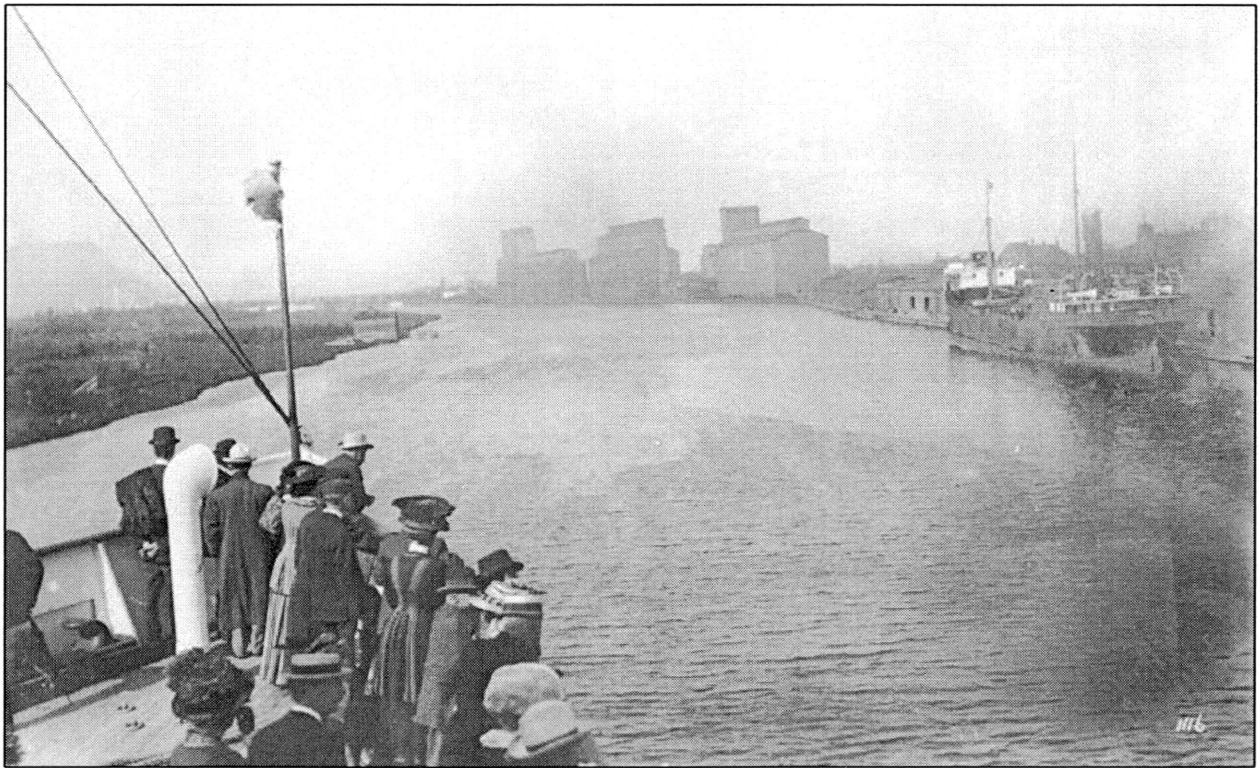


# URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND McKELLAR ISLAND SOCIAL HISTORY

**Douglas Arthur Yahn**



Fort William in the early 1900s, showing the remnants of the Oliver, Davidson and Company sawmill on McKellar Island (left) and Fort William harbour with CPR Elevators (right). Photo by William Topley courtesy of the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society.

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McKELLAR ISLAND SOCIAL HISTORY

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the way in which archaeology can contribute to the study of McKellar Island. McKellar Island has seen ancillary development as Fort William emerged from its fur trade past to become a major transshipment hub, as well as a key regional centre. This paper presents a social history of McKellar Island in relation to regional and national development, viewing the process of its evolution as a response to those external factors. Key themes in McKellar Island's development, such as Aboriginal and freemen land use, mining and land speculation, and industrial potential, are important in the evolution of its role in the post-industrial city of Thunder Bay.

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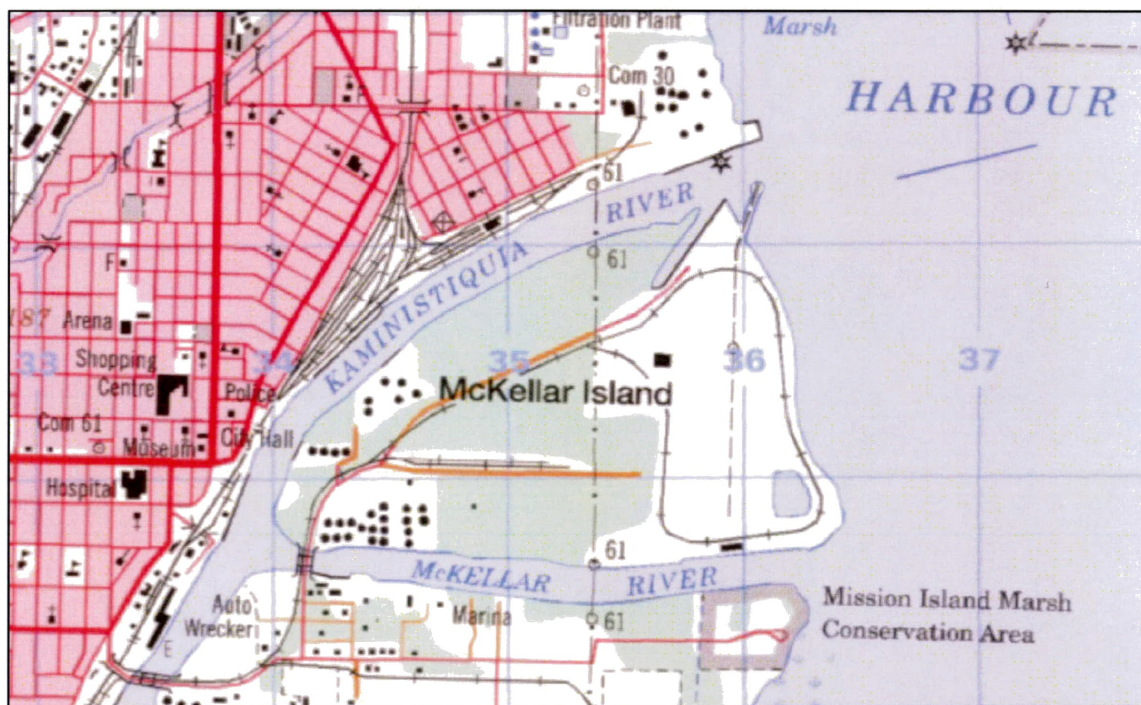


## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Situated opposite the mainland of Thunder Bay's South Ward (formerly Fort William), McKellar Island is the northernmost of the two islands located at the outlet of the Kaministiquia River into Lake Superior (Figure 1-1). Both islands shared a similar developmental history. The southernmost island (Mission Island) is significant for its proximity to the earlier French trade posts, and its later association with the Fort William Mission. McKellar Island was selected for this study because of its immediate proximity to the Euro-Canadian settlement at Fort William.

As stream gradients and lake levels stabilized and deltaic sediments accumulated at the river's mouth, McKellar Island became a likely location for early Aboriginal occupation. McKellar Island's contribution to permanent settlement and industry began in earnest with the nearby establishment of the inland headquarters of the North West Company in 1803. Although pre-dated by two other French establishments, the construction of Fort Kaministiquia (renamed Fort William in 1807), marks a turning point in the development of the island. The pivotal position of Fort William during the competition era of the fur trade cannot be overstated. Under the North West Company, Fort William was an important administrative and transshipment centre and was one of the largest fur trade posts in North America. An abrupt decline occurred after the 1821 amalgamation with the Hudson's Bay Company when trading operations shifted emphasis to York Factory and Fort Garry. The role of the island in the fur trade persisted, albeit at a more modest

scale, throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, but underwent dramatic transformation with Canadian Confederation in 1867, followed shortly thereafter with plans for the development of railway and steam ship transportation systems to link western and eastern Canada. Strategically located along this projected transportation and communications corridor, the Kaministiquia River mouth with its islands, underwent dramatic industrial and residential development. This persisted into the mid twentieth century whereupon the historic waterfront went into decline.



**Figure 1-1** A Portion of NTS Map 52A6 NAD 83 7th edition showing the location of McKellar Island across the Kaministiquia River from the South Ward of Thunder Bay, and north of neighbouring Mission Island.

Recent interest in the redevelopment of the Fort William waterfront has created a renewed focus in delineating the urban and industrial growth that has occurred there (City of Thunder Bay 2009 and 2010). Redevelopment and waterfront revitalization

necessarily involves the integration of many priorities and themes. The principal themes are environmentalism, history and heritage, tourism and public celebration (Sieber 1991: 125). As a component of the long term strategic plan for the area, an assessment of the historical and heritage significance of these sites is important. It is not sufficient to simply review the documented history of the area in this case. An archaeological investigation of McKellar Island, using a social historical approach, will provide the best assessment.

Archaeologist Charles E. Orser observed that historical archaeology "animates the people who lived in the past. It treats not only kings and queens, and the rich and famous, but the common folk, the anonymous makers of history... all those people who made the 'modern' world, all too often the people without documented history" (Orser 1995:5). Social history shares many of the same etiological goals as historical archaeology and often the two can serve to mutually inform each other. The inherent synergy between the two disciplines provides the methodological foundation for this thesis.

The thesis examines the evolution of settlement on McKellar Island, relying heavily upon written records and images, as a prelude to future archaeological investigations. The research proposes that the history of McKellar Island is a reflection of the colonial and post-colonial history of North America, and reflects a microcosm of key themes in Canadian urban social and industrial development. The study of the area includes an examination of pre-contact use by the Aboriginal peoples, the arrival of Europeans and the establishment of the fur trade, the dynamics of colonial expansionism, the industrial

age of natural resource extraction and transportation, and the recent transition into the post-industrial age. The study identifies the trends, periods and themes that define human history on McKellar Island, and identifies gaps in the historical record and suggests where archaeological investigations will help give a voice to those events or individuals who are forgotten or under-represented in the historical narrative.

The thesis is organized into five chapters, with the first chapter providing an introduction to the study and outlining the purpose and objectives of the thesis. The subsequent chapters address the two primary objectives of the thesis. Firstly, using a social history approach, the evolution of settlement on McKellar Island will be discussed and evaluated in terms of regional development to place it in the broader context of Canadian historical development and transformation. The underlying goal is to identify historical periodicity, cultural heritage themes, and sensitive localities. The second objective is to identify gaps and ambiguities in the historical narrative and pinpoint areas of particular interest on McKellar Island that would benefit from future archaeological investigations.

Chapter 2 explores the relationship between archaeology and history and endeavours to bridge the methodological gap between the disciplines to allow a comprehensive analysis of urban phenomena. Within this discussion, social history is broadly defined with an emphasis on urban history and the core concepts from the discipline that inform this research, namely metropolitanism, heartland-hinterland relationships, and the importance of a regional framework. The chapter also outlines the limitations and delimitations of the study, and provides an overview of the archival research process and the location of

primary and secondary source materials used to establish the historical timeline presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 introduces McKellar Island and traces its settlement system evolution in relation to regional urban development. The arrival of European traders in the seventeenth century to procure furs for the overseas market initiated an ongoing heartland-hinterland relationship with the area. The chapter explores how the fur trade heartland-hinterland role evolved in the industrial period, and how the waterfront and islands has transformed again in the period of post-industrial decline.

Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the processes that have brought McKellar Island to its current post-industrial state. Critical to this exercise is the development of a series of maps that identify zones upon the island where archaeological deposits associated with one or another heritage theme might be expected. This includes an evaluation of where subsequent land use might have damaged those heritage resources, and where archaeological material culture might still remain in interpretable context.

The final chapter recapitulates the key observations of the previous chapter and reiterates the most important trends and observations from the analysis of historic processes. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the practical application that this study in social history and archaeology has in contributing to upcoming land use planning and waterfront revitalization.

## CHAPTER 2: METHOD AND THEORY

Historical archaeology offers a multidisciplinary approach to the examination of past societies by integrating insight gained from both historical records and archaeological material culture. However, throughout much of its early development, the relationship between history and archaeology has been unbalanced, with the former providing most of the insight, and the latter playing a supplemental or confirmatory role by providing physical relics or icons of a past almost entirely reconstructed from the written record (Fagan 1991; Orser 1995; and Schuyler 1978).

The role of historical archaeology as the "handmaiden of history" might have been conceptually accurate when Ivor Noel Hume first used the phrase in 1964, but this approach has gradually been supplanted as researchers seek to more effectively integrate insights gained from both history and archaeology and develop a more complete interpretation of the past. The paradigm shift reflects the gradual maturation of historical archaeology, coupled with a growing recognition that there are systematic gaps in the written record and that the surviving record often reflects the perspectives of specific social groups, leaving others mute. These information gaps in the primary historic record can sometimes be addressed using archaeological interpretation of the material residue of historic sites. In some circumstances, historical and archaeological information can be used to critically assess and evaluate the insight gained from the other. To this end, the research for this thesis focused on the collection and synthesis of historical texts to

research for this thesis focused on the collection and synthesis of historical texts to interpret the social history of McKellar Island. The study will contribute to possible future archaeological consideration of the island in the event of a new round of land use planning and redevelopment.

The deliberate use of a social history framework to the research provides a stronger interpretive approach for the historical archaeologist. Social history endeavours to "relate the social experience of the lived past to the social structures that limit and define such experiences" (Opp and Walsh 2010: x). The discipline emerged in the 1960s to counteract the emphasis that traditional historians placed on the elites of society. The focus of social history is predominantly on those individuals who were marginalized in society and disenfranchised by traditional approaches to history. Although initially a broad field of study, social history developed to include a diversity of specialization. Today, there are many dedicated branches of social history which look at specific aspects of the human experience. The discipline supports researchers interested in economy, ethnicity, sexism, labour issues, geography, urban history, and other facets. Urban history, which seeks to understand the evolution of settlement systems and the rise of urbanism, is of particular interest to the historical archaeologist working in an urban environment. The work of urban historians sheds considerable light on important themes in the discussion of the McKellar Island study area.

Traditional urban history analyses reflect "changing technology as it has affected transportation links between settlements and their hinterlands and the interaction among

settlements at various levels of the urban hierarchy" (Dahms 1981:171). In Canada, urban development is often characterized by the metropolitanism approach (Careless 1954; Dahms 1981; Davis 1985; Stelter 1985) and further defined by heartland-hinterland relationships (McCann 1987; Fillion 2010) within a regional framework. The metropolitanism approach asserts the importance of large cities on the development of the nation. The heartland-hinterland paradigm establishes a means to look at how dominant regional centres interact with other regions. A regional framework allows us to distinguish between "urban places as dependant variables - the products of larger social forces - and cities as independent variables - as agencies of social change" (Stelter 1985:201). For this study, a broad regional framework is advantageous to exploring the relationships between Europe and its colonies, between Ontario and the western provinces, and between Thunder Bay and its own region. A broad framework also allows multiple stages of city-region relationships to be discussed while keeping the emphasis on McKellar Island.

The discussion of city-region relationships has changed somewhat in the last few decades as the impact of emerging economic, policy and demographic trends has become a focus of study (Fillion 2010). However, the historical foundation of Canadian urban systems as one "shaped by exogenous demand for staples and, subsequently, by the dichotomy between and industrial heartland and a resource based hinterland" (Fillion 2010: 517) still maintains its validity. As well, the influence of the metropolitanism approach on the study of urban systems is well established and remains an often-referenced concept.



As an explanatory model, the metropolitanism approach emerged in the mid twentieth century. Maurice Careless defines metropolitanism as a socio-economic concept that:

implies the emergence of a city of outstanding size to dominate not only its surrounding countryside but other cities and their countrysides, the whole area being organized by the metropolis, through control of communications, trade, and finance, into one economic and social unit that is focussed on the metropolitan 'centre of dominance' and through it trades with the world. [Careless 1954: 17]

Variants of Careless' metropolitanism approach predictably followed as other proponents endeavoured to refine the concept. Urban historian Alan Artibise emphasized the importance of the concept known as "boosterism", that argued that considerable urban development was a result of the actions of influential individuals or small groups of entrepreneurs with a vision for their communities. Boosterism was rather arbitrary, where "town promoters built or solicited railways when that was the rage, and bonused factories when industrialization was in vogue" (Davis 1985:99). The theme of boosterism is readily apparent in Thunder Bay's development, particularly in the late 1800s when it redefined the relationship between the area and the regional heartland of the country.

The relationship between heartland and hinterland is an important variant that was appended to metropolitanism by geographers such as Larry McCann. A derivative of the staples theory formulated by Harold Innis, the heartland-hinterland view holds that there are specific roles played by cities and regions, where the heartland (core) has influence over the hinterland (periphery). Economically and politically subservient, the hinterland supplies the heartland with resources and commodities that are needed by the core. The core contains "the controlling institutions and classes and the highest level of economic

development" and the periphery ensures the "production of export crops and raw materials for shipment back to the core" and the regional distinction is one of extended influence of the core over a great distance (Stelter 1985:195). Historically, the urban development of the core and periphery were uneven and the heartland generally experienced more rapid growth (Fillion 2010: 518).

Within the heartland-hinterland discussion, Gilbert Stelter's general interpretation of urban development in a regional context establishes cumulative stages of city-region relationships. Stelter asserts that the first stage is a mercantile foundation, where "colonial towns [are] dependent on a close connection with the imperial metropolis" (Stelter 1985:200). Growing regional and interregional development marks the second stage, represented by the commercial and industrial era of the nineteenth century. In this stage, former "colonial towns have become concentrated settlements based on a combination of trade and industry surrounded by hinterlands based on forestry, agriculture, or fishing... [and where] improved transportation increased the possible connections with smaller places and countryside" (Stelter 1985:201). He also described a shift in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century where "manufacturing was regarded as the key factor, as transportation and trade had been in the previous period" (Stelter 1985:201). Stelter's final stage is one where new forms of urban are defined, where the term "urban" can be seen "as a focus of cultural, economic, and transportation relations" (Stelter 1985:201). These stages of city-region relationships form an important part of the urban history perspective of this study and they serve to structure the periodicity of the historic narrative in the next chapter.

Social history and historical archaeology are not mutually exclusive disciplines. In advancing a methodological approach to the study of McKellar Island's past, consideration must also be given to archaeological perspectives. Therefore, in developing an integrated method to this study in urban archaeology, the researcher must consider an approach to the subject that relies on archaeological theory as well as social historical theory. The value of this approach is in the creation of a synergy between traditional historical and archaeological sources of data. The two disciplines individually contribute to the illumination of the invisible elements of past human endeavours, although each approach has systematic weaknesses and gaps in its capacity to animate and interpret the past. Interestingly, when you integrate the two, you then draw attention to the gaps, and one discipline can often fill in the gaps apparent in the other. This approach is not an entirely new one. Urban archaeology as a field of research utilizes a variety of approaches to the study of cities. The theoretical foundations of the discipline are drawn from a multitude of fields including archaeology, history, geography, anthropology and other areas of study. A multi-disciplinary approach to historical archaeology permits the researcher to interpret the social context of the material record to support higher levels of interpretation.

At its root, archaeology is the study of the material remains of a culture in order to understand the structure, operation and transformation of the culture being studied. Central to this endeavour is the recovery of material culture in a controlled spatial and temporal context so that interpretations can be appropriately framed. Historical

archaeological enquiry focuses on using the material cultural remains of a society to critically evaluate, test and refine the historical narrative (Orser and Fagan 1995).

Urban archaeology, a sub-discipline of historical archaeology, focuses on the development of cities and the associated material record, including buildings and systems. As built environments, "cities consist of anthropogenically created structures, including buildings of all sorts, streets, roads, pavements, and above- and belowground infrastructures" (Stein and Tarr 1998: 613). The opportunity to uncover and interpret this complexity is exciting, and holds the possibility of discovering much more about a city's past than a reliance on only written records would provide. When closely allied with history, archaeology can assist in piecing together a better picture of urban development and the use of space and environments by those who lived and worked within its boundaries. In the foreword to J. Brett Cruse's book on the battles of the Red River War in Texas, the historian Robert Utley stated that:

the cause of history is rarely better served than by the union of historian and historical archaeologist... archaeological findings can add missing content to the documents, confirm or dispute them, clarify obscurities, tell their own story. Documents can give critical meaning to archaeological remains, help identify specimens, account for their distribution, and give directions to the sites themselves. [Cruse 2008: xv]

As a researcher, one must constantly ask what questions remain unanswered by the available data sources. It is known that the historic record is incomplete. Much of the primary source materials in historical research tend to focus on the lives and priorities of the elites and should the record mention "others" in its narrative, it often reflects the perspectives of the elites towards the "others". Using a social history approach to inform

the archaeology allows us to gain insight about the non-elites, the voiceless and the disenfranchised. That is why social and urban history is a major focus of this study. Uncovering the past of the non-elites is also an important, and largely unrealized, potential of historical and urban archaeology. That is the rationale behind this study of McKellar Island and the justification for doing archaeology in the future. A well planned background study provides focus points for excavation, context to materials discovered, and a means to assimilate the archaeological recoveries into the greater story of the building, the business, and the people who worked there.

Addressing that greater story of McKellar Island requires effective cultural-historical integration of the data. The term "cultural-historical integration" applies to "everything the archaeologist does in the way of organizing his [sic] primary data: typology, taxonomy, formulation of archaeological 'units,' investigation of their relationships in the contexts of function and natural environment, and determination of their internal dimensions and external relationships in space and time" (Willey and Phillips 1967: 5). With this in mind, a review of the previous archaeological excavations undertaken near the study area was completed to contextualize the research. The National Site Registration Database determined the presence of two known archaeological sites within 2 kilometres of the study area. The Kam Mission site (DcJh-3) and the Fort William site (DcJh-8) are both historical period sites situated on the mainland. The Fort William site documents are of particular value because of the site's position on the shore directly opposite McKellar Island. In 1968, during the Fort William site excavations, archaeologist Ken Dawson also conducted a brief investigation on the shore of McKellar

Island (Dawson 1968: 73). The methodology and background research developed during these previous investigations assisted in providing source material to inform the archival research.

Archival research was the primary means of data collection for this study. Available documents and materials created in the course of the area's development were explored. Land registry documents and historical land use and ownership records proved to be essential documents, as were primary historical document sources such as surveyor's correspondence and voter's listings. These records established both depth and accuracy in the research. Secondary historical document sources, such as books and papers on local history, were sourced and read to compile a cohesive picture of the research area. The major sources of information for the archival research were the Archives of Ontario, Henderson's Directory (Twin Cities of Fort William and Port Arthur, and Thunder Bay), Lakehead University Archives, Library and Archives Canada, Northern Studies Resource Centre at Lakehead University, NextLibrary, On-Line Archives, OurOntario.ca, City of Thunder Bay Archives, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Archives, and the Thunder Bay Public Library. The archival research produced textual, photographic and cartographic records. During the initial archival research, key existing records were identified and any gaps in information were noted. This information provided the foundation for the organization and analysis of the data.

As can be expected, there are limitations in the use of archival data. The limitations and delimitations of the study must be clear at the outset. It is the researcher's task to

ascertain the reliability of the source material. Who produced the document? When, where and why was the document produced? What underlying issues might bias the document? Did the author of the document have an agenda? Evaluating the details surrounding each source supported its utility, or lack of utility, for the research. It is also important to note that the researcher's own presuppositions and values have an effect on the interpretations, and understanding this allows reliability to be derived from the research. Due to the limitations on the scope of this study, I have deliberately elected not to conduct personal interviews with former McKellar Island residents and businesses. I would advocate this step for future work, as it is essential to contextualizing the data and may in fact elucidate more of the historic narrative.

From the archival research, it is evident that the primary sources of information about McKellar Island's urban and industrial development are the images. Much of the evolution of McKellar Island can be viewed through visual imagery. The standard cautions regarding historical documentation must be observed and biases acknowledged, taking into account the content and the intended use of each visual record. Maps were essential to contextualizing the information, so both recent and historical maps were sourced at the best available scale with the highest resolution. Additionally, historical settlement maps were sought to ensure that all resource components were present. Given the nature of the research, specialized maps such as those produced for municipal engineering studies and fire insurance purposes were also valuable. The availability of good quality source maps and landscape documents was an important component of the research and, where possible, existing digital copies were used. Otherwise, essential

documents were scanned to produce digital versions. Aerial photographs obtained from the Thunder Bay Archives and the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society were used to identify changes in built structures over time. In truth, our knowledge of McKellar Island owes much to aerial photography. The key developmental stages in McKellar Island history discussed in the subsequent chapters benefit from references to the available imagery. The images assist in showing the processes of change over time.

From the available imagery, and from textual records, the complex task of analysis began. It was important to examine the historical record for information that would allow each period of settlement evolution to be discussed. As Fred Dahms suggested, a "comparison of the number of functions and establishments found in each period" can allow the importance of settlements to be measured, where "a function is a distinct type of retail or service business, while an establishment is the building where such a business is conducted" (Dahms 1981: 179). To operationalize this type of data, the study area was overlaid with an artificial grid system (Hammond 1974). The grid represented two components, spatial and temporal, in three axes. The spatial data form units on a two-dimensional grid using two axes. The temporal dimension places the spatial data in layers over time. Each spatial unit was 200 meters on each side, roughly equivalent to the surveyor's measurement in chains (1 chain = 201.168 meters) used in the first land survey of the area in 1876. Each temporal unit represented a broad historical period defined by this research which allowed trends to be observed without overburdening the project. Each layer was placed in context by amalgamating the social history and archaeological themes into one narrative, and identifying potential drivers of change.



Spatial analysis of the historical changes on McKellar Island was then utilized to reveal opportunities for the archaeologist to explore and excavate, with the intent to uncover information about each of the island's key phases (see Chapter 4). The goal of the analysis is to seek linkages that will shed light on the role that the study area had as a microcosm of regional development from the contact era to its current state of deindustrialization (Seiber 1991).

### **CHAPTER 3: THE McKELLAR ISLAND SETTLEMENT SYSTEM AND REGIONAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

This chapter does not attempt to offer a causal interpretation to account for change, but instead introduces the study area and outlines the narrative history of the region in order to provide a background for the analysis that will be presented in Chapter 4.

Located on Lake Superior, McKellar Island is the northernmost of two islands situated at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River at what is today Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada.

The bedrock geology of the island is Late Precambrian in origin. The Animikie rock is a conglomerate of iron formation, shale and greywacke and is in part tuffaceous (Tanton 1931: Map 276A). The recent and Pleistocene surface deposits are comprised of the alluvium from the present rivers (sand and silt) with fine sandy soil (Tanton 1931: Map 197A). The soil supports a mixed forest vegetative environment consistent with the Continental Boreal Province ecological region type. Formerly designated as Island No.1 by the Dominion of Canada Survey of 1875, its name was changed to McKellar Island in 1971, following a By-law enacted after the 1970 amalgamation of Fort William and Port Arthur into the City of Thunder Bay.

