
RESEARCHING CHANGES TO THE LANDSCAPE IN THUNDER BAY

INTRODUCTION

This Research Guide provides a general overview of some key records available at the Archives that can be useful in researching major developments and changes to the physical landscape within Thunder Bay. The Guide is not an exclusive list of available resources. You may find other records useful, depending on your specific research interests. The records covered in this Research Guide include:

- Aerial Photographs
- Fire Insurance Maps
- Historical Photographs
- Henderson's City Directories
- City Clerk's Files

Other related topics not exclusively covered in this Research Guide include: industry and commercial developments, local improvements and public works, economic growth, urban renewal and public utilities development. Visit or contact the Archives for more information on these topics.

Digital copies of aerial photographs, fire insurance maps and historical photographs are available at the Archives. Costs for digital copies vary and are different to standard photocopy costs.

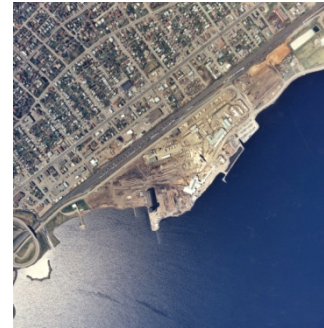
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Aerial photographs are high level aerial views that capture a measured portion of the City below. Aerial photographs can indicate changes in landscape and the presence or absence of items such as buildings, parks and roads. These photographs also reveal natural geographic features such as rivers, shorelines and undeveloped lands.



"Map of Port Arthur, Fort William and some townships" circa 1962 1990-17 (Item 30). Series 4. City of Fort William fonds.

The Archives has sets of aerial photographs encompassing the whole city for the following years; 1949, 1955 (Fort William only), 1959, 1962, 1968, 1969, 1974, 1976, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1996. Photographs for the years 1987 to 1996 are in colour. Maps for the relevant years are available at the Archives. The maps help researchers determine the specific locations in the City and the photographs that they need to request.



Aerial photograph showing shoreline near Prince Arthur's Landing from 1996, TB 1996 L14-65.

Aerial photographs from 2002 and 2007 are available from The City of Thunder Bay Planning Division.

FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

Fire insurance maps provide information on what buildings existed within the City, their usage and the materials used in their construction. Examples include residential buildings, institutional buildings, industrial areas and utility buildings such as gas stations. Fire insurance maps feature a Key of Symbols that explains the colour-coded features of the maps.

Fire insurance maps are broken down into a series of sheets covering specific city blocks. An index is available for researchers to determine which sheets are of interest to them. Note that not all city blocks are available and only specific time periods are covered.

The Archives holds Fire insurance maps for the following time periods:

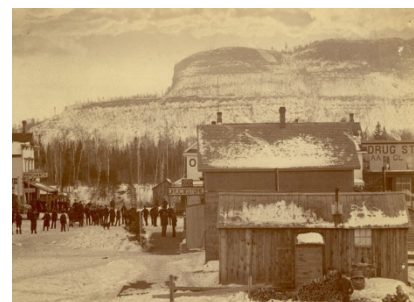
- Fort William: Predominantly 1919 (revised 1950), and 1961.
- Port Arthur: Predominantly 1908 and 1961. Some maps exist for the years 1911, 1913 and 1915.

Fire insurance maps from 1961 are a complete set, encompassing the entire cities of Fort William and Port Arthur. Earlier fire insurance maps have been digitally scanned and are available to view at the Archives. Maps from 1961 are for reference purposes only.

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Many of the historical photographs held by the Archives are useful for studying changes in landscape, offering street scenes of areas within the City and low-level aerial views of various locations within the City. Some examples include:

- Postcards offering street scenes of the former City of Port Arthur between 1920 and 1930.
- Photographs of Port Arthur Harbour relating to specific years including 1890, 1960 and 1980.
- Street views of downtown Fort William from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
- Low aerial views featuring prominent buildings, industrial areas, residential areas, elevators, train yards, bridges and rivers within the City and in the surrounding district from various years.



"Brown Street and McKay's Mountain, Fort William" circa 1885. 1991-01 (Item 198) Series 128. City of Thunder Bay fonds.

Historical photographs are searchable on the database available at the Archives. Note that the location and dates of many photographs are not known. Photographs do not cover all time periods and areas.

HENDERSON'S CITY DIRECTORIES

Not all records that can be helpful in researching changes and developments to the landscape of Thunder Bay are graphical. Textual records such as Henderson's city directories also provide a wealth of information on the City and the buildings that existed in the City over time. As directories identify properties by address and were generally published on a yearly basis, they allow the researcher to refine their inquiry to specific areas of interest and time periods.

Henderson's directories cover a large time frame and are simple to navigate.

