

# Intention to Designate under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act: University of Toronto Back Campus

May 14, 2013



*Contemporary Photo of Back Campus with Hart House and Soldier's Tower in background*

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND:**

A recently announced decision to redevelop the University of Toronto Back Campus as two field hockey pitches for the Pan Am games has created a large public expression of interest in preserving the space as a grassed common. A community group formed of University of Toronto faculty and students, as well as members of the surrounding residential areas has submitted a request for designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act of the Back Campus as a cultural heritage landscape, for contextual, historical associations and ongoing traditional activities associated with the space. The community group has gathered 5000 signatures on an online petition to protect the Back Campus as a common, community open space, held two demonstrations on campus, as well as one public meeting.



*Photo The Varsity, May 07, 2013*

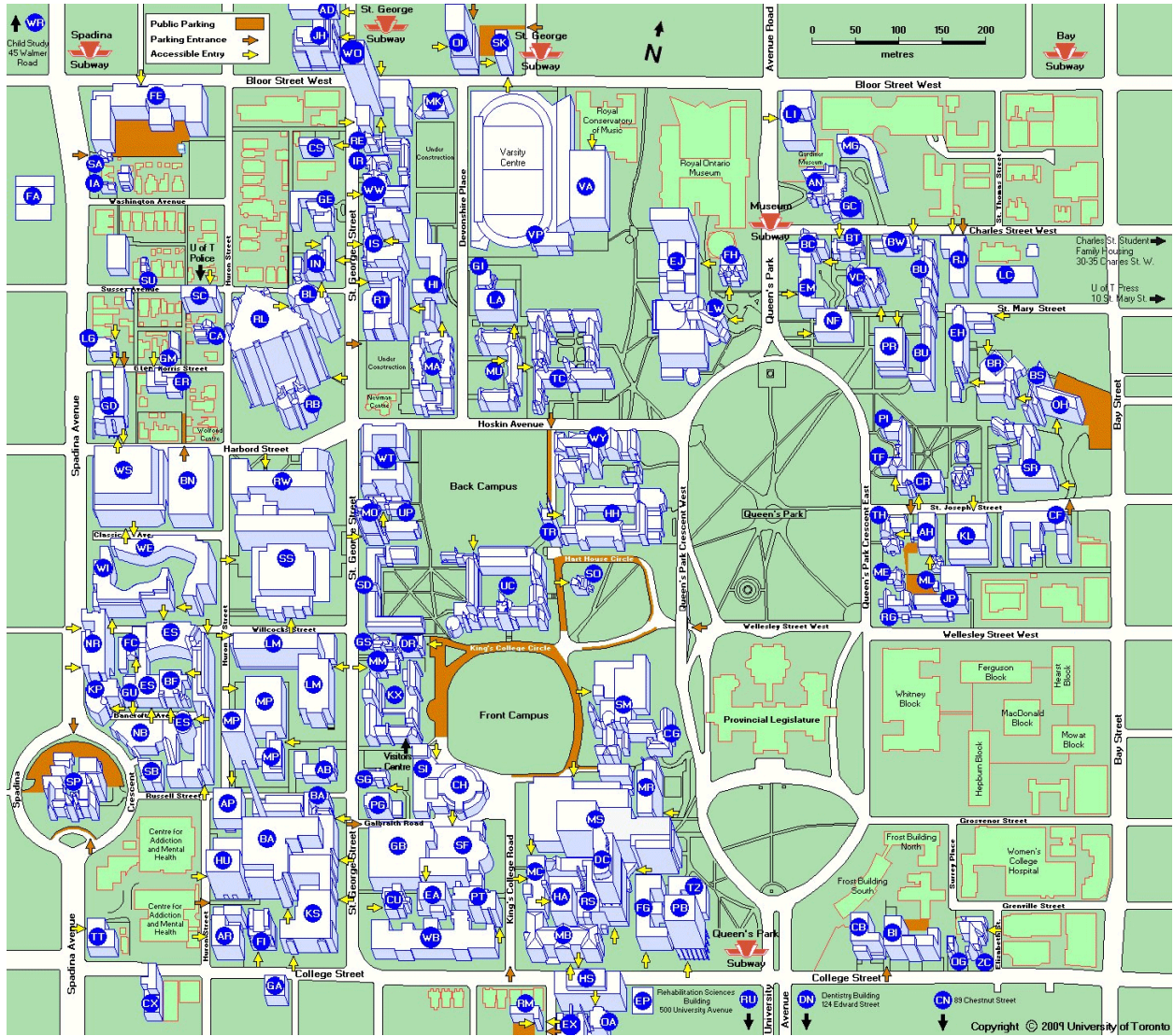
**Citizens active in Keeping the Back Campus Green (Partial List):**

