SHORT REPORT: LAND HISTORY OF THE EASTVIEW LANDFILL SITE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction** ................................................................................................................... 3  
  Background ............................................................................................................................ 3  
  Aims and Scope ..................................................................................................................... 3  

**Methods** ......................................................................................................................... 4

**Results/Findings** ............................................................................................................. 4  
  Indiginous Roots .................................................................................................................... 4  
  Settler Impressions ............................................................................................................... 5  
  Later Impressions ................................................................................................................ 6  
  Eastview Community Study and the Landfill ......................................................................... 7

**Conclusions** ................................................................................................................... 8

**References** ..................................................................................................................... 9
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The former Eastview Landfill Site is located between Speedvale Avenue, Watson Road, and Eastview Road in Guelph, Ontario. The full area is approximately 81 hectares, 45 hectares of which were used for landfill purposes. Currently owned by the City of Guelph, the Eastview Landfill Site has changed ownership several times over the course of its history. The landfill operated between 1961 and 2003, and was frequently a topic of debate in municipal politics as city planners and councilors sought to determine the best and most environmentally-friendly use of the land. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the remediation of the landfill area in innovative ways (e.g. O’Flanagan, 2014; Seto, 2013). One project aiming to use an arts-based intervention to reconnect to this “dead” land is ReMediate, an initiative led by Christina Kingsbury and Anna Bowen, two local artists. This report aims to inform this project, which includes a “living quilt,” poetry, and stories about the land. It outlines some Indigenous histories of the land, settler relations to the land, and decisions regarding the use and closure of the Eastview site. As detailed below, the report is a rapid response scan of available resources. Additional resources are listed in the conclusion of the report and may prove useful in informing the artistic intervention.

AIMS AND SCOPE

Community partners expressed a desire to learn more about the earlier history of the land, particularly how settlers in the area connected to the land (e.g. through gardening and agriculture, fabric craft, etc.), who had originally lived on the land (e.g. Indigenous histories), and the potential connections between Indigenous and settler stories of the land. Unearthing information specifically related to the settlement of the Eastview site proved particularly difficult due to a number of factors, including 100 “lost” years identified in histories highlighting the land’s Indigenous people (Wellington County Atlas, 1877). Thus, the findings reflect Indigenous and settler histories of the Guelph and Wellington area in general, in some cases extending further into Southern Ontario. Due to city/village name and border/boundary changes, it was not always clear which pieces of land were being referred to in documents consulted for this report.
METHODS

Several strategies were used to obtain the information outlined in this report. A Google search for the terms “Eastview landfill,” “Eastview road landfill site,” “Eastview landfill Guelph,” “land history,” “Indigenous history,” and “settler stories” (in various combinations) revealed relatively little beyond technical reports of ownership of the landfill, information about a Pollination Guelph project related to the former landfill, and several newspaper articles about the landfill, its closure, and subsequent ideas about its use. Given the limited information readily available via simple search strategies, several additional sources were consulted: the University of Guelph Library Archives, the Guelph Civic Museum, Wellington County Museum and Archives, the University of Guelph Aboriginal Resources Centre, OPIRG, and eyohaha:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic. The report reflects a scan of the resources available for consultation in a timely manner. Following Khangura and colleagues’ (2012) method for “rapid response” research, the “evidence” presented in this report was most readily available and accessible. While there may be further resources that could inform this project, it was impractical to consult resources such as microfiche documents in the five hours per week allotted to intern work. Where possible, further suggestions for resources are listed.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

