

Industry and the Environment Conference

This paper will sketch some of the physical and environmental changes that occurred in Indiana, the largest Industrial town in Haldimand County, in the 19th century. Over a span of just seventy years the town grew up, prospered and then fell away into obscurity. In my work I have been particularly interested in discovering why that happened and in finding out whether Indiana was unique in this regard or whether many other towns suffered similar fates. Here I will focus on how the residents and workers of Indiana might have experienced their physical environment and how it changed over the years from its initial roots as an agrarian society that was developing industrial technology in the 1830s, to a fully rural-industrial community by the 1860s and finally reverting back to its agrarian lifeways by the turn of the 20th century.

The History of Indiana: the early years

As the nineteenth century progressed, modes of transportation and communication rapidly changed: influencing lifestyles, standards of living, occupations, education, and even the manipulation of the environment by individuals and businesses. As in most small towns of its time, transportation in Indiana was complicated, with roads in constant need of repair. Not surprisingly, it was believed in the early part of the nineteenth century that it was considerably cheaper to transport goods via waterways than by land, particularly when roads were either non-existent or poorly maintained.¹ Indeed, merchants, military personnel, traders and governments all pushed for navigable highways.²

Entrepreneurs of this developing province would also have anticipated the need to move lumber, beef, pork, flour, whiskey and other goods along improved transportation routes.³ Additionally, the area along the Grand River was said to be a haven for resource extraction as it was described as having an “inexhaustible supply of timber” and the quarries along the river banks contained very pure white gypsum plaster.⁴ Thus the need to utilize the Grand River was obviously an important component to the development of towns along its banks.

The town of Indiana was situated on the Grand River approximately 22 miles from the mouth of the river at Lake Erie.⁵ Although navigation was possible on the Grand River, the water was frequently shallow, making movement difficult for heavily laden vessels. Existing technology had the potential to improve navigation along the river and there were many who believed that adoption of such advances could easily translate into high profits. Chief among the promoters were William Hamilton Merritt and David Thompson.⁶ As early as 1832, the Grand River Navigation Company (GRNC) was incorporated, with David Thompson holding twenty-five percent of the shares in the company.⁷ The intent of the company was to build five locks in a north-westerly direction between Indiana and Caledonia. Its mandate was to improve navigation from the mouth of the Grand River to Brantford, which encompassed 57½ miles.⁸ Thus, in 1833, in order to render the Grand River navigable, and to overcome the falls the GRNC began the improvement of the river.⁹ Canalers, boatmen, carpenters, blacksmiths and labourers were put to work on the installation of lock No. 1 at Indiana, which was the first of eight locks erected between Indiana and Brantford,

and the first of five locks built by the GRNC.¹⁰ Useable water transportation was one of the most important factors in Indiana's development, as this waterway facilitated the transfer of people and goods from Lake Erie, along the Grand River, to Brantford and beyond.

When Cayuga North Township was opened for settlement in 1831 Thompson was among the first settlers, securing mill sites Number 1 and 2 on the Grand River at the first rapids.¹¹ By the time Lock No. 1 was constructed at Indiana, Thompson was establishing water-powered mills adjacent to the Lock.¹² In 1845, twelve years after the GRNC began work on the canal in Indiana, David Thompson built Ruthven Mansion that was on land that was adjacent to the town of Indiana. David Thompson was an entrepreneur, miller, developer and the first Member of Parliament for Haldimand County in 1841.¹³ He was also the visionary behind the growth and development of the town of Indiana.

Generally, as towns developed in Upper Canada, a post office was customarily placed within a store. The post office provided the communication and commercial linkages in and between towns, while the school house and church gave a sense of social cohesion to the local community. Economic activities centred on the flour and grist mills, saw mills and other types of small workshops.¹⁴ In Indiana there were many such linkages through a variety of businesses that came and went over the years. Beginning in 1837, the first post office opened in Indiana. Then from the 1830s through the 1860s, Indiana saw the growth of one grist mill, two saw mills, one carding mill, a cooperage, a pail mill, a brick and tile yard, several inns, a school, numerous general stores, two

grocers, and two distilleries, as well as the artisanal shops of a number of blacksmiths, shoemakers, masons, carpenters and plasterers. A Roman Catholic Church and cemetery were built in 1841, and a Presbyterian church was erected by the Thompson family in 1851.¹⁵ Apart from business and religious activities, a variety of recreational facilities existed in and around Indiana, including a ball field and a nearby horse race track.¹⁶ There were other diversions such as taverns that were licensed by the government. Specifically, there were eleven licenses issued in Seneca Township in 1869, four of which were issued to establishments in Indiana.¹⁷ Clearly alcohol consumption was a very important leisure pursuit in and around Indiana.

