

Studies in Documents

The Discovery and Repatriation of the Lord Dalhousie Collection

by MARIE ELWOOD

The Cultural Property Export and Import Act provides funds to assist Canadian institutions to repatriate cultural property which is outside of Canada and considered "of outstanding significance and national importance." One of the most significant of the grants approved in 1985-86 enabled the Nova Scotia Museum to repatriate the Lord Dalhousie Collection, described by the then Minister of Communications, Marcel Masse as "a find of great cultural and historic value." It is a rare, private collection of Canadian material formed by the 9th Earl of Dalhousie during his twelve years in Canada as a colonial administrator. He came to Canada in 1816, after serving in the Napoleonic Wars as one of Wellington's generals, and was Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia from 1816 to 1820. On the death of the Duke of Richmond, Dalhousie was appointed Governor General and held this office until 1828, when he left to become Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in India.

When Lord and Lady Dalhousie left Quebec on 9 September 1828, they took with them many records of their years in Canada — several hundred paintings, drawings, prints, and maps and plans documenting their activities and interests. Dalhousie also kept a diary of his years in Canada which contains references to works which he commissioned from talented members of his staff and his friends. "Captain Young has made a large collection of drawings ... Pooley and Denney are both drawing for me which, with these of Young will form a valuable collection."¹ — "A valuable collection," as Lord Dalhousie used this term himself, showing a sense of the significance of these visual records of his tours of duty and inspection as an administrator in Upper and Lower Canada.

As well as drawings, Lord Dalhousie collected maps and plans. He received presentation copies of manuscript plans made in Canada by Colonel John By, Lieutenant H. Pooley, and other engineers for proposed canal routes, roadways, and bridges in Ontario and Quebec. Their present significance to national heritage lies in the original documentary evidence they provide of early nineteenth-century efforts to solve transportation problems in areas being opened to settlement before the beginning of railways.²

1 Marjory Whitelaw, ed., *The Dalhousie Journals*, 3 vols. (Ottawa, 1978-82), vol. 3, p. 109.

2 E. Dahl, Chief, Early Canadian Cartography Section, Cartographic and Architectural Archives Division, National Archives of Canada: Statement on Significance of the Collection to the Cultural Property Review Board.

Dalhousie also acquired manuscript maps of Nova Scotia as he made a number of coastal voyages around the province in 1817-19. Lord Dalhousie was interested in the building of a large timber ship on the Island of Orleans in 1824 and asked the builder for a drawing of the deck plan, midship, and elevation of the vessel, *Columbus*. Very few ship plans illustrating this rare type of vessel exist.

Another document in the collection was a large architectural plan for a hitherto unknown project, "A Government House at Sorel in Canada, 1820," showing the plan and elevation proposed for a Governor General's residence of some magnificence. This Regency architectural plan, mounted on stiff boards, is in excellent condition and bears the concise inscription, "Plan proposed but rejected, 1825." Lady Dalhousie kept a watercolour of the actual residence they used at Sorel, a modest farm house, with the inscription on the back of the painting — "for Ly. Dalhousie, 30 Sept. 1826 as a small token of remembrance, Fred de Roos."

Lord Dalhousie's collection also contained prints. As patron, he received a presentation set of four views of Halifax, drawn, etched, and published by J.E. Woolford in 1819, with an engraved dedication title-page. The set included two views of Government House, Lord Dalhousie's residence in Halifax. This series, one of the first to be published in Canada, is rare. Another early print he received was a lithograph, produced by J.F. Bouchette in Quebec in 1826, a portrait head of a young woman. As well, he collected a set of engravings of American Indians, published in 1822, and placed in one of his American portfolios. Lord Dalhousie was also presented with an interesting watercolour of a Micmac Indian encampment near Halifax, by Hibbert N. Binney (1766-1843), a scene filled with ethnographic detail of Micmac dress and artifacts.

Both Lord and Lady Dalhousie were interested in natural history. Lord Dalhousie was presented with a bound album containing forty-eight pages of mounted specimens of foliage. On the marbled cover was a label, printed with the Royal Coat-of-Arms and the title "Specimens of Wild Leaves Such as They Adorn His Majesty's Forests of Upper Canada." The pages are watermarked "MMB1820." Lady Dalhousie prepared a considerable collection of herbarium sheets, dated and identified, of plants in Quebec. She made some botanical studies — watercolours of plants, and compiled a list of flora of Nova Scotia and Quebec, with notes on habitat. A portrait of Lady Dalhousie shows her seated with an unfinished painting of a plant and a mounted bird specimen on a table beside her, emblematic of her interests. Lord Dalhousie was interested in birds and formed a study collection for the museum of the College at Edinburgh in compliance with a request from Principal Baird.