INDIGENOUS ROOTS

The Southern Ontario region is historically linked to a people alternatively called Attikadaron, Atiouandaronk, Attiouandaron, and Attiwandaronk, the last being the most common (Coyne, 1985). This group of people was known as “the neutrals” because of their neutrality in conflicts between the Hurons and the Iroquois; however, they were not a non-warring people, and were described as “warlike” in Champlain’s writings (Hodge, 2014/1906). This group was one of the largest in the Northeast between 1615 and 1650, with a population of around 40,000 people (Noble, 2007). By 1651, however, the Iroquois had destroyed all villages inhabited by the Huron & Neutral peoples, and the territory became inhabited by wandering tribes including the Mississaugas (Montague, 1986). The last that was heard of this group under the name neutrals or Attiwandaronk was around 1652 (Coyne, 1895). In 1784, the wandering Mississaugas, who had occupied the land following the dispersal of the Attiwandaronk in 1652, ceded the land to Sir John Johnson (No author, 2002). Elsewhere the purchase of the land on which
Guelph now stands is recorded as having taking place in 1792, 35 years prior to the founding of Guelph by Sir John Galt (Montague, 1986). In the 1980s, evidence of the Attiwandaronk was found in Puslinch. Two sites, the “Ivan Elliot Site” and the “Raymond Reid Site” were explored; the Wellington County Museum and Archives now houses a permanent exhibit highlighting the Attiwandaronk and their lifestyle.

According to the above cited sources, particularly the document by Coyne (1895), the Attiwandaronk were a “numerous and sedentary race living in villages and cultivating their fields of maize, tobacco and pumpkins.” The country inhabited by the Attiwandaronk, including the area on which Guelph was later established, is described as one of the most beautiful areas occupied by Indigenous peoples and explored by the fur traders and missionaries in the 1600s. While hunting was a part of life for these individuals, up to 80% of their diet is reported to have been agriculture dependent; the region was habitat for up to 15 types of corn, 60 different bean varieties, and 6 kinds of squash (Coyne, 1895). Long houses were the primary dwelling sites for the Attiwandaronk, who were dispersed between approximately 40 settlements with well-developed economic and political systems (Canadian Encyclopedia).

SETTLER IMPRESSIONS

Just as Champlain detailed the extraordinarily fertile lands of Southern Ontario in his field notes, so too was the land on which Guelph is now situated noted to be verdant and well-cultivated by early modern settlers. Writing about Wellington County, John Harland, Esquire (1828) described a county stretching over 60 miles with 27 townships. Of these, Guelph’s soil of “deep black loam” was noted to be “extraordinarily fertile […] neither very hilly nor yet very flat, but may be termed rolling, and affording excellent natural drainage.” This document highlights the heterogeneous management of farmland in the area. Harland suggests that while farmers in surrounding townships squandered their land by engaging in unsustainable farming practices, Guelph and Eramosa provided a striking contrast to the ill management of land. Instead, Guelph and Eramosa farmers are described as “do[ing] no discredit to the agriculturalists of Norfolk, Northumberland, or the Lothians.” The area took approximately 15 years to be considered “fully settled.” Settlers were primarily engaged in agriculture, particularly those on the outskirts of town, but several other industries were prominent, including sewing machine and musical instrument manufacturing (Harland, 1828). Other reports suggest that full settlement took slightly longer (up to 25 years) with a rapid increase in population since 1911 (Dahms, 1978).
LATER IMPRESSIONS

Interestingly, early reports of the land, including the nature of the soil (3/4 clay and black loam, ¼ sandy loam; 5% swampy and 20% wet springy land; Harland, 1828) are corroborated by later surveys of the land. Aspiring farmers recognized the value in the abundantly fertile land of Wellington County and intensively worked the land for the first century of its modern settlement. Despite a decrease in the practice of farming and farmland between 1961 and 1971, the “agricultural picture” of the area in 1971 was one of “fertility, urban pressures and farming practice” (Dahms, 1978, p. 37). The Ontario Agricultural Commission was established in 1881 and was based in Guelph; this organization sought to unearth details about the state of Ontario’s agricultural practices over time (Irwin, 1993). As a part of this mission, the 1828 article from John Harland highlighted above provides a detailed description of the state of agriculture in the area at the time of writing. It is one of two such documents (the other from 1849); however, the second was not available for access through the University of Guelph Archives. Nonetheless, agriculture in the area “has been treated as a perplexing question and the resolution of the question essentially deferred” (Tossell, 1972). A focus on exploring questions around agricultural and land practices in the area in general is underscored by the existence of the well-respected Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph and ongoing efforts to match agriculture to technological innovation.

