

History and Evolution of the Study Area

This section examines the history and evolution of the HCD study area. It draws on research that was completed as part of a built form and landscape survey, and background research of historical documents including maps from key periods in Toronto's history.

Key Development Periods

Yonge Street's History is characterized by its dual role as a major transportation route and a commercial main street. These roles connect several different periods in its history and solidify its importance to Toronto, Ontario, and Canada. From its initial survey as a transportation route between the Town of York and Lake Simcoe in 1796, Yonge Street was intended to drive the economy of the fledgling colony of York and facilitate its defence. Yonge Street continued to facilitate this role when Toronto was incorporated in 1834, but it also emerged as a key commercial street in the new city, especially as the population swelled and development pushed northward. The weight of Yonge Street's history is demonstrated in it being known informally as "Toronto's Main Street".

For the purposes of this report the history of the study area has been divided into seven periods:

- The Natural Landscape and Aboriginal Occupation
- Initial Survey of Yonge Street
- Early Settlement and Establishment of Park Lots (1800-1850)
- Sub-Division of Park Lots (1850-1870)
- Main Street Development and Early Public Transportation (1870-1900)
- Automobile-Age and Residential Intensification (1900-1930)
- Subway Construction and Modern Redevelopment (1930-1970)
- 1970s to Present Day (1970-present)

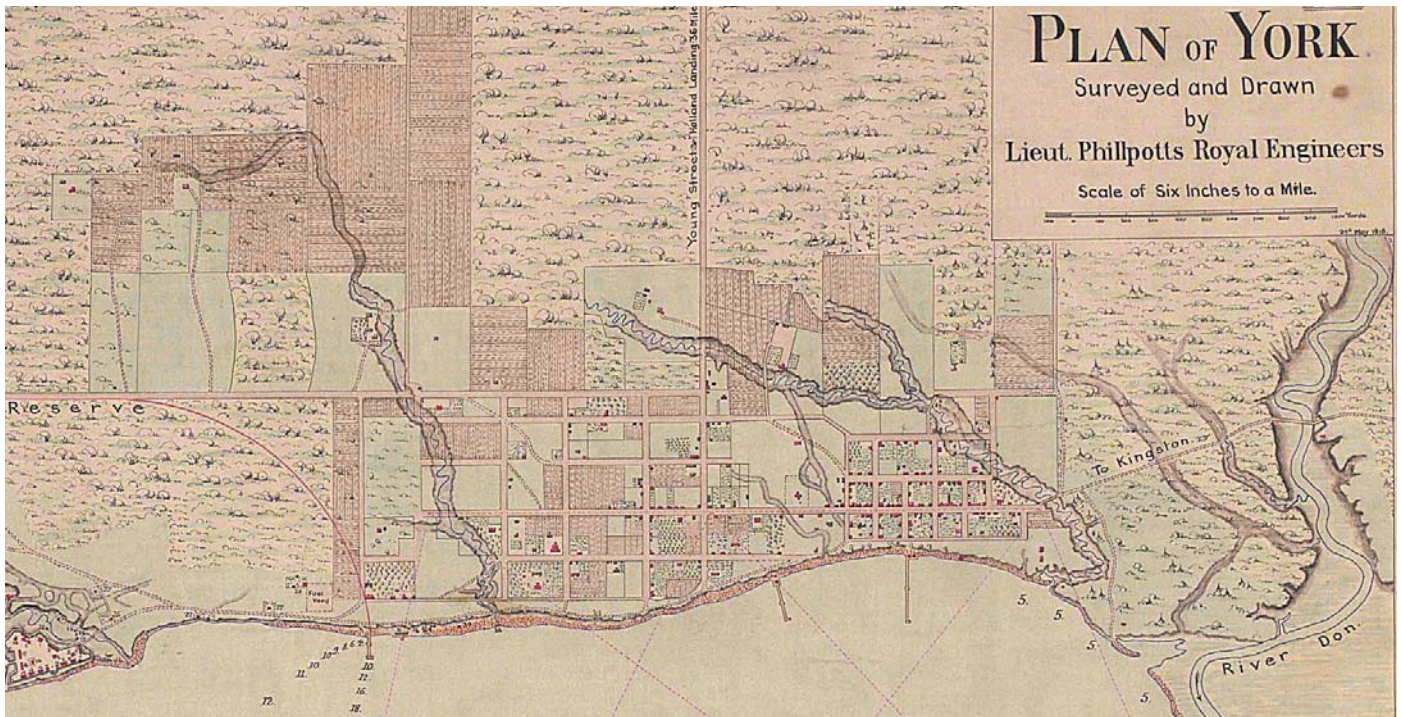


Figure 1. Plan of York drawn by Lieutenant Phillpotts of the Royal Engineers, surveyed in 1818 drawn in 1823. For context, the street to the west marked with "Reserve" is Lot Street which would later be renamed Queen Street. It shows the extent of development in Toronto (then York) at that time.

