

Timeline: Pre-1972

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First Nations

Our first residents, and those with the longest tenure on the land we now call Pickering, were the First Nations. Ironically, it is they who have left the fewest signs in passing.
~ John W. Sabean

John Sabean's book, *Time Present and Time Past: A Pictorial History of Pickering*, reminds us that we must never make the mistake of assuming that the story of Pickering begins with the pioneers.

Long before the first European families settled here, aboriginal groups made these fertile lands their home. At the dawn of history, following the Ice Age, the climate warmed and boreal forests gave way to the mixed forests we know today. Early nomadic groups, precursors of Algonquian-speaking tribes such as the Ojibway and Mississauga, followed the seasons, foraging in these forests and waterways throughout the region. In time, a mere millennium ago, a new cultural group built the first permanent communities on the shores of the great water they called "onitariio" – beautiful lake.

Over the centuries, these Algonquian-speaking people blended with newcomers, the Lake Ontario Iroquois, eventually becoming the Huron, the Six Nations, and others who share the Iroquoian language group.

Following the arrival of the French and English in North America, tribes aligned with each nation became involved in wars for the rich fur trade. The Huron were eventually driven from this area and were replaced by the peoples of the Iroquois Confederacy, who were in turn displaced by an alliance of Algonkian people.

By the time of the first white settlement here, in the early 19th century, there were few aboriginal peoples still living on the lands we call Pickering – not a consequence of Indian wars, but because the native population signed treaties with the new British governors and were ultimately moved to reservations, in a process that many today consider a national shame.

The Settlers and the Growth of a Community

Rebellion and resistance have been part of the history of north Pickering almost since the arrival of the earliest European settlers. Refugees in large part, many of them were United Empire Loyalists who had sided with the British in the American Revolutionary War. Others were seeking a new life, free from religious persecution. At the turn of the 19th century these Loyalist, Baptist, Quaker, and Mennonite pioneers (the latter settling mostly in the hamlet of Altona, close to Stouffville) set to work clearing the vast forests and ploughing the fertile fields of north Pickering, living in harmony for the most part, founding their churches and communities, and (in the case of the Loyalist military families) joining the British fight against the Yankees in the War of 1812.

But their harmony was ripped apart during the Rebellion of 1837, when most of the settlers of North Pickering Township followed the reform leader, William Lyon Mackenzie, in armed revolt against the colonial government. The Matthews and the Barclay families in particular joined the fight, with Peter Matthews becoming the leader of the Pickering contingent. The future community of Brougham became known as Radical Corners, and Matthews was hanged for his involvement in the uprising, while the Barclay brothers and many others were arrested. In a move that would have its echo in the expropriations a century and half later, the Matthews family's land was taken by the Crown in perpetuity, even though it had been a Loyalist grant and father and sons had all fought for the British in the War of 1812. The Matthews family, with few exceptions, returned to the United States.

In the years that followed, the crossroads of Concession Road 6 and the Brock Road – land owned by the Matthews family – was named Bentley's Corners in recognition of the prosperous family that had settled on the south side of the concession, had founded several businesses, and had eventually built one of the grandest homes in the Township there.

As the geographic centre of the Township and because of its location at a major crossroads, the Bentley's Corners community grew and prospered, eventually changing its name to Brougham. For over a century, Brougham was the heart of the Township, boasted a busy commercial area, and was a centre for sports and culture. The community hall, built by the residents in the 1850s, was home to Pickering's municipal council.

The land continued to be farmed. The area greatly benefitted from its location to the immediate south of the Oak Ridges Moraine, a major groundwater recharge zone. It was criss-crossed by stretches of woodland and by freshwater streams bearing the names of those, many of them Mennonites, who had settled in the area: Wixon, Michell, Reesor... The soil was particularly fertile, deep clay loam, and the farming community prospered over the next century. Brougham flourished, as did the smaller hamlet of Altona.

This was the situation in 1961 when the federal government first looked into possible future need for another Toronto airport. The Timeline formally starts here.

Lead-up to Announcement

1961

- The Civil Aviation Branch of the federal Department of Transport (DOT) examines the need for a second airport for Toronto and concludes that none is required.

1966

- A consulting firm's report to the DOT reaches the same conclusion: no second Toronto airport is needed.

1967

- The Master Plan for Toronto's Malton Airport [now Pearson] suggests that Malton needs to expand.
- The Master Plan for Montreal's Dorval Airport suggests that a second Montreal airport is needed. DOT starts a site search.

1968

- Ottawa announces an expansion of Malton, then does a U-turn. Despite the 1967 findings, DOT initiates a site search for a new Toronto airport. The public is informed only 3 months later, at which time the new airport is said to be "imperative" before 2000. Five "potentially acceptable sites" are identified. Pickering isn't one of them.

1969

- Ste-Scholastique, north of Montreal, is chosen by Ottawa (over Quebec's protests) as the site of what will become Mirabel International.
- DOT's Toronto-area search continues, with locations near Orangeville, Sutton, Port Perry, and Guelph being favoured.

1970

- All four Toronto-area sites remain in strong contention but none is ideal. Some DOT planners still push for expanding Malton.
- New criteria adopted, which broaden the search to 56 possible sites. Pickering, deemed unsuitable from the start, is eliminated.

1971

- Debate and studies drag on. The one-large-airport idea briefly becomes a five-smaller-airports idea. The Pickering site is revisited. Studies conclude that a Pickering airport would present "a major [airspace] conflict" with Malton, would wipe out two towns, and would violate a provincial reserve for agriculture and recreation. Back to one airport.
- Ottawa favours a western site, Ontario an eastern one, to tie in with its new regional plan. Ottawa, determined to have an airport at any cost, caves in to Ontario. Unsuitable Pickering becomes the preferential site. Needless to say, little or nothing of this is known to the public.