Interspersed with the businesses and recreation facilities in the town plan that was first drawn in 1846 and subsequently registered in 1862,¹⁸ there were 117 house lots many of which had houses built on them for workers and their families. It appears that the majority of labourers in the early years however did not live in the town itself but rather in make-shift shanties that sprung up along the river banks. A shanty might have measured only 8 feet by 10 feet, with a roof that slanted from 6 feet to 4 feet at the back. The cabin had only one room. Doors and windows were cut into the log building after the cabin was constructed. The floors were usually made of mud in the beginning but wooden floors were often laid at a later date. The fireplace was initially an open fire on a hearth with large stones backing it. The smoke escaped through a hole in the roof.¹⁹ The shanty, sometimes considered the juncture between industrialism and rural society, drew workers from a mixture of social groups.²⁰ No matter where

they came from or what job they undertook, the conditions were difficult and privacy was non-existent. Of the 163 shanties built by labourers at Broad Creek on the Welland Canal, only 29 were single-family dwellings. The rest were occupied by two to three families, sometimes also containing various numbers of boarders.²¹

As one would expect, the principle reason that people lived in these shanty towns was because they couldn't afford to live elsewhere. That was largely due to the unpredictable nature of employment and how little they were being paid. One contemporary noted that the unemployed regularly congregated along the canal banks because they had nowhere else to go.²² Due to the residents' desperate economic situation, these shanty towns were commonly said to have been built from pilfered materials. According to government and newspaper reports, pilfering became the order of the day because the unemployed reportedly stole anything that was portable, including food, fence rails, firewood, money and livestock'. While reports deplored this criminal activity, observers agreed that it was their extreme poverty which propelled these individuals to criminal acts.²³

The existence of shanties in Indiana suggests that the reality of life in the town included transience, poverty, and cramped living conditions. Such evidence also suggests that Indiana was a noisy, bustling, busy town where people worked, played and went about the activities of daily life, contributing to the varied sights, sounds and smells of this industrializing place. Life in Indiana would not have been the idyllic quiet country existence that some envision of the

past. Unlike other nearby small towns Indiana was in the process of industrializing and it had the poverty, noise and stench to prove it.

Reanimating Indiana

Paul Shackel is a renowned American Historic Archaeologist. He contends that it is important to understand the constructed nature of landscapes so that we can appreciate how we remember our past.²⁴ In other words, he believes that when buildings fall down or are taken down, it's as if the history of a place disappears. On the other hand when buildings remain standing we tend to interpret the history of those buildings as the history of the entire area.²⁵ Thus when considering the past surrounding Ruthven and Indiana, it is little wonder that the history that was previously told about the area focused on the Thompsons and their mansion that is still standing. Indiana was virtually ignored. But how does one reconstruct the physical environment of a town that has little left but a cemetery, a house and a nearby mansion? How does one reconstruct the past? In my work one of the things I have been trying to do is figure out how to reanimate Indiana and bring the town back to life. Let me try to draw some mental images for you about what the physical environment would have been like in Indiana between 1830 and 1900.

From the historical data obtainable from the 1830's, it is clear that Indiana would have been a raucous town almost from the very beginning. Indeed, if anyone had taken a walk in the area in 1834, for instance, they would have been assaulted by their senses. Other than the stench that would have gone along

with the presence of animal livestock and human waste, an observer would have been confronted with a sea of faces and the sound of Irish and Scottish voices would have been the norm.²⁶ Moreover there would have been the ever-present sound of sawing, hammering, carting and the movement of water. Apart from the cacophony of noise that would have hit the casual observer, there would have been the visual impact of construction in every direction.²⁷ The first obvious visual construction project would have been the canal. It would have been dug by hand, with the help of oxen and carts, hence mud and rock would have been ubiquitous.²⁸ Trees would have been one of the most common elements on the horizon.²⁹ Buildings would have been slowly erected but in the meantime there would have been shanties, tents or other temporary structures in abundance to house the many labourers that were in the area to build the canal. Specifically, David Thompson advertised, in June of 1834, for 1,500 labourers to work on the canal at Indiana.³⁰ As the decade progressed there would have been an effort to build more permanent structures for the mills and other industries that were part of any growing town.³¹ The grist and saw mills would have been the first and largest structures built by Thompson and others in order to facilitate further growth of the area.³²