Of greatest interest in Lord Dalhousie's collection, however, were the many topographical paintings and sketches (over four hundred) which he assembled in Canada. As already noted, he commissioned talented amateurs on his staff to record landscapes, buildings, and inhabitants of Canada. In one such sketch of a Quebec farmer, by Capt. John Crawford Young, the artist noted on the mount, "Recommended by His Excellency the Earl of Dalhousie as a good Subject for a Sketch." Of the artists whom Lord Dalhousie patronised, he commissioned most from John Elliott Woolford, who travelled in his retinue as his official draughtsman recording his travels — a unique Canadian appointment by a Governor General. All these sketches were assembled, inscribed, and mounted in library bindings — half-bound in morocco, sewn on raised bands, with hard

covers of marbled boards, with the bookplate of the 9th Earl on the cover. The bookplate has since been identified as the work of James Smillie, Junior, etched in 1825, in Quebec.³

This collection of Canadian maps, plans, prints, documents, with the bound volumes of sketches and paintings was duly transported to Scotland and taken to Lord Dalhousie's principal residence, Dalhousie Castle, an ancient red sandstone castle of fourteenth-century foundation near Edinburgh. The 9th Earl had "modernized" his baronial castle before he went to Canada. (In his journal he speaks of incurring heavy building expenses.) He replaced its ancient crow-stepped gables with a pitched roof and a massive tower. Within this tower was his library, its bookshelves built to conform to the curvature of the tower walls. Here Lord Dalhousie placed his Canadian collection.

My search for this collection has had an extended history. The original clues to its existence I found in a letter, written in 1857 by the artist John Elliott Woolford, Lord Dalhousie's official draughtsman, when he was an old man living in Fredericton, N.B.⁴ A photostat of this letter was sent to me for comment by a researcher working on a biographical article on J.E. Woolford. "I hope," he wrote, "you will find it easier to decipher than I did." There were three ledger-sized sheets of paper, written in a cursive script, which I transcribed. The recipient of the letter was not given in the original, but it became evident that it was addressed to the 10th Earl of Dalhousie. The letter ended with a request from the aged Woolford to be released from his duties as Barrack Master of Fredericton, since "I am now approaching my 79th year and cannot longer perform active duties." He had held the position for over thirty years. This request was preceded by a lengthy account of Woolford's service to the 9th Earl of Dalhousie, couched in the language of patronage.

Woolford began the letter by recalling his earliest encounter with Lord Dalhousie in 1797, when at the age of 19, Woolford joined the 2nd Queen's Royal Regiment of Foot. Lord Dalhousie was one of his commanding officers, Woolford wrote and "His Lordship had found out that I was somewhat skilful in sketching and painting and had employed me, during any leisure in those pursuits." Their regiment was then en route to Egypt to take part in the British campaign under Sir Ralph Abercrombie to expel the French army from Egypt. Woolford made "many sketches" during the campaign, which, he wrote, "I have no doubt are still in the Castle." When Lord Dalhousie was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, the letter continued, "I received an offer from His Lordship to come to that place which I did in 1816 and was employed in my professional pursuit in collecting sketches in that and the adjacent province." And later, Woolford wrote, "when His Lordship succeeded to Canada ... I followed and accompanied His Lordship on his tour in 1821 to the Lakes as far up as Superior and returned by the Ottawa collecting a large quantity of drawings which I have no doubt are still in existence and most probably in Your Lordship's possession."

It was evident from this letter that Woolford was writing of Lord Dalhousie as his patron, from his earliest encounter in 1797 until 1828, when Lord Dalhousie left Canada. Woolford stayed on, for fifty years, in New Brunswick. From the letter I inferred that

3 R. Tovell, Associate Curator, Department of Canadian Prints and Drawings, National Gallery of Canada: Statement on Significance of the American Portfolio No. 1 by Capt. J. Crawford Young, to the Board of Governors, National Gallery of Canada.