The Natural Landscape and Aboriginal Occupation

Davenport Road, at the north end of the HCD study area follows the shore of glacial Lake Iroquois, which came into existence around 12,000 years ago (Chapman and Putnam 1984). The waters of this lake then gradually receded to such an extent that by roughly 3,000 years ago the shoreline was established more or less in the location at which it stood when the Town of York was founded. A number of minor creeks ran through the general study area prior to nineteenth and twentieth century urban development. A minor tributary of Taddle Creek rose in the area of Queen's Park and flowed southeast, crossing Yonge Street just south of Wood and Grenville Streets to join a larger branch of the system that flowed more or less straight south along what is now Church Street. Another creek, Castle Frank Brook, which was a minor tributary of the Don River that rose in the Dufferin Street-Lawrence Avenue area, flowed through the Rosedale Valley ravine to the immediate north of the study area. Castle Frank Brook was also known as Brewery or Severn Creek, and was named after Severn's Brewery which was located near Davenport Road and Collier Street.

Davenport Road preserves the route of an inland Aboriginal trail, skirting the Lake Iroquois strand line and linking the Don and Humber rivers. It was later utilized by French explorers and

missionaries traveling to and from Huronia. There are vague accounts of two Aboriginal sites located in the general vicinity of the study area. The Taddle Creek site is thought to have been a Late Woodland village located at Clover Hill, and later, the former estate of John Elmsley, which was eventually developed for St. Michael's College University. The Sandhill site is reportedly a burial site or cemetery located near the southwest corner of the intersection of Yonge Street and Bloor Street (Scadding 1873, 399-400).

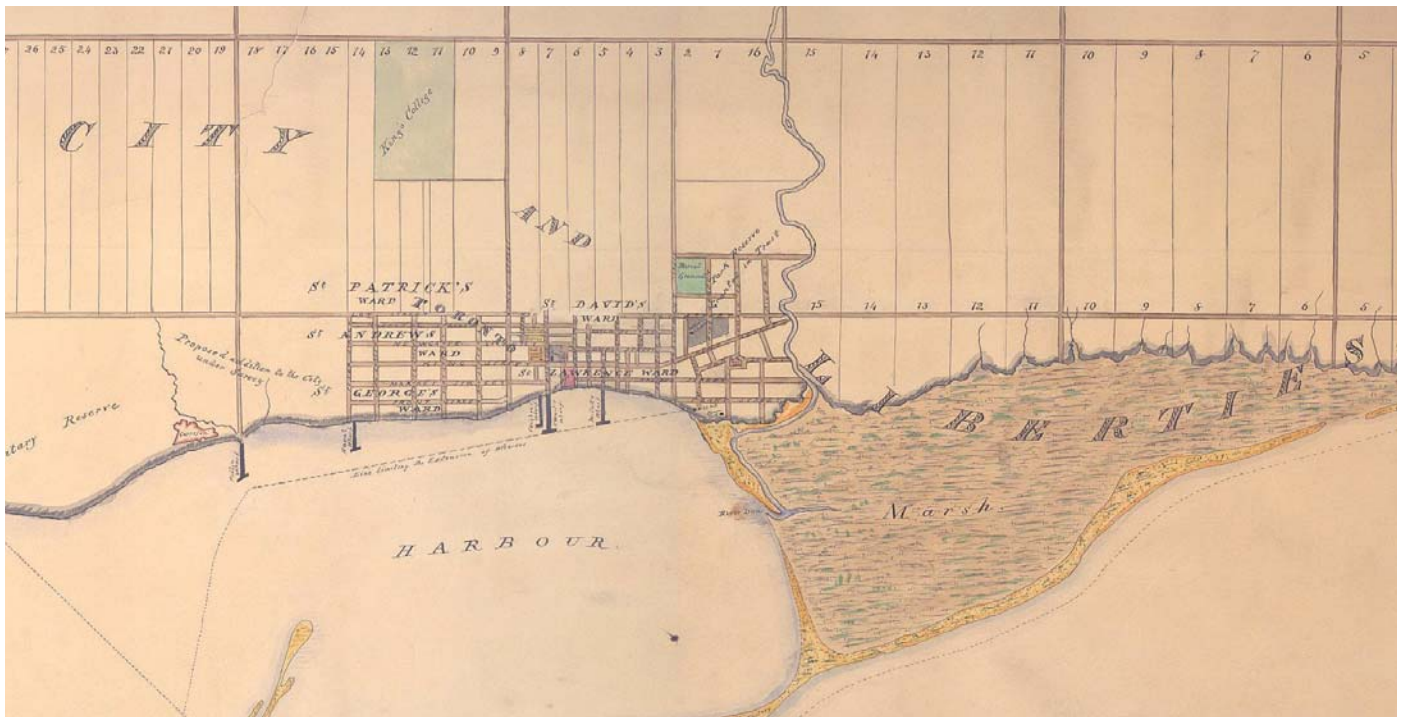


Figure 2. This Plan of Toronto was commissioned by the new City of Toronto the year it was incorporated in 1834. It was drawn by James Grant Chewett and shows the demarcation of Park Lots, note Yonge Street between Lots 8 and 9.