The history of McKellar Island is very closely linked to the history of Thunder Bay. The changes and developments seen on McKellar Island were driven by the changes occurring in Fort William, which were in turn subject to regional, national, and

international forces. In many ways, however, the development of McKellar Island can be seen in terms of its local and regional potential. Ian Davey notes this potential with reference to text from the 1909 Henderson's Directory:

...the land between the Kaministiquia and the McKellar River... will become most valuable for manufacturing sites. [There are] ...many reasons why a lakehead location is likely to result in the building of a city. It is likely to be a port - a point at which transfer is made between water carriage and land carriage of persons and goods, a place of trade with a large hinterland, a place of processing of goods brought together by both land and water, and a place for the establishment of secondary manufacturing. [Davey 1975: 323]

The history of the Thunder Bay area has broader significance because it was a key transshipment point for goods and people travelling between the hinterland and central Canada. Raw materials passed through this transshipment point to the manufacturing centers of central Canada for final domestic consumption or export to Europe. These shipping functions were also central for the redistribution of finished goods to consumers located within the hinterland. In many ways, one can see the role of Thunder Bay as a perpetual "marshalling yard" in history.

Using social history theory and the criteria established in the previous chapter, a general timeline of development and change can be proposed for the area that has relevance for understanding the role of northwestern Ontario in the broader historic evolution of Canada. The key themes of regional development can be clearly seen. Heartland-hinterland interaction processes and the long-distance stimulus of the Kaministiquia River area form the foundation of the area's history. That initial advantage would be further developed through entrepreneurial initiative and boosterism as competition grew

between Fort William and other centers (most notably Port Arthur). Technological innovation in areas such as transportation accelerated the development of Fort William's position as a transshipment center. With this progression in mind, the area's regional development can be characterized as following five primary periods: The Pre-Contact Period to Early Contact (~9000 BP to 1660 AD), The Colonial Period (1660 AD to 1855 AD), The Commercial Revolution to Post Confederation (1855 AD to 1870 AD), The Industrial Period (1870 AD to 1970 AD), and Deindustrialization and the Post-Industrial Period (1970 AD to Present).

### **3.1 The Pre-Contact Period to Early Contact (~9000 BP to 1660 AD)**

With deglaciation, new land was exposed, weathered and became biologically viable, thereby permitting habitation by animals and also humans. The Lake Superior basin underwent dramatic lake level changes prior to arriving at its current elevation (Boyd 2010). Its modern elevation likely occurred around 6,400 BP following the "basin-wide drop in water level that occurred at the end of the Nipissing highstand in combination with differential isostatic rebound" (Boyd 2010). Archaeologist Scott Hamilton notes that "access to water has traditionally been considered the most prominent criteria affecting prehistoric land use in the Boreal Forest" (Hamilton 1995: 97). It is also essential to recognize the complicated issue of landscape evolution in a post-glacial environment, as it relates to interpreting settlement with associated proximity to streams and lakes.

Only limited archaeological investigation has been done in northwestern Ontario, with some additional information deriving from the Aboriginal oral historical record. Initial research carried out between 1950 and 1975 provided the foundation for more recent studies. The most recent work in the area is summarized in government publications (Hamilton 1995) or confined to documentation in unpublished reports. The earliest research conducted in the Thunder Bay area dates to Richard "Scotty" MacNeish's 1950 investigation at the Brohm site. Subsequent site discoveries and archaeological surveys began anew in 1962 with the discovery of and subsequent work at the Cummins site (Dawson 1983). Archaeologists such as K.C.A. Dawson, P. Julig, J.V. Wright, W. Fox, C.S. "Paddy" Reid, W. Ross, M. MacLeod, J.S. Hamilton, A. Hinshelwood, D. Norris, and others have continued research in the region. Based on the body of available archaeological research, archaeologist William Ross identifies three cultural traditions in the Lake Superior area. He defines the three as follows:

(1) Palaeo-Indian, (2) Archaic, and (3) Woodland, each known by their tool technology and economic specializations. The Palaeo-Indian tradition is characterized by the manufacture of tools from rock materials such as taconite and silicified sandstone. The characterization of tools that has evolved through time is based only upon those items that survived, and it is likely that Palaeo-Indian peoples also used wood, bone, skins, bark, and other materials, none of which has survived. Similarly, the Archaic tradition in the Lake Superior region is distinguished largely by the use of native copper for implements and ornament and by a major change in the type of stone tools that continued to be made, though native copper and stone remained in use in the Woodland tradition, it is more commonly characterized by the use of pottery. [Phillips and Ross 2008: 5]

Early contact with Europeans occurred at the end of the Woodland Period, and was a cultural challenge for both Aboriginal people and European traders who relied heavily on the expertise and knowledge of the Aboriginal people. The established Aboriginal trade

routes were far ranging and had developed over thousands of years of interaction with other Aboriginal groups. An established trading network, and the knowledge of the rugged interior, was of paramount importance to the success of the European fur trade. Victor Lytwyn observed that "copper tools and weapons originating in the western Lake Superior region... have been found in sites as far away as the St. Lawrence River to the east and the Saskatchewan River to the west. It is evident that the Thunder Bay area was one of the primary hubs of commercial activity well before the arrival of the first Europeans" (Lytwyn 2008: 17).

The early Aboriginal peoples of the area likely used McKellar Island seasonally, perhaps as a meeting place or a location for native gardening and/or fishing. There are many fish species in the area and the marshland on the island supports migratory waterfowl (City of Thunder Bay 1995: 6). Aboriginal resource use and land tenure reflected political economies that were largely designed to address a finite level of local need, with some extra-regional exchange. In effect, natural resource harvest involved localized hinterlands servicing small hubs that were generally temporary and highly mobile. In many ways, this reflects moving people to resources, rather than moving resources to people. In the case of the islands in prehistory, one can picture short-term encampments that were places of residence for seasonal resource harvest, or for groups travelling through the area. The warm season occupation might have represented gatherings of larger groups if, for example, it coincided with seasonal fish spawn. Such activity might facilitate seasonal aggregation of macro-bands over a few weeks or perhaps a month or two before people would have moved on. Additionally, those same groups might return for similar

gathering the next spring. This may represent the vast majority of island history prior to the mid 1600s.

Archaeological investigations and Aboriginal traditional knowledge are the only means to adequately tell the story of local prehistory. There has been only one recorded archaeological exploration on McKellar Island to date. In 1968, K.C.A. Dawson conducted a brief investigation of the bank opposite the original location of the Fort William trading post which yielded only "recent period" material (Dawson 1968: 46). In addition to this limited investigation, there has been some anecdotal evidence of prehistoric material recoveries on the island. Peter McKellar, in a 1918 communication with the director of the geological survey of Canada, relayed that a "discovery of relics was made in 1872 in the McKellar garden on island No. 1, Fort William, about one hundred and fifty (150) feet back from the junction of Kaministikwia and McKellar rivers. The plough turned up seven (7) or eight (8) copper tools in a bed of ashes. The tools were much eroded and covered with green carbonate of copper" (Tanton 1931: 84). Of these tools, Ken Dawson writes that "no information was obtained as to the type of tools recovered or what has become of them" (Dawson 1972: 16). In the absence of the tools themselves, the information they provide is limited. Additional evidence of early occupation or land-use can only be obtained through new archaeological survey and excavation.

### **3.2 The Colonial Period (1660 AD to 1855 AD)**

The early Colonial Period was an age of European exploration. The French Colonial Period begins around 1534 with the explorations by Jacques Cartier in his search for the Northwest Passage. In 1605, Port Royal was founded in Nova Scotia and, by 1608 Samuel de Champlain had founded Quebec as the capital of the fur-trading colony of New France. The French colonial expansion to Huronia at Georgian Bay by 1615 paved the way for the establishment of an important trade center by the late 1630s. Internal and external conflict in Huronia led to its fall in 1649. The fall of Huronia, a key consequence of the Iroquois wars era, contributed to the subsequent expansion westward of unlicensed and later licensed traders into the upper Great Lakes by the late 1650s. Sieur Medard Chouart Des Groseilliers, joined later by Pierre-Esprit Radisson, led the French exploration.

For the purposes of an examination of McKellar Island, the explorations of Radisson and Groseilliers, beginning with their exploration of the Lake Nipigon area in 1660 (Beaulieu 2010 and Southcott: 20, Morrison 2007: 11, Tronrud 2008: 19) and subsequent interest in Lake Superior, provides the starting point. The narrow passage into Lake Superior, at what is today Sault Ste Marie, restricted travel into the region. The passage was an important site of Aboriginal encampment and trade. The Aboriginal people closely guarded the entrance to Lake Superior, in order to maintain their own control over the resources (Lytwyn 2008: 18). Despite this, in 1660, a group of Aboriginal middleman traders brought Radisson and Groseilliers through this passage to Lake Superior (Morrison 2007: 11).



The fur trade was the dominant factor affecting the colonial presence at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. As in prehistoric times, movement of people and goods relied upon canoes travelling on the complicated network of rivers and lakes. These natural transportation corridors were critical for selection of the Kaministiquia River mouth as a hub for French colonial presence and commerce.

Fur trade operations in the Lake Superior area contributed to the flow of raw materials from the hinterland of that vast country to the European markets. Many traders, both licensed and unlicensed, endeavoured to forge alliances with the Aboriginal people and carve out a livelihood from the wilderness. As exploration continued, both the physical and human geography of the Lake Superior area became better understood. Early cartographers struggled with spatial data, often creating map images from multiple sources and lacking information from those as yet unexplored areas (Figure 3-1 and Figure 3-2). As the fur trade expanded, knowledge of the geography improved.

In 1679, Fort Caministigoyan was established on the south bank of the Mission River by Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut. It is likely that this establishment was not a large structure, in keeping with French fortifications of the period, nor was it a permanent establishment. When Jacques de Noyon travelled to Rainy Lake using the Kaministiquia route in 1688 (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 28), he found the fort abandoned. De Noyon refurbished Fort Caministigoyan and he "occupied it for a time before moving on" (Mauro 1981: 17). Any other subsequent use of du Lhut's fort had ceased by 1696 when, due to an oversupply of furs, all trading licences were cancelled by the French (Lytwyn

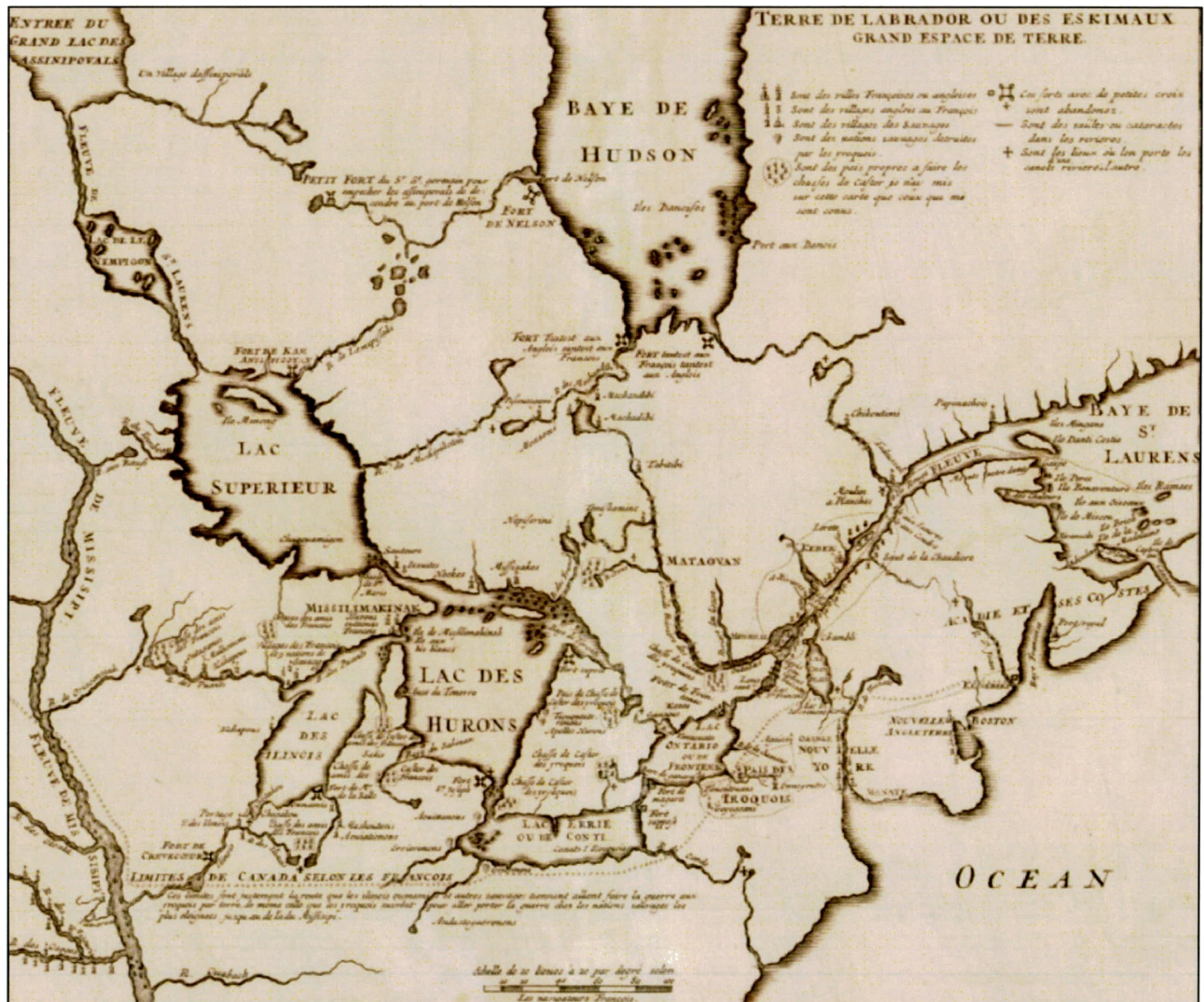
2008: 19). A European cartographic view of the area traversed by de Noyon can be seen in a globe segment from that same time period (Figure 3-1). We must note that the location of "Forte Du Luth" on "Lago Tracy, o Superiore" was plotted by individuals travelling by watercraft who did not yet know the scale or the scope of the geography of what would one day be known as North America. The location is simply relative to other known points and does not represent a true picture of the landscape.



**Figure 3-1** Portion of Vincenzo Maria Coronelli globe segment, 1688 showing Forte Du Luth (Image from [www.raremaps.com](http://www.raremaps.com), Inventory ID 20100).

The fortification was re-established across the river in 1717 by Zacharie de la Noue (Morrison 2007: 14). This second incarnation of the fort was an important point for

French trade in the region. It established a control point for inland trade for the French utilizing the St. Lawrence route. A depiction of the area at this time is represented in a map from 1719 (Figure 3-2). The fortification at the river mouth location was located at a point of best access which, true to Charles Whebell's corridor theory of urban systems discussed by Davis (1985), became important in linking transport with economic growth.



**Figure 3-2** Henri Chatelain Map of 1719 showing Fort De Kamanistigoyan (Image from [www.raremaps.com](http://www.raremaps.com), Inventory ID 20868).

By 1670, the British Hudson's Bay Company had received its official charter to conduct trade throughout the Hudson Bay drainage basin (Rupert's Land). The English and the French traders had two different business models. The English encouraged the Aboriginal people to bring furs to the Hudson's Bay Company posts located along the coast of Hudson and James bays, whereas the French expanded their posts into the inland hinterland to accommodate trade. The rivalry between France and Britain over fur trade and imperial domination of northern North America often escalated into warfare at various times in late 1600s and early 1700s. This culminated in the Seven Years' War, the conquest of New France and British control over much of North America.

According to the conditions of the 1763 Treaty of Paris, New France was surrendered to Britain. This transition of power and control over trading routes was important in the establishment of ongoing activities at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. The French fort built by de la Noue at the Kaministiquia River was abandoned in 1763, but the interest in the Kaministiquia River route was maintained. Thomas Corry, an independent trader associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, rediscovered the ruins of the fort in 1767 and traded in the area (Morrison 2007: 18). However, it would be more than three decades before the Kaministiquia River saw another permanent fur trade establishment on its shore. The North West Company would build the new establishment.

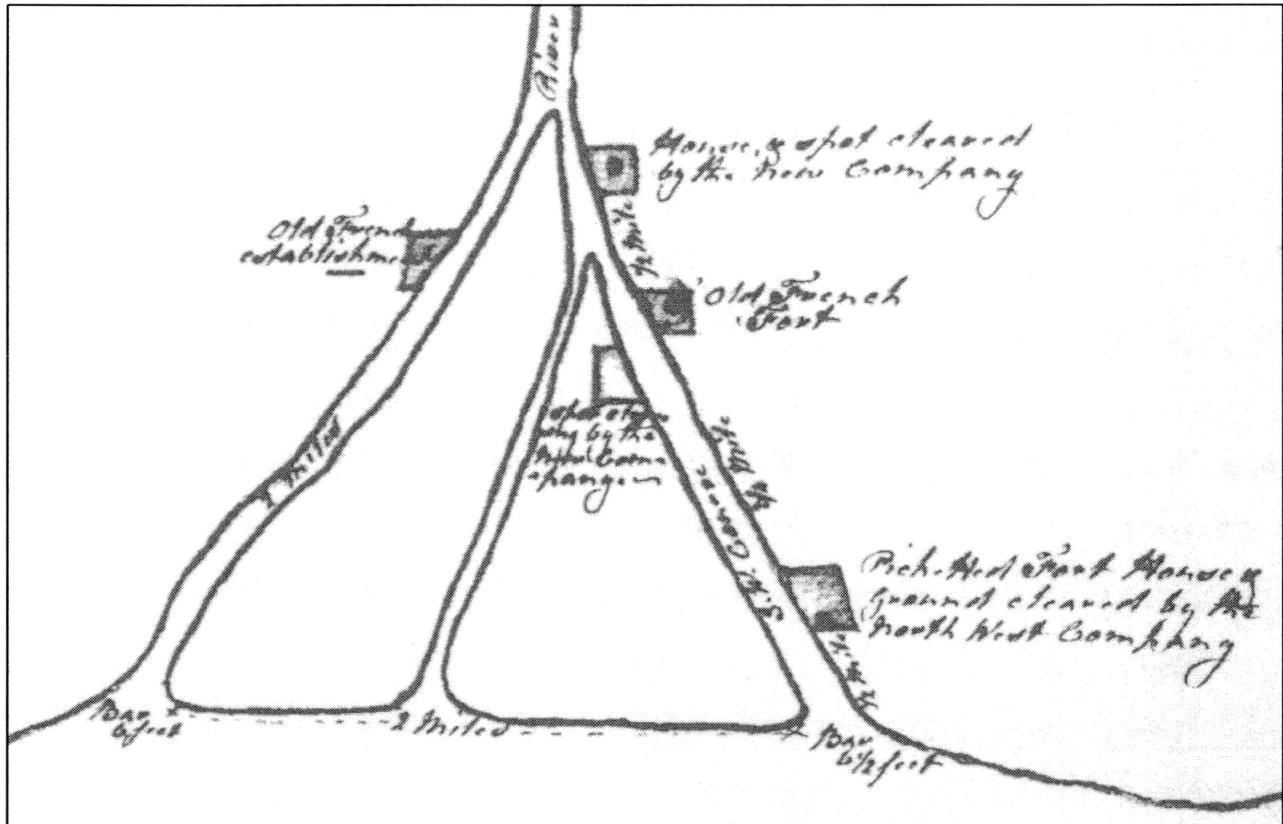
The post-1763 Montreal fur trade was predominately controlled by a number of merchants mostly of Scottish origin (Campbell 1976: 10) who appropriated French labour and the accompanying fur trade knowledge. These merchants quickly expanded to the

limits and beyond of the French system. This rapid inland expansion was a result of the dramatically different attitude of British colonial authorities from that of the French. These English-controlled traders gradually formed larger partnerships leading to what became known as the North West Company. It was this aggressive English-Montreal trade that finally forced the Hudson's Bay Company to move inland or face economic ruin, changing the power dynamics of trade in the 1770s. As with earlier French trade, Montreal was still the major transshipment point for goods shipped inland to supply the fur trade posts and where furs were transported for sale in Europe. Grand Portage, located along a new inland route to the interior, became the initial headquarters of the North West Company's regional interests. On Lake Superior in the northeast corner of what is now the state of Minnesota, the Grand Portage route offered easier travel than the Kaministiquia River. It was an important early rendezvous point for western trade by the Montreal traders and the early North West Company. The large Montreal canoe brigades that travelled the Great Lakes would meet the North canoe brigades serving the interior river systems. However, the fur traders using the St. Lawrence Route were not operating in a monopoly system. Competition between independent companies, the North West Company, and the Hudson's Bay Company was heightened during this time, as each sought to exploit the raw materials of the interior (Morrison 2003). With the Hudson's Bay Company being slow to move inland, the Montreal traders were dominant in the interior trade (Lytwyn 2008). Throughout this period, Grand Portage (and later Fort William) was a critically important administrative and transshipment point for the Montreal traders. The Hudson's Bay Company eventually adjusted their initial strategy and established Cumberland House inland in the late 1700s (Morrison 2003: 49).

With the 1783 defeat of Britain during the American Revolution, control and ownership of a significant part of British North America shifted to the new United States of America. By 1791, many British loyalists had moved northward into territory that remained in British hands, including Upper and Lower Canada. The Jays Treaty, signed in 1796, formally defined the border between the United States and Canada, and the British were forced to vacate forts within the United States. This treaty left the Grand Portage route within the territory of the United States, forcing the North West Company to relocate their regional headquarters in 1802.

In 1803, the North West Company constructed its new regional headquarters at Fort Kaministiquia. The area cleared by the North West Company for the new fort and the location of the previous establishments are presented in Captain Bruyere's sketch of 1802 (Figure 3-3). The map is of particular interest to the study of McKellar Island, as it references a clearing on the island used for corn hangers. It is not clear if the corn hangers predated the arrival of the North West Company or was a provisioning practice brought to the area with the establishment of the new post. The new post was renamed Fort William in 1807 in honour of the North West Company's chief director William McGillivray. During this period of the fur trade, the North West Company post at Fort William played a strategic role. As the North West Company's major inland transshipment point, Fort William's role was to ship merchandise "inland and 'the produce of the wintering posts' to England via Montreal" (Morrison 2007: 46). For the limited commodities of the fur trade, Fort William acted in a role analogous to that of a

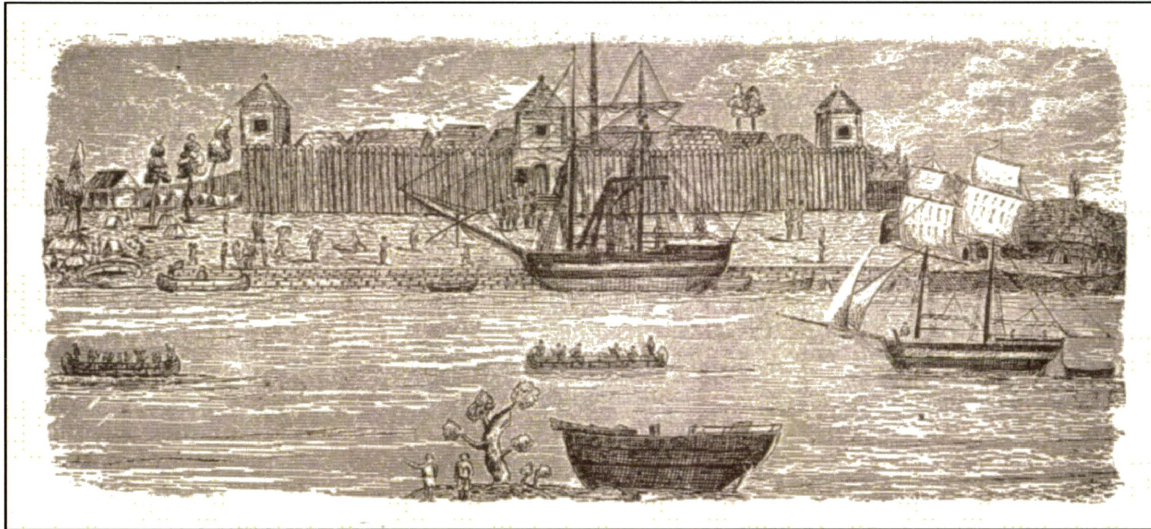
marshalling yard, a role it would later embrace literally during the rail era when the people and goods related to colonial expansion would move through the same location.



**Figure 3-3** Bruyere Map of 1802 showing the location of the 1717 fort and the 1802 location. The notation on McKellar Island reads "spot clearing by the new corn hangers" (LAC 5117).

As an annual rendezvous-place for the wintering partners and the Montreal agents, Fort William showcased its regional dominance. Auxiliary to the fort activities, the shore of the island opposite the Fort William post supported the activities of both Aboriginal and freeman groups. Canoe construction and repair, as well as clothing manufacture, subsistence agriculture, fishing and other activities were carried on there. Sketches of Fort William by contemporary artists (Figure 3-4) are often the only glimpse we have of

the island across the river. Written accounts of land use on the island are rare and often limited in the information they provide.



