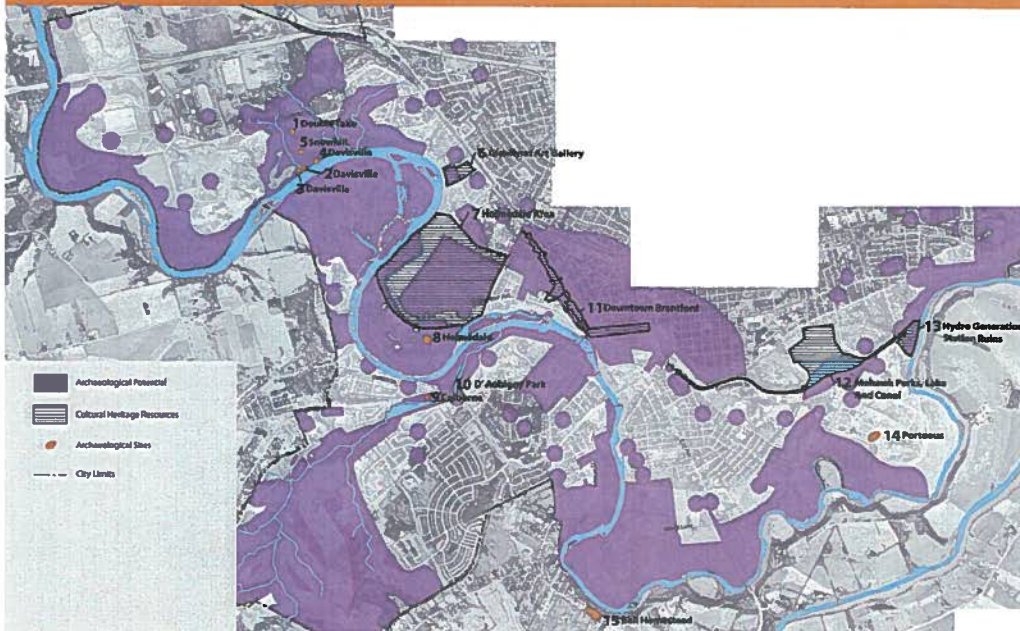
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DAY TWO

Heritage & Culture Framework



band council and administration would pull a staff member who was sitting as an observer on the Waterfront Task Force overseeing the writing of the master plan, and step back from further participation until those issues are settled.

So far, there has been no visible movement to resolve them. "I understand their perspective that there are unresolved land claims," said Coun. Marguerite Ceschi-Smith, who chairs the task force, "but what's proposed in the master plan is for the overall benefit of all peoples and the water. I still hope that this could be the opportunity for us to come together and engage in serious dialogue. We all share the river."

Regardless of the outcome of that discussion, the final approved draft of the master plan will continue to hold to the concept of the long continuous sweep of history.

"Attesting to the importance of this area as a focus of human settlement are the dozens of archaeological sites that have been registered along the Grand River dating to almost every millennium between 11,000 years ago and today," the master plan says.

"The majority of pre-contact sites represent the remains of small camps occupied for short lengths of time, as people moved throughout their traditional territories on a seasonal basis."

"The relatively large number of early villages documented in the Brantford region points to this portion of the Grand as having been one of the core areas of the agricultural revolution that occurred toward the end of the first millennium A.D."

Ron Williamson, of Archaeological Services Inc., who wrote those sections of the master plan as part

of the consulting team, says Brantford is replete with excavations and artifacts that are well documented in academic journals and familiar to experts in the field, but mostly unknown to the general public.

In public sessions in the writing of the master plan and in front of the task force, Williamson spoke at length about 15 sites across the city, either with documented digs or with known archaeological potential.

In one session, to give a flavour of the rich historical legacy he placed special emphasis on one site in Holmedale, where a wealth of artifacts shows a transition of aboriginal society from hunter-gather to agricultural village life.

"This site is so important that it is featured in discussions among archaeologists," he said. "I'll bet many of you in this room are hearing what I've said for the first time."

In an interview, Williamson said

changing contemporary perceptions of modern, post-colonial communities in Ontario and getting residents to appreciate the longer historical roots beyond their own experiences is a challenge.

"It's an interesting question we face across the province," he said. "There persists a perception that is colonial in nature."

In building aboriginal components into an overall record, "there are parts of the province in which the history is rich and parts where it is not," he said.

"The Brantford area is particularly rich. What we have is a complex 11,000-year history of more or less continuous movement up and down the Grand, and periodic settlement by different groups in this area."

"It should be better understood and celebrated."