The Eastview Landfill site in particular has troubled those seeking to make the best use of land in the area. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a community study was undertaken in the general vicinity of the landfill. The Eastview Community Study, while not exclusively about the landfill site, provides insight into the state of the land at the time. The land included in the community study stretches 1500 acres, of which the Eastview Landfill comprises 81 acres of “policy area 5 (open space)” (Cumming Cockburn Ltd., 1991).
In 1986, Ecologistics Ltd. ranked the land as a “class C natural area,” meaning that there were no constraints to developing the land. In their report, the consulting firm highlighted the various types of trees in the area, including:

- Silver maple (primarily)
- White ash
- Trembling aspen
- White cedar
- Willow
- Staghorn sumac
- Common buckthorn
- Single remnant apple orchard

All trees were noted to be in “fair to good” condition. This report also contains a number of topographic maps that highlight the various types of vegetation in the Eastview community, including their quality and health.

**EASTVIEW COMMUNITY STUDY AND THE LANDFILL**

Notably, at the time of the study, the “Guelph Sanitary Landfill site” (Eastview landfill) was owned by the City of Guelph and was anticipated to close in approximately 7 years, at which point it would be landscaped into “a major open space” (Cumming Cockburn Ltd., 1991). At the time, a major construction project was underway in order to contain the leachate and methane gas stemming from the landfill. Until 1984, leachate was recirculated (collected in underground drain collectors and then sprayed on the landfill); the re-circulation of leachate was then discontinued, and leachate was pumped from underground tanks and trucked to a sanitary sewer system (Ibid). The question of leachate and methane gas stemming from the landfill continued to be an issue of importance in future landfill deliberations. Later, the methane gas from the landfill was used as an alternative source of energy for the City of Guelph; Envida Community Energy Inc. began operating an alternative energy plant (the Eastview Landfill Gas Energy Plant) that converts methane gas into approximately 2.5 megawatts of electrical energy per year (about 1% of Guelph’s needs) in 2005 (Ontario Power Authority, n.d.).

In 1999, the City of Guelph obtained approval to continue to fill the Eastview landfill site for approximately 4-7 more years under the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA) and the Environmental Protection Act (EPA). While the Eastview Land was noted to be among environmentally sensitive areas in Guelph (Eagles et al., 1976), it has
nonetheless been at the center of environmentalist concerns. Its closure in 2003 (notably prior to the predicted closure date) sparked conversations about the future of the large space. As noted above, environmentally-minded groups including Pollination Guelph have sought to turn the land into a more sustainable and productive space; this group, for example, has planted plants and grasses native to the Southern Ontario region, including coneflowers, black eyed Susans, milkweeds and others on the land with an eye to return the surrounding area to a naturally-pollinating space (Wildlife Preservation Canada).

CONCLUSIONS

Unfortunately, retrieving specific Indigenous and settler stories relating to the use of this land proved extremely difficult. Likely, these histories are held in the expertise of those who lived on and around the Eastview landfill site. Hopefully the above information will help to provide context for the history of the land, which can be fleshed out through discussions with those who have first-hand experience of working with and living on the land. The University of Guelph library also has resources in the form of microform/microfiche, specifically relating to agricultural clubs in the area. These include resources from:

- Tweedsmuir histories
- Federated Women’s Institute
- Junior Farmers
- Farmers Advocate
REFERENCES

Coyne, J. (1895). The country of the neutrals (as far as comprised in the county Elgin) from Champlain to Talbot. St. Thomas Ontario: Times Print.