**Figure 3-4** 1805 New Fort with an indication of the island in the foreground (Lumby 1974: 39).

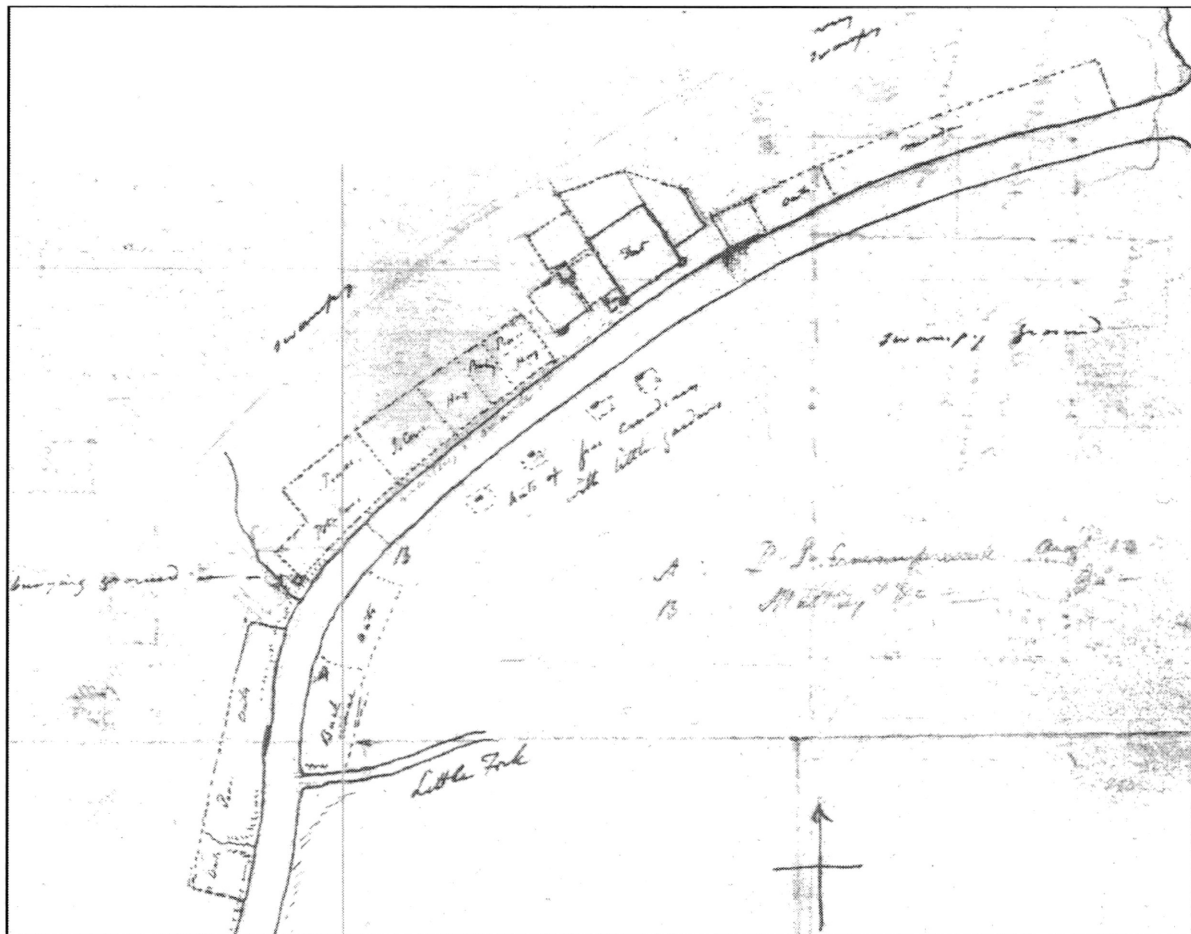
Professor Henry Hind, a member of the 1857 expedition examining the Red River Route refers briefly to the island as it had been during the early 1800s:

In the time of the North West Company, this island (opposite the fort) was denuded of the trees it sustained, which consisted mainly of tamarack, for fuel and other purposes and the greater portion is now covered by secondary growth. A large area south of the fort still remains denuded of wood and forms the site of an Ojibway village, besides serving as an excellent pasture ground for a herd of cows belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, which swim across the river every morning, a distance of 400 feet, and return at an early hour in the afternoon to the farmyard in the vicinity of the fort. [Hind 1860: 30]

The early Europeans used the island for farmland and habitation. The huts of free Canadians were present at that time and areas sown with buckwheat and oats are depicted in the Selkirk Papers from the early 1800s (Figure 3-5). As with the lands upon which the fort was situated, much of the island was noted as swampy and heavily wooded. The



scale in the sketch from the Selkirk Papers is somewhat distorted, and the tributary noted as the "Little Fork" is situated improperly. As a sketch of the area, however, the presence and absence of salient features provides useful information. In addition to the huts on the island, the interesting features of note on the sketch are the reference to the burying ground on the mainland and the details of the crops planted on the mainland and on the island. The general sketch is similar in composition and features to the 1928 Bayfield Track Survey (Figure 3-7). Lieutenant Irvine's 1811 painting grants a view of Fort William as it would have been looking across the river from the shoreline just beyond the northernmost freeman's hut (Figure 3-6).



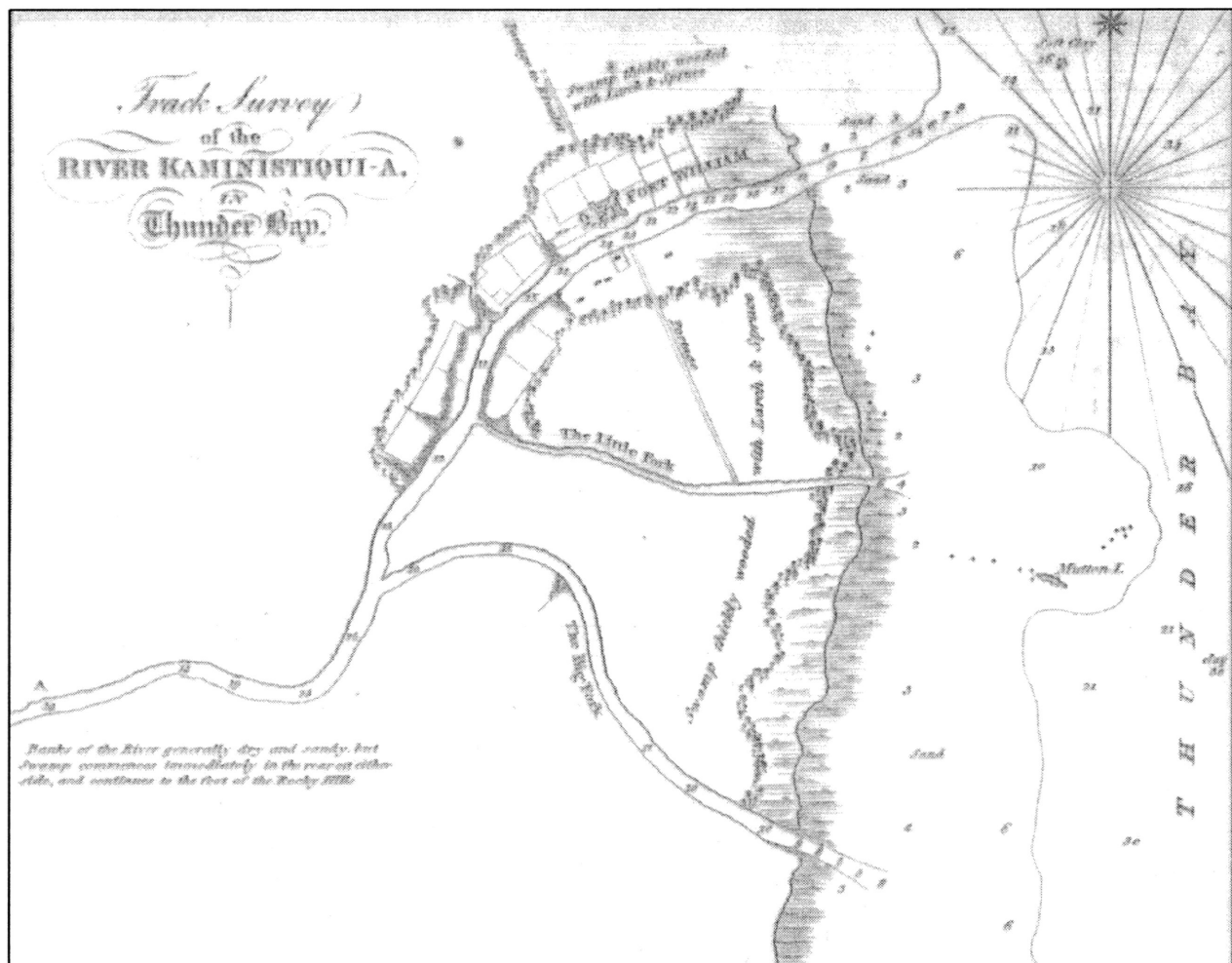
**Figure 3-5** Sketch of Fort William and island in early 1800s showing the huts of Free Canadians with little gardens on the island opposite the fort (Selkirk Papers Created c.1809-1816, Archives of Ontario).



**Figure 3-6** 1811 watercolour by Lieutenant Irvine showing Fort William, an establishment of the North West Company, on Lake Superior, (LAC Ref: R9266-290).

The amalgamation of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in March of 1821, and the subsequent rerouting of much of the interior trade through York Factory on Hudson Bay, forced Fort William to become a supply outpost (Campbell 1976). At this time, the "prevailing mood was pessimistic" (Arthur 1973: xxxiv) about the prospects for the area. The Hudson's Bay Company would still provide "virtually the only basis for contact between... [Fort William] and the rest of the world" (Arthur 1973: xxiii).

Many of the former North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company employees who had been released from their contracts, so-called "freemen" (Lytwyn 2008: 29), remained in the area. Many employees had taken "country wives" and had families and Aboriginal social connections in the area. The freemen's huts and gardens of the early 1800s are still depicted on sketches from the late 1820s (Figure 3-7).



**Figure 3-7** 1828 Lieutenant Henry Wolsey Bayfield Track Survey of the River Kaministiquia. Huts of Free Canadians, cultivated fields, and a portage are visible on the island (Hydrographic Archives, Taunton, England).

Commercial fishing rose to dominate the economic activity in the area following the amalgamation of the two fur trade companies. Indeed, Fort William "was in charge of managing seventeen fishing stations and harvesting 180,000 kilograms of fish a year" (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 44). The local population remained predominantly Aboriginal. This is significant when it is noted that, as recorded in 1833, the Aboriginal population of the entire Lake Superior District was 760 (Arthur 1973: xliii). The fishing industry was a transition for many of those who had previously worked in the fur trade. The fishing industry continued into the early 1860s, when the Hudson's Bay Company chose to abandon it because of the decline in the market demand for fish due to the events of the American Civil War (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 48). However, during this era of commercial fishing, Fort William was still relatively isolated. In 1845, although the "urbanization and industrialization of southern Ontario accelerated" (Dahms 1981: 179), Fort William remained untouched.

Social and spatial change began to take place when the Immaculate Conception Jesuit Mission (also called the Fort William Mission) was established on the mainland in 1849, roughly a mile from the fur trade post, on the south bank at the junction of the Kaministiquia and Mission rivers. It would operate until 1906. A year after the establishment of the Fort William Mission, the Robinson-Superior Treaty came into being. A reserve was positioned just over 3 kilometres from Fort William on lands near the Mission. Some saw the treaty as the Aboriginal "incentive to take up permanent homes" in the area (Arthur 1973: xlvi). There were, however, many concerned about the ramifications of such an agreement. Stefan Huzan of the City of Thunder Bay Planning

Division notes in a 2010 discussion of the Kaministiquia River and Islands area history that "only part of the Fort William original land purchase (1798) and McVicar and McKellar farmsteads were recognized as legal holdings by the Robinson-Superior Treaty. Only after the establishment of Crown ownership of land in 1850, were people able to own, survey, subdivide and sell property." This ability to own land was to set the stage for urban development of the area.

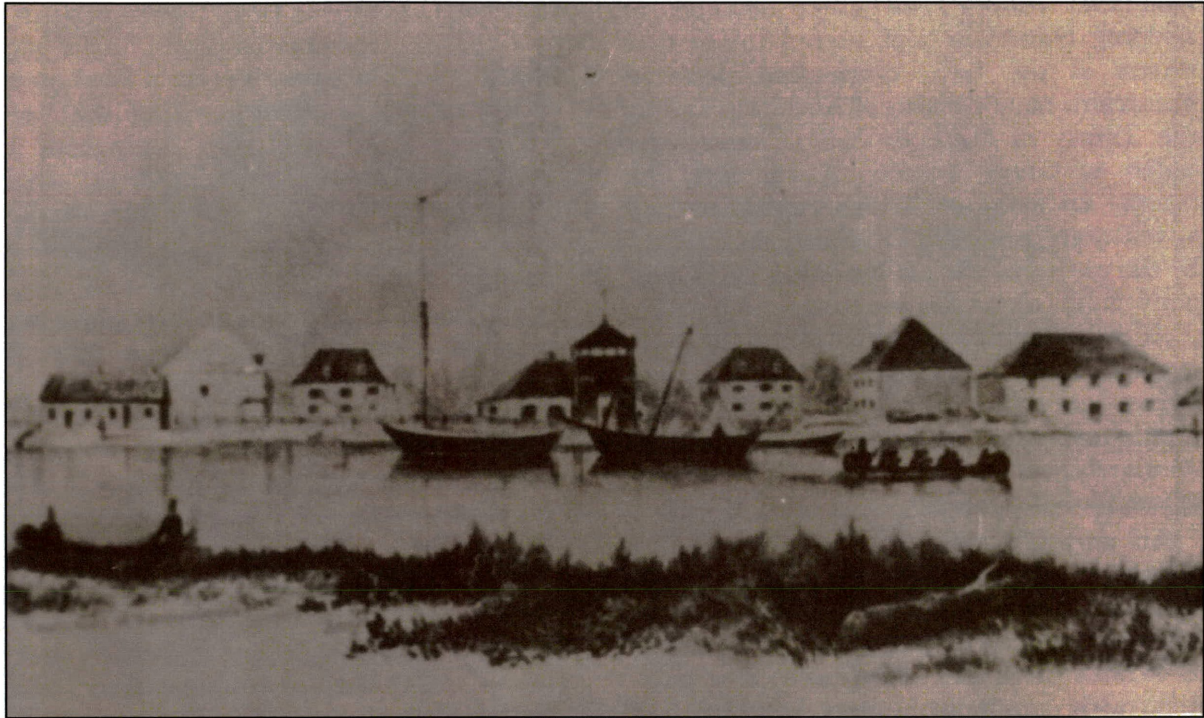
### **3.3 The Commercial Revolution to Post Confederation (1855 AD to 1872 AD)**

The 1855 opening of the Sault Ste Marie Canal greatly improved water travel throughout the Great Lakes, bringing a "commercial revolution" (Arthur 1973: 1) to the Fort William area. This canal enabled steam-powered watercraft to access Lake Superior, greatly easing cargo and passenger transport. Surveyors, prospectors, and others were more easily able to reach the previously isolated area (Arthur 1973: 1). It was that same year that John McIntyre assumed control of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort William. Although McIntyre's fort (Figure 3-8 to Figure 3-11) was still seen as a central place by the inhabitants of the area in 1855, expansion and development would reduce its significance. In 1856, the government established the Neebing and Paipoonge townships (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010) and the survey of the Fort William Town Plot followed in 1859 and 1860. The creation of the Town Plot suffered from jurisdictional issues between the Hudson's Bay Company and the emergent government of Canada (Arthur 1973: xxiii). However, lots were subsequently established. Purchases of these early lots were based on projections of urban growth and development.



**Figure 3-8** An image of McIntyre's fort by William Armstrong showing the presence of Aboriginal activity on the island opposite the fort (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society).

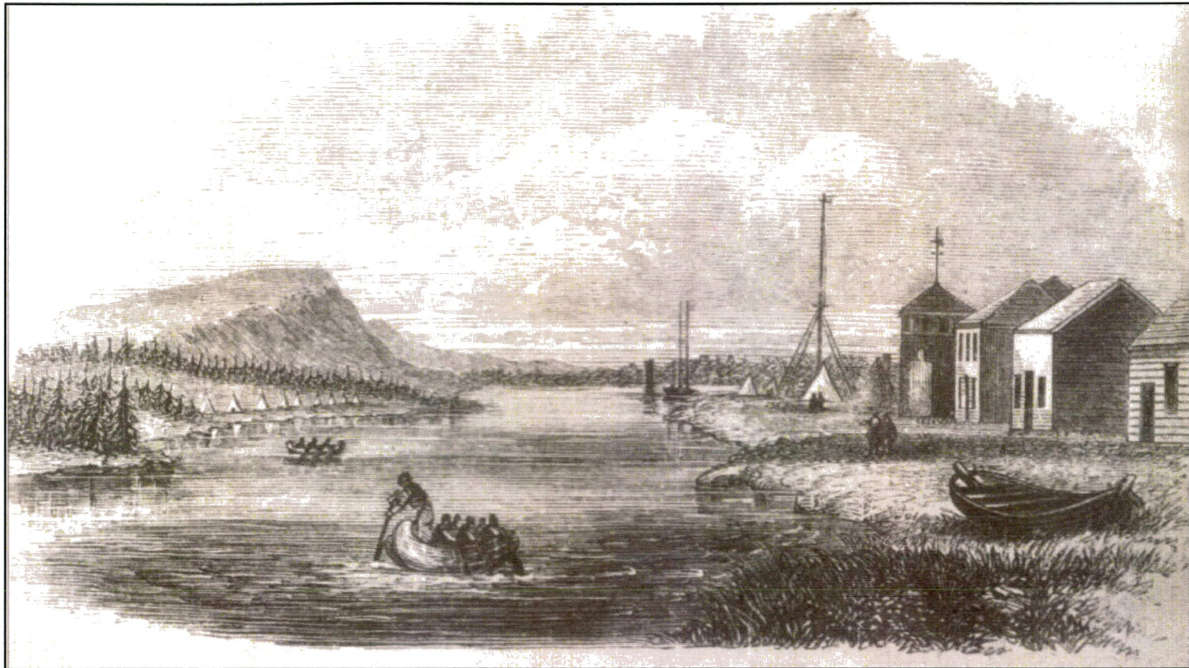
In 1857, John Palliser was commissioned to determine if a cross-Canada railroad could be built (Mauro 1981: 31). On arriving at the mouth of the Kaministiquia, he wrote that Fort William's "returns as a trading post are inconsiderable" (Mauro 1981: 31). He also noted, perhaps prophetically, that only "by the discovery of mineral wealth would this region be likely to attract settlers" (Mauro 1981: 32). He assessed that there were "only a few and isolated spots where agriculture could be carried on" (Mauro 1981: 32). In spite of Palliser's bleak depiction of the Fort William area, there were those who felt that the Kaministiquia mouth still held potential for settlement and development. Indeed, the subsequent decades would see the area become the gateway to the west, a role it would hold well into the twentieth century.



**Figure 3-9** 1850s Fort William with McKellar Island in the foreground (Mauro 1981: 20).



**Figure 3-10** 1857 William Napier painting of Fort William with McKellar Island and Aboriginal family in the foreground (Library and Archives Canada).



**Figure 3-11** 1858 Fort William showing Aboriginal encampment across the river (Morrison 2003: 140).

Land speculation was an essential component of Fort William's history. As of 1863, there were only three non-Aboriginal families residing in Fort William. This included the families of Captain Robert McVicar, the Postmaster at the time, Governor John McIntyre of the Hudson's Bay Company, and Duncan McKellar with his two sons Peter and John (Mauro 1981: 38). In fact, the arrival of the McKellar family and their subsequent settlement in Fort William was motivated by land speculation and prospecting opportunities (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 49). Change was on the horizon and the drivers of Fort William's destiny were soon to see opportunities arise for urban growth.

The formation of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867 paved the way for self-governance and nationhood. For the period immediately following 1867, the drive to establish a post-colonial national identity and also territorial consolidation was high on the agenda of the new government. Concern over the settlement of the lands west of the



Dominion by the ever-expanding United States meant that land claims and political control over the continental interior had to be established and maintained (Dawson 2004: 46). Significant localized evidence of this desire to unify the regions of the Dominion could be seen with the construction of the Dawson Road. The road, first surveyed by Simon J. Dawson in 1858, began the western end of its construction in 1868 under Henry Hind (Dawson 2004: 48). Construction of the eastern end of the road followed under Simon J. Dawson himself. This road was designed to link the Red River Settlement with Prince Arthur's Landing, the settlement near Fort William on the shore of Lake Superior. The entire Dawson Route would see completion in 1871.

Mineral resources would also prove to be a key regional asset. Although there had been rumours of mineral wealth since the 1820s (Arthur 1973: xxxiv), the "history of mining in this region commenced in 1846 when the first mining locations were taken up. Several parcels of land, each embracing 10 square miles, were located in that year" (Tanton 1931: 88). However, the 1868 discovery of silver by the Montreal Mining Company at nearby Silver Islet sparked a mining boom that did not end until the late 1880s (Di Matteo 1991: 300). The government had relaxed or removed many of the restrictions on mineral rights, allowing prospecting and mining to flourish. However, this strong regional mining industry "did not produce permanent settlement" (Arthur 1973: xlv).

During this early period of mineral extraction, there was mining carried out on McKellar Island. According to T.L. Tanton of the Canadian Department of Mines, a vein on the island "was discovered in 1869 by the Messrs. McKellar Brothers, and some years

afterwards test work was done" (Tanton 1931: 188). Tanton refers to a figure by E.D. Ingall, who prepared a report on mines and mining on Lake Superior in 1887-8, which "shows a shaft, 130 feet deep; an adit, 150 feet long; and a crosscut 60 feet long" (Tanton 1931: 188). Tanton reprints Ingall's text, which notes that the vein:

is very large, consisting of coarsely crystalline calcite and barite, occurring in separate ribs for the most part, although they are mixed in parts of the vein. With these preponderating minerals there is a smaller proportion of quartz, generally colourless. The metallic minerals consist of zinc blende with a little galena and pyrite which are for the most part concentrated in dark-coloured bands in the main vein, of which bands there are two on the north side and one on the south side of the island. A sample of one of these streaks assayed - gold, none; silver, about 1/4 ounce; whilst another from another place in the same gave neither gold nor silver, showing that the dark coloration was not due to finely disseminated argentite or argentiferous blende (See Geol. Surv., Canada, Rept. of Prog. 1886, Pt. T, Assays 33 and 34).

Besides this main vein which is composed of solid spar, and is about 60 feet wide on the south side of the island there are numerous side stringers intersecting the country rock of the west wall of the vein, and on these the developments have been mostly made.

The enclosing rock is a dark green, coarsely-grained trap. This composes the whole island which is only some 500 or 600 feet in diameter, and is evidently part of the outcrop of a dyke which appears farther west in Thompson island. A little altered argillite appears on the south side of the island still clinging to the dyke.

According to Mr. P. McKellar, argentiferous blende was the chief silver-bearing ore of the vein. The developments done so far have not opened up any very large body of ore.

During the summer of 1886, the barite rib on the east side of the vein has been worked down from the surface, some thirty men being employed at this work, and the product, after hand-picking to extract as much of the calcite and quartz as possible, was being shipped to the United States, the buying firm giving \$5 per ton over the rail at the island for the best quality. [Tanton 1931: 188]

The expansion of the newly formed Dominion was limited without the ability to acquire additional land. This was resolved in 1870 when the Dominion of Canada purchased Rupert's Land and the North West Territories from the Hudson's Bay Company. Subsequent to ceding control of those lands, the Hudson's Bay Company underwent a

remarkable transformation. The Hudson's Bay Company began to market their remaining land holdings and began the "joint development" of town sites with the Canadian Pacific Railway (Selwood 1981: 73). Beginning in 1879, this initiative led to a three year program to sell off Hudson's Bay Company land "when and where there was demand" (Selwood 1981: 76). The acquisition of Rupert's Land set the stage for dramatic growth and development throughout western Canada, and along the northwest shore of Lake Superior.

The sale of Rupert's Land without accommodation or consideration of the Métis residents of Red River led to a rebellion in 1870 under leadership of Louis Riel. The Canadian response involved dispatching the Red River Expeditionary Force, led by Colonel Garnet Wolseley, to put down the Red River Rebellion. The Wolseley expedition landed at the Depot (modern Port Arthur) in 1870, and then travelled further west by water route and overland portage to arrive at their destination. The utilization of the Dawson Route reasserted the relationship between east and west. The role of Fort William and neighbouring Prince Arthur's Landing as the intermediate destination between eastern and western Canada re-established their essential role in the nation.

### **3.4 The Industrial Period (1872 AD to 1970 AD)**

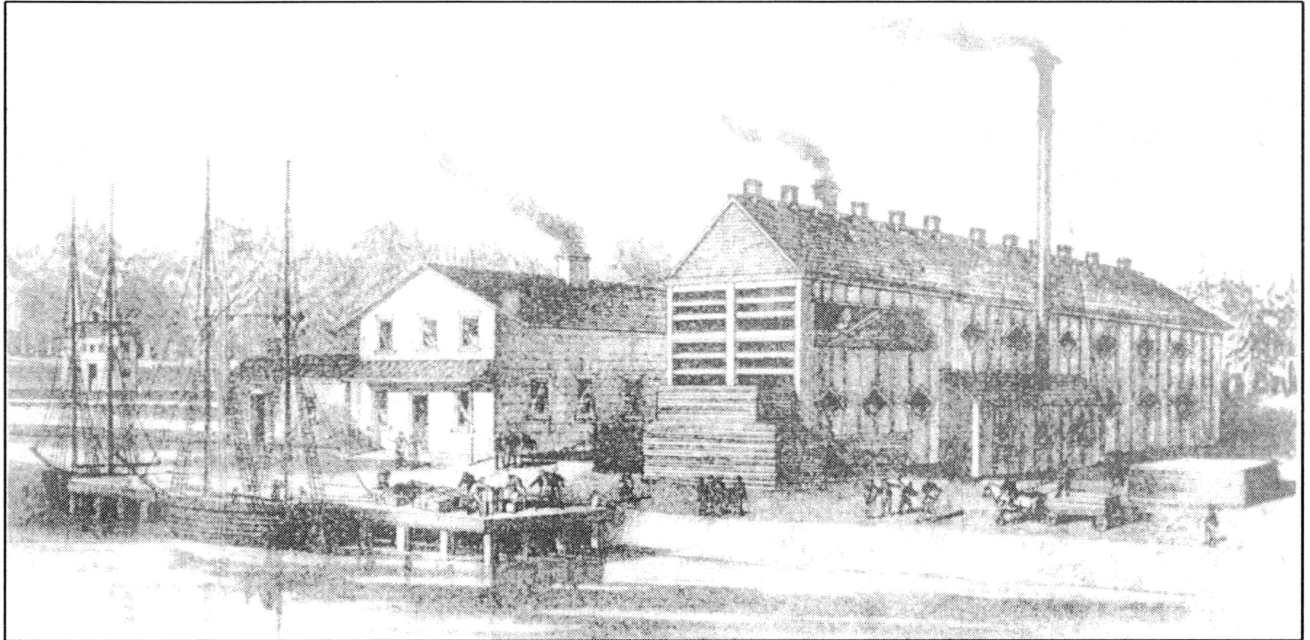
At a time when only a few homes had been constructed at the Town Plot several kilometres upstream from McKellar Island (Arthur 1973: lxxxviii), there were only a small number of individuals with any property interests on the island itself. Property ownership at this time was still fuelled by speculation. One such important landowner

was Adam Oliver. By 1870, Oliver and his partners Brown and Davidson (Oliver, Davidson and Company), owned "about 4,000 acres of land on the north side of the Kaministiquia River, and half of all land patented on the South side, between it and Pigeon River" (Mauro 1981: 70).

