

Celebrating and Protecting the Champlain Oaks, 1613-2013

Report to: The Planning Committee for the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Built Heritage Advisory Committee.

Submitted by: The Champlain Park Community Association, the Westboro Beach Community Association, and the Island Park Community Association

Date: June 1, 2013

Subject: Listing 10 “heritage trees” in the City of Ottawa Heritage Register

Report recommendation: In celebration of the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain’s arrival in the Ottawa area, and for the benefit of future generations of Ottawans, to add the properties (10 trees) listed in Schedule A to the City of Ottawa Heritage Register.

Background: Trees can be designated as properties of cultural heritage value under Part IV, Section 34.5 and Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990. There are a number of cases in Ontario of designation under the act for individual trees, hedgerows, and groves, usually by municipal by-law. In Ottawa, various Heritage Conservation Districts (HCD) make specific references to tree conservation, including the Clemow Estates East HCD, New Edinburgh HCD, the Village of Rockcliffe Part, Lorne Avenue HCD, Lower Town West HCD, and Sandy Hill West HCD. The treed property at 300-310 Des Pere Blancs (Richelieu Park) Vanier has also been added to the City of Ottawa Heritage Register in recognition of its natural heritage character.

Section 27 (1.2) of the Act also gives municipalities the ability to list **non-designated** properties (including trees) of cultural heritage value or interest. While the consent of the property owner is not required under this section of the Act, the owners of 7 trees listed in Schedule A have consented to listing on the City of Ottawa Heritage Register. The other 3 trees are the property of the City of Ottawa

Summary: The Bur Oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) in Ottawa’s Champlain Park, Westboro Beach and along Island Park Drive (Map 1) are a community of healthy, pre-settlement trees centuries old. Several trees from the same original forest remain along the NCC pathway on the Quebec side of the river between the Champlain Bridge and Deschênes Rapids. Oaks this age (150 – 180 years) in an urban environment are very rare. A surviving old-growth forest fragment interspersed with residential development is exceptional. In addition to their natural heritage value, the trees provide a living link to the history of human activity in this area (Algonquin village “Miciming”, Deschênes Rapids, early French explorers, Samuel de Champlain’s Astrolabe, Captain Daniel Keyworth Cowley, post-war residential development, current community history). The properties to be listed are in Schedule A, and the reasons for listing are set out in Schedule B.

Schedule B: Champlain Oaks: A natural and human history¹

Natural History

Flooded by the Champlain Sea after the retreat of glaciers of the last Ice Age, the Ottawa River valley has a varied geology (Hogarth, 1962; Champman and Putnam, 1984). The shoreline at what is now Remic Rapids in Ottawa and Deschênes Rapids in Gatineau is a limestone plain with very thin soil known as an Alvar (Huggett, 1993; 1995). Shirley's Bay is also a shoreline Alvar. This is a rare ecosystem in Ontario and Quebec with plant associations adapted to extremes of wet and dry. Two major Alvar plant associations are Red Cedar-Prickly Ash and Bur Oak-Prickly Ash (Laird, 1995; Catling et. al., 2012).

Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) is a species of oak native to the deciduous forest zone of eastern and midwestern North America. Ottawa is on the northern edge of the bur oak species range. Also known as Burr Oak and the Mossycup White Oak, the tree commonly lives 250 years, and may survive up to 400 years. It is drought-tolerant and fire-resistant because of its thick bark, a feature that accounts for its presence in open-forest savannas. Once established, the Bur Oak tolerates urban pollution (Laird, 1995) and grows faster than most other oak species. Due to its varied properties and values, the Bur Oak is among the top 15 trees identified by the Ancient Tree Archive Project (www.ancienttreearchive.org) as global priorities for propagation and conservation of the genetics of ancient champion trees.