Initial Survey of Yonge Street

The study area was part of a larger area that included a meeting point of land and water routes developed by the aboriginal population and used by early settlers and trappers. There was an extensive, but circuitous, system of trails that followed the topography of the land in order to facilitate travel. One of the better known trails that survives to this day is Davenport Road, at the northern limit of the study area. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Davenport Road became part of an important route for farmers traveling to markets or to conduct business in Toronto. It is undoubtedly one of Toronto's oldest roads.

Portions of Yonge Street overlap this ancient trail system. In 1793 Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, contracted Augustus Jones to survey a route for Yonge Street from the Township of York to Lake Simcoe, and by 1794 the Queen's Rangers had begun constructing a "bush road" following Jones' survey (Miles 1878, x). At this time the northerly limit of the town was set at Lot (Queen) Street and the study area was not yet within the town's limits. The study area therefore provided a link between the new Township of York and this rudimentary "bush road". The impetus to improve that link arose for economic reasons.

On December 18, 1800, Chief Justice of Upper Canada, John Elmsley Sr., convened a meeting to discuss the best options for

improving the road in order to facilitate farmers and traders bringing their goods to market. The Upper Canada Gazette hoped the road improvements would attract the attention of the North-West Company who could use the Township of York as a depot in the fur trade (*Upper Canada Gazette*, March 7, 1801). The improvements at this point were rudimentary and consisted mainly of removing tree stumps, residual brush, and smoothing the road north. Nevertheless, the investment paid off and the community flourished.

The Township of York's population increased gradually before the War of 1812, but grew significantly during the 1820s. In 1797, for instance, the total number of inhabitants within the town was estimated at 212 persons. Within the space of one decade, this number had doubled to 414. By 1824-1825, the town contained 1,679 residents. By 1834 the population had reached 9,254 and by 1845 this number had doubled again to 19,706 (Walton 1837, 41; Smith 1846, 193; Mosser 1984, 7, 67, 157).

In 1834 the Township of York was incorporated as the City of Toronto and its boundaries were expanded, at which point the majority of the study area (between College/Carlton Street and Bloor Street) was formally constituted as part of the new city. The remainder of the study area, north of Bloor Street, was developed initially as the Village of Yorkville and would not be annexed by Toronto until February 1, 1883.