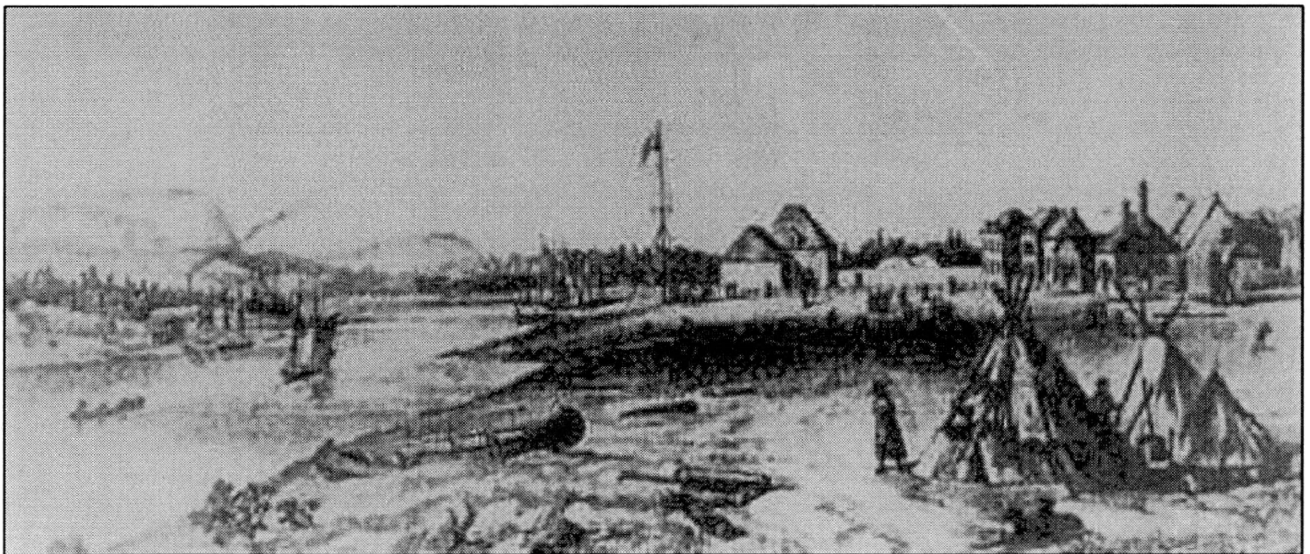
The partners also owned property on McKellar Island at this time. On this land, "situated on the island opposite the fort" (Arthur 1973: lxxxviii), the "first commercial steam sawmill was constructed in 1872 at the mouth of the Kaministiquia to mill timber cut from land purchased from the Fort William Reserve, and later from the Reserve itself" (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 57). Oliver, Davidson and Company operated this mill until 1875 when W.H. Carpenter took over the mill operations (Lumby 1974: 41). Carpenter endeavoured to repeat the early successes of Oliver, Davidson and Company (Arthur 1973: lxxvii), but fell short of his expectations.

The Oliver, Davidson and Company sawmill establishments (Figure 3-12, Figure 3-13, Figure 3-15, Figure 3-28 and Figure 3-29) were predominantly wooden structures and included the sawmill, the door and sash factory, multiple sheds and dwellings with brushwood exposures beyond. Other functional areas included a lumberyard and wharf facilities. The wharf facilities were comprised of fixed platforms on pilings and a boom. As all materials were transported to and from the mill by watercraft, the wharf was assuredly a hub of activity. The mill was a structured, task-focussed complex of buildings. In addition to the primary mill function there were also repairs to be made and labourers to coordinate. There may have even been a dwelling that served as a general

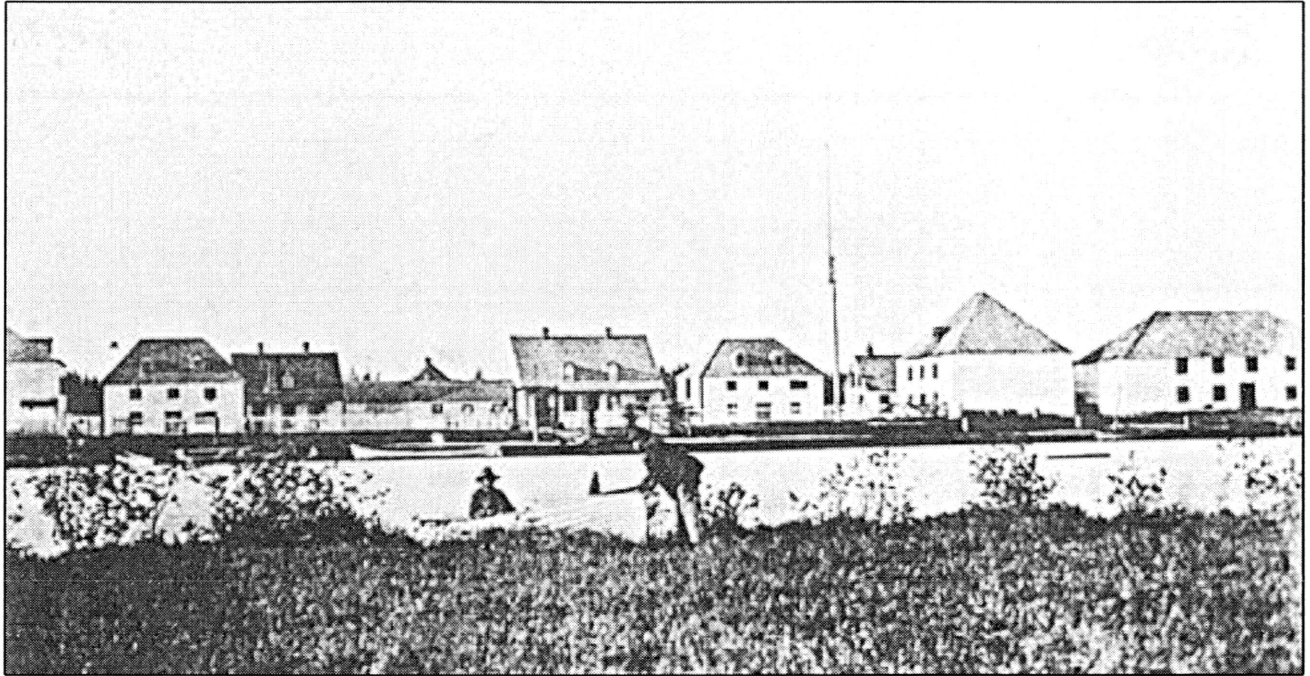
goods store for the camp, providing basic daily essentials. The planing mill was located north of the sawmill establishments (Figure 3-16, Figure 3-17 and Figure 3-25).



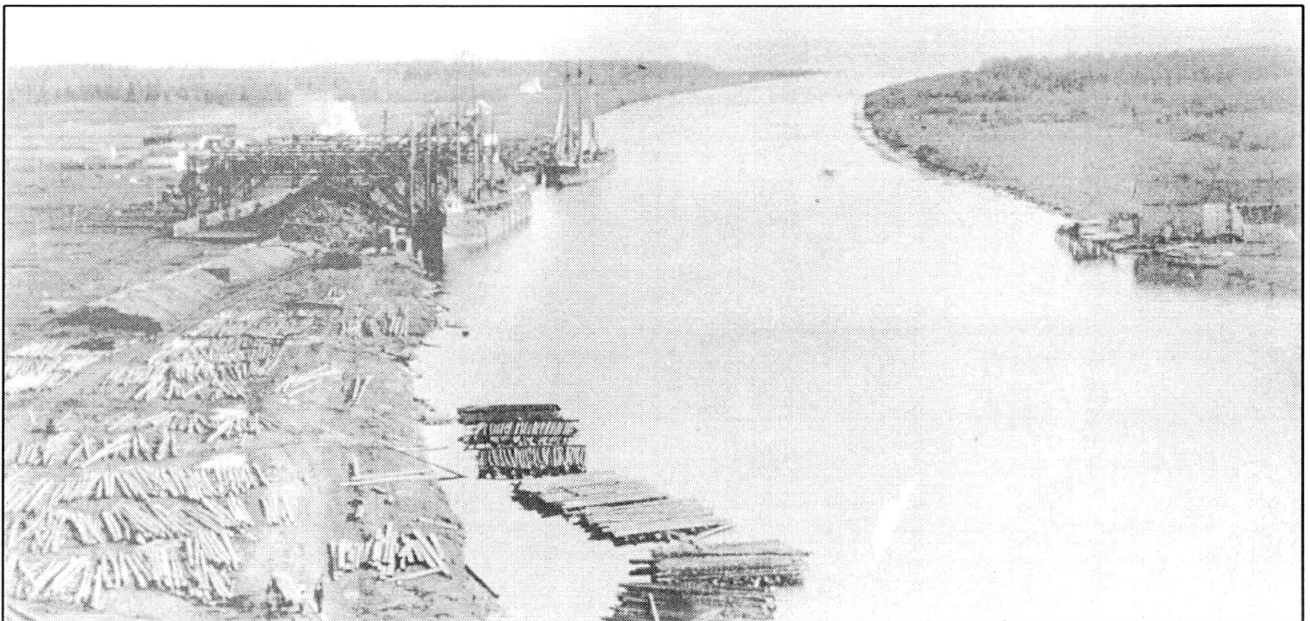
**Figure 3-12** Oliver, Davidson & Co. sawmill, 1873 (TBHMS 973.61.10e).



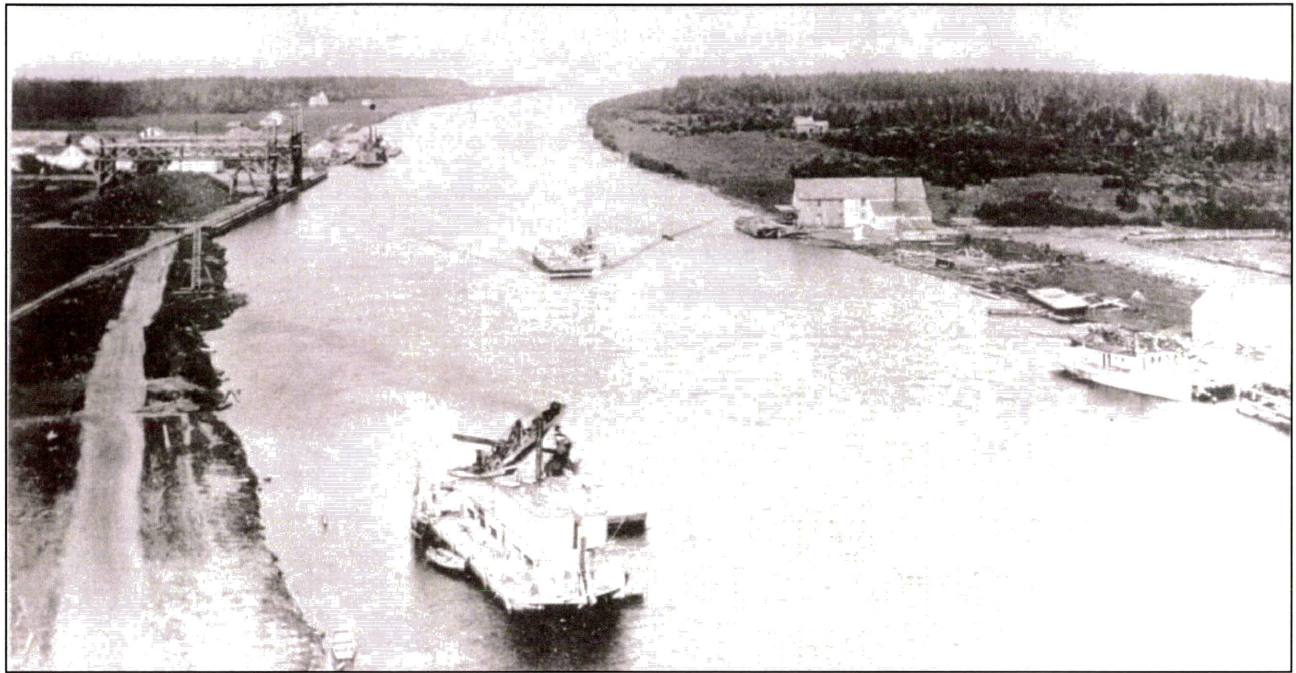
**Figure 3-13** William Armstrong drawing of Fort William from 1873 showing the sawmill on the island (TBPL: P 37(33) Photo of a sketch)



**Figure 3-14** Fort William in 1873, contemporaneous with the operations of the sawmill. Photo taken from McKellar Island (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society).



**Figure 3-15** Oliver, Davidson & Co. sawmill (on right), 1885. Timber (on left) being assembled for the construction of C.P.R. Elevator A (TBHMS 973.61.10b).



**Figure 3-16** Oliver, Davidson & Co. sawmill (on right) in 1887. C.P.R. Coal Dock (left) and remains of the Hudson's Bay Post (TBHMS 973.61.10a).



**Figure 3-17** Oliver-Davidson and Company sawmill "with steamer lying at the docks" (Lumby 1974: 41)

On August 3, 1876, *The Sentinel* (the newspaper of Prince Arthur's Landing) included the following statement:

We did not cross to Messrs. Oliver and Davidson's Mill, but learned that the hum of industry is to be heard, fitting up the mill, door and sash factory, overhauling the *Jennie Oliver*, etc. We learned that a good business had been done in the past winter in the sale of lumber, and a superior quality of logs has been secured to run the mill when the weather permits. [TBHS Papers and Records 1921]



**Figure 3-18** Former Oliver, Davidson & Co. sawmill site (on right) (TBHMS 975.6.102).

The locations of the structures of the Oliver, Davidson and Company sawmill are indicated on the survey map created in 1875 for the Neebing Additional. This survey map was to include areas surrounding the fur trade post and Island No.1 (later McKellar Island) and Island No.2 (later Mission Island). The Neebing Additional survey map was completed on July 29, 1875 and was officially approved on October 12, 1876. The 1875 survey map of Island No. 1 (Figure 3-20) contained lot and concession limits as well as a designation of those areas of irregular shape cleared and occupied by individuals prior to the survey. After the initial patents were granted, additional patents were granted for water lots, purchased on speculation. Although some of the patent holders were not local residents, there was still local ownership. In addition to the sawmill structures, the 1875 map indicates dwellings on lands belonging to Duncan McKellar, John Cousin, and the Blackwood family (Figure 3-19 and Figure 3-20). Unlike earlier in the century, there seems to be no indication of Aboriginal settlement on McKellar Island, although encampments on the Kaministiquia River were still present (Figure 3-21).





Figure 3-19 Survey map of Island No.1 from 1875 (76) showing concessions and lot ownership (TBHMS 974.49.1).

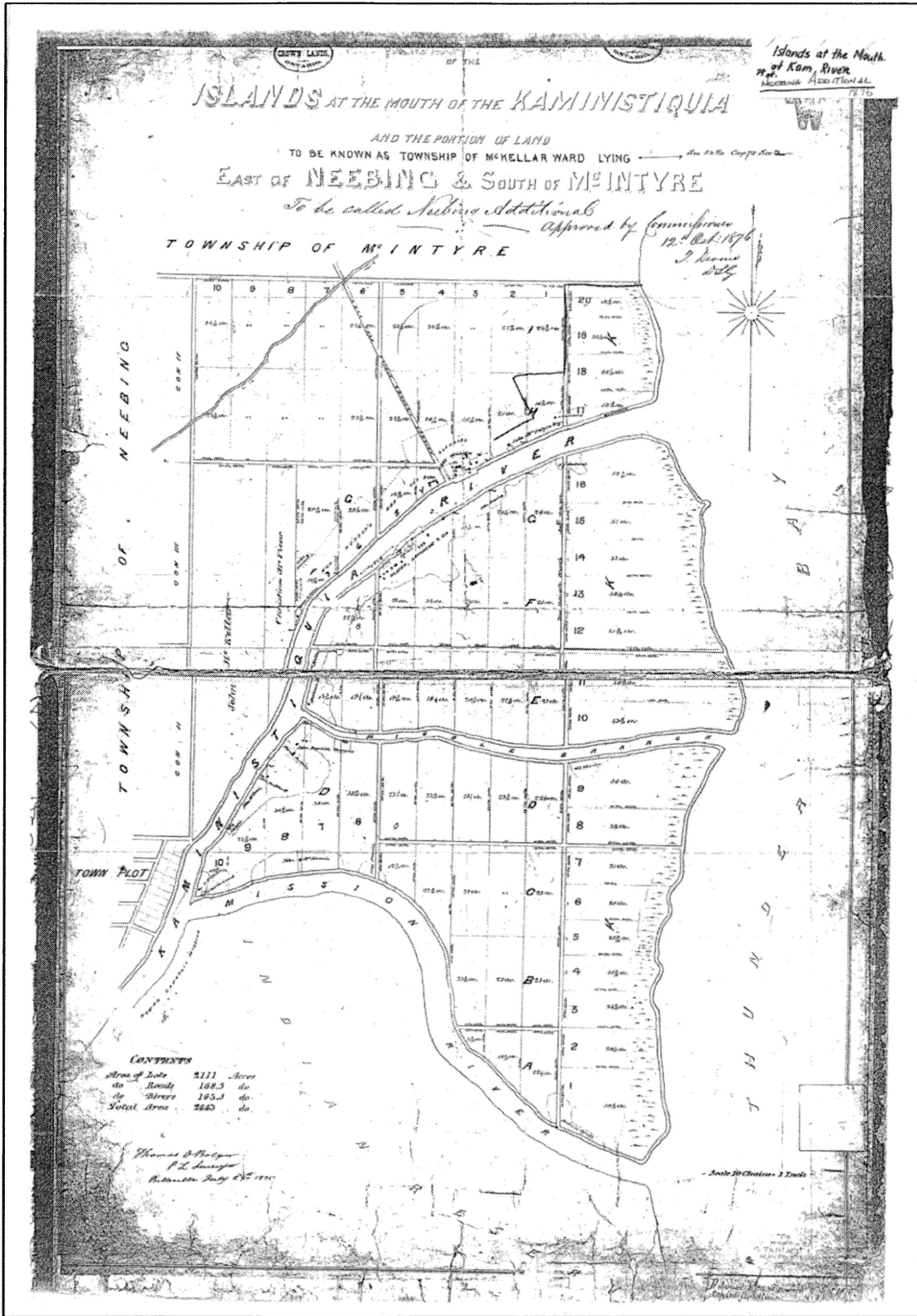


Figure 3-20 Islands at the mouth of the Kaministiquia (Neebing Additional), 1875.



**Figure 3-21** c.1880s Aboriginal encampment on the Kaministiquia River (Campbell 1976).

The Dominion of Canada had established a national policy of settlement and development. A large part of this plan would rely on the construction of a national railway that would link the Maritimes with British Columbia. The decision to establish the terminus of the transcontinental railroad at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River was made in 1875. The decision to select Fort William over neighbouring Prince Arthur's Landing was a contentious one, and formed part of the story of rivalry between the two urban centers (Tronrud and Epp 2008). Adam Oliver, entrepreneur and owner of the first local sawmill, turned the first sod for the new Canadian Pacific Railway on June 1, 1875.

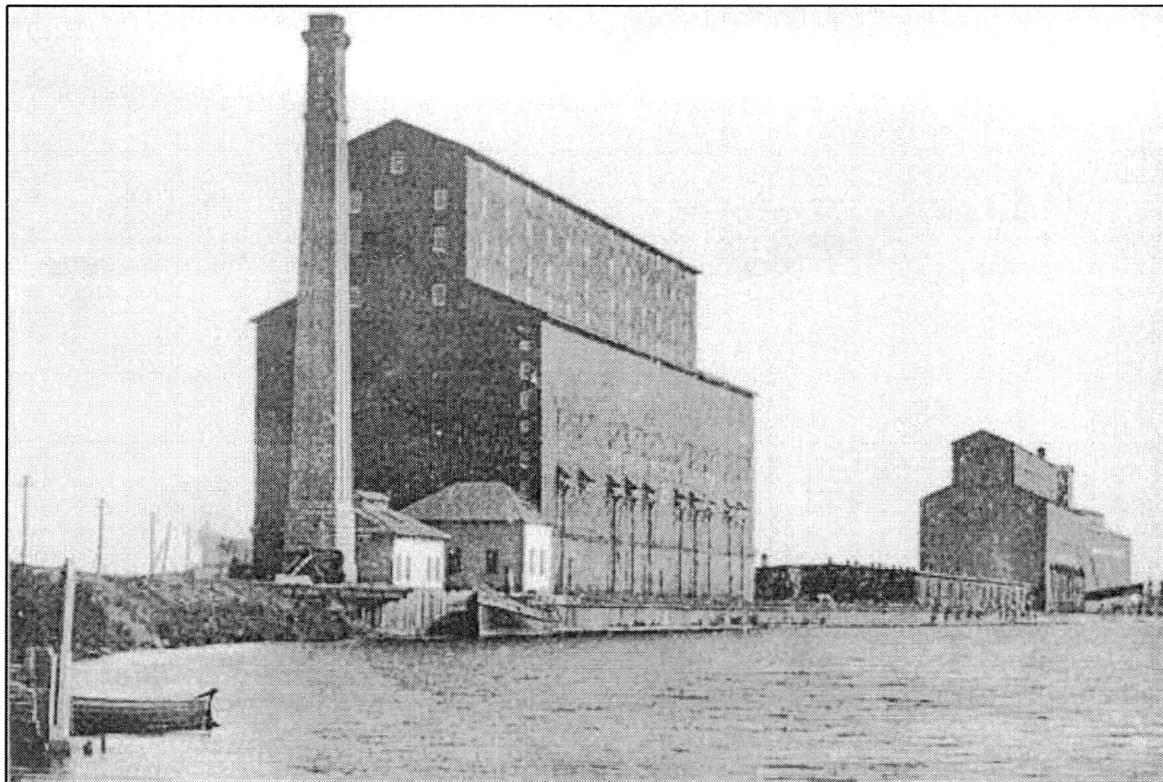
The railroad removed some of the physiographic limitations that Fort William had during the fur trade era allowing it to re-emerge as a transshipment hub and commercial center.

The railroad supported the development of the western resource frontier. As expected, the establishment of the transcontinental railway was also followed by settlement and local farming became important to provide food for the growing population (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 58). In addition to other staple crops, local farmers relied on hay production and dairy farming. By 1881, according to the Census of Canada for the District of Algoma of that year, Fort William had grown to 690 residents. In that same year the Canadian Pacific Railway took over the construction of the transcontinental railway and in 1883 the Fort William fur trade post finally closed its doors (Lytwyn 2008: 34). In its place, Canadian Pacific Railway yards were constructed to supplement the earlier yards.



**Figure 3-22** Portion of a map from 1885 showing concessions, lots, and the addition of a new road [Simpson Street] on mainland (TBHMS 972.122.54).

Further construction was spurred by the rise in western agriculture during the late 1800s. As grain shipments from the west increased after the early 1880s, grain storage facilities were required at Fort William. This led to the construction of grain elevators along the waterfront to store incoming shipments (Figure 3-23).



**Figure 3-23** CPR Elevators B (1889) and C (1890), c.1903 (MacFarlane 1904).

Expanded harbour and railway facilities naturally followed out of necessity. To accommodate the shipping industry, the Kaministiquia River was dredged to allow larger ships entry to the port. Secondary industries developed to support and enhance the waterfront. Fort William (Figure 3-24) also processed some of the raw materials prior to export to provide "value added" to customers. In addition, tariffs and trade policies had been put in place to protect the Lake Superior shipments. Other industries were also

successful during this period. Demands for lumber in the prairies and for railway construction meant a vibrant lumber industry during the 1880s (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 58). By 1891, a year before it was incorporated as a town, Fort William supported numerous functions and establishments (Table 3-1). In 1892, changes in pulpwood licensing led to a further boom in the Fort William lumber industry (Arthur 1973: lxxvii). The area as a whole was focussed on growth and development.



**Figure 3-24** 1888 Fort William Town Plot (Mauro 1981: 102).

**Table 3-1**

1891 Fort William Functions and Establishments

1 Bakery	1 Book Store	2 Brick Yards	3 Bucher Shops
4 Churches	2 Coal Docks	1 Courthouse and Jail	1 Dominion Express Office
1 Drug Store	1 Furniture Store	1 Grocery	1 Huckster Shop
1 Ice Cream Saloon	1 Insurance Agency	2 Lumber Yards	1 Millinery Store
1 Portable Saw Mill	1 Pump Factory	2 Schools (Good)	1 Telegraph Office (C.P.R.)
1 Weekly Newspaper	1 Boat Home	3 Steamers	1 Wagon Maker
3 Barbers	1 Chief of Police	2 Doctors	2 Draymen
5 Dressmakers	2 Green Grocers	2 Painters	2 Real Estate Agents
3 Teachers			

Source: Mauro (1981: 158)

In 1891, a series of fire insurance plans were commissioned to detail the structures and their interior and exterior construction. Each building that needed to be insured required that a plan be registered. The plans were updated as the area grew and changed. The revised fire insurance plans of Fort William from 1895 show the layout of the town, its streets, businesses and residential areas (Figure 3-25 to Figure 3-28). The original plan of 1891 shows the structures of the Oliver, Davidson and Company sawmill in place across from Elevator A, the latter located on the north bank of the Kaministiquia River (Figure 3-29), whereas the revised plan of 1895 (Figure 3-28) shows the absence of the sawmill establishment.

In examining the fire insurance maps, it becomes clear that the planing mill, the sawmill complex and the associated sheds and dwellings are the salient establishments on the island in 1891 and 1895 for insurance purposes. There are no available records to indicate that any of the functions of the mill were active at this time. In 1883, Graham & Horne had opened a saw and planing mill on the Fort William mainland (Figure 3-27) to support additional railway demand (Arthur 1973: lxxvii). The dwellings at the Oliver, Davidson and Company mill were used by the labourers and perhaps by the supervisors during the mill's operating period. Single and two storey dwellings may point towards class divisions on the mill site. Given the daily needs of the business, the limited boat-only access to the mainland would account for the need to establish a residential component to the mill.



Figure 3-25 Fire Insurance Plan of Fort William, 1891, Revised 1895, 1 of 4 (LAC Ref: R6990-388-3-E).





Figure 3-26 Fire Insurance Plan of Fort William, 1891, Revised 1895, 2 of 4 (LAC Ref: R6990-388-3-E).