“The Champlain Oaks” (Map 1) are a community of healthy, pre-settlement Bur Oaks descended directly from the open forest of the Ottawa River shoreline Alvar between Chaudière Falls and Deschênes Rapids. Oaks of this age (150-180 years) in an urban environment are very rare. A surviving old-growth forest fragment interspersed with residential development is even more exceptional. These features present significant natural heritage value due to prominence (tree size and age), integrity (overall condition and expected longevity) and appearance (interspersed on streets and in back yards). The genetic resources embodied in the surviving trees are adapted to the climate of the National Capital and have important design value for urban environments affected by pollution, periods of drought, and storm water runoff. For this reason, members of the community have established tree nurseries for several young examples of “Champlain Oaks”. Planning for protection of the progeny of the heritage trees and the continuity of the remaining forest fragment is an integral part of celebrating the natural history of the neighborhood. It is also consistent with a pre-cautionary approach to conserving the few remaining examples of the genetic pool from the forests of our past.

¹ Prepared by Daniel Buckles and Debra Huron, 2013

² Tree age estimated by Mike Pisaric, Carleton University from a cross section of a

Human History

“Miciming,” which in the Algonquin language means “where the oaks grow” was in the 1600s an Algonquin camp located at present day Deschênes Rapids (which means “some oaks” in French). Bur Oaks were important to the Algonquin people because the nuts are edible and can be collected in great numbers. They were eaten as a vegetable and also ground into a flour and stored as a “hunger food” (Beresford-Kroeger, 2010).

To the early French explorers, and pre-industrial Europe in general, oaks were highly valued for their use in shipbuilding. Maps and journals of the period reference the location of oaks, which were considered the property of the Kings of the day. **In 1686 the French Captain Pierre Chevalier de Troyes took note of “the oak forest” he portaged through between Chaudière Falls and Deschênes Rapids.** He was on his way back from successfully routing the English from “Charles Fort” on James Bay. The journal entry reads:

“Ensuite je me rendis au portage des chesnes, ainsi nommé à cause de la quantité de ces arbres qui sont en cet endroit, qui est à environ une lieue et demie du saut de la chaudière. Je monté dans cette route plusieurs rapides qui se rencontrent entre deux, et fis un portage qui est a une lieue ou environ de celuy de la chaudière qui a un quart de lieue de long ainsi que celuy des chesnes.” Pierre Chevalier de Troyes, 1686

“Then I returned to the oak portage, so called because of the number of these trees which are in the area, which is about a league and a half from the plunge of the Chaudière Falls. I climbed the many rapids which are encountered between the two on this road, and made the portage which is at nearly a league from that of the Chaudière, which is a quarter of a league as long as that of the oaks”. Pierre Chevalier de Troyes, 1686

Before de Troyes, Samuel de Champlain noted in his journal of 1613 as he made his way up the Ottawa River, that near its confluence with the Gatineau River, the river view was “very beautiful and wide,” with banks covered with “fine open woods” (quoted by Fischer, 2008: 308). Not long afterwards he lost his astrolabe while portaging around rapids on the Ottawa River near Cobden, Ontario. The recovery of the astrolabe in 1867 near Green Lake involved the family of Captain Daniel Keyworth Cowley, after whom streets in today’s Champlain Park, Westboro Beach and Island Park are named (Daniel Avenue, Keyworth Avenue, Cowley Avenue, Mailes Avenue).

When Nepean Township was granted to George Hamilton, an Irish veteran of the Revolutionary War, it included the land where “The Champlain Oaks” are located today. The Loyalists that were expected to settle the land never came, and “Nepean in 1810 remained a wooded wilderness” (Elliot: 1991: 7). By 1830 Nepean was surveyed and subdivided into lots (Map 2), but still remained largely unsettled. Lot

33, which encompassed all of present day Champlain Park and extended south of Richmond Road, was a Clergy Reserve held by the Anglican Church (Elliot: 1991: 11, 19). In 1839 it was patented to George Lyon, a mill-owner from Richmond planning to build a railroad from Ottawa's Bytown to Britannia. The project did not materialize, and Lot 33 continued to be transferred between land speculators until 1852 when it was purchased by William Hamilton. He built a large stone house called Maple Grove on the north side of Richmond Road, and in subsequent years began to improve the land as a farm (Elliot, 1991:5, 81, 107). **The oldest of the surviving Bur Oaks in Champlain Park would have been saplings at this time, and consequently part of the original old-growth forest.**² It seems likely that they were not disturbed immediately by farm development as the portion of Lot 33 nearest the Ottawa River was subject to periodic flooding and of little agricultural value. Furthermore, a common practice of the day was to leave clumps of trees on farmland as boundary markers and wind breaks (Elliot, 1991).