Alan Ackerman	Astra Burka	Jack Radecki
Suzanne Akbari	Hilary Cunningham	Larry Richards
Robert Allsopp	George Dark	Stephen Scharper
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Research materials and a draft designation statement have been prepared and submitted by “Keeping the Back Campus Green” for consideration by the City of Toronto and are attached. Prepared by Catherine Nasmith OAA CAHP / Research Professor Hilary Cunningham, University of Toronto, Illustrations Kim Storey

1. Location Map, University of Toronto May
2. Draft Designation Statement, Statement of Significance
- 3 Heritage Property Research and Evaluation, History, and photographs

# 1. Location Map, University of Toronto



## **2. Draft Designation Statement (Statement of Significance)**

### **University of Toronto Back Campus**

#### **Property Description**

A grassed playing field and common open space on University of Toronto lands, north of Hoskins Avenue, south and west of Tower Road, flanked by University College and Soldiers Tower on the south, Wycliffe College and Hart House on the east, Whitney Hall Residences, and University College Union on the west. Facing onto the Back Campus across Hoskin Avenue are Massey College and Trinity College. Along the western edge of the Back Campus is a walkway planted with historic English Elms which links to walkways and open space between University College and the Sir Daniel Wilson Residence.

#### **Statement of Cultural Value or Interest**

The grassed common and flanking treed walkways are a cultural heritage landscape, valued as an open public common meeting place, used for over a hundred years as a place of assembly, for casual and formal sports by University faculty and students as well as members of the public.

The back campus has contextual value in providing a dignified lawn setting for many historic campus buildings, all designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Back Campus “common” is valued as an excellent vantage point to enjoy the eclectic historic architectural expression of the buildings that surround it. It is framed on the west by a grove of historic English Elm trees. Other trees are planted around its edges, some mature.

It has historic associations as a place of assembly and training for The Royal Flying Corps during World War I. The Soldiers’ Tower sits at the entrance to the Back Campus to commemorate University of Toronto Faculty and students who fought during the First World War. The opening ceremony was held on the Back Campus in 1924. More recently, the field was filled with runners’ tents for the Run for the ROM fundraising events in the 1990’s.

The Back Campus of University College, located to the north of its main building—is lined on the east side by Wycliffe College (est. 1877), the theological seminary of the Low Anglican tradition; and to the north by Trinity College (est. 1851) representing the High Anglican tradition on campus. Consequently, the back campus historically has provided—and continues to provide—a “commons” whereby students

from diverse faith-traditions, such as Jewish, Muslim, Aboriginal, as well as atheist traditions, can share space with Christian students affiliated with the undergraduate and graduate programs at the university.