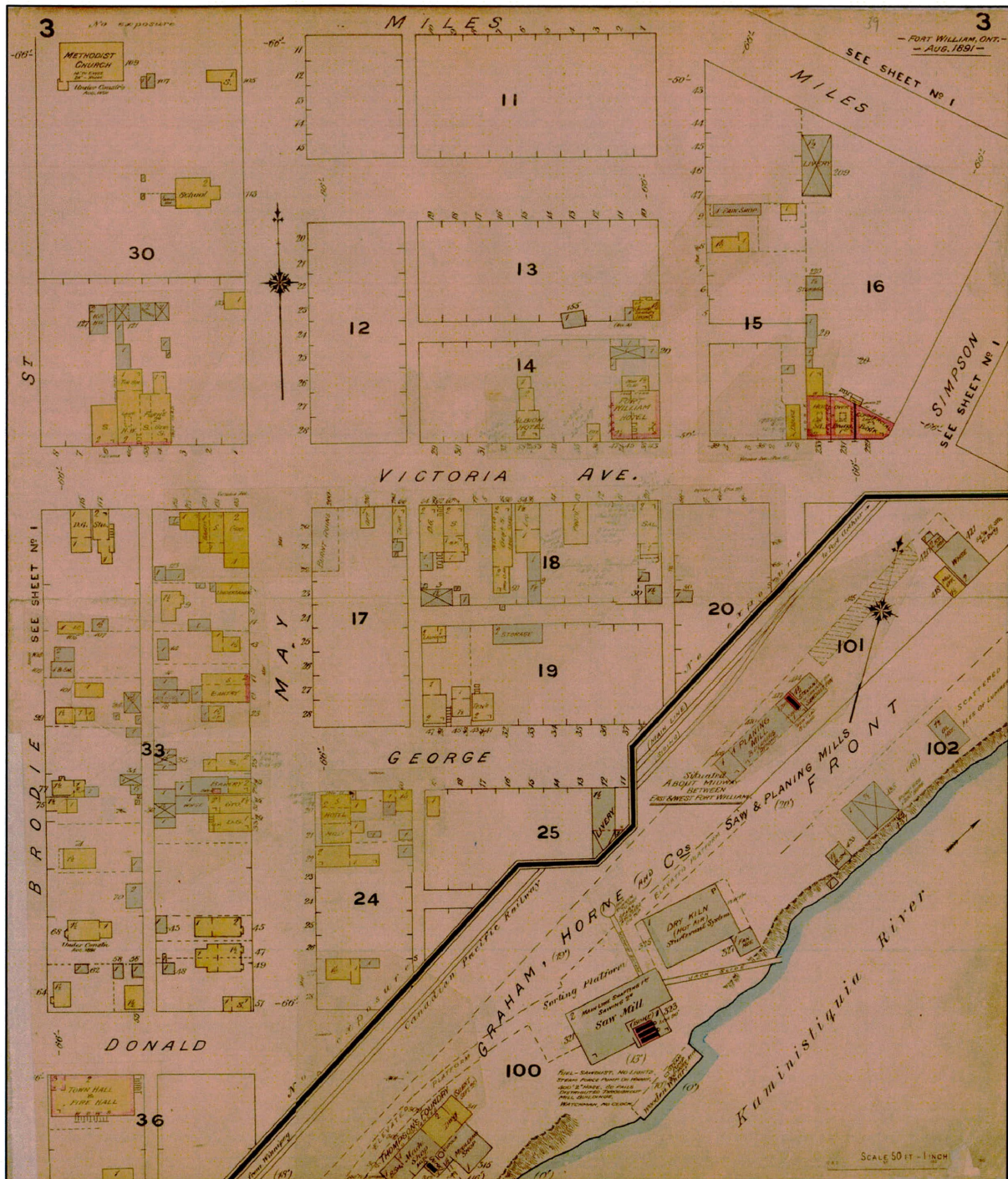


Figure 3-27 Fire Insurance Plan of Fort William, 1891, Revised 1895, 3 of 4 (LAC Ref: R6990-388-3-E).

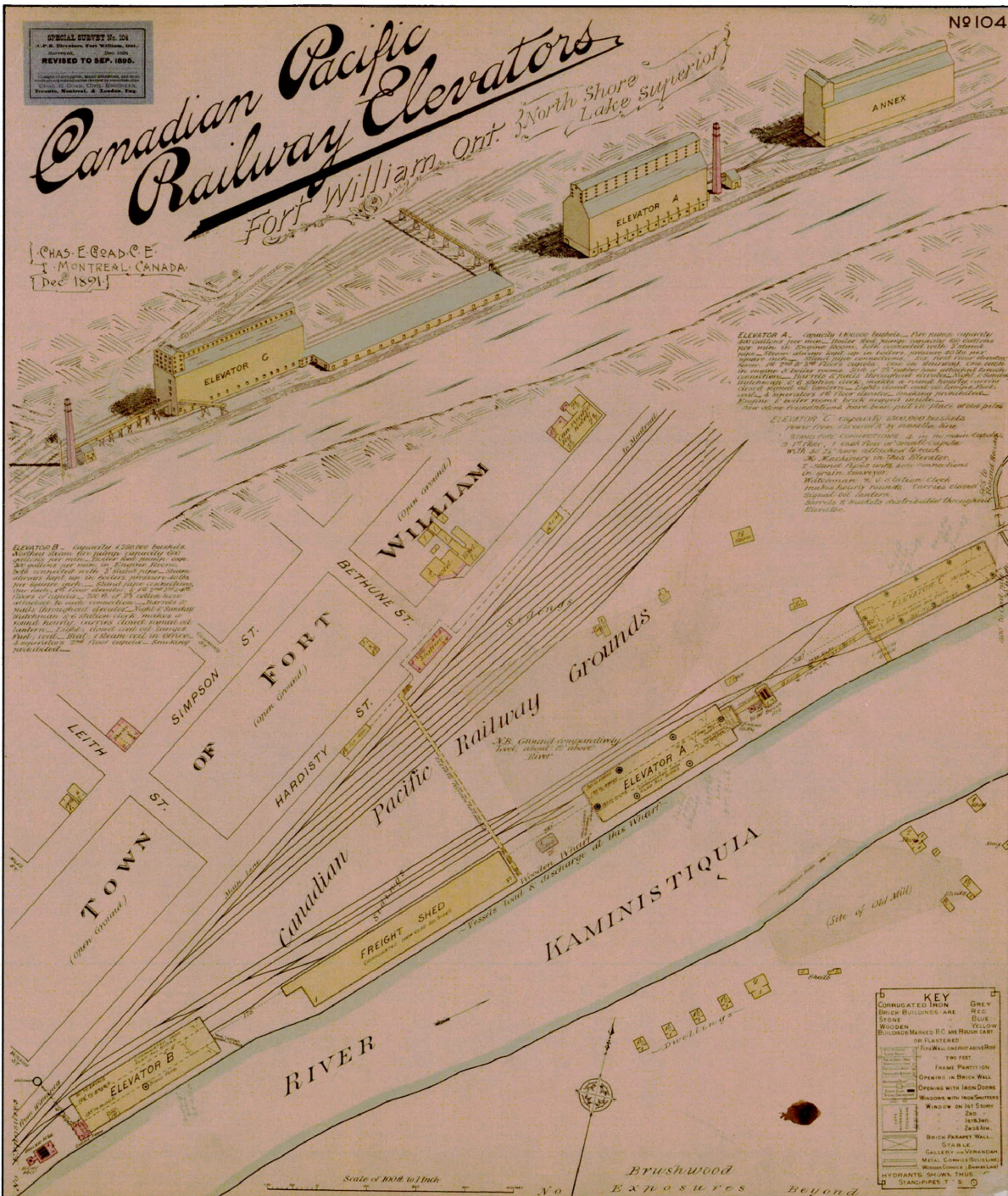


Figure 3-28 Fire Insurance Plan of Fort William, 1891, Revised 1895, 4 of 4 (LAC Ref: R6990-388-3-E).

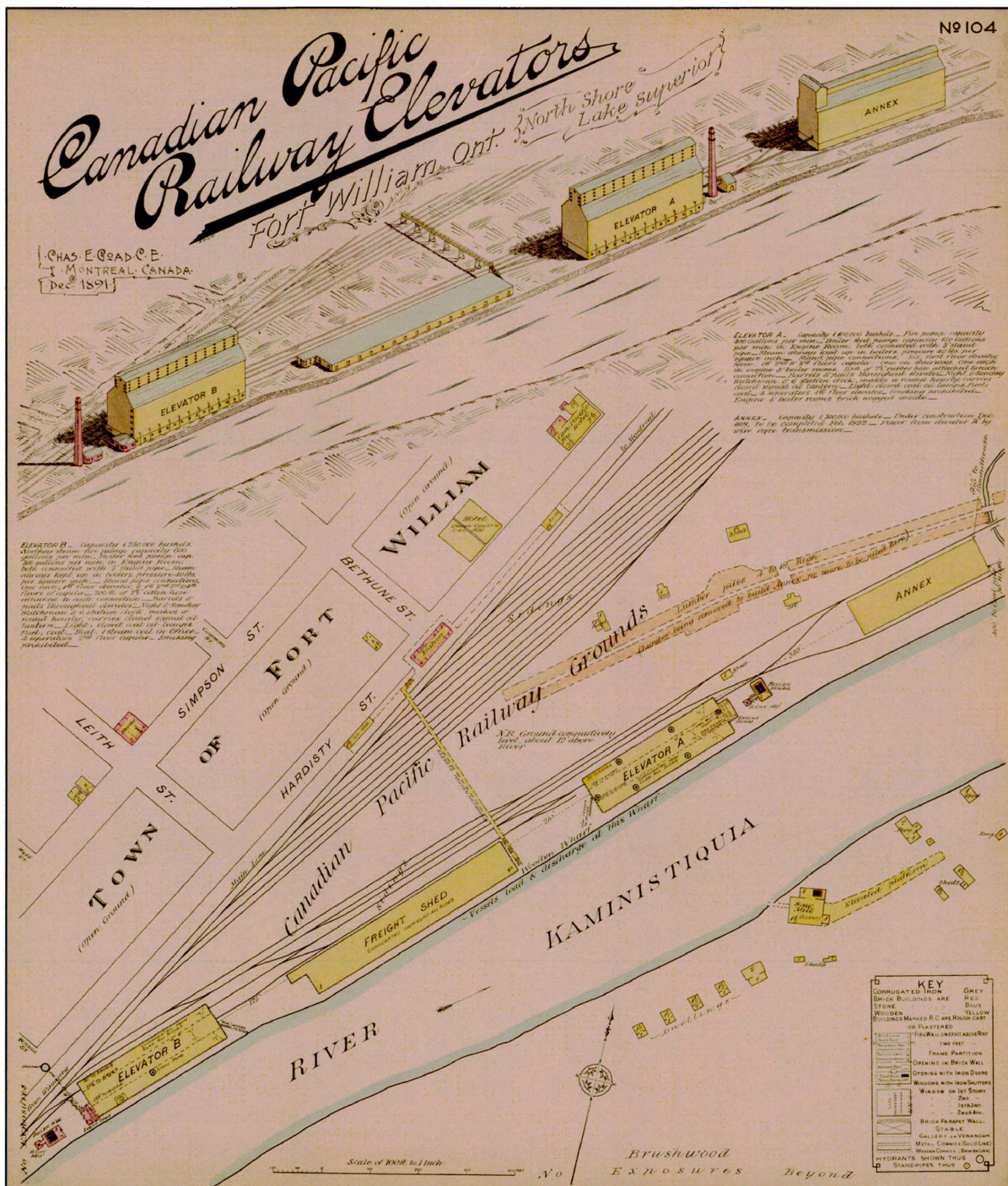
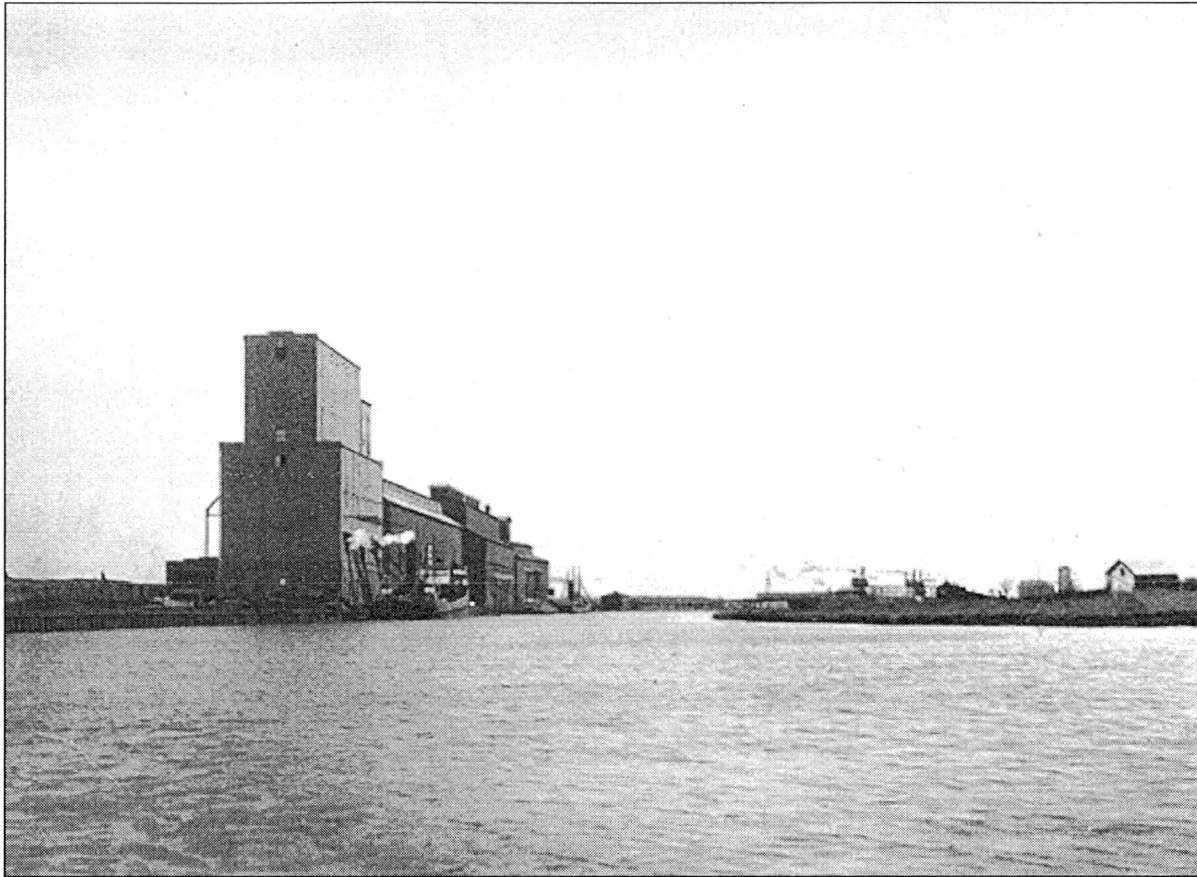


Figure 3-29 Unrevised Fire Insurance Plan of Fort William, 1891 (LAC).

Public and personal transportation changed dramatically in the 1890s. At that time, following their adoption by neighbouring Port Arthur (formerly Prince Arthur's Landing), electric streetcars were in use in Fort William. This altered the way in which people were able to travel between locales. The advent of automobile manufacture at the turn of the twentieth century also impacted urban development. The impact of automobile manufacturing would not be felt on McKellar Island until the construction of bridge works which connected it to the mainland.

The growth of Fort William was linked to its industrial development. At the turn of the century, mining and lumber had replaced the fur trade (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 68) and the railway had created a national transportation network for goods and for people. The nation was rich in raw materials. As a conduit for those materials for export, the Thunder Bay area thrived. The continued prosperity of the region supported immigration in the early 1900s. As the population increased, so did its cultural diversity.

Representatives from many ethno-cultural groups established homes in Fort William. Some worked in the city's industries as labourers and supervisors, and some were entrepreneurs and shop owners. Each would help define the development of the area. It is hoped that the archaeology may be uncover some further evidence that might help delineate the nature of life for these individuals living and working at Fort William and, more specifically, on McKellar Island.



**Figure 3-30** Photograph from 1900 showing McKellar Island [McKellar Point] on the right with dwelling (perhaps McKellar farmstead) (MacFarlane 1904: 7).

Of the families who had long made Fort William their home, the McKellar family is of particular value to the examination of the island that bears their name. As major landholders in Fort William, the McKellar family sold town lots and blocks of land to private individuals and to the town itself, including the 1891 sale of property for the construction of the Fort William city hall. The 1903-1904 assessment of the McKellar holdings list a house on Island No. 1, Lot 7, Concession E (Figure 3-20 and 3-30) belonging to Mary McKellar (valued at \$2160) that she owned in addition to property on the west half of Lot 6 (\$500). Maggie Deacon owned the west half of Lot 5, Concession E (\$465). Susie McKellar owned the west half of Lot 4, Concession E (\$465). The east half of Lot 4 was owned by John McKellar (\$465). Peter McKellar owned the south part

of Lot 5, Concession F (\$750) and the south part of Lot 4, Concession F (\$500). Donald McKellar is not shown as owning property on the island at this time. This amounted to a total of \$5,505 or 36% of the \$15,205 property assessment. In 1908, additional property was purchased from Donald, Carlotta, and Peter McKellar by the government of Canada in order to widen the Kaministiquia River. The government of Canada in 1914 expropriated further land for the sum of \$4,170 to widen the McKellar River.

In 1912, the Northern and Northwestern Ontario Development Act came into effect, thereby encouraging settlement in more remote portions of the province. This meant more movement of people through the city. Not only were people still travelling westward to settle, many were encouraged by the Act to remain in Northwestern Ontario and this probably contributed to the continued local immigration at Fort William.

1912 was also the year that the Fort William area first saw a telephone exchange listing for Island No. 1. The listing for Mrs. Hugh Reid changes after the first year, and the exchanges for the CPR Coal Dock become dominant (Table 3-2).

**Table 3-2**  
1912-14 Telephone Exchange Listings for Island No. 1

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>EXCHANGE</b>	<b>CLIENT</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>
1912	South 1599	Reid, Mrs. Hugh	Residence	Island No. 1
	North 22	Reid, Mrs. Hugh	Residence	228A McVicar St.
1913	South 1599	CPR Coal Dock Power House		Island No. 1
	North 1919	Reid, Mrs. Hugh	Boarding House	Bare Point
	North 22	Reid, Mrs. Hugh	Residence	228A McVicar St.
1914	South 1599	CPR Coal Dock Power House		Island No. 1
	South 1096	CPR Coal Dock Office		Island No. 1

Source: Twin Cities Official Telephone Directory

In 1912, the Maritime Nail Company was given a \$250,000 guarantee to establish itself at the Lakehead. They likely also "received tax exemptions and other bonuses in addition to their cash grants and guarantees" (Tronrud 1993: 66). This practice of bonusing, or subsidizing, had been a key component in the establishment of industry in the area prior to 1914. In fact, Thorold Tronrud states that it appeared that "no other Canadian community on record bonused as heavily as Fort William and Port Arthur together" (Tronrud 1993: 40). When the company arrived at the Lakehead, it situated its operations on Island No. 1 (Figure 3-36). The 1913 Henderson's Directory notes that the Maritime Nail Company plant cost \$700,000 and employed 250 men.

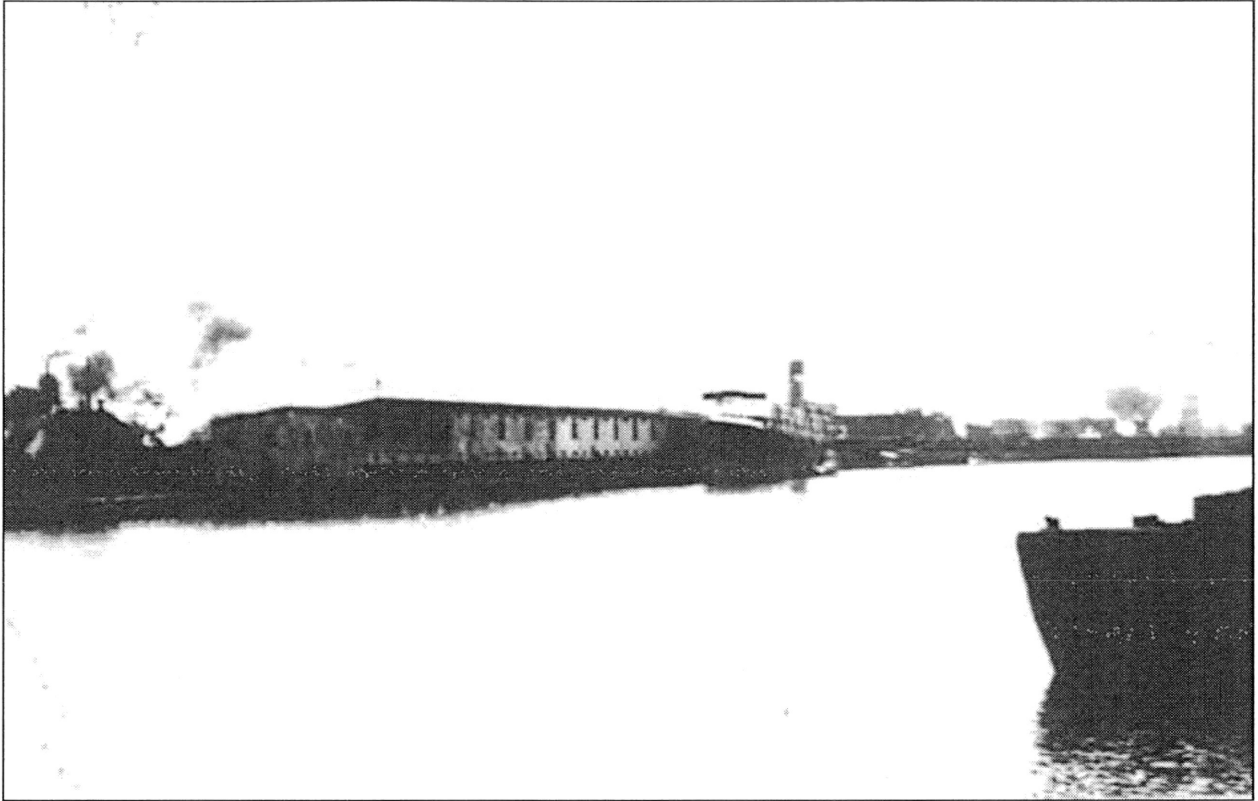
The same volume of the Henderson's Directory mentions that improvements to the Fort William waterfront during 1912 totalled \$14,000,000 and that the planned improvements for 1913 were expected to be close to \$20,000,000. The Fort William waterfront was undergoing considerable growth and development at this time, as were Island No.1 and Island No.2. In addition to the establishment of the Maritime Nail Company, maps of the time also show land on Island No.1 assigned to the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (Figure 3-36). The proposed growth of the industrial waterfront of Fort William was to be dramatic.

In 1913, the Canadian Pacific Railway constructed the Bascule bridges on the Kaministiquia River between the mainland and Mission Island, and on the McKellar River between Mission and McKellar Islands. This opened up both islands for rail traffic and facilitated subsequent industrial development on the islands (City of Thunder Bay



1995: 1). This concurs with the original land use plan for McKellar Island that was to include both industrial development and residential development to support the industries (City of Thunder Bay 1995: 5). Island No. 1 was intended to be an integral part of the proposed growth of the Fort William harbour. Additional slips were planned for the island to handle additional shipping, and improvements to railway facilities were expected. However, many of the proposed improvements to the island (Figure 3-33 to Fig 2-36) did not come to fruition.

One of the reasons may have been the severe recession in 1913, just prior to the First World War, which coincided with the slowing down of "the great agricultural expansion of the west" (Artibise 1984: 159). The recession resulted in a reduction of the labour force in Fort William, as many factories shut down (Stafford 2008: 44). It is around this time that the Maritime Nail Company also closed its operations on Island No. 1, and industrial development on the island stagnated. The Henderson's Directory does not list either businesses or residences on Island No. 1 prior to 1913. There could be various reasons for this lack of information, as the Henderson's Directory is not always comprehensive in its coverage. However, the Henderson's Directory does note the presence of the CPR Coal Dock and Plant, as well as the CPR Rail Dock and Sheds in 1914 (Figure 3-31). These two complexes would dominate the island for the first part of the century.



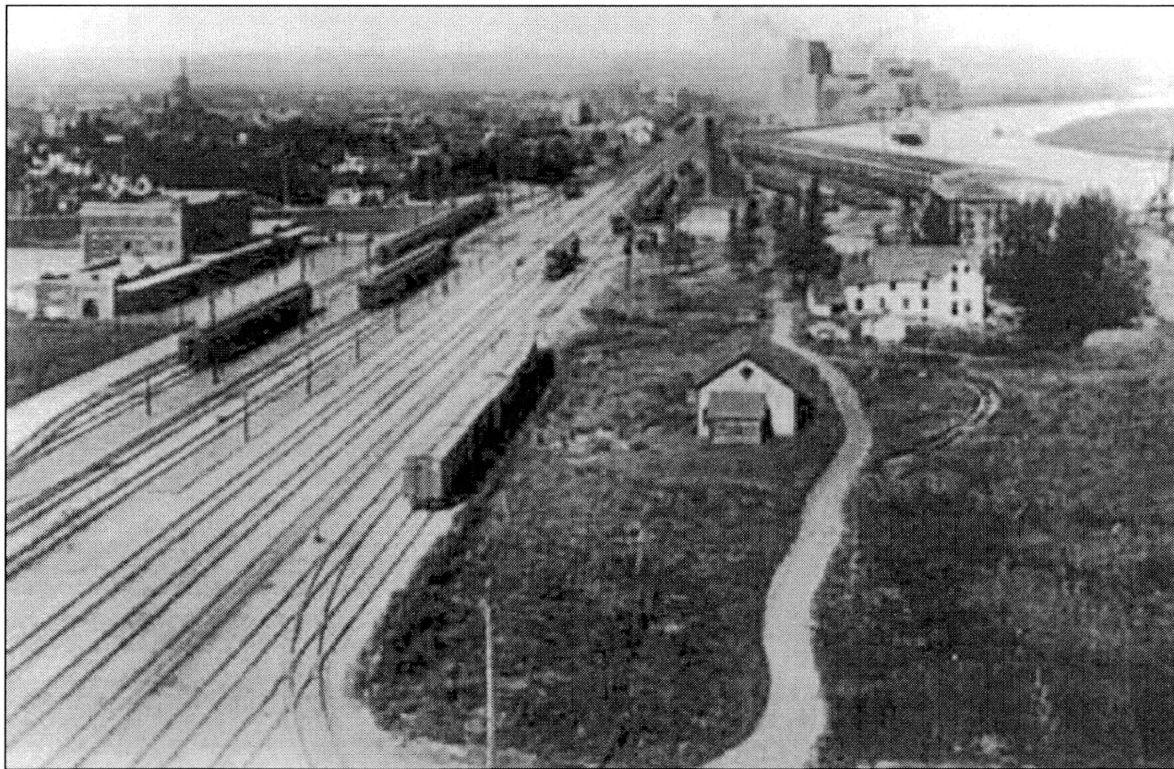
**Figure 3-31** CPR Freight Sheds on the north-eastern tip of McKellar Island, 1914 (TBPL: P112 (64)).