By 1867, Canada's Confederation, Lot 33 was being divided into smaller parcels. Captain Daniel Keyworth Cowley, who owned a fleet of riverboats on the Ottawa River, purchased 192 acres. This included the Hamilton stone house, which Cowley renamed "The Manor House" (Elliot, 1991: 110; Grainger, 2005: 46; Stothers, 1930: 7). In that same year he acquired the Champlain Astrolabe from a 14-year old farm boy named Edward Lee who had found it when clearing trees near Green Lake. Eventually it was acquired by the Department of Communications for the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Museum of Civilization website).

The northern boundary of Captain Cowley's property was the present OC Transpo Transitway, which was the rail line built in 1870 by the Canada Atlantic Railway (Grainger, 2005:46). Ottawa lawyer Charles Hamnett Pinhey purchased some of Lot 33 north of the railway to the river, as did Senator James Skead. Their purpose, as with Captain Cowley, was speculative rather than intensive farming (Elliot, 1991: 107). While Senator Skead operated a lumber mill at Westboro Beach processing pines from the upper Ottawa valley (Grainger, 2005) **his land where Champlain Park is located today remained undeveloped.** The land was wooded enough to host a fox hunt in 1874, attended by Lord Dufferin, the Third Governor General of Canada (Ottawa Free Press, May 2, 1874, sourced by Bob Grainger, personal communication).

The bankruptcy of Skead's business in 1880 placed his lands in receivership for many years (Elliot, 1991). Parts of Lot 33 were purchased in 1896 by Robert H. Cowley, the son of Captain Daniel Keyworth Cowley (Elliot, 1991: 191; Stothers, 1930). R.H. Cowley also purchased 38 acres from Ottawa lawyer Charles Hamnett Pinhey. These lands were subdivided by R.H. Cowley in 1903 and in 1916 to create "Riverside Park," a cottage development with streets named Daniel, Keyworth, Cowley and Mailes (after his grandfather). Oakdale Avenue was created on Captain

² Tree age estimated by Mike Pisaric, Carleton University from a cross section of a healthy bur oak cut down in 2010.

Cowley's property south of the CPR line. The business model for the development assumed that the Ottawa Electric Railway extension to Britannia in 1900 would create a demand for the properties, but this largely by-passed Riverside Park in favor of Britannia Park (Elliot: 1991: 194; Grainger, personal communication). **One of the homes in Riverside Park, still standing at 124 Cowley, was built in 1904 intentionally between two large bur oaks.** One of these trees still stands today, the second largest in the neighbourhood and a prime example of a "Champlain Oak" overlooking what is today the City of Ottawa Champlain Park.

Riverside Park developed very slowly between the two World Wars, with some lots reverting to the township of Nepean because the owners could not pay the property taxes (Grainger, personal communication; history of deeds for Keyworth Avenue). Aerial photographs from 1927 and 1946 show residential development on Northwestern Avenue, Carleton Avenue, Cowley Avenue and Keyworth Avenue, but none to the west as far as Island Park Drive (Map 4 shows the forest cover in Champlain Park as of 1946). Interviews with local residents indicate that a narrow pathway through heavy woods connected these streets to Island Park Drive, where King George VI and the Queen Mother passed in 1939. Daniel Avenue and Patricia Avenue were developed by the Canada Life Assurance Company in 1948, the first site in Ottawa subjected to a standard subdivision agreement requiring developers to construct suburban roads (Elliot, 1991: 230-231). **Many examples of mature Bur Oaks were intentionally left in place during this development.** Trees (mainly maples, lindens, and a pin oak) were also planted along the streetscape as part of the sub-urban development plan. Annexed by the City of Ottawa in 1950, Riverside Park was renamed Champlain Park to distinguish it from another Riverside Park in the south end of Ottawa (at Mooney's Bay).