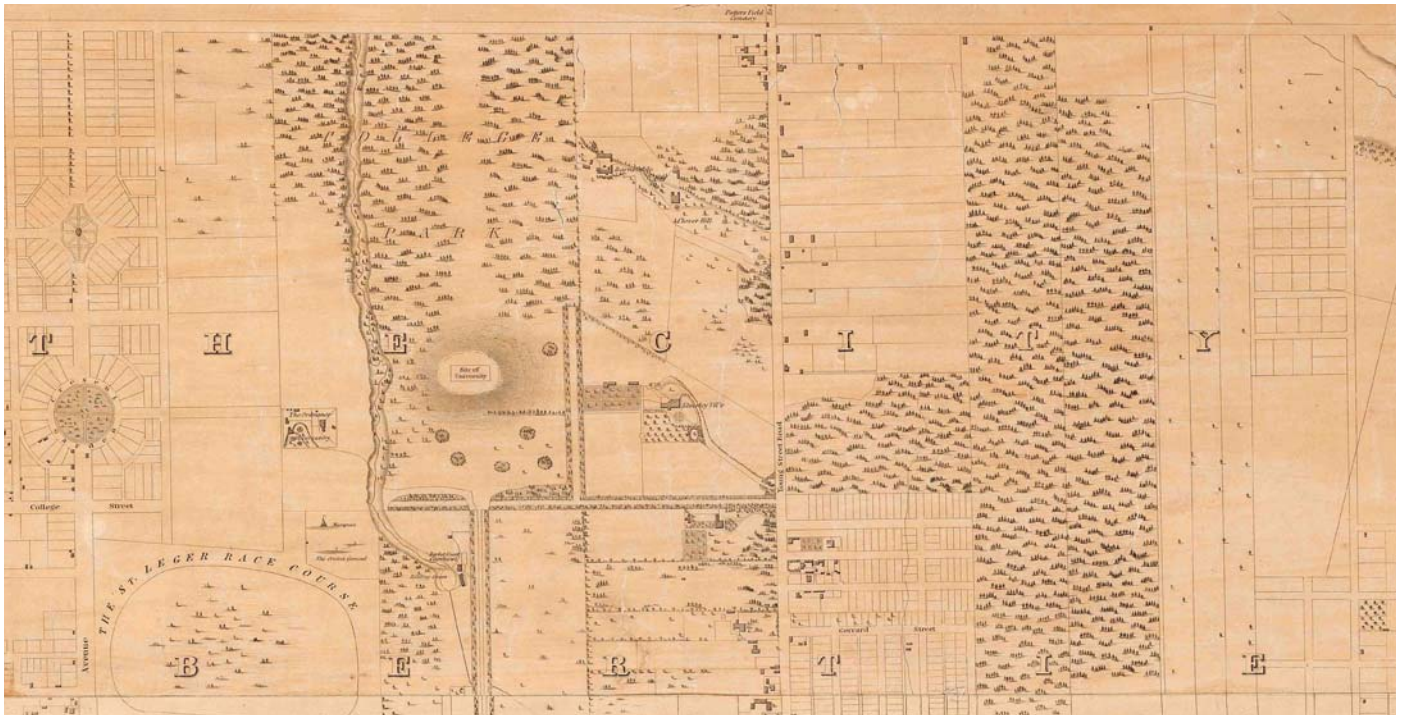


Figure 3. Plan of the City and Liberties of Toronto, surveyed and drawn in 1842 by James Cane. It shows some early subdivision of Park Lots and the sparse development in the study area.

Early Settlement and Establishment of Park Lots (1800 -1850)

During the initial township survey, large Park Lots between Queen Street and Bloor Street had been set aside. When the capital of Upper Canada was moved from Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake) to York, these Park Lots were granted to government officers, members of the Family Compact, and other influential individuals. This was done partly as an incentive for them to move, and as compensation for any losses sustained by having to give up their homes in Niagara. The largesse of the colonial government in granting these large tracts of land would later become one of the catalyst's of the Upper Canada Rebellion led by Mackenzie King.

The study area incorporates portions of two Park Lots; Lot 8, on the east side of Yonge Street, and Lot 9, on the west side of Yonge Street (see figure 2). In 1799, Chief Justice John Elmsley acquired the northern portion of Park Lot 9 beginning at the southwest corner of Bloor Street and Yonge Street running south to approximately where Wellesley Street is today (Scadding 1873, 392). The Park Lots that composed the remainder of the study area were similarly held by affluent individuals.

Development was slow in the study area leading up to and following the formation of Toronto given that much of the land was privately held. Eventually the owners subdivided and sold

their lands to capitalize on a growing population and the demand for land. These blocks would not be densely developed until the 1870s and 1880s (Bailey 1838; Cane 1842; Dennis and Fleming 1851; Boulton 1858 plate VII).

Road Improvements

Despite the improvements to the road undertaken in the early 1800s, during the 1820s and early 1830s, Yonge Street remained for the most part a dirt road cut through forest. Travel remained difficult for farmers or craftsmen with loaded wagons during the spring thaw or rainy periods. It was proposed that travel along Yonge Street could be improved if the road was macadamized—an early form of paving made with broken stone and gravel. The first section of macadamized road was called the “Yonge Street Mile,” and was intended to form a “test strip” in order to determine whether this method of road building was suitable for a Canadian climate. It was so successful the legislature tripled their initial investment in order to continue with these and other local road improvements (Statutes of Upper Canada, 3 William IV c. 37; 6 William IV c. 30; 7 William IV c. 76; 3 Victoria c. 53 sub. 57; Scadding 1873:388).

The loan to pay for the macadamization was financed through road tolls, and the first toll gate was located at the northeast corner of Bloor Street and Yonge Street, and contained a small house, which provided office space and accommodation for the gate keeper (Myer 1977:81).

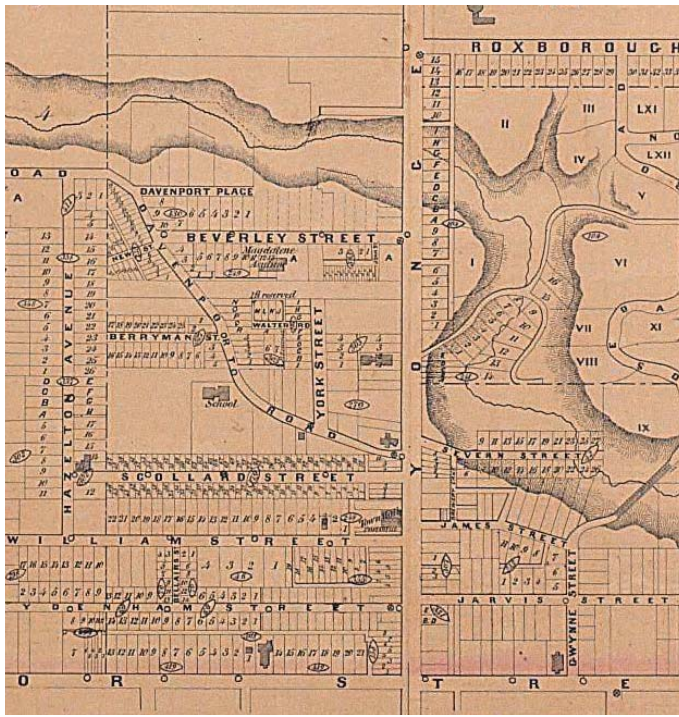


Figure 4. Plan of the Village of Yorkville surveyed and drawn by S. James in 1877.