4 Saunders Family papers, University of New Brunswick Archives.

Woolford had carried out three major assignments or commissions for his patron. In 1801, during the British expedition in Egypt, Woolford “made many sketches.” Secondly, in 1816, when he came to Canada at Lord Dalhousie’s invitation, he “was employed in his professional pursuit in collecting sketches.” Finally, in 1821, when Woolford accompanied Lord Dalhousie on his ambitious two thousand mile trip by canoe to Lake Superior, he collected “a large quantity of drawings.” These assignments were later confirmed in fleeting references to “my draftsman Woolford” in Lord Dalhousie’s journal. It was evident that Woolford thought that the many paintings and sketches that he had done for Lord Dalhousie had survived, since he wrote that they were “no doubt still in existence” and “doubtless still in the Castle.”

I decided to take Woolford at his word and assume that his large collection of sketches dating from 1801 to 1828 might still survive, not in Canada, but in Scotland. I found that the title and estates of the 10th Earl had passed to a collateral branch of the family, because he had two daughters and no male heir; that a descendant of those daughters had sold some material from the library of the 9th Earl in the 1930s, and that Dalhousie Castle was now a hotel. I then wrote to the principal Scottish art galleries asking if they knew of this artist or his work. Eventually, I received a reply from the National Gallery of Scotland, stating that there was a private collection of works by Woolford and that they were not at liberty to disclose the owner’s name but that they had forwarded my letter of enquiry. Sometime later, the owner replied that he had no objection to my visit.

Accompanied by a curator from the National Gallery of Scotland, I set off from Edinburgh into open country, then past stone walls and a gate lodge to a large mansion with a turret. I was taken to the library, a long, rather dark room where I talked to the owner about Woolford’s letter and its implications. I was shown a library table, set in a window embrasure, on which were two volumes. I opened the first, and saw *Halifax from Fort George* — a panoramic view of Halifax from the Citadel, identified in Woolford’s neat, cursive hand. I turned page after page — there were over one hundred sketches of Nova Scotia. The date “1817” was stamped in gold on the spine.

I recognized Lord Dalhousie’s bookplate — and that these were the sketches referred to in Woolford’s letter, his first Canadian assignment for his patron. The sketches showed his professional competence; many gave evidence of rapid execution, in grey or brown wash over pencil. This was no ephemeral collection but a sequential, pictorial record of Lord Dalhousie’s travels in Nova Scotia (figure 1). The second volume, similarly bound, recorded Lord Dalhousie’s visit to Niagara by way of Quebec and Montreal, in 1819. These sketches were also identified in Woolford’s handwriting. I could not conceal my interest as I examined the sketches — these were the “many sketches” Woolford referred to in his letter. The bell rang for lunch; I left the library thinking I might never see the sketches again. I talked to the owners about Woolford and his assignments in Canada and asked if I might look at them again. The owner sat opposite watching as I turned the pages and then, to my surprise, asked if I would be interested to acquire them. I said yes. On my return to Canada I discussed the significance of this collection with staff of the National Archives of Canada and then entered into negotiation with the owners. Because the material met the criteria of “outstanding importance and national significance,” it was eligible for a Cultural Property Grant, and the Nova Scotia Museum was able to repatriate the two volumes, containing 162 sketches of the period 1817-19. The Nova Scotia Museum then presented the volume illustrating Lord Dalhousie’s journey to Niagara in 1819 to the National Archives of Canada, where it is now in the collection of the

Documentary Art and Photography Division. *Sketches in Nova Scotia, 1817* is in the Nova Scotia Museum collection. In cataloguing this volume, I found a pencil wedged tightly in the binding, long undisturbed, a thin pencil with an unvarnished cedar wood shaft which I took to be Woolford's pencil, since he had mounted and inscribed the sketches.

How had these works by Woolford come to the library in which I found them? They were in the ancestral home of the Countess of Dalhousie, wife of the 9th Earl. She was Miss Christian Broun, an heiress in her own right, of an ancient Scottish family. The estate has descended in the direct line, male and female, from Sir David Broun, whose name is on the estate charter of 1272. The original fortified dwelling, a small square thirteenth century tower with thick stone walls has over the long history of ownership been incorporated into the present mansion which has, I was told, over one hundred rooms. The Lord Dalhousie collection had descended in the family of the present owners, who are direct descendants of the 9th Earl and Countess of Dalhousie.

To this ancestral home of Countess Dalhousie I was invited to return. On this second visit I found, in a shuttered room, a collection of thirty-seven finished watercolours illustrating Lord Dalhousie's ambitious journey of two thousand miles by canoe through the Great Lakes in 1821, with a company of forty men, one of whom was Woolford. I recognized these as the second assignment in Woolford's letter, "the large quantity of drawings which I have no doubt are still in existence." In these, Lord Dalhousie was easily identified, seated under a canopy erected in the middle of the canoe, wearing a top hat in the wilderness.