Bur Oaks are prominent landmarks in the community today and a defining feature of three connected neighbourhoods: Champlain Park, Island Park, and Westboro Beach. A number dominate the streetscape at gateways into Ottawa from the Champlain Bridge and into the two neighborhoods on either side of Island Park Drive. For example, the intersections of Island Park Drive and both Sunnymede and Clearview Avenues are marked by old-growth bur oaks. The intersection of Sunnymede Avenue and Keyworth Avenue also host clusters of old-growth bur oaks. An old-growth Bur Oak on Patricia Avenue is the gathering place for the annual Patricia Avenue "street party." Three large Bur Oaks are located next to the fieldhouse in Champlain Park. Homes on Patricia, Daniel, Keyworth, Cowley, Carleton, Northwestern, Remic, Latchford, and Island Park Drive intentionally and creatively incorporate mature Bur Oaks in the house design and construction. Many backyards throughout the neighbourhood have mature oaks, left in place when the homes were built. A new residential development in Westboro Beach on Clearview Avenue is called "The Oaks" in recognition of a stand of Bur Oaks within the property. Bur Oaks are also prominent on the small chain of islands (including Bate Island) on the Ottawa River linked by Champlain Bridge, on Lemieux Island downstream and at the Place Samuel de Champlain parking lot on the Quebec side of the bridge. An inventory 130 Bur Oaks 50 cm or more in diameter in the three

neighbourhoods was created in 2012 through a community project. Their number and distribution attest to the prominence and continuity of the Bur Oak with the pre-settlement “oak forest” observed by Pierre Chevalier de Troyes in 1686.

Various other community initiatives demonstrate the will of local residents to recognize, celebrate and protect “The Champlain Oaks” as a tangible expression of Ottawa’s natural and cultural heritage. They include several well-attended “community tree walks” in Westboro Beach and Champlain Park, and a prolonged community protest in 2011 over felling of a mature, healthy Bur Oak on Northwestern Avenue. The protest was documented in an exhibit called “Six Moments in the History of an Urban Forest” at the Bytowne Museum created by Professor Joanna Dean and Mr. Will Knight of Carleton University. In early 2013 community meetings and consultations in Champlain Park concluded with a proposal to establish an installation in Champlain Park recounting the connection between the Bur Oaks, the era of Champlain, and the Cowley Family. The present proposal to list 10 “Champlain Oaks” in the City of Ottawa Heritage Registry is intended to both celebrate the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain’s arrival in the Ottawa area and recognize this natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations.

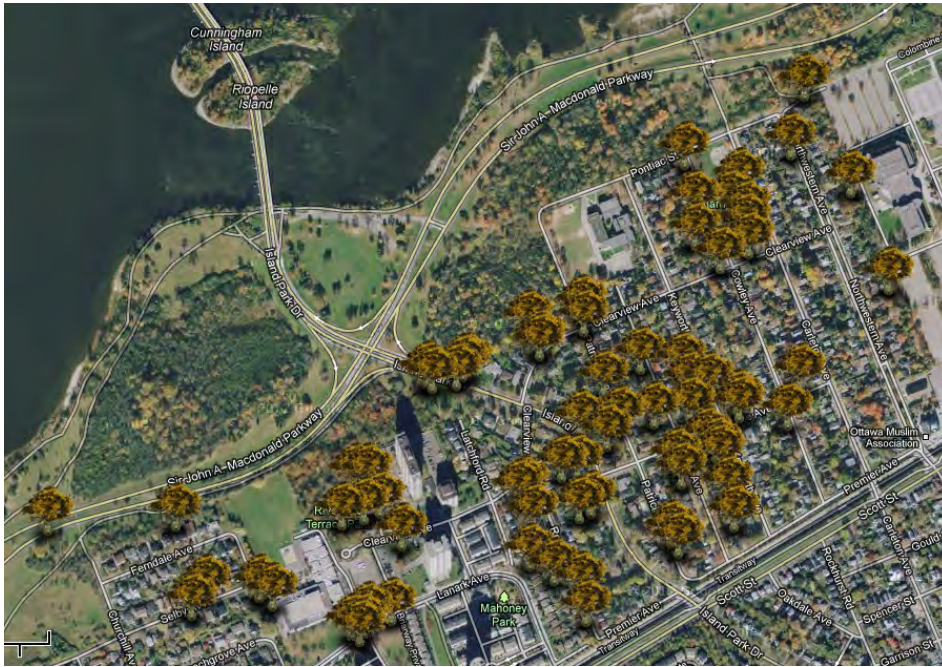
Table 1: A Timeline of the Natural and Human History of the “Champlain Oaks”