### **Heritage Attributes:**

- Open natural grass field providing unobstructed public access, a place for formal and informal sports and other unorganized recreational activities
- Open routes across the field
- Historic English Elm Trees
- Treed edges along Hoskin Avenue and Tower Road
- Views from the field to surrounding historic buildings, including University College, Hart House, Wycliffe College, Massey College, Trinity College, Soldier's Tower

### **3. Heritage Property Research and Evaluation Report**

#### **1. The Back Campus's Historical Context**

University College is the first publically, non-denominational University in Canada. Established in 1853, University College is the founding College of the University of Toronto. As a whole, its buildings, grounds and landscaping are fundamental features of the University of Toronto's history and heritage. Historians of the University have suggested that the College's unique architectural eclecticism (which includes Norman, Romanesque revival and Byzantium and Italian palazzo styles) is also representative of its commitment to a non-sectarian education.

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All three university colleges (Trinity, Wycliffe and University colleges) are distinctly visible from the Back Campus “commons,” and consequently together they represent a “horizon” of non-sectarian education on the University of Toronto campus, a physical representation of the University's commitment to public education and the associated values of unity, equality, and tolerance in public education is inscribed in this unique “open space” and the architectural horizon it commands.

#### **Bibliography:**

Claude T. Bissell. *University College: A Portrait*. The University of Toronto Press, 1953.