Directories also cover a larger time frame than fire insurance maps. The Archives has directories for the following years: 1909 – 1911; 1920 – 1923; 1925; 1927; 1929 – 1931; 1935 – 2000. The Archives also keeps phone directories and currently has the years: 2002 – 2003; 2006 – 2007; 2009 – 2011/2012.

Directories are arranged alphabetically by street name and by the surname of the owner or resident of each property listed. Directories published on or before 1969 are broken into sections for Port Arthur and Fort William. Note that directories do not cover areas outside of established city limits.

CITY CLERK'S FILES

The Office of the City Clerk interacts with all departments of the municipal government and the operations of City Council. As a result, City Clerk's files are varied and relate to a variety of different topics and issues. However, specific files regarding city planning, land use and development goals are particularly useful in researching landscape changes and developments. City planning files consist of reports correspondence and publications relating to the development of residential subdivisions, commercial and industrial districts, recreational areas, industrial expansion, amendments to Official Plans, changes to the shape and length of streets, and city land acquisitions. City planning files also feature information regarding urban renewal strategies, including building demolition and construction and the phasing out of industrial areas. Many files also feature related maps, plans and blueprints.

Files relating to city planning, land use and development goals are useful in researching landscape and infrastructural changes.

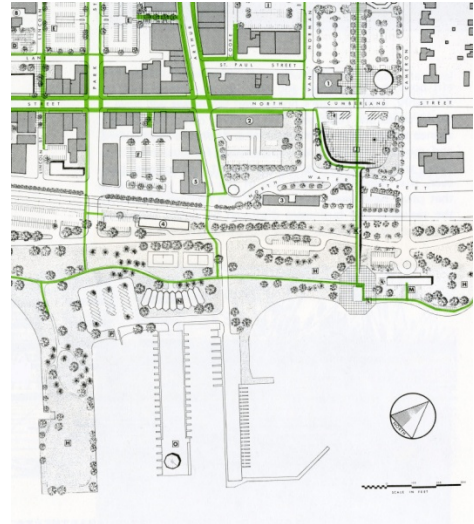
Records created by the Office of the City Clerk that pre-date 1970 relate to the former Cities of Fort William and Port Arthur and are organized separately from the records produced by The City of Thunder Bay. The relevant series include:

- Fort William City Clerk's Files (Series 4) 1903-1969
- Port Arthur City Clerk's Files (Series 29) 1884-1969 (predominantly 1950-1969)

- Thunder Bay City Clerk's Files (Series 117) 1970 to the most recent accession.

Earlier records created by the former Cities of Fort William and Port Arthur are not complete and only cover specific years. Key features of each series include:

- **Fort William:**
Records from the former City of Fort William cover the period between 1940 and 1969 and provide a wealth of information relating to the development and growth of the City in the Post War period. Information can be found on specific topics including: industrial development for the Canadian National Railway, plans for the expansion of residential neighbourhoods, plans regarding the redevelopment of City owned industrial areas, reports that identify potential areas for industrial development and studies relating to land use on Mission Island.
- **Port Arthur:**
Planning files for the former City of Port Arthur cover the period between 1950 and 1969. Although there are not as many records available in this series, information that can be found includes: maps of Port Arthur dated 1952 indicating planned land use, the presence of other features such as mines, quarries and prominent buildings and the Port Arthur city limits; by-laws, information booklets and maps showing planned redevelopment of the downtown Port Arthur district under the Urban Renewal Scheme.
- **Thunder Bay:**
Records for The City of Thunder Bay are more extensive, covering the full time frame since the City's amalgamation in 1970. Records detail the early stages of planning and development in Thunder Bay and show the ongoing changes since this time. Key topics that can be found in this series include: housing development, industrial expansion in the intercity area, shopping centre development, information regarding the Neighbourhood Improvement Program, and waterfront development.



Map indicating buildings set for demolitions and new constructions within downtown Port Arthur under the Urban Renewal Scheme. Adapted from *Urban Renewal in Your City* (City of Port Arthur, 1968). Series 29. City of Port Arthur fonds.

City Clerk's Files are arranged by subject and year. Research using these files can be time intensive and it is recommended that researchers have an understanding of the scope of their research inquiry and the relevant years prior to engaging these records.

The City of Thunder Bay Archives also has a range of publications including Official Plans covering time periods between 1960 and 1980 and related studies and reports conducted by the Planning Division in preparation for Official Plans for the City. These publications can be located using the database available at the Archives. The most recent Official Plan is available on the City's website: www.thunderbay.ca

The City of Thunder Bay's Planning Division also has information on zoning by-laws, Official Plans and City Street Index Maps.

CONTACT THE ARCHIVES

235 Vickers Street North
Thunder Bay, Ontario
Phone: 807-625-2270
Fax: 807-622-4212
Email: archives@thunderbay.ca