Mesozoic period	The shoreline at what is now Remic Rapids in Ottawa and Deschênes Rapids in Gatineau is a limestone plain with very thin soil known created after the retreat of glaciers of the last Ice Age. It develops as an alvar, a rare ecosystem with diverse plant associations, including the Bur Oak (<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>) and Prickly Ash.
1600s	Present day Deschênes Rapids (which means “some oaks” in French) was in the 1600s a Algonquin camp called “Miciming,” which means “where the oaks grow”.
1613	Samuel de Champlain notes in his journal that the Ottawa River near its confluence with the Gatineau River was “very beautiful and wide,” with banks covered with “fine open woods”.
1686	The French Captain Pierre Chevalier de Troyes took note of “the oak forest” he portaged through on the north side of the Ottawa River between Chaudière Falls and Deschênes Rapids.
1792	Nepean township granted to George Hamilton, an Irish veteran of the Revolutionary War. Surveyed in 1794, creating Lot 33 fronting the Ottawa River where Champlain Park is now located. The township was intended for settlement by Loyalists, who never came.
1830	Anthony Swalwell’s plan of 1830 shows Lot 33 as a Clergy Reserve.
1852	William Hamilton purchases Lot 33 and builds a stone house called Maple Grove on the north side of Richmond Road. Begins to improve the land as a farm. The oldest of the bur oaks in Champlain Park today were saplings in the original forest.
1867	Captain Daniel Keyworth Cowley purchases the south part of Lot 33 and moves into the Hamilton stone house, which he renames “The Manor House”. Senator James Skead purchases the north part of Lot 33, and moves into The Elms.
1874	Senator Skead entertains Lord Dufferin with a fox hunt through his land.
1896	In anticipation of residential development along the Britannia line (established in 1900), Robert H. Cowley (son of Captain DKC) buys 81 acres from James Skead’s mortgagee, and 38 acres immediately to the west from Ottawa lawyer Charles Pinhey.
1903	RH Cowley subdivides Skead and Pinhey property as a cottage area called Riverside Park (Plan #219), with streets named Daniel, Keyworth and Cowley. DKC Manor House is destroyed by fire. Formerly located roughly at intersection of Mailes Avenue (DKC’s father’s name) and Patricia Avenue, west of Oakdale Avenue
1904	124 Cowley Avenue cottage built centered between two Bur Oak trees
1912 and 1916	RH Cowley subdivide another portion of Lot 33 and Lot 34 to create Plan #331 and Plan #388, which included the east side of Carleton and Northwestern Avenue (formerly Kensington Road) and south of Sunnymede to the CPR line. Police Village of Ottawa West created in 1912, comprised mainly of land owned by RH Cowley
1920s and 30s	Very slow development of homes in Riverside Park, due to depression and competition from Britannia
1945	Returning veterans and very small scale developers build on Keyworth, Cowley, Carleton and Northwestern.
1948	Canada Life Assurance Company develops Aberdeen, Daniel and Patricia in Ottawa West. First larger scale subdivision model in Ottawa’s history, with the financial burden for road construction and installation of services shifted from the township to the developers. Many examples of mature Bur Oaks left intentionally in place, on the street and in backyards
1950	Annexation by the City of Ottawa, and renamed “Champlain Park” to distinguish it from “Riverside Park” in the south end of Ottawa (Mooney’s Bay).
2007	Bur Oaks are prominent landmarks in the community today and a defining feature of three connected neighbourhoods: Champlain Park, Island Park, and Westboro Beach. Area begins to feel the impact of the current drive for intensification.

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Map 1: Location of the “Champlain Oaks”.



Map 2: Nepean, 1830, showing Lot 33 as a Clergy Reserve (Map by Anthony Swalwell).



Source: Elliot, 1991.

Map 3: Nepean, 1879. One oak icon shows the approximate location of the present-day “Champlain Oaks”, and the other the location of Deschênes Rapids.



Source: Grainger, Robert (2005)

Map 4: Aerial photo of the defined area, 1946. Significant remnants of the original oak forest are clearly visible just prior to the 1947 development of Daniel and Patricia Avenues and in Westboro Beach.