Figure 5. Historical sketch of rebels marching on Toronto by C.W. Jeffreys.

War of 1812

During the War of 1812, Yonge Street undoubtedly continued to be used as a route to and from the Town of York for private citizens and for farmers on their way to market as a key ‘safe’ route for shipping goods. During the War, Yonge Street was also used for the movement of the local militia from North York and the outlying townships in York County, and for the transportation of the militia stores and equipment.

Upper Canada Rebellion

Yonge Street was the site of the short lived “Upper Canada Rebellion” that demanded responsible government in Canada and an end to corruption in the colonial government. The largesse demonstrated by the awarding of Park Lots to members of the Family Compact was one of several motivations for the rebellion. On December 6, 1837, William Lyon Mackenzie, the first mayor of Toronto, led a group of rebel forces to the tollgate at Yonge Street and Bloor Street. In order to demonstrate their hostility, they set fire to the two-storey frame residence of a local doctor. Following this the rebels marched south where they were confronted by Sheriff William Botsford Jarvis who was hiding with a group of 27 riflemen near Yonge Street and Maitland Street. Gunshots were exchanged, but Mackenzie’s rebels, who were not seasoned fighters, quickly panicked and fled. Several rebels were later taken prisoner, tried, and sentenced to death (Bailey 1838; Scadding 1873:258; Myer 1977:74-75).

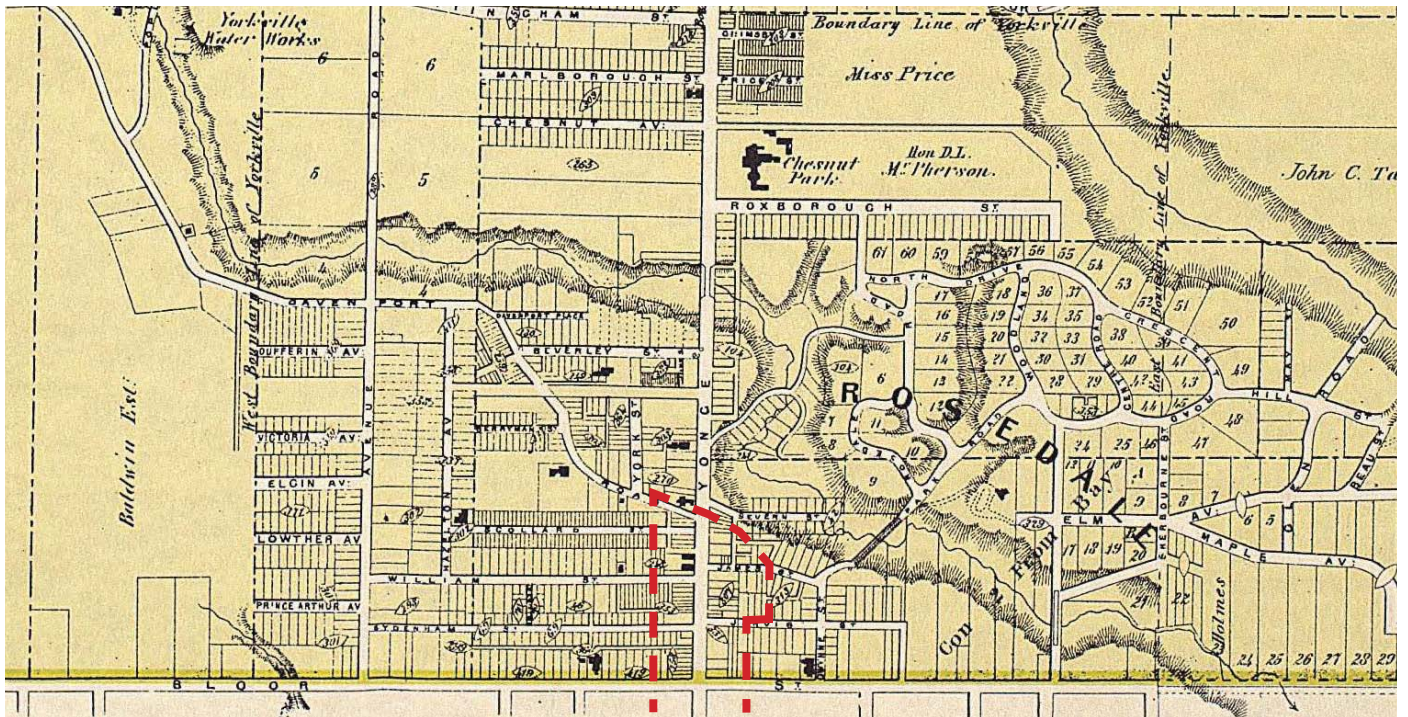


Figure 6. Map of Yorkville and its Vicinity in 1878, drawn by Alfred T. Cotterell. It shows the general extent of development in Yorkville shortly before annexation to the City of Toronto. Approximate bounds of study area in red.