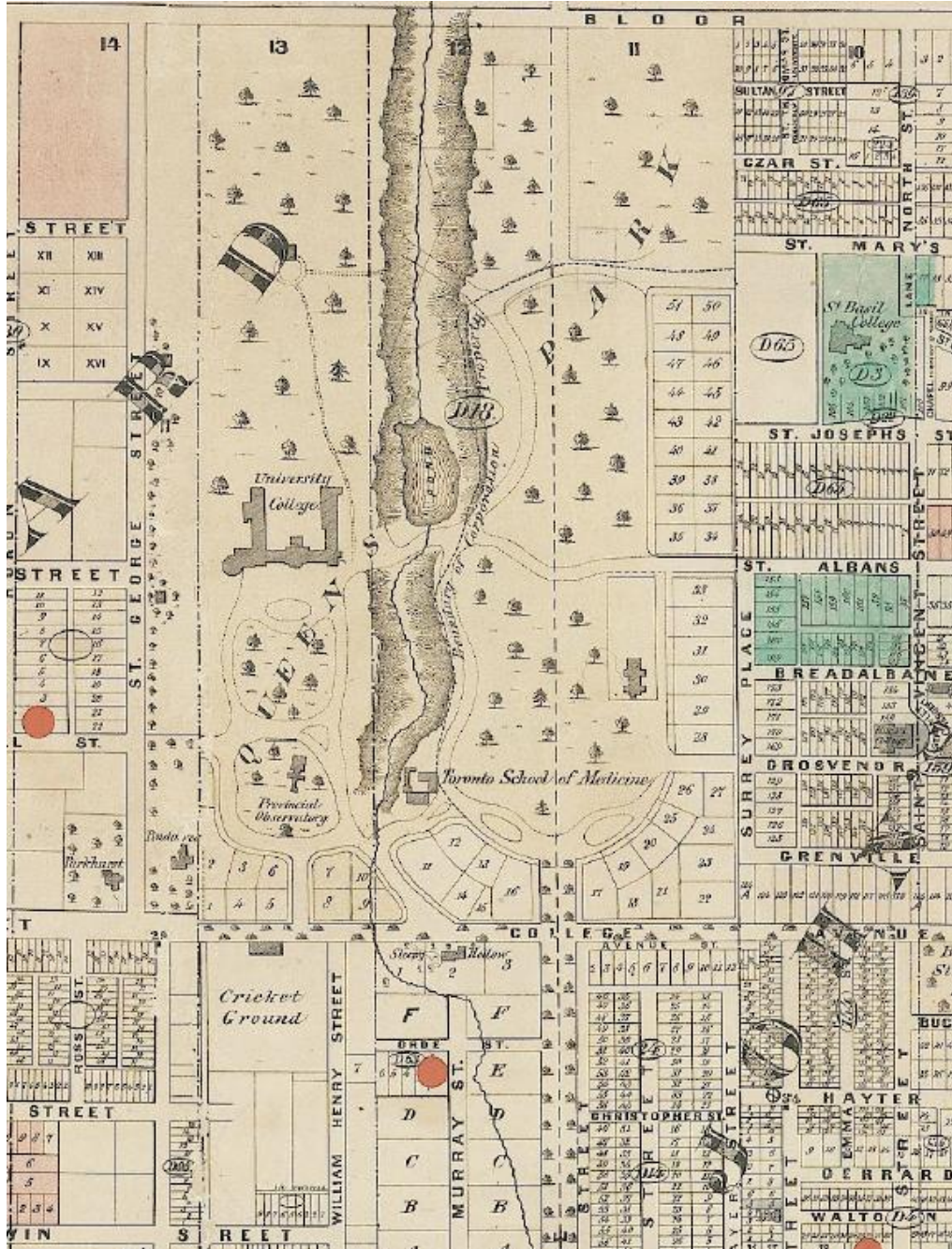
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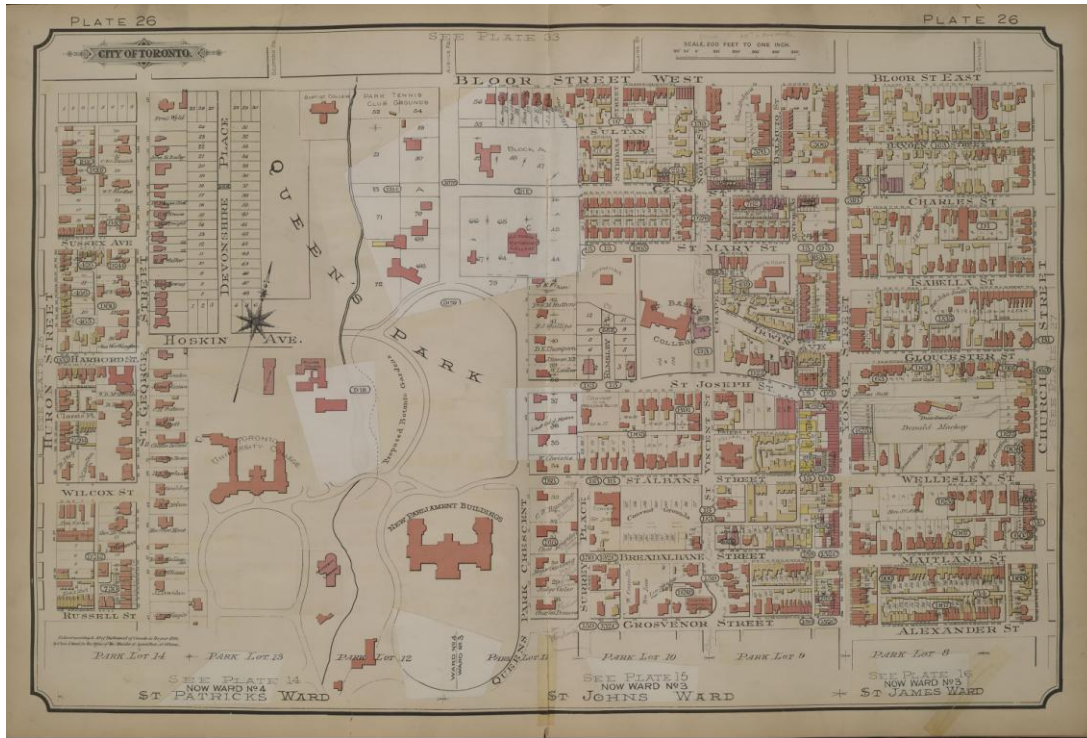
#### **2. History of Land**

The Back Campus land contained a ravine of Taddle Creek (See Map Brown and Storey) and was originally linked to other Taddle Creek ravine lands now buried. For sanitary reasons, Taddle Creek was buried and put into a sewer in 1883.