This second discovery was repatriated by the Nova Scotia Museum with a Cultural Property Grant. Thirty-three works referred to the Great Lakes journey of 1821 and the Nova Scotia Museum shared these with the National Gallery of Canada, which did not have any works by Woolford in their collection.

In 1984, I made a study visit to Scotland and was again invited to visit the estate. It was on this visit that the largest collection was found. On a dark shelf in a library cabinet was a very large portfolio, with a paper label on the cover "Egypt by Woolford." This was what Woolford had obliquely referred to in his letter as "many sketches" made during the campaign in Egypt in 1801 and represented his earliest work and first commission from his patron, Lord Dalhousie.

This portfolio, *Egypt by Woolford*, contained sixty-four large, finished watercolours and six manuscript maps (two by Lord Dalhousie) and was sequentially arranged to show the progress of the campaign. It appears to be a unique pictorial record of this important campaign of the Napoleonic Wars, as well as an early illustrated war record (figure 2). I went to the National Army Museum in London, later, and found there a small, manuscript, regimental record of Woolford's regiment, the 2nd Queen's Royal Regiment of Foot, with daily entries made during the Egyptian Campaign, providing further documentation of Woolford's portfolio.

That evening, my hosts had invited a Woolford descendant to meet me, and after dinner, I sat at a library table to examine this newly discovered Egyptian portfolio, with Lord Dalhousie's descendant on one side and Woolford's descendant on the other. For all three, it was our first view of this volume which had apparently lain undisturbed for decades.

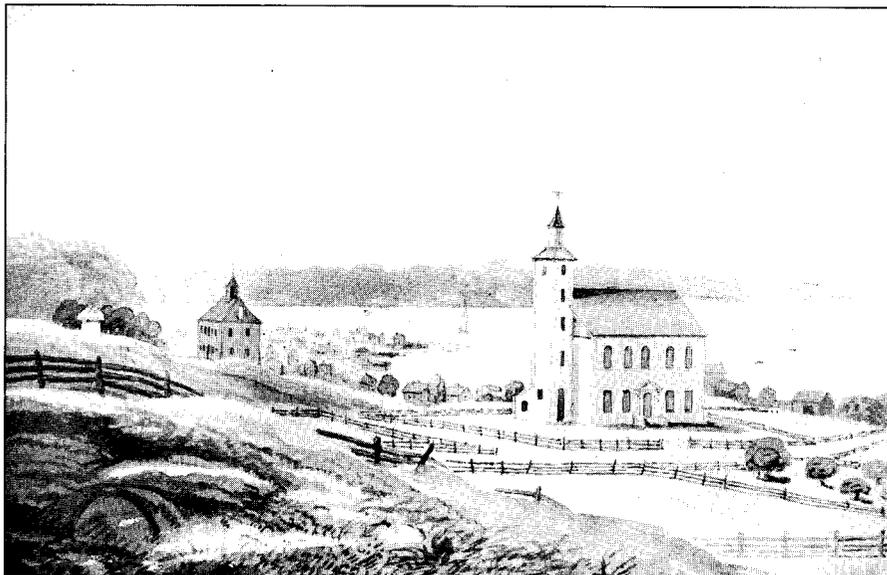


Figure 1: "Town of Digby," grey wash over pencil, by John Elliott Woolford (1778-1866) from the bound volume "Sketches in Nova Scotia, 1817" commissioned by the 9th Earl of Dalhousie in 1817. Courtesy: Nova Scotia Museum.