The 1860s would have felt like a significantly different decade than the 1830s in Indiana. Gone from the town were the temporary shanties that would have been the norm during the building of the canal.³³ Instead there were well-laid out town plots with wooden houses and out-buildings associated with them, spaces for parks, sidewalks and gardens.³⁴ Men, women and children were

present in the largest numbers seen in Indiana's history, peaking at 766 known individuals in the 1860s. Some of the occupations that employed workers in this decade included those who were artistic and oriented toward presenting an attractive face to the world, such as artists, architects and gardeners. Although various building projects continued in this decade, and labourers of various types abounded, construction was mainly for pleasure or to reinforce previously existing buildings. In a few cases, buildings were moved and building materials salvaged from structures that were being torn down but, in the main, construction was not on the same scale as that witnessed in the 1830s.³⁵ Other changes on the landscape include the fact that the immense quantity of trees that once existed around Indiana would have dwindled significantly as the last saw mill closed in Indiana in 1869. Thus the area around Indiana would have looked significantly different than the 1830s because by the 1860s farmer's fields, open spaces, manicured lawns and well-ordered streets were the norm.

Considering the town on a sensory level, in the 1860s an observer would have heard the call of French, German, Scotch, Irish and English voices. The town itself would have been noisy from the clanging of various mills and the water wheels that supplied their power. In addition, the smell of the town would have been somewhat unpleasant from the waste byproducts from the mills that caused pollution in the water. Indeed, there are documented cases where more than a few people died from diseases associated with impure water conditions. In spite of pollution, when residents were not working they pursued various social activities for fun but they were also interested in the beautification of themselves

and their surroundings. Clothing styles became more prominent in Indiana primarily because women became more visible than they were in previous decades. Architecture also underwent changes as features such as window glass and brick became more and more common. All in all, the decade of the 1860s would have presented a prosperous, growing and somewhat idyllic picture to those who happened upon the town of Indiana.

Things began to change by the 1870s as businesses had problems and began to shut down. For instance, the saw mills were closed in 1869 and the rest of the mills ceased operations by the late 1870s and early 1880s. The first and largest mill, the grist mill, which had once been a major source of income for the Thompson family, experienced frequent problems with the dams that supplied the water power to the mill in the 1870s and 1880s. Consequently, after numerous attempts to repair the damages, Ruthven Mill was silenced and eventually abandoned by 1884. Most other businesses in the town also ceased operations during the 1870s and 1880s as declining populations meant that employment opportunities for labourers dwindled and then virtually disappeared. Today little has survived today beyond a few scattered farm houses, farmers' fields, and Ruthven mansion itself. Indeed, if you didn't know that a town existed on the site, nothing would call such a history to mind because Indiana sits partially on the grounds of Ruthven Park National Historic Site, which comprises 1500 acres of protected land that is owned and administered by the Lower Grand River Trust Inc. Today it is picturesque and tranquil - a far cry from the town that once existed in the 19th century.

Looking at the environment from a different angle, an assessment of the towns and villages that surrounded Indiana reveal that in a span of just six kilometers, between York and Cayuga, in the mid-1800's, there were five known towns: York, Mount Healy, Indiana, Deans and Cayuga. Today only York and Cayuga exist. The other three are often labeled as ghost towns on historical documents related to the towns, if they are mentioned at all. In other words, forty percent of towns in a six kilometer span exist today, while sixty percent are no longer viable. If that statistic holds true for the rest of the province, specifically that sixty percent of the earliest towns disappeared by the twentieth century, then it is imperative that further research is undertaken of towns and villages that once existed along the Grand River, and other major Ontario waterways, in order to discover the roots of industry and their impact on the environment in the 19th century.