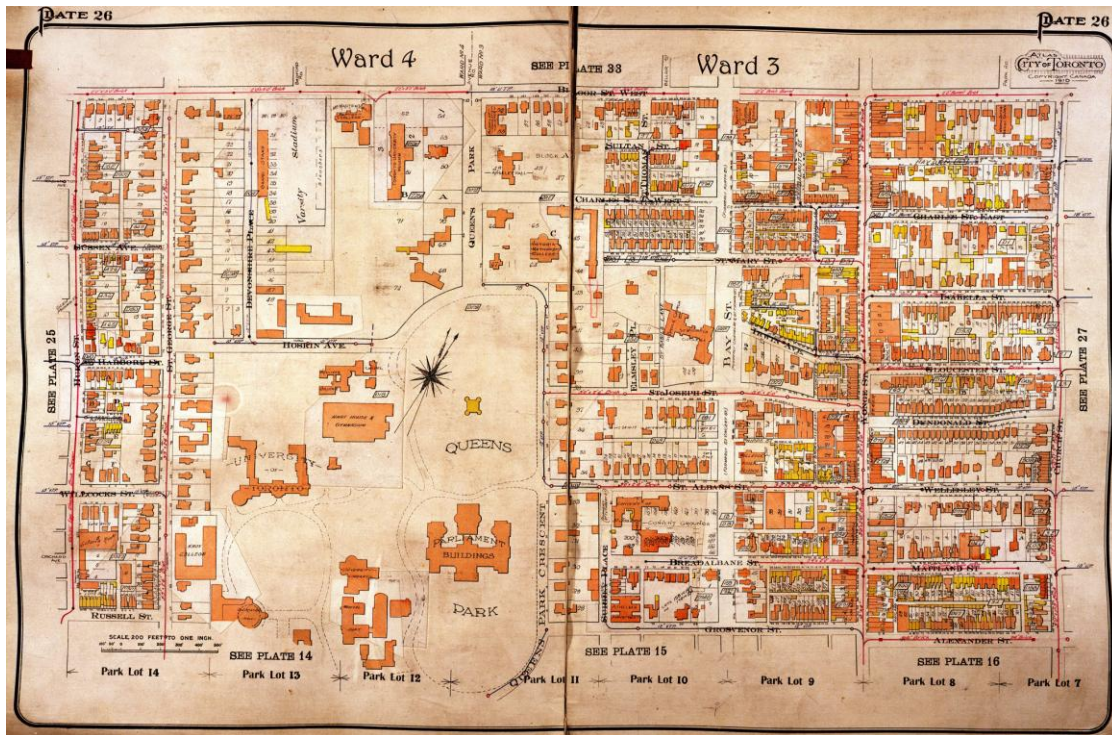


Wadsworth and Unwin's Map of the City of Toronto, 1872





Goads Atlas, 1903



Goads Atlas 1924



Taddle Creek Ravines - *Drawing by Brown and Storey Architects*



*Aerial Photograph 1940, Photo courtesy Anthony Belcher*

### **3. Heritage Properties surrounding the Back Campus:**

Several Ontario Heritage Properties surround the University of Toronto's Back Campus. Historically the Back Campus has formed a "commons" or "green" for these buildings and institutions, and this open space continues to be widely used as "commons" and athletic playing field by students at University College, Trinity College, Wycliffe College, and Massey College, as well as members of the larger University community.