Sub-Division of Park Lots (1850 - 1870)

Using historical maps it is possible to trace the subdivision of the Park Lots and estates along Yonge Street. The James Cane map from 1842 (figure 4, page 5) provides a snapshot of the study area south of Bloor Street prior to extensive subdivision. It is clear from this map that the majority of lands were still held in large blocks, although some parcelling-off had occurred on the west and east sides of Yonge Street closer to the Yonge Street and Bloor Street intersection. The narrow rectangular lots that define the study area today had not yet emerged.

The Fleming Map (figure 7) shows that by 1851 the subdivision of land within the study area south of Bloor Street was well under way. On the west side of Yonge Street large portions of the Elmsley Estate lands had been parcelled out. Comparatively less subdivision had occurred on the east side of Yonge Street at this point.

In 1858 the Boulton's Plan (figure 8) shows that the urban fabric that exists today within the study area had begun to emerge. The current pattern of narrow rectangular lots oriented towards the street was laid out along new streets that had been carved through the Park Lots, closely resembling the current street network and block pattern.

By 1862, most areas on the west side of Yonge Street had been

registered as plans of subdivision, and some lands on the east side of the street had been registered as well. The only estate that was not subdivided belonged to a wealthy merchant named Donald Mackay. These lands were located between Gloucester Street and Wellesley Street on the east side of Yonge Street. The estate would not be fully developed until Mackay's house was demolished in 1904 and a new street (Dundonald Street), named after Mackay's estate, was constructed to provide frontage for new residential lots.

Village of Yorkville

The west side of the Village of Yorkville was subdivided during the late 1830s and 1840s by Sheriff William Botsford Jarvis and Joseph Bloor. The land on the east side of Yonge Street formed part of Jarvis's country estate named "Rosedale". This was not laid out in a plan of subdivision until 1854, when it became the focal point of the surrounding farming community and an important stopover for those travelling north on Yonge Street and for farmers taking their goods along Davenport Road to St. Lawrence Market and the docks.

Yorkville was not formally incorporated until 1852. As a testament to the industriousness of its founders, their trades are recognized in Yorkville's coat-of-arms with an anvil (blacksmith), a barrel (brewer), a brick mould (builder), a carpenter's plane (carpenter), and the head of a cow (butcher). The Village's coat-of-arms was relocated to the fire hall tower at 34 Yorkville Avenue. Built in