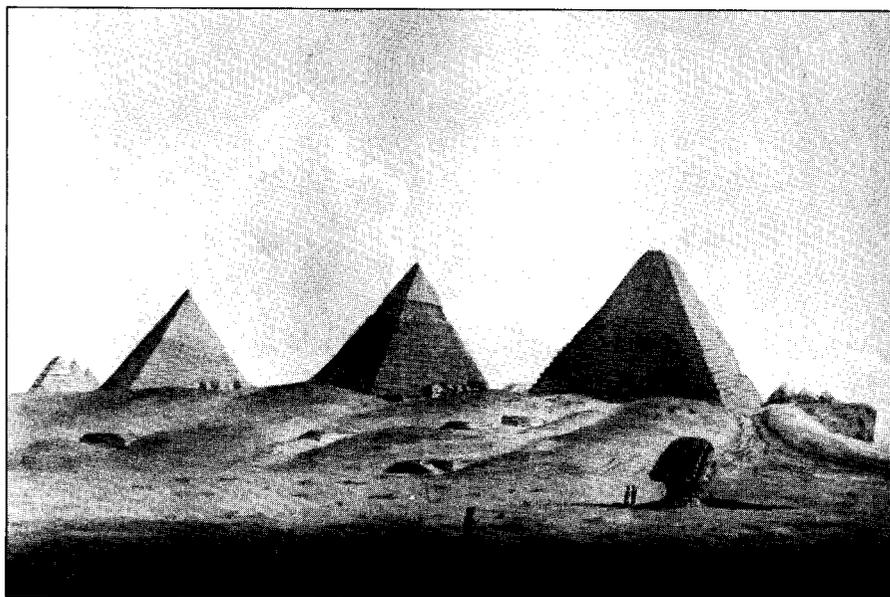


Figure 2: "Pyramids of Sphinx," watercolour by John Elliott Woolford from the bound volume "Egypt by Woolford" containing sixty-four watercolours and six manuscript maps of the Egyptian Campaign, commissioned by the 9th Earl of Dalhousie in 1801. Courtesy: National Gallery of Canada.

On another shelf was a large bound volume with a red leather label printed in gold, "American Portfolio No. 1," showing Lord Dalhousie's methodical assemblage of these commissioned works. It contained forty landscape and genre paintings, done by Captain John Crawford Young, Lord Dalhousie's aide-de-camp. These were the drawings mentioned in the Earl's diary. Of special interest were figure studies of habitants, Indians, and fishermen at work (figure 3). "As a whole this portfolio, more than any other known visual document," opined one expert, "presents a vivid picture of the many facets of the people and places that made Quebec City of the 1820s."⁵ Only seven works by John Crawford Young were known until the finding of this portfolio.

On an adjacent shelf I found a second volume labelled "American Portfolio." This contained paintings, prints and drawings including the presentation series of aquatint etchings of Halifax buildings, done by Woolford in 1819, the early lithograph by J.F. Bouchette and an early painting of Dartmouth, N.S. made in 1819. Below this was a flat portfolio, bound in green silk ribbon, containing paintings and drawings by the Countess of Dalhousie, as well as her lists of Canadian flora, and notes on a coastal voyage in Nova Scotia in 1819. At the back of this portfolio were six amusing, satirical drawings of social scenes in a garrison town with caricatures of provincial ladies and military officers. These are on paper watermarked 1813-19 (figure 4). Lady Dalhousie lived in Halifax from 1816-20. Later, in the Muniment Room was found the collection of maps and the canal plans, rolled and securely tied with faded red tape, probably put away in 1828 and not unrolled since. With them were the plans for the Government House at Sorel and eight documents dealing with the New Brunswick disputed boundary claims, 1826-27, which were categorized by the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick as "rare items of prime historical value."⁶ The last documents found were appropriate — they were Capt. John Crawford Young's design for the Wolfe-Montcalm monument in Quebec City — "The front elevation and the section plan of the construction of the monument". Lord Dalhousie wanted to erect this monument honouring the two great generals, and Young submitted this design. Lord Dalhousie wrote in his journal, "I leave this behind me, an acknowledged classic and handsome column, worthy of the intention and I am vain enough to think it in some respect a monument to my own name, at the last hour of my administration."⁷

One of Lord Dalhousie's last official functions before he left Canada was to lay the foundation for this monument on 9 September 1828. The plans he took with him back to Scotland where they stayed with the rest of his Canadian collection until December 1884.

Negotiations for the purchase of the collection took place in 1985. The Nova Scotia Museum applied for a Cultural Property Grant and again proposed to share the collection with other institutions — the National Gallery acquired the Egyptian portfolio by J.E. Woolford, because their mandate includes collecting works done outside of Canada by significant Canadian artists, and also American Portfolio No. 1 containing all the works by Capt. John Crawford Young — because of the variety of the genre scenes. The National Archives of Canada acquired the manuscript plans of canals and water routes in Ontario and Quebec, as appropriate to their collection (figure 5). The Provincial Archives

5 R. Tovell, Statement on Significance of the American Portfolio No. 1.

6 Personal communication from Burton Glendinning, Supervisor, Historical Division, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