The establishment of residential lots on Island No. 1 led to the procurement of land by absentee landowners who bought lots in the hope that subsequent development would generate profitable sales. The following street names were associated with Island No. 1 properties: McKerrow Avenue, Taylor Avenue, River View Street (which became an extension of Horace Street in 1911), Kingsley Avenue, Laughton Avenue, Roy Street, Terence Street, Horace Street, Carpenter Street, Arthur Street East, Fifth Avenue (known as Hector prior to 1911 and as 105th after 1974), and Tenth Avenue (changed to 110th after 1974). The street names were changed by Fort William By-law #1041 of 1911, and Thunder Bay By-law #21 of 1974. The modern Island Drive is an amalgamation of some of the former streets. Figure 3-37 shows the streets where residential settlement was

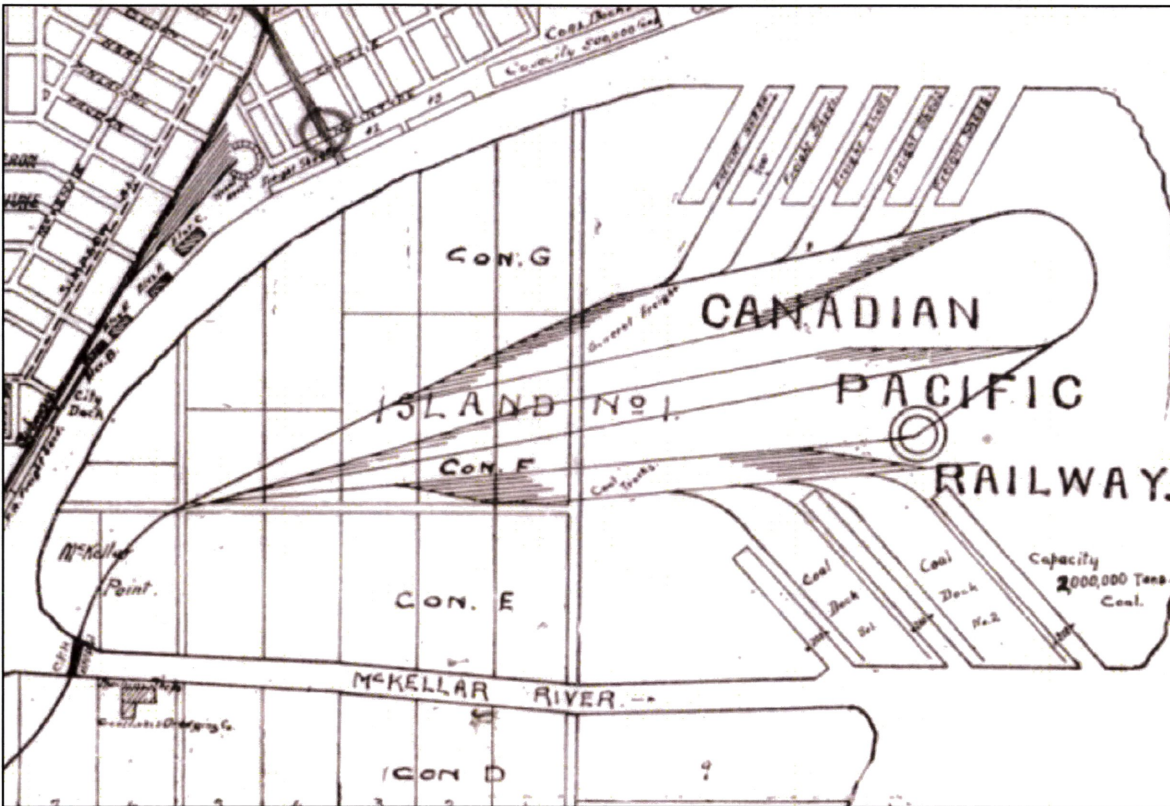
envisioned. As previously mentioned, there was an expectation that there needed to be residential properties available on Island No.1 to support the proposed growth of industry. The neighbourhoods proposed by the realty maps were for the most part non-existent, although some lot and street assignments did occur.

In multiple years, the list of voters for the City of Fort William (specifically Ward 3, Polling Sub-division No. 1, Part 2) indicates ownership of Island No. 1 Lots and Concessions by individuals not residing on the island. In reference to the 1918 list, posted on November 28, 1917, there are at least 35 individuals listed as holding property on Island No. 1. Some of these individuals have addresses in the City of Fort William in the Henderson's Directory of that year, while others are not listed as residing in either Fort William or nearby Port Arthur. By 1940, only three individuals on the list of voters are shown to have property ownership on the island, namely Dr. C. W. Clark (Lot 162 Kingsley), M. G. Crombie (Lot 1, Concession E), and J. Taylor Webb (Lots 6 and 7, Concession E). Fire insurance maps and other reference documents have not produced any evidence of dwellings related to the individuals listed, only that they held property on the island. By the early to mid 20th century, much of the property had been purchased from landholders by industry. The Fort William Henderson's Directory also provides some useful information about residential properties on Island No. 1. However, because the listings only indicate 'Island No. 1' as an address, and no lot or street designation, it is difficult to pinpoint the location of businesses and residences. In the 1930s, a few households were established on the island, namely John Battin (labourer), Elvin Battin (driver), Nick Babin (proprietor of Island No. 1 Dairy), and Harry Kowalski (proprietor

of Thunder Bay Flour and Feed). It is interesting to note that the address of Thunder Bay Flour and Feed is listed as 624 Simpson Street, which means that Harry Kowalski commuted to work. Anthony Discepolo, a driver for Fitzsimmons Fruit, set up a household on the island from 1944 until 1951. With the closure of Island No. 1 Dairy, Nick Babin (listed in error as Babian) took employment at the Can Car and Foundry until he retired in 1956. Mrs. Sofie Babin replaced her husband Nick Babin in the 1957 Henderson's Directory after his death. Sophie Babin ceased to be a resident of Island No. 1 by 1960. Harry Kowalski is shown as retired in 1962, and is no longer listed as a resident of the island by 1964. From 1975 to 1990, Robert Kowalski (farmer) is shown as a resident on the island. Robert Kowalski is shown as retired in 1990.



**Figure 3-32** CPR terminals at Fort William in 1916 with McKellar Island [McKellar Point] shown in background (TBPL: P37 (15)).



**Figure 3-33** Close-up of G.R. Duncan & Co. map, showing proposed slips and terminals (TBHMS 972.19.263).



**Figure 3-34** Close-up of artists drawing showing Fort William harbour with proposed improvements (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society).

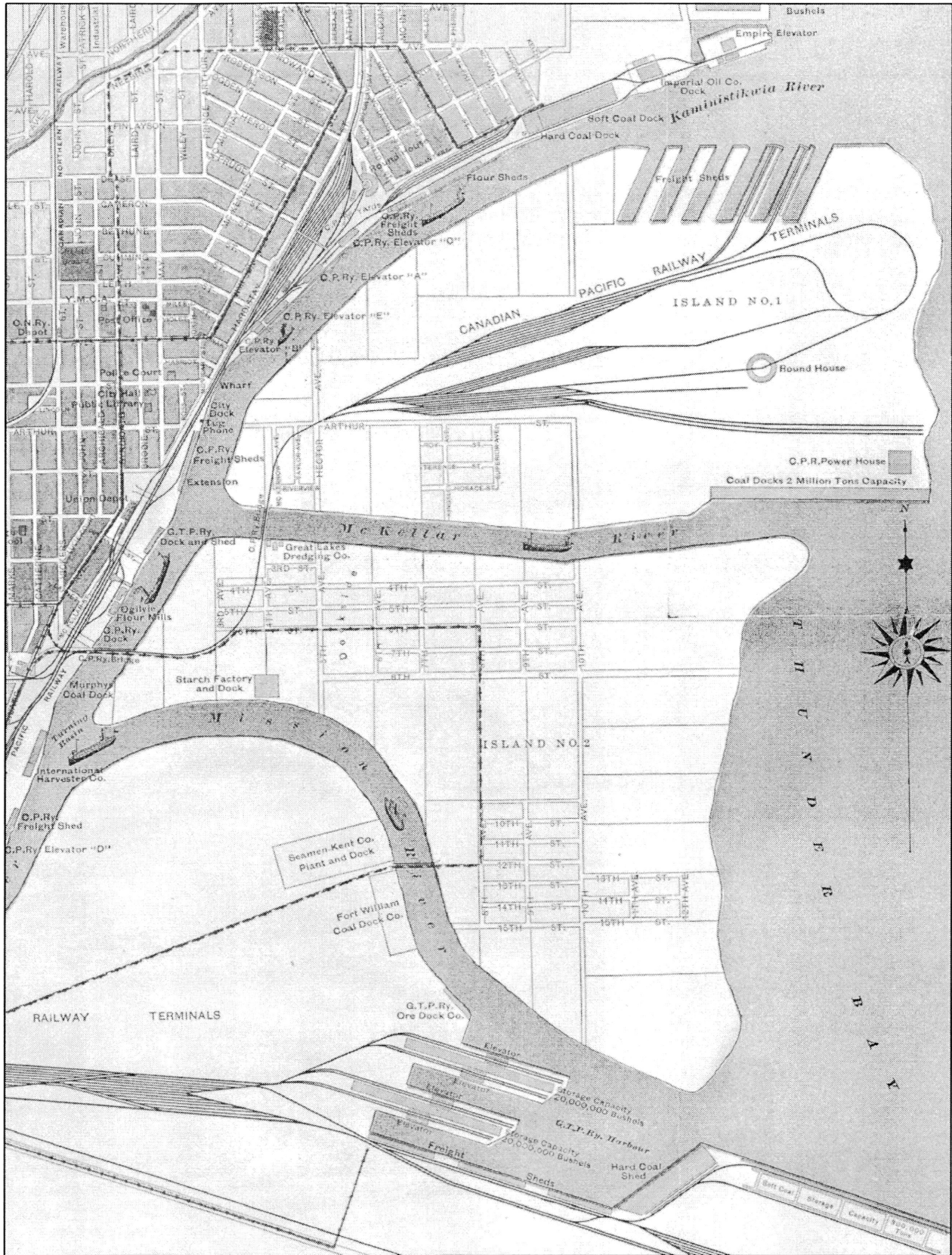


Figure 3-35 Map of Islands No.1 and No.2 from 1912, showing proposed changes to existing terminals (TBHMS 974.71.113).

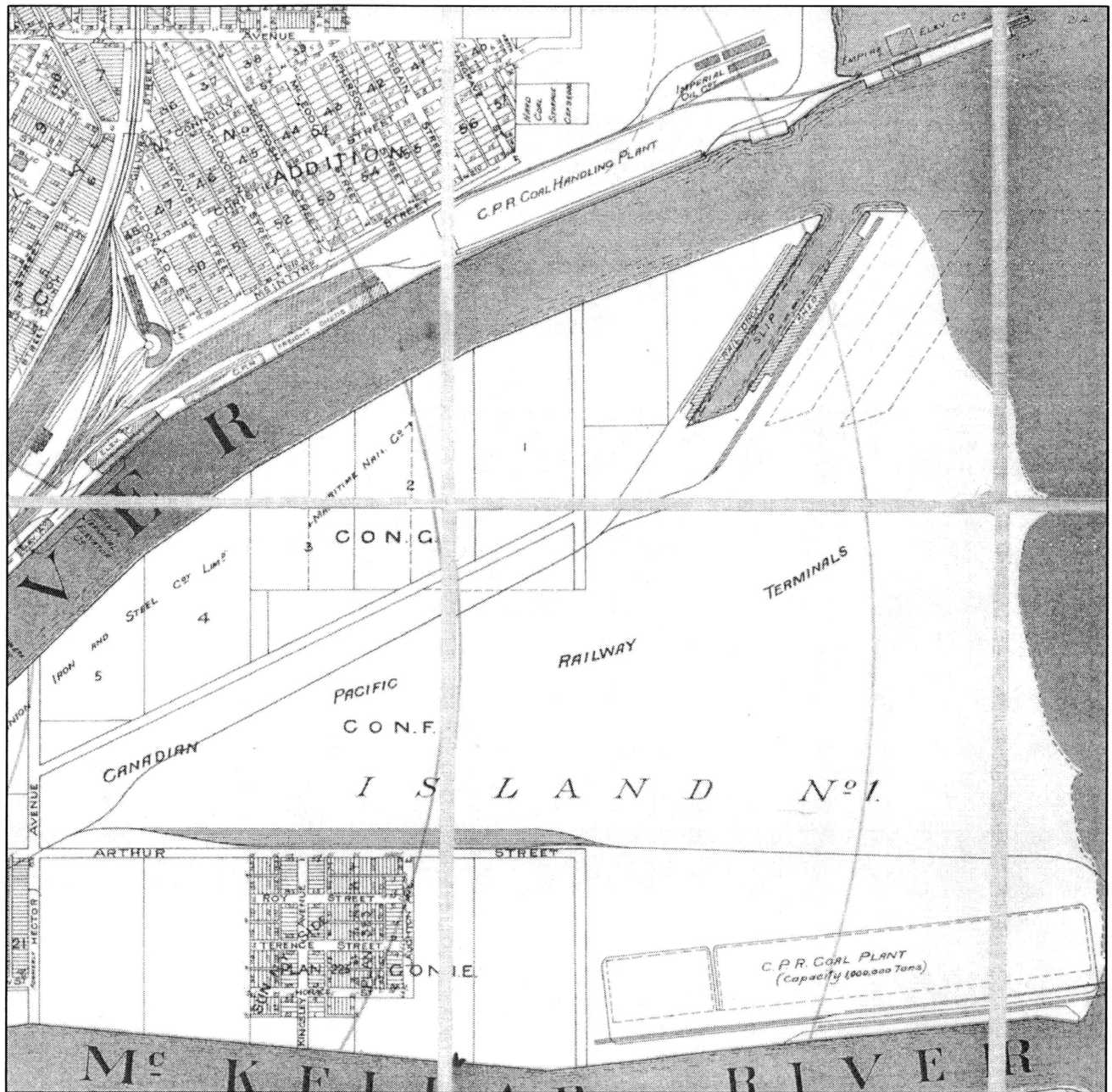


Figure 3-36 Map of Island No.1, 1913. Close-up showing company properties and planned residential. One of the only references to Dominion Iron and Steel Co. Ltd. and Maritime Nail Co. (TBHMS 972.77.6).

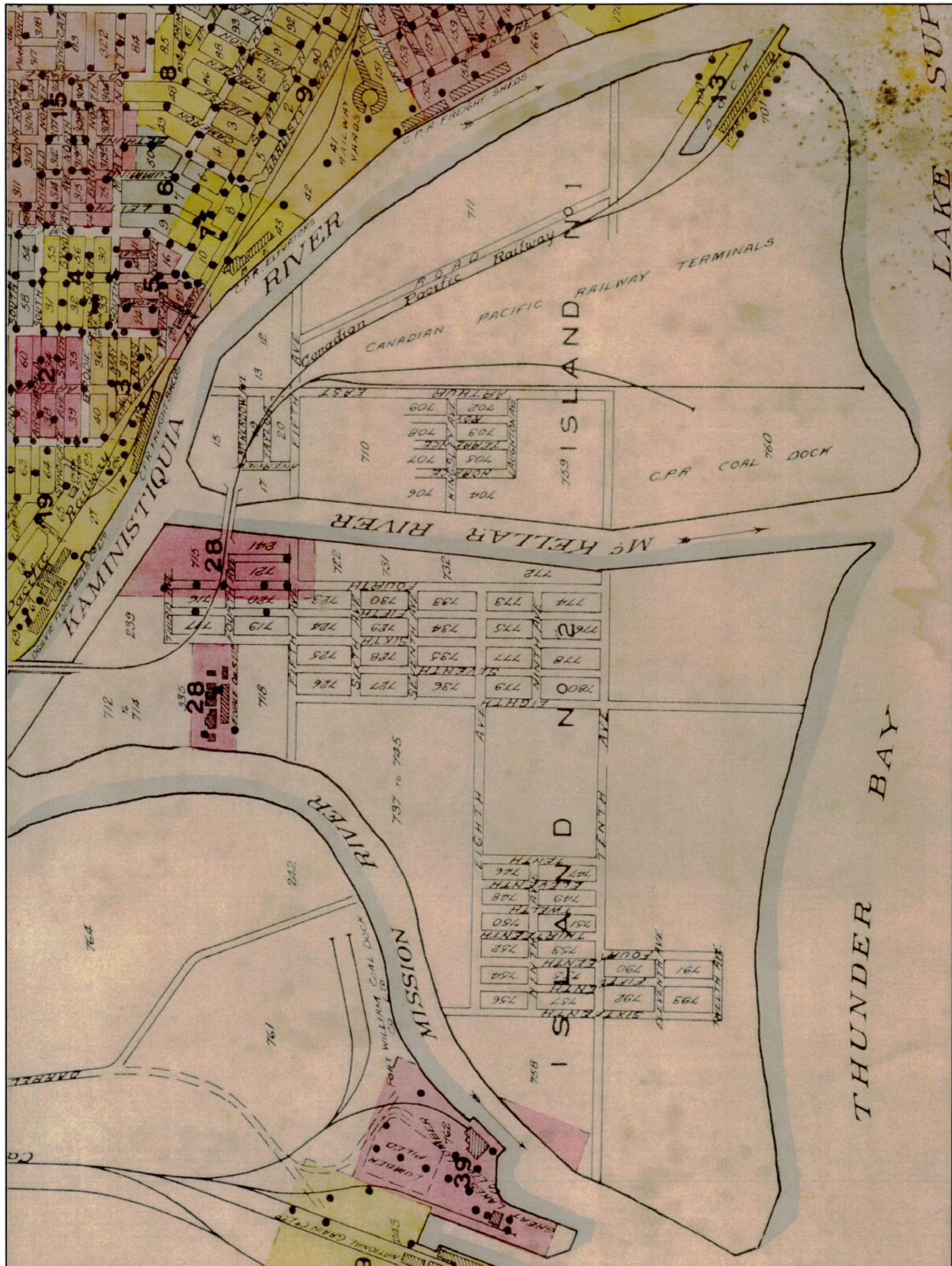


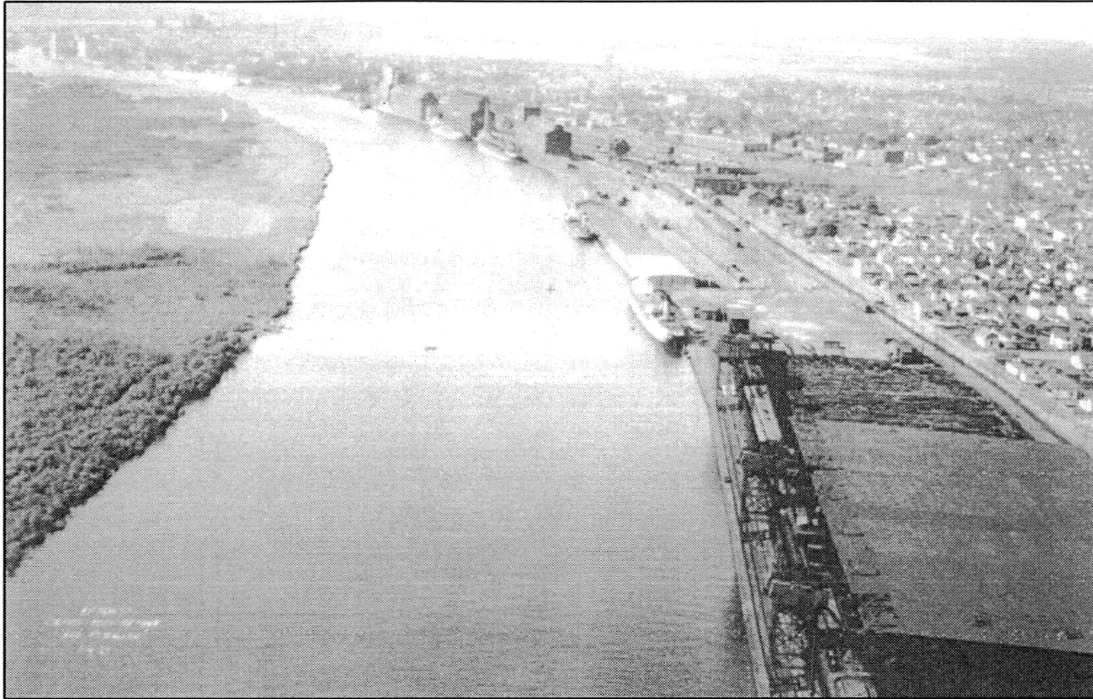
Figure 3-37 Fire Insurance Plan of the City of Fort William, 1919 (Revised to 1950), showing Island No.1 (B33/1/1).



The interwar years saw most urban centers in Canada focussed "not on growth, but survival" (Artibise 1984: 162). This was not the case at the Lakehead because of its ongoing focus on natural resources. A pulp and paper mill was opened at Port Arthur in 1917 and at Fort William in 1920. By 1925, Fort William and neighbouring Port Arthur were two of the ten largest cities in Ontario (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 83). "By the end of the 1920s pulp and paper was the leading manufacturing industry in Canada" (Stafford 2008: 48). The depression of the 1930s still impacted the area, but the forestry industry continued to grow. American tariffs were removed, which allowed a Canadian boom in pulp and paper required to supply United States newspapers. However, Island No.1 continued to be underutilized (Figure 3-38 to 3-40). The initial boom at the turn of the century had been curtailed by the war. There had been little activity on the island since the construction of the CPR Coal Docks and CPR Rail Docks.



**Figure 3-38** The bustling Fort William mainland of 1920, showing none of the proposed development on McKellar Island [McKellar Point] (TBHMS 990.15.63).



**Figure 3-39** Aerial view of Fort William in 1927, showing Island No. 1 opposite the mainland. No residential or commercial activity on this portion of the island (TBHMS 986.8.5 and TBHMS 986.8.17).

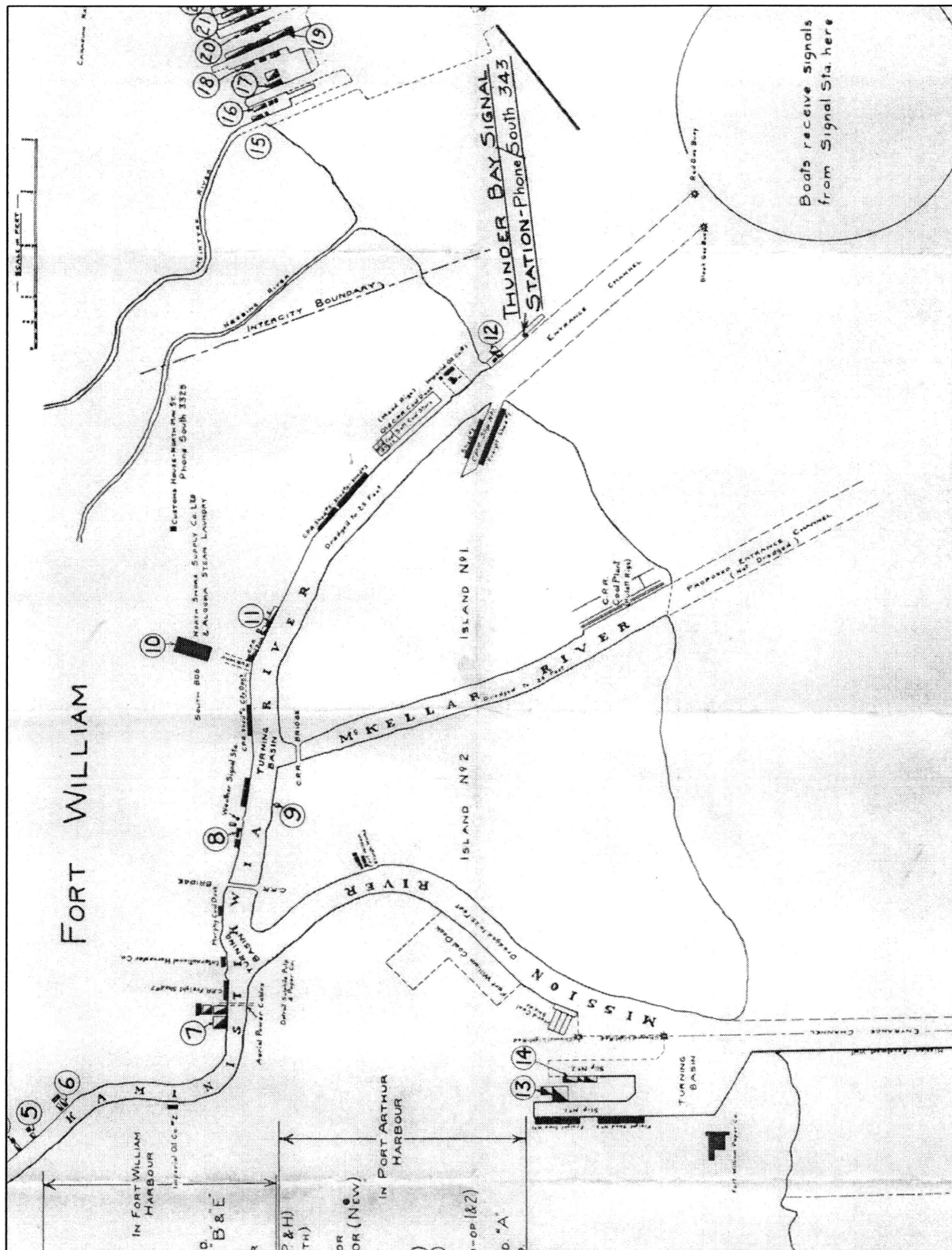


Figure 3-40 J.W. Wolvin Map from 1928, showing the key to the harbours and indicating the dredging of the rivers. Only the CPR holdings indicated on the island (TBHMS 974.2.409).

The 1930s saw a change in land use on Island No.1. The Coal Dock and Plant, and the CPR Rail Dock and Sheds, were joined by the McColl-Frontenac Oil Company Limited (Figure 3-41), and Island No. 1 Dairy. The arrival of the oil company ushered in a new era of industrial development. Canada Creosoting Company Limited established themselves on the island from 1940 to 1946. Canadian Oil Companies Limited operated a marine terminal from 1952 to 1960, and then maintained a bulk plant until 1965. Riverlake Oils Limited was established on the island in 1953 and operated for a few years. The arrival of Husky Oil and Refinery in 1956 began their almost thirty years of operations on the island. When Texaco bought McColl-Frontenac Company Limited in 1959, and renamed it Texaco Canada Limited, they continued operations on the island until 1990. Beginning in 1966, Shell Canada Limited, later Shell Canada Limited Oil and Lubricant Dealers, maintained operations on the island until 1992. Esso Petroleum Canada Oils and Lubricants (Imperial Oil), which also shut down in 1992, only operated for a couple of years. Other companies, such as the Weaver Coal Company (1960-1966), Lakehead Stevedore Limited (1960-1966), McEwen Fuels and Range Oil (1967-1968), Cook V B Company Limited (1980-1981), Ditmars Fuels (1982-1989), and the Pinch Gas Plant, made their home on the island during the 1900s. Unfortunately, other than the large oil refineries and the bulk handling facilities, there are no references to the other businesses in maps or photographs. The most enduring of all the establishments on McKellar Island, Thunder Bay Terminals Limited, was first established in 1978. The expansion of the Thunder Bay Terminal facilities on McKellar Island in 1981 included a dedicated bulk handling facility. It is the only facility that has operated successfully on the island to the present day.