#### **List of Heritage Buildings Associated with the University of Toronto Back Campus:**

1. University College, Built 1859, Designated National Historic Site of Canada, 1968

2. Trinity College, Designated Part IV OHA, 1988
3. Wycliffe College, Designated Part IV OHA, 1977
4. Massey College, Built 1960, Designated Part IV OHA 1990
5. Hart House, Built 1919, Designated Part IV OHA, 1990
6. Soldier's Tower, Dedicated 1924, Designated Part IV OHA, 1990
6. W.D. Matthews House, Newman Centre, Built 1891, Designated Part IV OHA 1981
7. Devonshire House, Built 1907. Listed Part IV OHA, 1973
8. Sir Daniel Wilson Residence, Built 1953, Listed Part IV OHA, 1976
9. Whitney Hall, Built 1931, Listed Part IV OHA, 1976
10. Nicholls House, Built 1885, Listed Part IV OHA, 1973

#### Photographs



*View to Wycliffe College Photo Brown and Storey Architects*



*View to University College Photo Brown and Storey Architects*



*View to Soldiers Tower and Hart House, Photo: Brown and Storey Architects*



*View to Trinity College and Munk Centre  
Photo: Brown and Storey Architects*



*View to Hart House Photo: Brown and Storey Architects*



*View to Whitney Hall Photo: Brown and Storey Architects*

#### **4. Heritage Trees on the Back Campus:**

A rare grove of English Elms stands on the west side of the Back Campus and has been recently evaluated by certified arborists as being in good health. About a decade ago, Harold Averill, Assistant University Archivist, counted 120 annual rings in an elm tree that was removed from the grove because of its declining condition. The remaining English Elms are estimated to be 130 years old and have been described as “prominent features” of the University Campus.



*Heritage English Elms Photo Brown and Storey Architects*



*English Elms frame walkway Photo Brown and Storey Architects*



*View from north along pathway Photo Brown and Storey Architects*

## **5. Back Campus as a Common:**

### **a. Preserving “open space” at the University of Toronto**

The green, open space behind University College—known as the “back campus”—has long provided space for formal and informal athletic and leisure-based activities. At various times University Administrators have proposed construction projects for the Back Campus and have been met with opposition from students and faculty. Student-based advocacy for keeping the Back Campus space open goes back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Fall of 1892, students discovered that the University was planning to build a gymnasium in the back campus and that part of the foundation had already been laid. Students protested and the administration finally agreed to move the gymnasium if students covered the cost of re-location. The students did so and the field was kept open. As the University of Toronto Heritage website states:

“This was the first of several victories in defending this open space.”

Reference: (<http://heritage.utoronto.ca/chronology>)

Two more recent examples include:

- In 1994, faculty and students successfully opposed the construction of underground parking garage beneath the back campus.
- In 2002, faculty and students successfully opposed the plan to construct a student residence on the back campus.

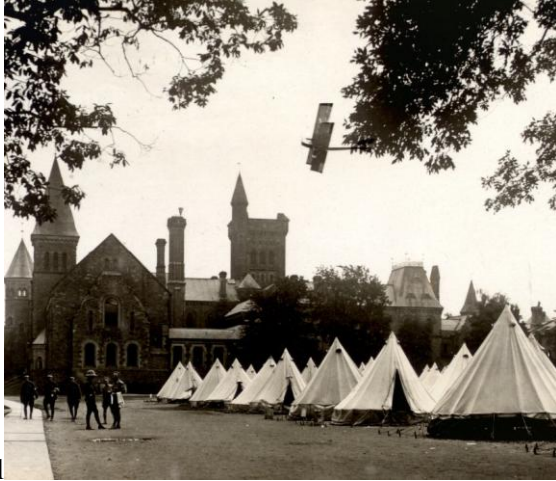
The Back Campus therefore has a long history of being “contested space” in the University and as an “open space” and a “commons,” and thus is an important locus of democratic struggle and student activism.

#### **b. Unique Historical usage of and events at the Back Campus:**

The back campus has provided open space at key moments in Toronto and Canada’s history.

Between 1917 and 1918, cadets for The Imperial Royal Flying Corps as well as many American soldiers from Fort Riley in Kansas received training on the Back Campus. Tents were erected on the front and back lawns of University College to house the soldiers, and the Back Campus served as training grounds.

Note: There is potential for archaeological remains associated with the WWI occupation. It is likely that artifacts may have been left in the field and remain buried there.