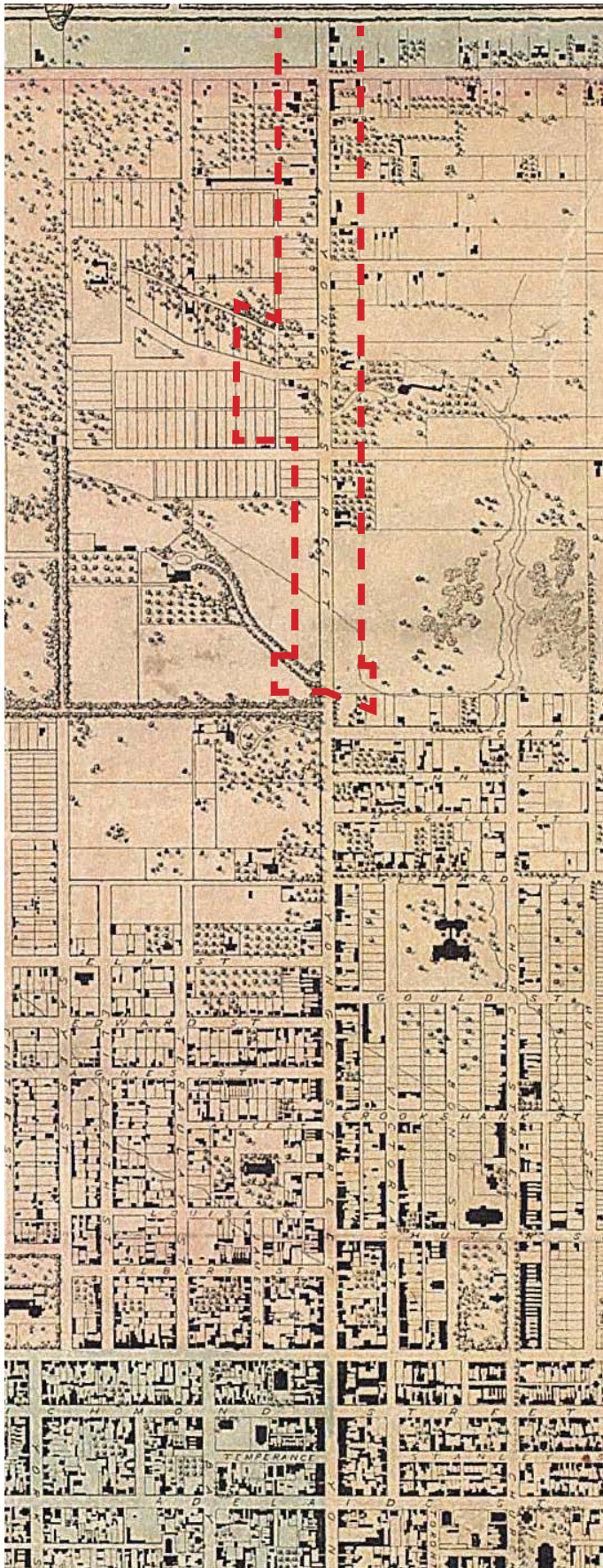


Figure 7. Extract from the Fleming Map, 1851, showing the emerging subdivision of Park Lots along Yonge Street. Approximate study area in red

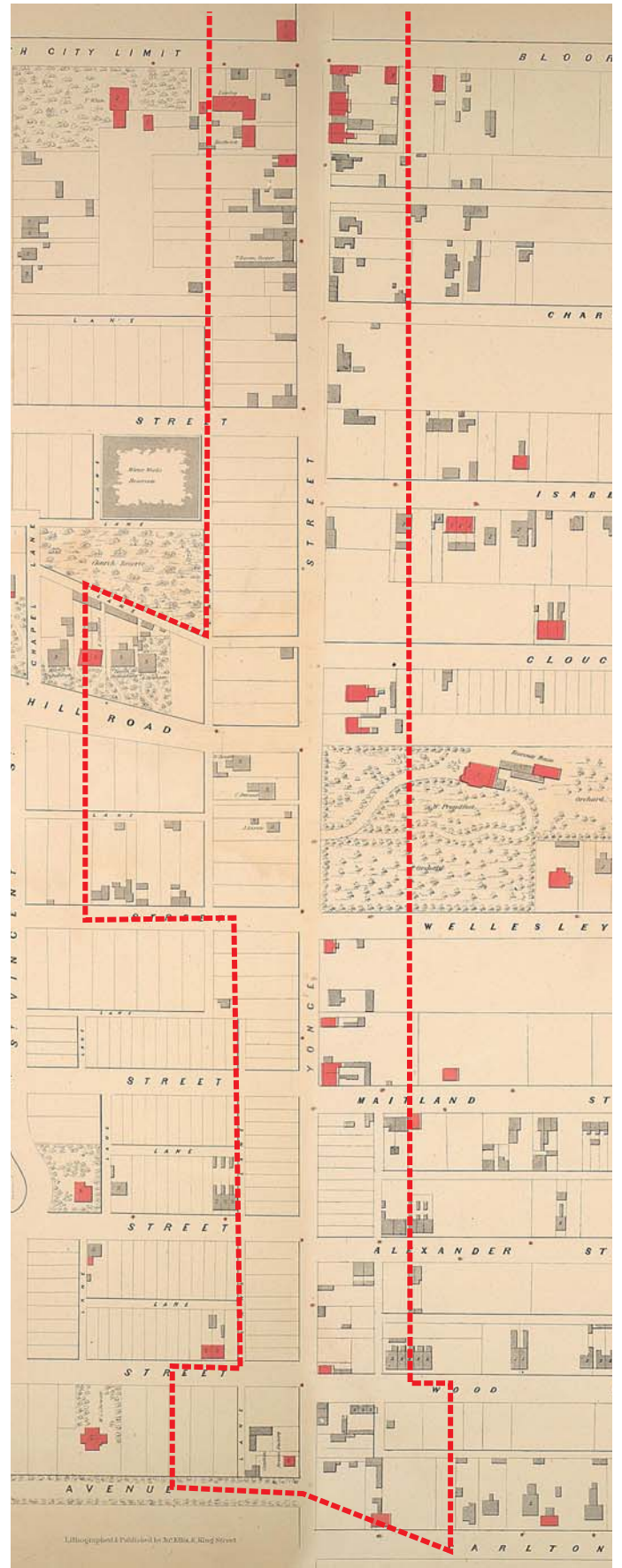


Figure 8. Boulton's Plan, 1858, showing the emerging urban structure in the study area, highlighted in red. Yorkville is not yet part of Toronto and hence does not appear on this map.