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Coun. Marguerite Ceschi-Smith

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Chief Coun. Bill Montour

Here are the main archaeological sites highlighted in the master plan's recommendations (See map), which have significance for both native and non-native history:

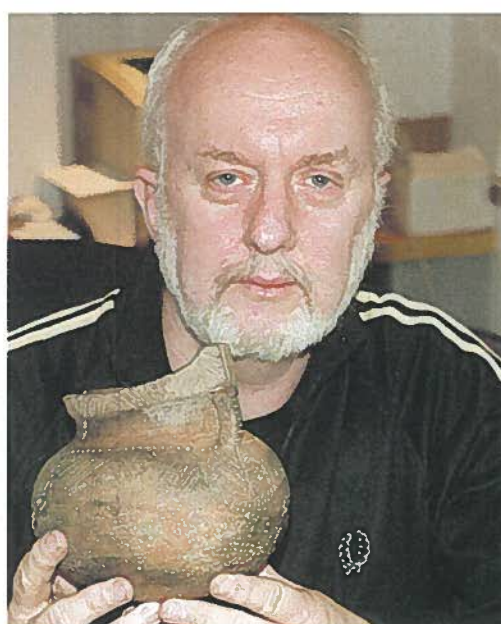
- **Double Take** -- Discovered within a proposed residential development, yielded Late Paleoindian projectile points (spear, arrow heads) about 8,000 B.C., as well as Middle Woodland arrows and pottery.
- **Davisville** -- While many Mohawks resided in the vicinity of Her Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks in the early 19th century, the Davisville mission site, on the north shore of the Grand River across from Brant Park Conservation Area was a second noteworthy location. Both Mohawks and the Mississaugas lived in the settlement. Between 2002 and 2004, archaeological investigations revealed large deposits of burned bone, most of them from deer, muskrat and beaver. Also recovered were lead shot, glass beads, shell wampum beads, gunflints and metal scrap.
- **Snowhill** -- Discovered within an area of proposed residential development lands. Dates to the Late Paleoindian period, circa 8,000 B.C.
- **Glenhyrst Art Gallery** -- Originally the mansion of Brantford industrialist Edmund Cockshutt, its grounds front onto the river and contain buildings that are designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.
- **Holmedale** -- Rich in pre-contact history, recovered from archaeological sites, artifacts and oral history. Part of it was a Woodland period settlement, located on a local terrace of an oxbow near the water treatment plant. Radiocarbon dating verifies charred corn and walnut shells from A.D. 984 to A.D. 1020. The area also contains structures and artifacts of an early industrial period for Brantford, including a dam and canal and remnants of mills. Landsdowne Park was built in the northern part of Holmedale as a planned community to settle workers and their families with clusters of cottages. The master plan recommends that a feasibility study be done to designate the Holmedale area as a cultural heritage landscape under the Ontario Heritage Act.
- **Colborne** -- Salvage excavations conducted on a stretch of Colborne Street West reveal remnants of aboriginal occupation in the Middle Woodland period.
- **D'Aubigny Park** -- Discovered during an archaeological assessment of a proposed watermain in a soccer pitch. A subsequent excavation recovered fragments of ceramic sherd and maize kernels.
- **Mohawk Lake, Mohawk Park and the Canal** -- These features are the remnants of the great canal project of the Grand River Navigation Co. When the company took over the stretch in 1848, it elevated the water levels for a turning basin for industrial operations. The former canal and locks were a focus for a number of industries** The canal was taken out of operation in 1875, and was later turned into an amusement park. The Brantford Canoe Club held regattas on the lake. The city took over the property in 1915.

"It's an interesting question we face across the province. There persists a perception that is colonial in nature. ...there are parts of the province in which the history is rich and parts where it is not. The Brantford area is particularly rich. What we have is a complex 11,000-year history of more or less continuous movement up and down the Grand, and periodic settlement by different groups in this area. It should be better understood and celebrated."

Ron Williamson, of Archaeological Services Inc



A sign posted on the Lorne Bridge identifies the Grand River as a Canadian Heritage River.



Ron Williamson is the chief archaeological from Archaeological Services Inc. in Toronto.

The master plan makes the following recommendations to protect and enhance Brantford's aboriginal and early European archaeological heritage. It will be up to the new council to consider their implementation:

- Prepare interpretation plans for archaeological sites in the Northwest, Holmedale, Colborne Street, D'Aubigny Creek and other sites. **Cost: \$50,000.**
- Complete a feasibility study to designate the Holmedale area as a cultural heritage landscape under the Ontario Heritage Act. **Cost: \$25,000.**
- Complete a feasibility study to designate Mohawk Park, Mohawk Lake, the canal and the Alfred Watts generating station ruins. **Cost: \$10,000.**

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