Endnotes

¹ Cheryl MacDonald *Haldimand History: The Early Years, 1784-1850*, (Nanticoke: Heronwood Enterprises, 2004) 41.

² Bruce Emerson Hill, *The Grand River Navigation Company*, (Brantford: Brant Historical Society Publications 1994), 128

³ *Gazetteer and Directory of County Haldimand*, (Toronto: Irwin and Burnham, 1867) 69

⁴ *Ruthven Park Mansion Tour Script*, updated August 27, 2006, Ruthven National Historic Park, Cayuga; A contemporary source described the value of moving “coal, lumber, salt and gypsum”, along the Grand River to the Dunnville feeder, then to the Welland Canal, which then provided access to markets in Buffalo and beyond. William Kingsford, *The Canadian Canals: Their history and cost with an inquiry into the policy necessary to advance the well-being of the Province*, (Toronto: Rollo & Adam, 1865). William Kingsford was a civil engineer, in the office of the Registrar of the Province of Canada.

⁵ Extracts from Mr. Molesworth’s Report, “Grand River Navigation”, *Grand River Sachem*, November 20, 1867.

⁶ *Gazetteer and Directory of County Haldimand, Indiana*, (Toronto: Irwin and Burnham, 1867) 67

⁷ Hill, 1994, 6; Hill wrote that the company was incorporated in 1832 with joint stock capitalized at £50,000. In David Thompson’s *General Journal 1834-1849*, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga, he noted his own purchase of 2000 shares of stock in 1832, for which he paid £12,500, thereby making him a quarter shareholder in the company. He was also a director of the company that year (Hill, 1994 pp 109).

⁸ *Gazetteer* 1867, 68; Molesworth, *Grand River Sachem*, Nov 20, 1867

⁹ Kingsford, 1865, 82..

¹⁰ *Gazetteer*, 1867, 107; *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Counties Haldimand and Norfolk*, (HR Page and Co, Toronto, 1877) 5; Drawn from an examination of my own work on the *Names and people who lived in Indiana and Deans* and the extraction of data from 1831-1840. In the tables I generated, it was possible to note the years and occupations of individuals in Indiana; Hill, 1994, 129.

¹¹ Craig Sims *Historic Structures Report, Ruthven Park National Historic Site*, Heritage Building Consultant, (Kingston, 2006) 57

¹² The original plan and design for the Grist Mill, called for the installation of 4 Mitre Wheels each 46 cogs, 1 ¼ inch pitch & 3 inch face; 1 spur wheel, 32 cogs, 1 ¼ inch pitch, 2 ½ inch face; 1 spur wheel 45 cogs, 1 ¼ inch pitch, 2 ½ inch face with 8 inch socket, 8 square; 1 Bevel wheel 42 cogs, 1 ¾ inch pitch, 2 ½ inch face and 2 Bevel wheels each 47 cogs, 1 ¾ inch pitch, 2 ½ inch face. See: “Specifications of Castings for Grist Mill, July 21st, 1837” Signed Henry Barton. Located attic Pigeonhole#12B, Doc #9, front, back & inner left and right, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga; According to the contract between Henry Barton and David Thompson, the grist mill was to be in full running order by August 1837 and the saw and carding mills were to be in operation by September 1837. See: copy of a handwritten note, between D. Thompson and Henry Barton regarding furnishing mill castings, attic pigeonhole 12, #8, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park; Both Thompson men kept the cooperage in functioning order as it was a useful adjunct to the Grist Mill to have barrels made on premises. Thompson II sold the cooperage to his chief cooper Michael

White in 1865 for \$175, *Indiana Petty Ledger, 1862-1870*, 84, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga.

¹³ Thompson was elected in 1841, 1844 and 1848, MacDonald, 2004, 114.

¹⁴ Bloomfield and Bloomfield, 1990, 15.

¹⁵ *Indiana Land Registry Records*, Cayuga, Ontario, 8-9; The Presbyterian Church in Indiana was begun by Thompson I, but he stipulated in his will his wish that his executors "shall finish the Presbyterian Church now partially erected near my present Residence", David Thompson, Last Will and Testament, Feb 18, 1851 (Ontario Archives, microfilm, Court of Probate, RG 22-155, MS638 (68), Estate Files 1793-1859).