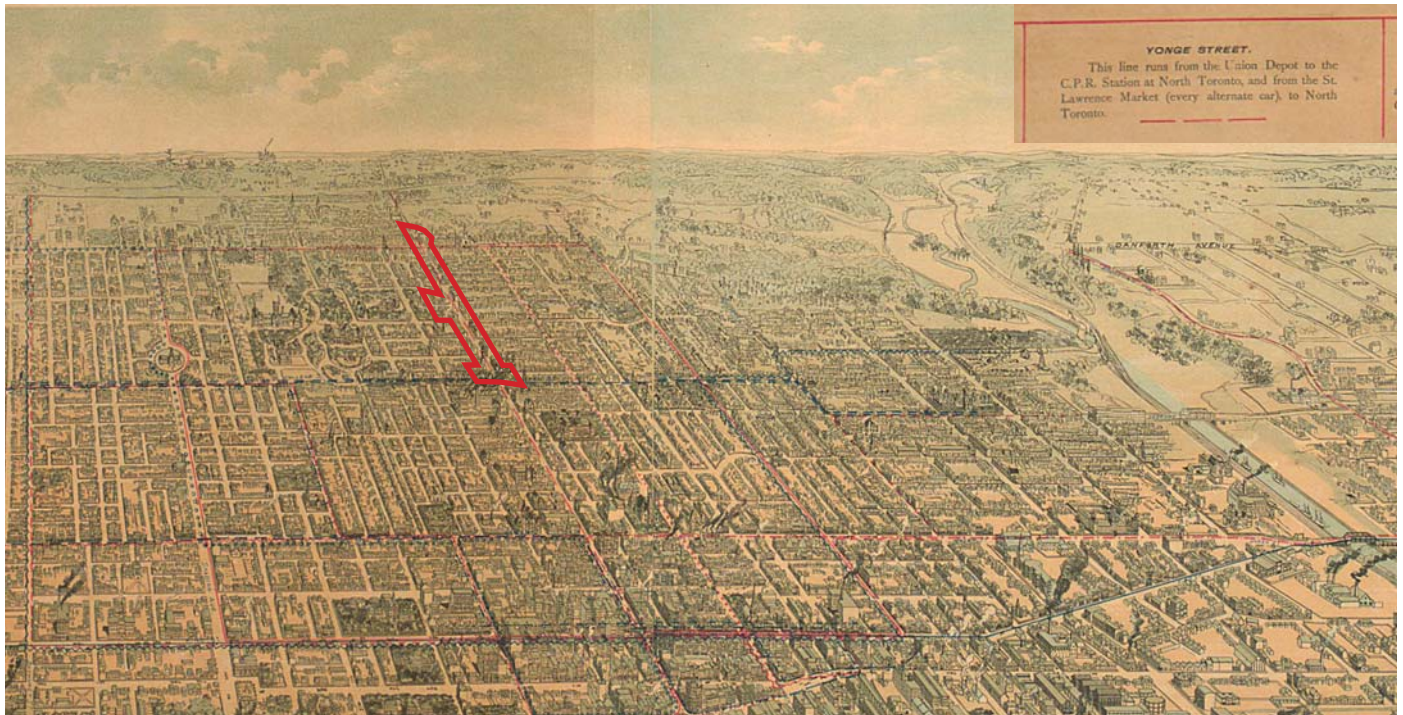


Figure 9. Map of Toronto's Streetcar and transportation lines, prepared by the Toronto Railway Company in 1892. Approximate bounds of study area in red. Excerpt explaining service along Yonge in upper right corner.

1876, the tower still stands today, however, the main hall was replaced in 1889.

Main Street Development and Early Public Transportation (1870-1900)

Development along Yonge Street rapidly accelerated between 1870 and 1900, commensurate with Toronto's rapidly growing population. 53% of all extant buildings in the study area were built during this period. This resulted in the annexation of Yorkville in 1883 as the young city quickly outgrew its borders. Important innovations in public transportation also helped to fuel development along Yonge Street during this period.

Early Public Transportation

The first bus line (omnibuses) began to operate on Yonge Street in 1849. Buses departed from St. Lawrence Market every ten minutes, and headed north from Yonge Street/King Street to the Red Lion Inn just north of Yonge Street/Bloor Street. In May 1861, the Toronto Street Railway was established with the construction of tracks along Yonge Street. Cars were drawn by horse along these tracks until electrification 1892. There were 100,000 residents in the city at this time.

By 1900, the study area had changed significantly and was

now intensely developed compared to just fifteen or twenty years prior. The Goad's map of 1899 (figure 11) shows a nearly continuous street wall of buildings fronting along Yonge Street and well developed residential neighbourhoods to the east and west.

St. Nicholas Street

St. Nicholas Street runs parallel to the commercial storefronts on the west side of Yonge Street, between Wellesley Street West and Charles Street West. The areas surrounding St. Nicholas Street formed part of the Elmsley family's extensive "Clover Hill" estate, which was subdivided during the 1850s. During the 1880s and 1890s, the southern extension of the street between Wellesley Street and St. Joseph Street was known as "Brownville's Lane." During this time the street contained a series of small rough-cast cottages, today numbered as 45-63 St. Nicholas Street, which were constructed in 1884. The cottages were developed and owned by the Scottish Ontario Manitoba Land Company, which also owned and developed a row of prominent Second Empire buildings fronting on Yonge Street that were designed by E.J. Lennox. He was also the architect who designed Old City Hall among many other important buildings across the city.