*Royal Flying Corps, tents on back campus., ca. 1918*

### **c. Women's athletics and the Back Campus**

Hart House, an athletic facility originally open only to men, was completed in 1919. Although university women were already active in several sports, they were left without a proper facility until after WWII. For outdoor field sports, the back campus became a space where women's sports leagues and teams could practice as well as engage in intramurals. UofT runs an extensive summer camp for members of the public—many of these programs use the back field for sports as well as other outdoor activities.





*Womens Rugby, 2006:09:29 17:15:00, University of Toronto photograph*

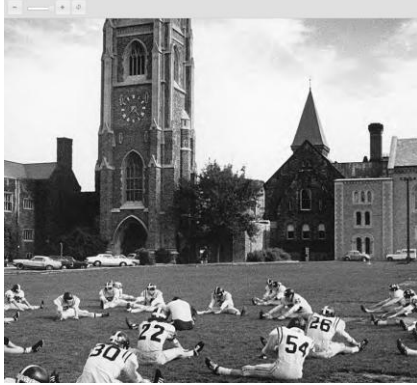


*Girls rugby*

**d. Contemporary student and athletic uses:**

The back campus continues to be widely used by student groups on campus. Scheduled intramural sports are played regularly on the back campus, including baseball, football, rugby, lacrosse, soccer, and field hockey. Spontaneous, non-intramural sports are also played regularly here.

The Back Campus is also the site of many student events, including student orientation in the Fall.



*Warm-up exercises on the back campus before a football game. 29 August 1974*



*Quiddich Match Photo Keeping Back Campus Green*

**e. Public uses of the back campus:**

The Imperial Royal Flying Corps (its official title) establishes a training centre for Canada with headquarters in Toronto. The cadets received their preliminary training on campus before being sent to flying camps at Leaside, Borden and Desoronto; the first cadets headed to Borden at the end of April. During the summer of 1917 a large number of Americans from Fort Riley in Kansas also arrived for training, and the RFC took over the front and back lawns, parts of the Engineering Building, Convocation Hall and Hart House; Wycliffe College, most of Burwash Hall, and Devonshire Hall. A number of airplanes (or parts thereof) were set up around the campus for instructional purposes, and in the gymnasiums of Hart House the RFC cadets "mastered the principles of engine and aircraft construction by stripping down an old Curtis Jenny and re-assembling it again". In 1918 the Back Campus and the quadrangle of Burwash Hall were filled with tents.

**Heritage Property Evaluation:**

<b>Design or Physical Value</b>	
i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	<b>X</b>
ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	<b>N/A</b>
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	<b>N/A</b>

While the materials of the space grass and trees are common, a large open publicly accessible space in the downtown of Toronto is irreplaceable. The site includes several rare 120 year old English Elm trees which are an important part of the University tree canopy.

<b>Historical or Associative Value</b>	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	<b>X</b>
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture.	<b>X</b>
iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	<b>N/A</b>

The property is associated with over 100 years of formal and informal sports and other public assembly activities. Most significant was the use of the field as a training base for airmen during the World War I, with tents pitched across the field. There is potential for archaeological remains associated with the occupation by soldiers and underlying geology remains of the Taddle Creek Ravine. Soldiers also gathered there at the dedication ceremony for the Soldier’s Tower in 1924. It has also been defended from development on several occasions by community action, reflecting ongoing community value placed in it as a “common”.

<b>Contextual Value</b>	
i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	<b>X</b>
ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	<b>X</b>
iii. landmark	<b>NA</b>

The Back Campus has important contextual value in providing a dignified setting and vantage point for the surrounding historic campus buildings, listed in **Section 3. Heritage Properties surrounding the Back Campus**. It physically, visually, and historically links all of these buildings together, and provides access from one to another. It is also an important vantage point to enjoy the architectural richness of the surrounding historic campus buildings.