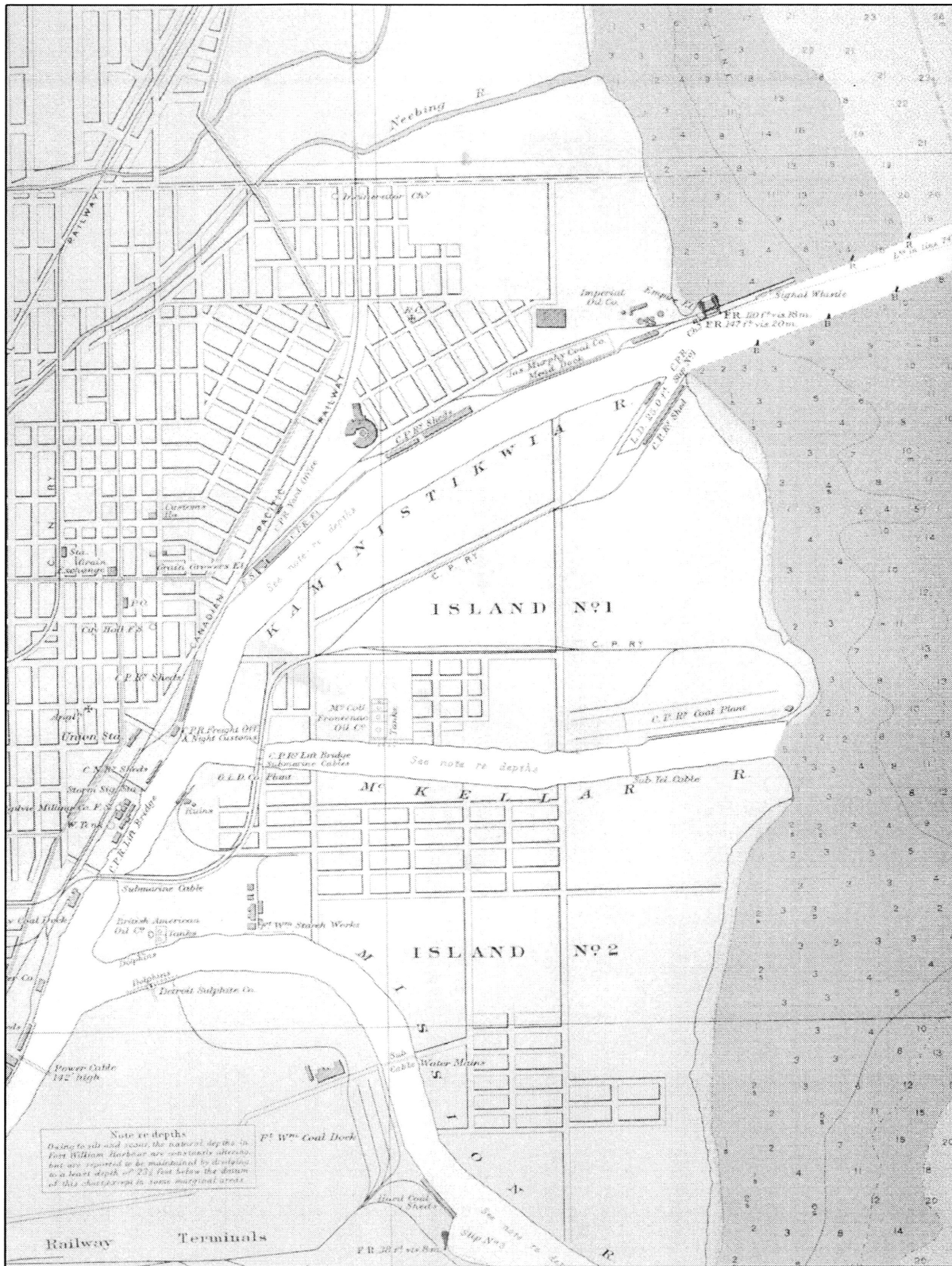


Figure 3-41 Map of Islands No.1 and No.2 from 1940, showing McColl-Frontenac Oil Company. Planned residential blocks are shown to the left and right of the oil company holdings (TBHMS 974.34, 1).



**Figure 3-42** Fort William Waterfront in 1948. McKellar Island (near left) and Mission Island (middle left). Oil company holdings visible on McKellar Island. South-western corner still vacant (TBHMS 984.39.21).

Following the Second World War, each province began to develop strategies for growth. The "containerization of most shipping cargo" (Sieber 1991: 122) reduced labour demands as mechanical handling became predominant. Trucks and airplanes were taking over the shipment of many goods. By 1947, the Trans-Canada Highway became the primary shipping route out of Fort William. As in many areas of the world, "air transportation has displaced water as the major form of public intercity and trans-oceanic travel" (Sieber 1991: 122). Due to these changes in passenger transportation and goods transportation, "miles of downtown finger piers and warehouses have thus been rendered obsolete" (Sieber 1991: 122).

By 1957, the same year that the Lakehead airport terminal was completed, the Trans-Canada Pipeline was built across Northwestern Ontario (Stafford 2008: 52). Also in

1957, the City of Fort William halted all residential construction on McKellar Island and the island was reclassified as "heavy industrial". The City of Fort William also set a plan in place to purchase all remaining residences on the island. By 1995, only one residence remained on McKellar Island (City of Thunder Bay 1995: 5).

The construction of Keefer Terminal in 1962, largely in response to the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, meant that the Fort William waterfront's role in the transshipment network had diminished. Now with centralized shipping, Fort William and Port Arthur focussed on maintaining ongoing regional relationships with other communities in Northwestern Ontario, by establishing itself as a services center. This classification as a central place is important to the city in the transition away from large-scale transshipment, as it allowed for some level of stability during this period of economic change. With the external pressures of progress setting the stage for redundancy, the time had come to establish a united urban center at the lakehead.



**Figure 3-43** Aerial photograph from 1954 showing oil company holdings on McKellar Island. A single dwelling is visible in the area designated for residential blocks [lower right] (TBHMS 984.53.899c).



**Figure 3-44** Aerial photograph from September 1957, prior to the arrival of the Husky Oil & Refining Limited tank farm (TBHMS 973.28.8m).





**Figure 3-45** Unknown Date (c. 1960). Husky Oil & Refining Limited tank farm and Canada Oil Company tanks are shown. Bridge to Island No. 2 visible in lower right (TBHMS 973.28.8g).



**Figure 3-46** August 1960. Husky Oil [left] and Texaco [right] are shown (TBHMS 973.28.8c).

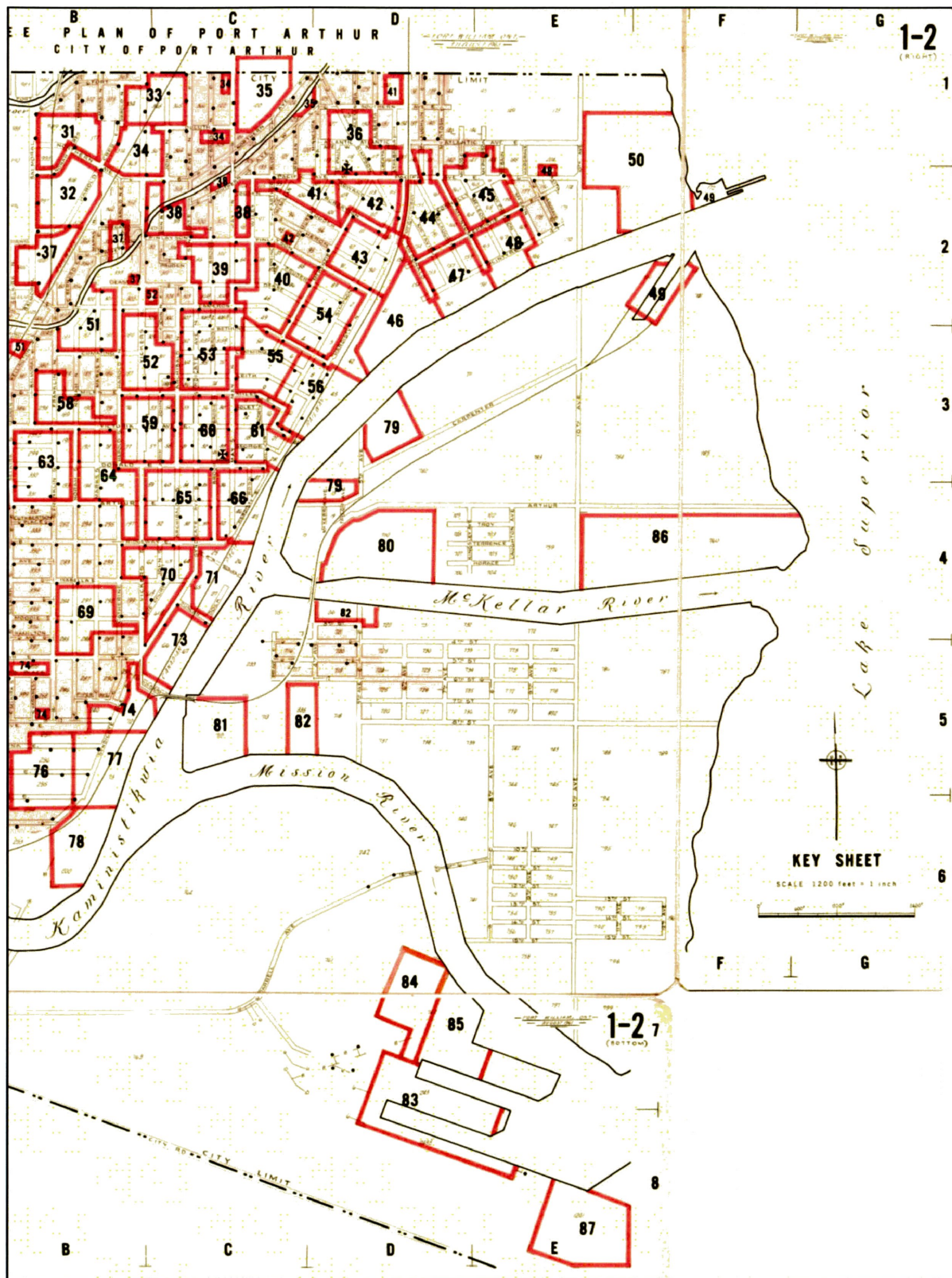


Figure 3-47 Fire Insurance Plan of Thunder Bay, August 1961, Series 349 (City of Thunder Bay Archives Ref: MO56).

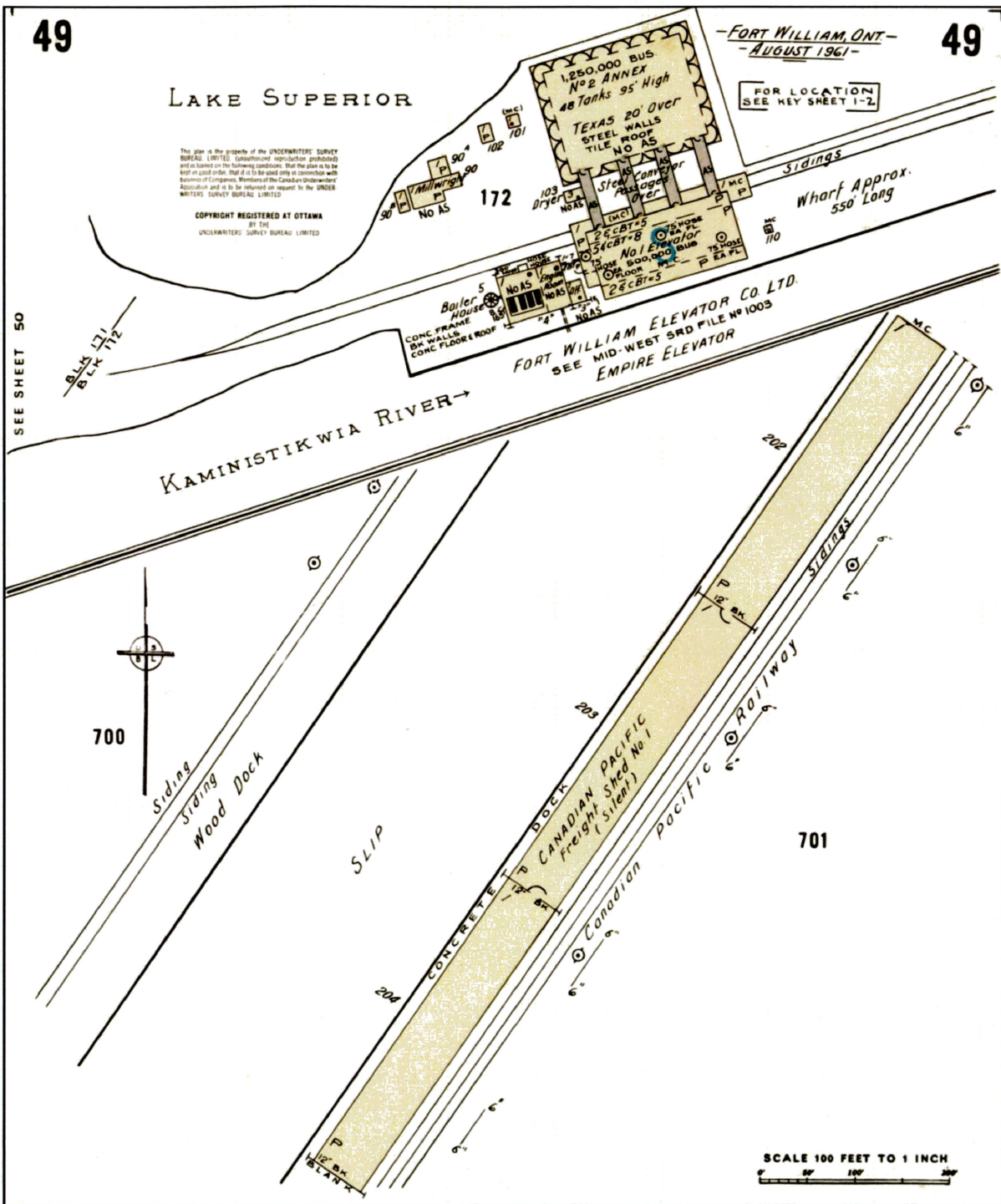


Figure 3-48 Fire Insurance Plan of Thunder Bay, August 1961, Series 349, No 49 (City of Thunder Bay Archives Ref: MO56).

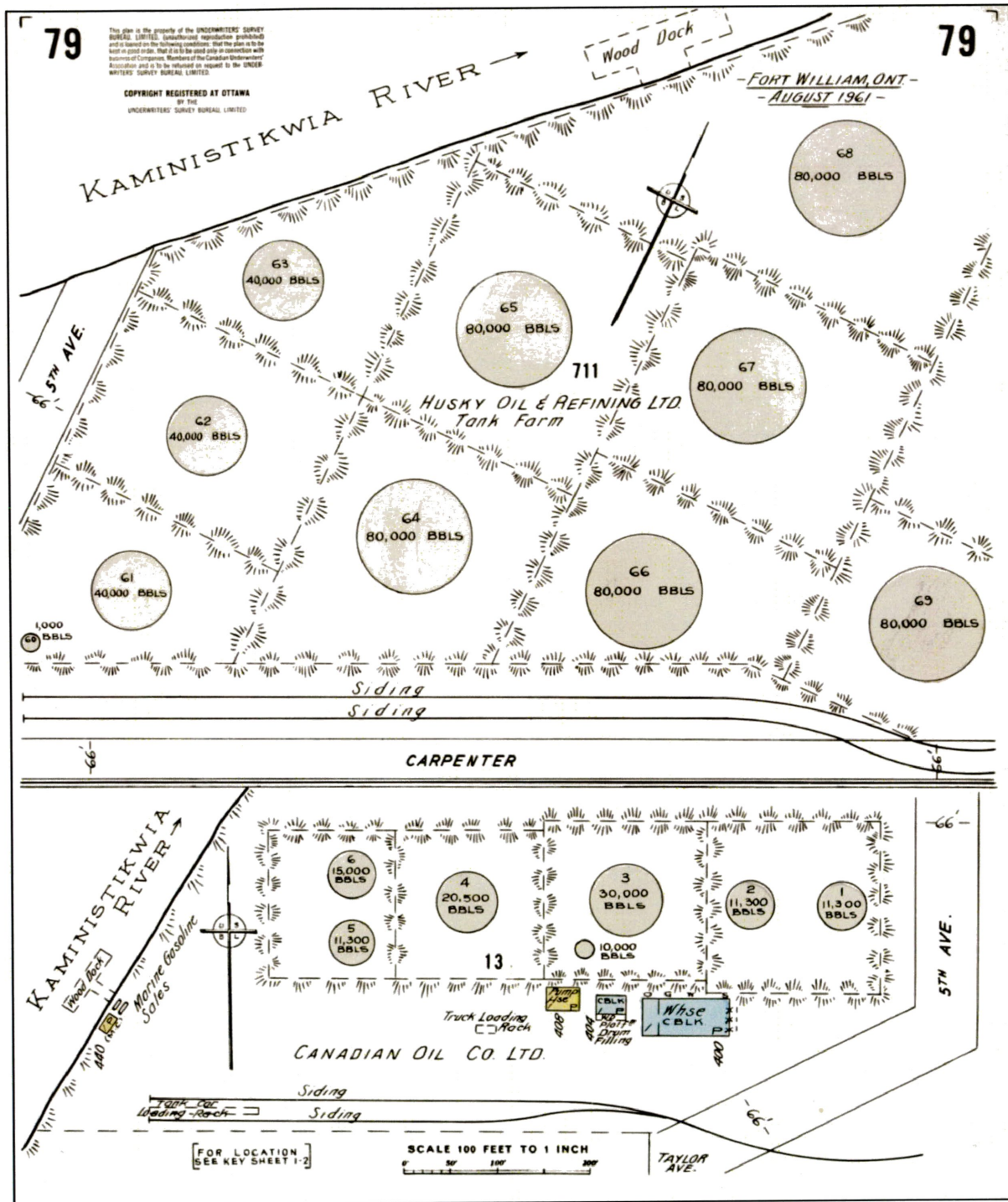


Figure 3-49 Fire Insurance Plan of Thunder Bay, August 1961, Series 349, No 79. Shows tank farm and marine gasoline sales at a dock on the Kaministiquia River (City of Thunder Bay Archives Ref: MO56).

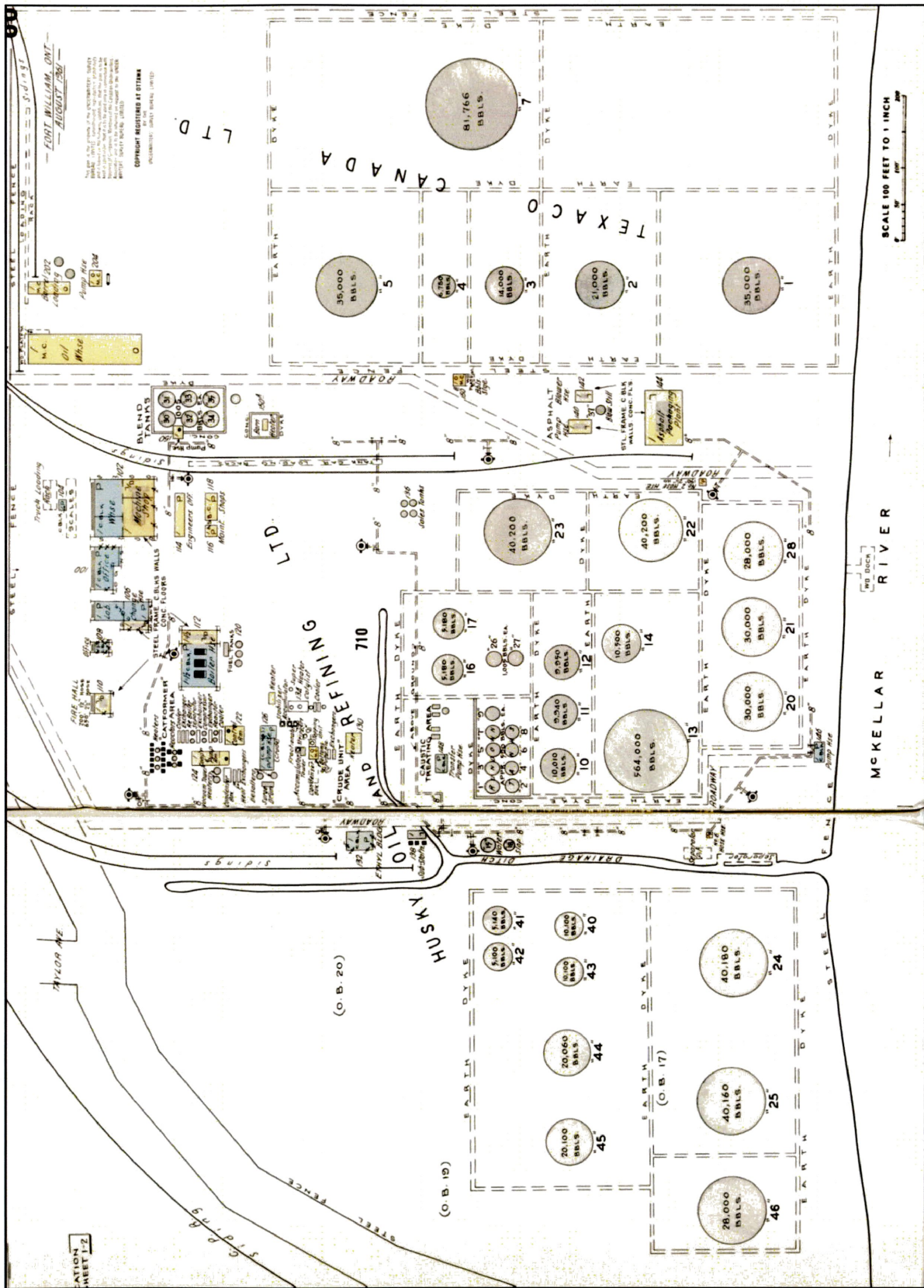


Figure 3-50 Fire Insurance Plan of Thunder Bay, August 1961, Series 349, No 80 (City of Thunder Bay Archives Ref: MO56).

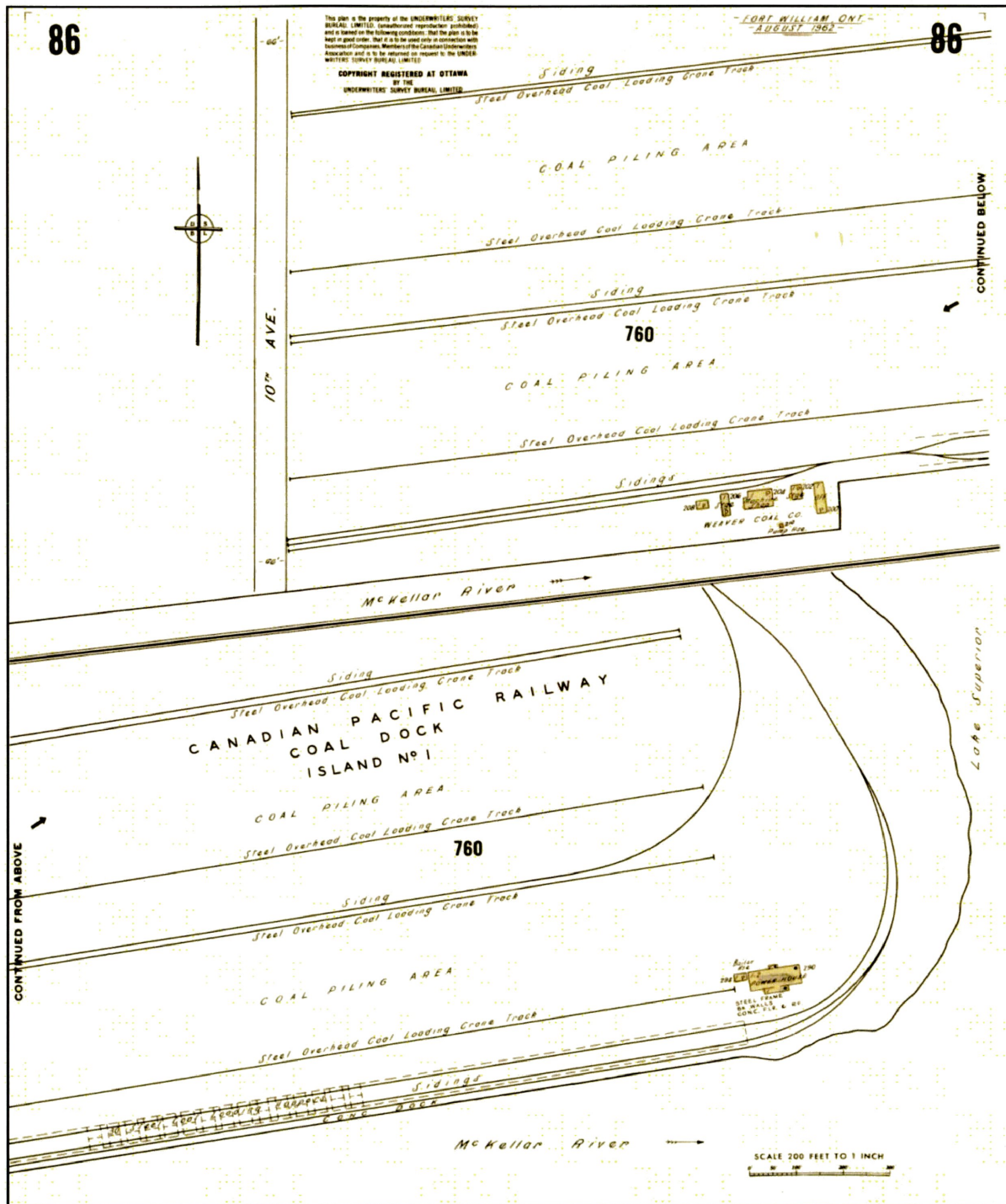


Figure 3-51 Fire Insurance Plan of Thunder Bay, August 1961, Series 349, No 86 (City of Thunder Bay Archives Ref: MO56).

