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## The Founding of Osgoode Township

On July 28, 2001, a provincial historical plaque commemorating the founding of Osgoode Township was unveiled at Vernon, Ontario as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pioneer Day. In addition to the plaque unveiling, two local markers were also unveiled to honour the founding families of the McDonells and the Yorks. The bilingual plaque reads:

### **THE FOUNDING OF OSGOODE TOWNSHIP**

Named for William Osgoode, the first Chief Justice of Upper Canada, Osgoode Township was established on lands the British acquired from the Mississaugas in the 1780s. Land for farming and a plentiful supply of white pine and white oak attracted the first non-native settlers, the families of Archibald and Catherine McDonell and William and Ann York, who arrived in 1827. They founded the new community's first industries and institutions, and they built the first two roads in the Township, converging here at what was Baker's Corners. These roads, the Rideau Canal and railway lines between Osgoode and Bytown (now Ottawa) encouraged further settlement, and the Township was incorporated in 1850. On January 1, 2001, Osgoode Township became part of the City of Ottawa.

### **FONDATION DU COMTÉ D'OSGOODE**

Nommé en mémoire de William Osgoode, premier juge en chef du Haut-Canada, le comté d'Osgoode est établi sur des terres que les Britanniques acquièrent dans les années 1780 et qui appartenaient aux Mississaugas. Attirés par ses terres arables et par l'abondance de pins et de chênes blancs, les premiers colons non autochtones s'y installent en 1827, notamment les familles d'Archibald et Catherine McDonell et de William et Ann York. Ils implantent les premières industries ainsi que les institutions de la nouvelle communauté et construisent les deux premières routes du comté, qui se croisaient en ce lieu, alors appelé Baker's Corners. Ce sont ces routes, le canal Rideau et le chemin de fer reliant Osgoode à Bytown (devenue Ottawa) qui stimulent la colonisation. Le comté d'Osgoode, incorporé en 1850, est rattaché à la ville d'Ottawa le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2001.

## **Historical background**

In the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the American Revolutionary War, the land north of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario was the hunting territory of several First Nations, most notably the Mississaugas. At the conclusion of the War in 1783, the large number of United Empire Loyalists flooding into what is now Canada prompted the British to acquire native lands for settlement. Under the direction of Governor General Haldimand, Captain W.R. Crawford negotiated what would become known as the “Crawford Purchase” with the Mississaugas. In exchange for clothing, hunting supplies and “liquid assets,” the British took over most of what would become the counties of Hastings, Addington, Frontenac, Leeds, Grenville, Dundas, Stormont, Glengarry, Lanark, Russell, Prescott and Carleton. In what would become Carleton County, the purchase included Marlborough, North Gower, Osgoode, Gloucester and part of Nepean townships.

Many of the first land grants in this area were made to United Empire Loyalists between 1799-1827. Osgoode and nearby Russell Townships were surveyed in 1822. Osgoode Township was named for the first Chief Justice of Upper Canada, the Honourable William Osgoode.

Two couples, along with their families, share the title of being the first non-native settlers to the township: Archibald and Catherine McDonell and William and Ann York. In a rather strange coincidence, the McDonells and Yorks had been neighbours before they moved to Osgoode. Born in Scotland, “Squire” Archibald McDonell came to Canada as a boy in 1785 and settled in Cornwall. There he married Catherine McDonell, whose father was a Loyalist. The couple already had eight children when they left Cornwall for Osgoode, where their ninth was born. Archibald, a veteran of the War of 1812, was granted 800 acres of land, and Catherine was granted 200 acres due to her U.E.L. roots.

William York, his wife Ann Embury and their nine children arrived in Cornwall in 1824 from Sussex, England. Unbeknownst to one another, both the Yorks and McDonells decided to relocate to Osgoode Township at the same time in March 1827. The McDonells settled just south of what would become Baker’s Corners (now Metcalfe) and the Yorks settled only two miles away, near what is now known as York’s Corners.

Osgoode Township was initially thought to be an impenetrable swamp, and it took time before potential settlers received word that it was not all swampy. Eventually, it was also realized that the geography of the terrain and its several watercourses allowed swampland to be drained. Deep forests of white pine and white oak also attracted settlers. Although agriculture was the main reason most people came to Osgoode, many found that lumbering was more lucrative. The McDonells’ and Yorks’ efforts to build roads towards Bytown (now Ottawa) facilitated

travel, allowing new settlers greater access to the area. The roads they cleared converged at what is now the junction of Victoria and Albert Streets in Metcalfe.

The McDonells and Yorks proved to be valuable members of the growing community. The “Squire” opened the township’s first store, started its first sawmill, and was its first municipal councillor. William York helped to found the 1<sup>st</sup> Methodist church in Osgoode (the second church to be built in the township) in 1834.

Five years after the arrival of these first settlers, there were 15 other families in the township. The early settlers are known to have heard terrible thundering sounds as they cleared their properties. They eventually realized that it was Colonel John By and the Royal Engineers setting off explosives as they built the Rideau Canal just 20 miles away. Following the completion of the Canal in 1832, the population of the area increased steadily. The two railways that crossed the township, the New York Central line and the Ottawa-Prescott line, also brought more people to the area, beginning in the 1840s. Osgoode Township was incorporated on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1850.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, on the 151<sup>st</sup> anniversary of its incorporation, Osgoode Township became a ward of the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa.



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