¹⁶ There are a number of references to the ball field in the documents at Ruthven Park. See for example a letter to the editor of the *Sachem*, May 9, 1864, from "Conscience"; Complaint made to Thompson II, JP April 26, 1866, Artifact Room, Col ATT metal trunk, 8, #2, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga; Like the ball field, there were numerous references to the horse track. See for example: Barbara Martindale's column For what it's worth "The Indiana saga Unfolds" *The Sachem*, date unknown; *Gazetteer, Cayuga*, (Toronto: Irwin and Burnham, 1867) 94.

¹⁷ From the Ontario Sessional Papers 32 Victoria 1868-69 (31), there is a report on the "Return of the Number of Tavern Licenses issued in each County, City, Town, or Incorporated Village, in detail. Also, the name of the party to whom issued, and the name of the Issuer for each County, with the amount received from such Licenses to date." The report is dated January 6, 1869. In Haldimand, JR Martin was the issuer of licenses.

¹⁸ William Carrol of Caledonia who was a provincial surveyor produced the sketch in 1846. See artifact room, metal trunk, 10, #1, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga

¹⁹ Elizabeth Bloomfield and Linda Foster, *Localities of Landowners Assessment Roll Evidence 1861-1956*, (Guelph: Caribou Imprints, 1995) 64.

²⁰ Lorne F Hammond, "Anatomy of a Lumber Shanty: A Social History of Labour and Production on the Lievre River, 1876-1890", *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. IX*, ed. Donald H Akenson, Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1994, 298.

²¹ Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840's", *Canadian Working-Class History: Selected Readings, 3rd Edition*, eds. Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006) 28-51.

²² Bleasdale, 2006, 30.

²³ Bleasdale, 2006, 30.

²⁴ Paul A. Shackel, "Introduction", *Myth, Memory and the Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Paul A Shackel, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001) 4.

²⁵ Paul A Shackel *Archaeology and Created Memory: Public History in a National Park*, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), vii.

²⁶ This information I derived from the known origins of people associated with Indiana.

²⁷ For a sampling of historical scholarship on sensory histories, see: Joy Parr, "Smells like?" *Environmental History* Vol. 11, Issue 2, 2-3; Karen Harvey "Practical Matters", *History and Material Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2009), 12; Karin Dannehl "Object

Biographies: from production to consumption", *History and Material Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2009), 130; Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁸ Andrew Thompson wrote that his grandfather David Thompson I, used oxen to clear land when Indiana was being constructed, *Something About my Family*, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga

²⁹ From the beginning there were references in the Thompson journals that Thompson was having the trees felled and was selling the lumber to his brother and others. See for example: June 16, 1837, letter from David Thompson to his brother Archibald telling him he was moving lumber from Indiana to Archibald, David's 1863 briefcase, B#3, Doc 11; June 20, 1837, another letter from Thompson to Archibald telling him he was sending lumber, front hall back bookcase, file#4, Doc 16; August 17, 1838, letter from Thompson to Archibald regarding the shipment of lumber, Davids 1863 briefcase, #3, Doc 3, all found: Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga.

³⁰ Advertisement, *British American Journal*, June 10, 1834

³¹ Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 92-93

³² See: Specifications of Castings for Grist Mill, July 21st, 1837, Attic Pigeonhole #12B, Doc #9, front, back and inner left and right, Thompson Family Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga

³³ Shanties still existed outside the town where logging and other natural resource extraction was taking place but it was generally in the bush or related to mining

³⁴ Various people rented gardens from Thompson II, including William McKay in 1860, *Indiana Ledger B, 1860 to 1881*, pp 164; Michael White in 1861, *Indiana Blotter #3, Oct 1860-May 1862*, April 1, 1862, no pp#, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga

³⁵ There are numerous examples of houses that were moved or salvaged. See for example: *Indiana Day Book A 1858-1864*, James McCue pp. 52, Thomas Mclory pp. 60; *Indiana Blotter #3, Oct 1860-May 1862*, no pp#; *Indiana Day Book "A", 1854 to 1860, General Journal 1870-1877*, pp 145, Thompson paid John Young to move a store from Cayuga to Deans, Thompson Papers, Ruthven Park, Cayuga.