7 Whitelaw, *The Dalhousie Journals*, vol. 3, p. 170.



Figure 3: *Indian and French Canadian Market Place, Quebec watercolour, signed "J.C.Y." from American Portfolio No. 1, a bound volume containing forty watercolours of Canadian subjects by Capt. John Crawford Young, Aide-de-camp to Lord Dalhousie, presented by the artist to Lord Dalhousie in 1827. Courtesy: National Gallery of Canada.*

of New Brunswick obtained the documents dealing with the New Brunswick disputed boundary claims and the Nova Scotia Museum retained the American Portfolio No. 4 and the Countess of Dalhousie's portfolio. All four institutions contributed to this large repatriation project, greatly assisted by a Cultural Property Grant. The Lord Dalhousie Collection went on exhibit at the Nova Scotia Museum in February 1986. A press release from the Hon. Marcel Masse congratulated the Nova Scotia Museum on the research which led to the discovery of the collection and the federal-provincial cooperation which was demonstrated in its acquisition.

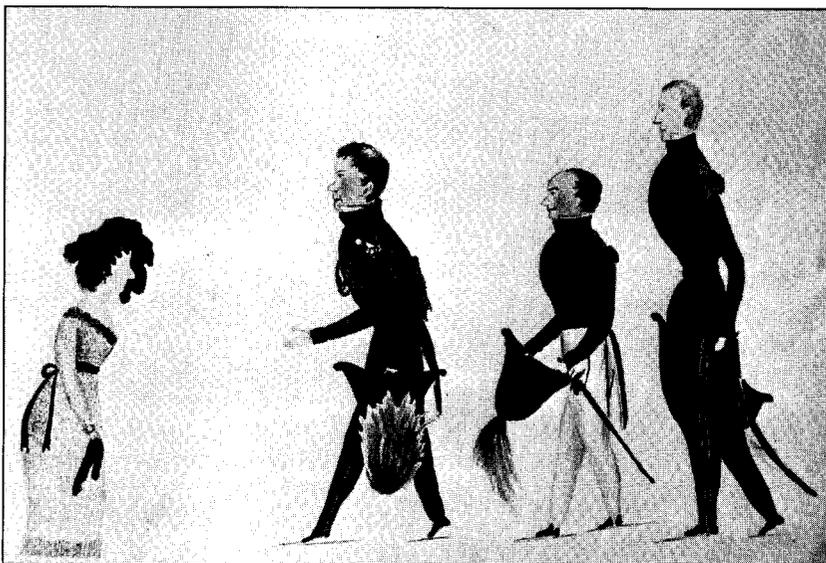


Figure 4: Untitled drawing from the Countess of Dalhousie's Portfolio of three military officers in dress uniform presenting themselves to a lady. Watercolour, attributed to Lady Christian Dalhousie, on paper watermarked "1819". Courtesy: Nova Scotia Museum.

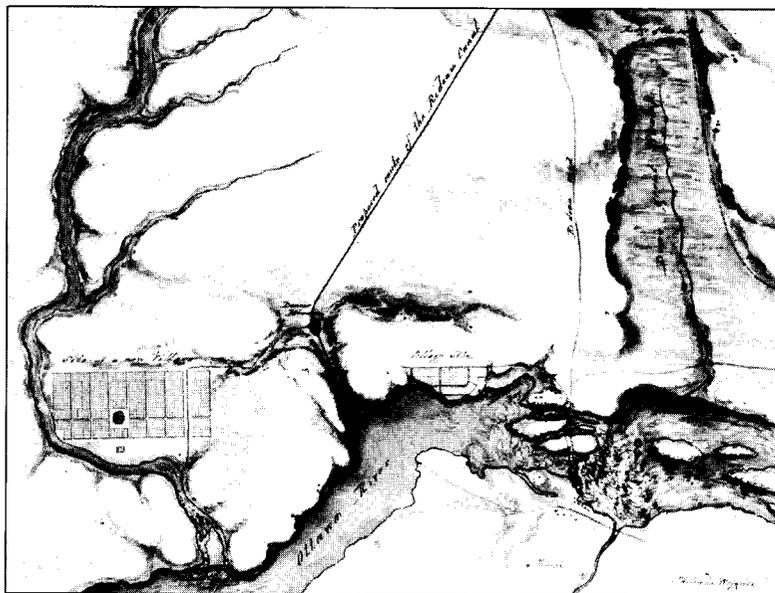


Figure 5: Detail of "Sketch of the route of the Rideau Canal from Canal bay in the Ottawa to the foot of the Black rapids," manuscript map circa 1827. The two shaded areas, "Site of a new village" and "Village Site" (to the right of present-day Parliament Hill) are now part of the City of Ottawa. Courtesy: Cartographic and Architectural Archives Division, National Archives of Canada (NMC 97797).