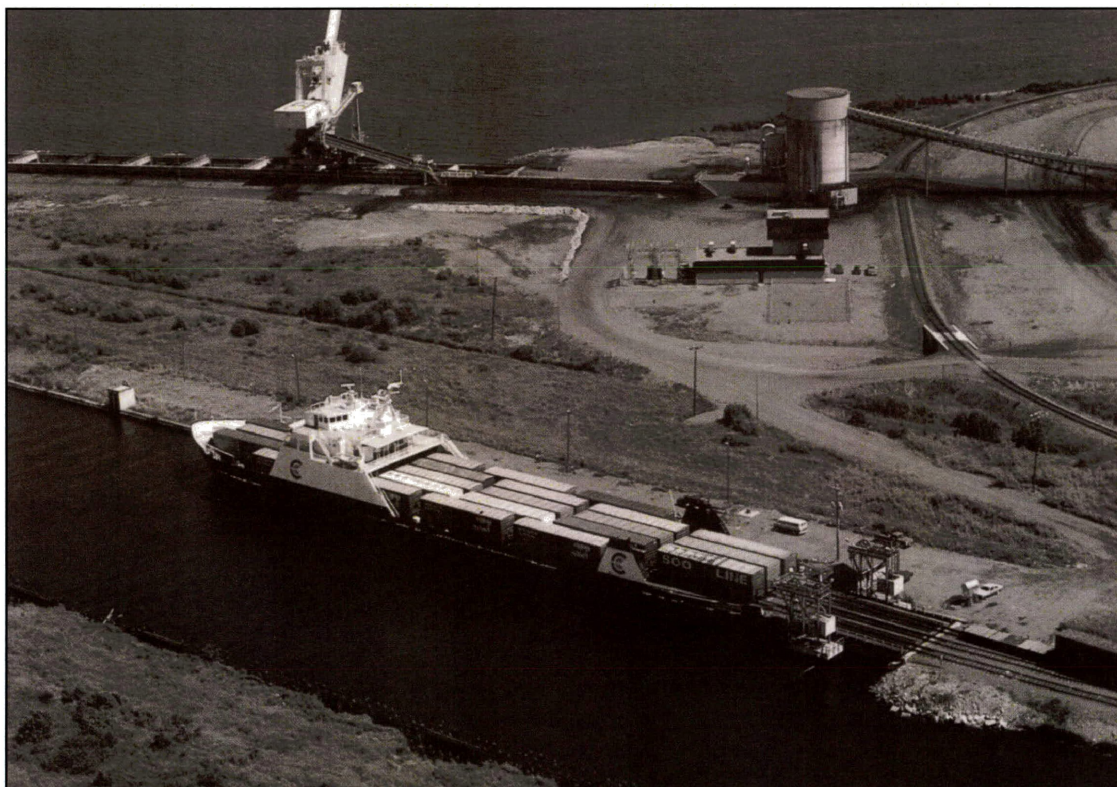
### **3.5 Deindustrialization and the Post-Industrial Period (1970 AD to Present)**

Deindustrialization was born out of the amalgamation of the two cities, Fort William and Port Arthur, into Thunder Bay. No longer were there internal pressures for each city to strive against the other. Common goal-setting and mutual interests would introduce new ideological models. Revitalization of the new city core, and waterfront initiatives were shifting Thunder Bay into what has been termed post-industrialism.

The international, national, and regional need for the port at Fort William had diminished. This does not mean that economic revitalization was not attempted. In 1980, the McMillan-Bloedel wafer-board plant and the Great Lakes Paper particle-board and wafer-board plant were harnessing potential industrial growth. Joseph Mauro records that "Thunder Bay Terminal's coal-handling facility on McKellar Island cost more than \$50,000,000.00 and was able to transfer coal cleanly and efficiently, by conveyor belt under the McKellar River, to Ontario Hydro's thermal generating units on Mission Island" (Mauro 1981: 373).

In the western provinces, the processing of primary products prior to export was now a key component of their industrial strategy (Norrie 1984). This meant that the role of Thunder Bay as a transshipment hub of bulk raw materials and its role in undertaking "value added" processing had diminished. Furthermore, a reduced flow of grain to the ports of Thunder Bay was forcing a change in the dynamics of the waterfronts. This reduction of grain flow was likely a reflection of emerging markets in Asia, the decline of those markets in Europe and USSR, the development of grain handling capacity in British

Columbia, the focus of western provinces on the energy sector, and a significant investment in railway grain hopper cars that enabled more efficient transshipment of cleaned and sorted grain to eastern markets without transfer to bulk cargo ships.



**Figure 3-52** 1981 Terminal on north-eastern tip of McKellar Island (Piovesana, Boegh and Tronrud 1999: 52).

The City of Thunder Bay has also been hindered in its own development by the remnants of past growth. The existing locations of Canadian Pacific Railway lines restricts development on prime waterfront property. Even the presence of now redundant grain elevators, and former industrial sites which require mitigation to eliminate harmful ground contaminants, have diminished the internal growth of the city. Although the data concerning the levels of soil contamination are limited, areas where contamination is



anticipated are those "lands known to have been used for industrial purposes in the past, all railway lands... and any use involving the use of or storage of petroleum products" (City of Thunder Bay 1995: 9).

By 1995, the zoning of McKellar Island consisted of a Heavy Industrial zone, a Harbour Industrial zone, and an Open Space zone (along the McKellar River). Although the later creation of the fixed crossing at 110th Street for passenger vehicles allowed greater access to the island, it did not result in any additional growth. In addition to the presence of "one single detached dwelling located in the south western section of McKellar Island" (City of Thunder Bay 2010), the island is dominated by industrial holdings. At the time of this study, McKellar Island's industry landowners are as follows:

Canadian Pacific Railways is a major land owner of this island, holding approximately 90 of the 192 hectares of land. Some of this is dedicated railway lines and right-of-way, but most is the entire central portion of the island and the easterly (Lake Superior) shoreline. Thunder Bay Terminals, a heavy industrial use mainly for the shipping/storage and transfer of coal used at the Ontario Power Generating Station on Mission Island, is situated on the easterly one third of the island. Husky Oil has ownership of almost all of the remaining shoreline of this island comprised of 75 hectares of land. Most importantly are the Shell and Husky oil companies' holdings on the shoreline across from the Kam River Heritage Park and the Fort William Downtown Neighbourhood which are currently being remediated. Oil tanks have been removed and the lands are being greened. [City of Thunder Bay 2010]

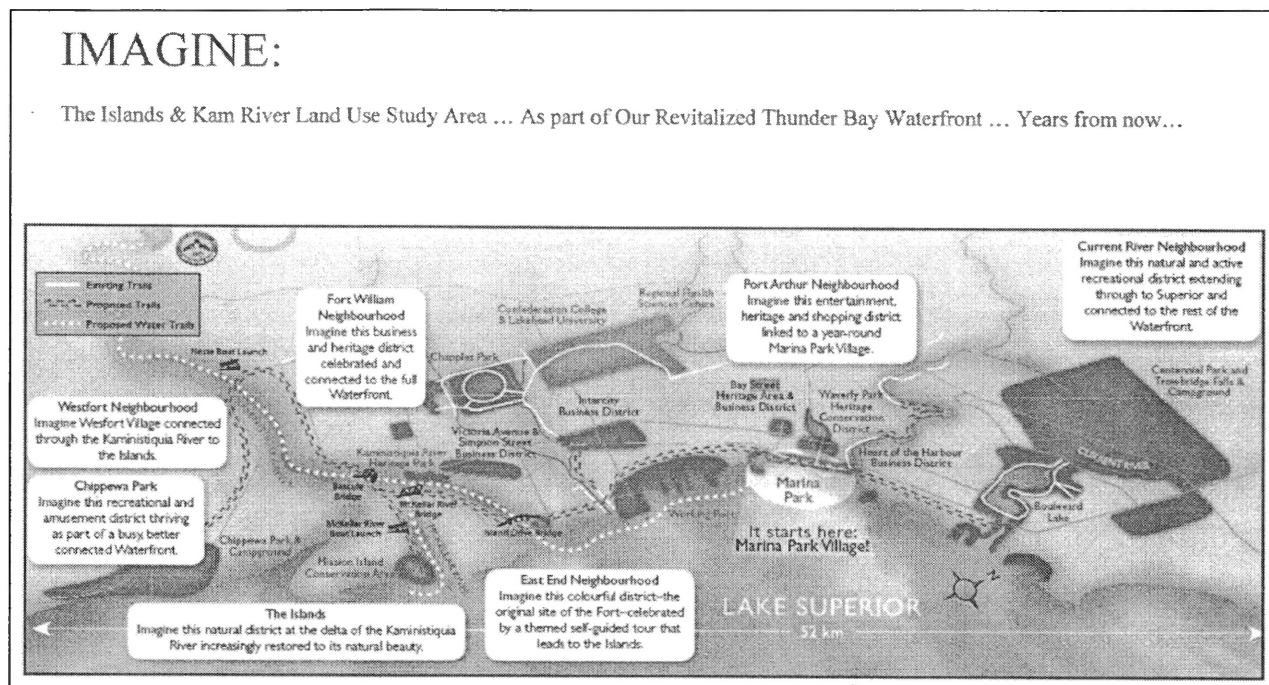
The post-industrial transformation of the urban landscape is a widespread phenomenon in North America. "This post industrial transition has resulted in the ascendancy of service and information industries in urban economies, and the increasing colonization of downtown districts by new urban professionals" (Sieber 1991: 121). As part of this general trend, Thunder Bay has seen a shift in much of its labour force to jobs in the

service sector, such as health, education, business and community services, and government office positions (Stafford 2008: 53). Access to these services in Thunder Bay has drawn people in from the surrounding region. The role of the city is like many other large centres that perform specialized services. As Alan Artibise (1984: 158) has stated, large cities "acted as central shipping and distribution points and were locations of such key facilities as railway marshalling yards, roundhouses, locomotive shops, grain terminals, stockyards, warehouses, and wholesale businesses." Professional services, hotels, and retail establishments were additional hallmarks of urbanization. At this stage, however, many of these key facilities have been downsized or made redundant.

In his paper Waterfront Revitalization in Postindustrial Port Cities of North America, R. Timothy Sieber presents a compelling "cultural theory of waterfront redevelopment" and characterizes it as a response to "international economic restructuring, technological obsolescence of port facilities, and corporatization" (Sieber 1991: 120). Although Sieber is interested solely in the analysis of tangible trends in North American revitalization, his assertions are applicable to Fort William as a Port city. He points out that the decentralization of manufacturing industries, both away from the waterfront and (in the case of large corporate industry) overseas, has displaced city residents and that waterfronts "have become transformed from places associated with working-class people and manual work to the province of the new urban professionals" (Sieber 1991: 124). This adequately characterizes the trends evident in future planning in the City of Thunder Bay. The city's waterfront and the islands at the mouth of the Kaministiquia are, once

again, on the brink of dramatic change. Will McKellar Island finally realize its potential, or will history repeat itself?

Some suggestion has been made to establish a walkway along the perimeter of McKellar Island (City of Thunder Bay 2010) in order to provide what Sieber would call "passive visual access" (Sieber 1991: 125) to the water and to heritage locations. Often, "preserving and celebrating" heritage is a way "of creating a sense of character and tradition that distinguishes place" (Sieber 1991: 127). "This paradoxical celebration of tradition in situations where its original cultural basis is rapidly eroding has long been noted in urban anthropology" (Sieber 1991: 127). As with Fort William Historical Park, built in the early 1970s, there is often "considerable selectivity in the traditions that are used to define urban identity" (Sieber 1991: 128). Caution must be taken because "today's invented culture frequently becomes tomorrow's traditional one, even coming to be appropriated by those who were its initial objects and whose historical and cultural realities it may have falsified" (Sieber 1991: 132). One can see this clearly in the depiction of the rugged voyageurs, those gentlemen adventurers, who occupied the fur trade post at Fort William. In addressing the proposed walkway, it will be important to take inventory of the potential heritage resources that may be impacted by its construction and subsequent use. By mitigating the threats to historic and archaeological resources, a plan could be established to build an interpretive walkway that highlights the salient periods of the area's past.



**Figure 3-53** Kam River and Islands Study Area, showing proposed walkways (City of Thunder Bay 2009).

It has also been suggested that the "westerly tip of McKellar Island" might support commercial uses such as specialty retail stores and restaurants to compliment those established on the mainland opposite, as well as residential development in the form of apartments (City of Thunder Bay 2010). This shift towards commercial and residential use coincides with Sieber's analysis.

### 3.6 Discussion and Synthesis

The interest in the conservation and development of the Fort William waterfront and the McKellar and Mission Island sites must address the urban and industrial growth that has occurred there. In order to support the analysis that follows in Chapter 4, we must first summarize the data and place it in its social-historical context and acknowledge that the narrative derived from the historical record has raised unknowns, uncertainties and

information voids. From this position, we can discuss how archaeology might help address those voids. This synthesis seeks to see the individual in its discussion of the broader narrative.

There is scarcely any information about the lives and activities of the Aboriginal people who inhabited the area prior to the arrival of the European explorers and fur traders. In this case, we can only infer activities and local land use through analogy and information gained from the early contact period. Based upon archaeological evidence, we do know that humans have occupied the general region since before 9000 BP, but physical occupation of the islands themselves is likely conditioned by fluctuating Lake Superior water levels throughout the early Holocene. Artifact recoveries from McKellar Island, although anecdotal, might indicate the presence of prehistoric Aboriginal groups on the island, perhaps first dating to the Archaic period (between ca. 6000 and 2000 years ago). Most certainly we can expect that human occupation increased in frequency and density over the past 2000 years of the Woodland Period, but even during this era, human settlement was likely seasonal.

The emergence of Fort William as an urban center owes itself to the establishment of a fur trade post at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. Although the route to the interior provided by the Kaministiquia was, for a time, overshadowed by the Grand Portage route, the establishment of the North West Company post in 1803 ensured the foundations of urban development.

The North West Company post operated between 1803 and 1821. The rivalry and competition between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company proved to be the prevailing feature of the period after the 1780s. Following the amalgamation of the two companies in 1821, large administrative centres such as York Factory and Fort Garry governed the HBC fur trade. This change shifted power away from former key sites, such as Fort William, thereby ensuring Fort William's decline.

Both the French and British colonial fur trade systems envisioned the mouth of the Kaministiquia River as an important intermediate transshipment and forward administrative centre. However, the nature of North West Company operations at Fort William is significantly different from what came later. The operations of the North West Company had a seasonal aspect (Campbell 1968). The colonial fur trade was a single industry, the nature of which is defined by the technology of transportation. The mode of transportation for the goods of the fur trade period was water-based, using human labour to propel the craft and to carry goods in small packages over largely undeveloped portages. The huge distances that needed to be traveled, coupled with the large manpower requirement, resulted in the need for an inland warehouse depot and administration node along the transportation corridor that acted as a strategic hub for only a short period of time during the year (Campbell 1968: 24). After the 'rendezvous' period, all the players who animated that site either returned to Montreal or to their winter station, leaving the node largely idle until the next gathering (Campbell 1968: 26). In winter, Fort William was largely unpopulated and operated with only a skeleton staff. Permanent residents at the fort were few in number, and closely tied to the corporate

centre of the post. Activities on McKellar Island would have been seasonal as well. The island likely maintained elements of traditional aboriginal land use, but with significant degradation because of the traders' wood harvesting efforts and the other activities of Fort William personnel.

At the end of the fur trade era, engendered by the amalgamation of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, Fort William became marginalized and a much more localized central place with a comparatively small hinterland. At this time, Fort William re-established a reputation for itself as a commercial fishing port. As the market for the fishing industry diminished, local mining interests and land speculation dominated the growth of the area. The lumber industry developed to assist the mining endeavour, but came into its own in 1872 with the establishment of the Oliver, Davidson & Company sawmill on the island opposite the fort.

The influence of the Hudson's Bay Company fort had declined considerably by this time, and it served as little more than a supply depot. Immigrants to the area established the Fort William Town Plot, and the additional survey of the land for settlement by the Dominion of Canada, led to commercial development. When town boosters managed to convince the Dominion of Canada to construct the terminus of the Trans-continental Railway at Fort William, the role of the area as a transshipment hub was re-solidified.

With confederation and Canada's rapid development as a transcontinental nation, the Lakehead region rapidly transformed, and once again became a strategic logistics

location along the giant supply chain that linked the emergent nation into a whole. In the transformative process, the government of Canada envisioned the new western and northern lands as a giant hinterland that would supply unfinished raw materials, predominantly agricultural produce, to the industrial heartland of Ontario and Quebec. Although free land grants and a homesteading program were more successful in attracting immigrants to the western settlements (Beaulieu and Southcott 2010: 60), the Lakehead also grew. In addition to agricultural settlement, mining and lumbering opportunities reflected additional natural resources that could be harvested to supply the heartland. As part of the greater plan, the government envisioned a populated hinterland that would also consume a proportion of the finished goods returning back along that supply chain.

Before continuing, it is important to ask what happened to the Aboriginal population that lived in and around Fort William. After 1821, Aboriginal people are rarely mentioned in the historical records except in the context of the Fort William Mission. This is one of the most valuable pieces of the social history discussion. Although there might have been an Aboriginal presence on McKellar Island between 1815 and 1850 as part of the ancillary development associated with the trade post, it is likely that their presence was discouraged. Following the fur trade, there is very little documented information that addresses an Aboriginal presence on McKellar Island or elsewhere. The Aboriginal population, for the most part, is simply not mentioned. From the perspective of written history, the colonial development and the rise of urbanism and industrialization in early Canada is something associated with non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people seem to have been marginalized socially, economically and spatially all across Canada during that



time. Locally, we see the Aboriginal people being segregated at Fort William Reservation and not really invited to be part of the developing settlement and transshipment centre of Fort William. Instead of being the strategic players in the fur trade economy that they once were, they became marginalized and replaced with a new working class comprised of immigrant labourers and peasant farmers.

Was the skill set of the labour force the determining factor in hiring immigrant workers? Are we looking at the immigration of skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled labour? Is it perhaps the scale and scope of the undertaking that needs to be considered? When considering the broader role of Fort William in the railroad and steamship based transportation network that animated the heartland-hinterland configuration, it is important to recognize that this network clearly differs from the earlier fur trade system. The industrial period system is much more diverse and much larger in scale and, perhaps most importantly, does not have the element of seasonality seen during the fur trade era. People are now needed year-round in order to provide necessary services. This need for people involved massive European immigration on a national scale. With the introduction of this new permanent labour force, the social dynamic of the Fort William area also began to change.

The industrial period can be defined by many factors. The rapidly developing technologies offered by the industrial revolution provided a new and efficient means of industrialized extraction, transportation and processing of raw materials. The industrial period also brought the factory-level production of steel, the development of steam power

driven by early fossil fuel such as coal, and the expansion into and appropriation of huge hinterlands under the control of centralized Canadian authority.

Fort William responded by developing the required services and businesses of an urban centre whose primary function was to convey raw materials efficiently to the heartland, where the real value-added was generated. In some sectors, Fort William also developed some level of local processing of raw materials. For example, logs would undergo initial processing at the sawmill, so that the resultant dimensional lumber could be moved forward more efficiently in the production stream. The locally owned services and businesses of the industrial period stimulated the growth of Fort William.

During the industrial period, it was common to see a separation of industrial, commercial, and residential areas as the urban environment grew in size and developed an increased specialization in land use (Stelter and Artibise 1982: 28). McKellar Island transitioned from its predominantly agricultural base to a site of industry and industrial potential. Has this transition left us any clues as to the nature of the farmers who lived and worked on the island? Very little evidence has been recovered from the written record. Many of the early business and residential addresses are listed in the Henderson's Directory as simply Island No.1. Even as housing lots were established, the written record does not provide complete information regarding the owners of the land or the residents on the property. Many of the landowners were wealthy individuals, some had homes on the mainland and some lived in other regions of the country, and purchased lots on the island for a multitude of reasons. The fire insurance documents do not show any residential plans,

although there are street assignments made. So, who were the people living and working on the island during the industrial period, and what do we know about them? What was their ethnicity? We do know that the residents were no longer Ojibwe or Métis foragers, engages or fishermen as in the early period. The people on McKellar Island were predominately Euro-Canadian, probably recent immigrants, and mostly likely working-class people residing in an area close to their places of work. The dwellings associated with the Oliver, Davidson and Company sawmill (Figure 3-28) support this suggestion. Looking at many of the other images associated with the industrial period, one would expect this to be the case for the entire island. At least that is the vision imposed by the capitalists, speculators and planners. A strong residential settlement never really did get established on the island. One reason may have been that the commute to the mainland jobs was too complicated given the technology of the time, and it simply made better sense to establish those residential neighbourhoods (with associated service businesses) on the mainland. Examples of these mainland neighbourhoods can be seen in the east end of Thunder Bay near the rail marshalling yards and wharfs, and in the developing neighbourhoods adjacent to the elevators that lined the north shore of the Kaministiquia River. These communities were defined by their proximity to the workplaces central to Fort William and its growth.

With access to rail service to and from the western provinces, and port facilities that could bring shipments of goods to and from the east, Fort William built itself into one of the ten largest cities in Canada by the early twentieth century. The Canadian Pacific rail yards had replaced the Hudson's Bay Company fort in both location and importance.

Regular improvements to the waterfront, such as dredging and dock construction, made the port even more efficient and essential to the grain trade. Industry grew in response to the pivotal position of Fort William as a key transshipment point. The government encouraged industrial and manufacturing growth through bonusing and tax relief. The farm plots located on the island opposite the C.P.R. rail yards were purchased and transformed into industrial properties. The old sawmill had disappeared. The island was ripe with industrial potential. Proposals for additional slips and expanded coal-handling facilities went hand in hand with the proposed creation of residential lots.

Unfortunately, the potential of the island was never fully realized. The outbreak of World War I crushed the momentum of industry. Factories closed, and labourers were unemployed. Although the inter-war years saw the establishment of the pulp and paper industry, and the local Canadian Car and Foundry was retooled following the Second World War, much of the local economy struggled. Ever resilient, however, Fort William embraced its new path. With the coming of the oil companies on the island, industry once again began to capitalize on the potential for growth there. Few households were maintained on the island and, in 1957, all residential development was halted and the city instituted a plan to buy all properties thereon.

As Fort William grew and began to diversify its interests, both national and international factors reduced the importance of the city. Changes in transportation, new cost-effective shipping lanes, and overseas manufacturing, slowed the movement of freight through the ports. The decline and collapse of the Fort William waterfront might have resulted from

continuing advances in technological innovation and development that rendered its strategic role in the heartland-hinterland supply chain increasingly obsolete. The St. Lawrence Seaway enabled larger capacity ships to reach the Lakehead. Keefer Terminal was equipped to handle these larger ships, but the older and now obsolete ship handling facilities of the original waterfronts were unable to. Many other factors had also changed: bulk cargo handling relied less on steamship transportation; rail links became better at conveying heavy raw materials to the heartland on a single transportation system; less grain storage capacity was needed to overwinter grain to be shipped the next shipping season; large scale grain handling was facilitated in the hopper cars; Asian markets took over from European ones; and technological innovation meant automobile transport on highways or aircraft transport were prime movers of people and high value cargo. The system had not changed, but rather the technology of supply, transport and communications had. These changes brought about the decline and abandonment of the now obsolete facilities of the early twentieth century waterfronts.

Looking towards sustainability and with hopes of re-establishing itself, Fort William and neighbouring Port Arthur amalgamated into the City of Thunder Bay in 1970. This began a period of downsizing the waterfront industries and building infrastructure to support the new post-industrial state that both had been forced to embrace. The city began to look at redevelopment of waterfront property. Proponents of waterfront revitalization envision a destination for the urban elite, supported by knowledge-based and service industries and strong retail and entertainment sectors. According to the proponents, the living spaces would acknowledge the history of the area and uphold the

heritage of the area with walkways, murals, and other endeavours. This remains to be seen, particularly on McKellar Island, where its potential has been discussed in the past but unrealized.

As we can see, McKellar Island and the surrounding area passed through the key phases suggested by Gilbert Stelter (Stelter and Artibise 1982; Stelter 1985). Its mercantile foundations can be seen in the relationship between the Kaministiquia River establishments and the heartland of eastern Canada and Europe. The commercial and industrial transitions in the 1800s served to capitalize on the regional resources and establish Fort William as a transportation hub. As Fort William sought to embrace the manufacturing industry into the twentieth century, it continued to grow. Building on its national and regional importance, modern Thunder Bay has been able to better define itself as an urban entity.

The research of this thesis into the history of McKellar Island settlement systems shows a use pattern based on proximity and inherent potential. These use patterns were driven by the land use activities on the Fort William mainland. However, the social history discussion is missing any detailed evidence relating to the lives of those who lived and worked on McKellar Island. It is at this stage that one must turn to archaeology to assist history in illuminating the invisible. Two important questions must be posed to the archaeology. Firstly, where would one look on McKellar Island to find the best material evidence of each historic period? Secondly, once identified, what research questions could be asked of those locations to assist in giving voice to those used that space?

## **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL**

The preceding chapters of this thesis have discussed the social history of McKellar Island, with reference to the functions and establishments that were present on the island. What follows in this chapter is the analysis of those data in support of establishing areas of archaeological potential. The aim is to encourage future archaeological investigations at various site locations on McKellar Island to better define its role in the urbanization of the greater Thunder Bay area and shed light on the lives of those involved in the evolution of settlement on the island.

The organization of Canada's economic hinterlands reflected both regional and national interests, and resulted in the steady emergence of a predominately urban industrialized state. The underlying changes in settlement evolution are responses to changes in technology and transportation, and the associated changes between heartland-hinterland interactions. Social history theory offers an interpretative framework that allows us to see the historical evolution of settlement and land use on McKellar Island in the broader context of colonialism and nation building. The question that must be answered becomes what we know about the social composition of McKellar Island, and how the people articulated with the increasingly urban and industrial Fort William. Within the discussion of the rapid development of industrial and shipping infrastructure, what can be said about the people who worked within this system? The social issues that affected people

associated with the Fort William waterfront, and the expression that they may have had on McKellar Island, is worthy of exploration.

Where does the archaeology fit into the equation, and what new information will it contribute to the story of McKellar Island and the surrounding area? One goal of historical archaeology is to use the material record to confirm, test, refine, or refute the insights deriving from the historical record. Archaeology can also serve to confirm the location of historically reported occupations, collect additional information reflected in the material culture, and provide information about people, events and processes that are under-represented or ignored in the historic literature. With this in mind, the goal of this chapter is to map the archaeological potential of McKellar Island.

In the previous chapter, five key historical periods were identified that address the evolution of the settlement system of McKellar Island and the surrounding region. Gilbert Stelter (Stelter and Artibise 1982: 5) had suggested that three primary phases of urban development exist, namely (1) the mercantile era, (2) the commercial era, and (3) the new-industrialism. Stelter later refined the phases (Stelter 1985) to highlight the shifts in the industrial era between transportation, manufacturing, and new forms of urban development. This analysis of McKellar Island is consistent with Stelter's, adding only the pre-contact period and post-industrial period to complete the narrative:

- The Pre-Contact Period to Early Contact (~9000 BP to 1660 AD)
- The Colonial Period (1660 AD to 1855 AD)
- The Commercial Revolution to Post Confederation (1855 AD to 1872 AD)
- The Industrial Period (1872 AD to 1970 AD)
- Deindustrialization and the Post-Industrial Period (1970 AD to Present)



These five historical periods of settlement evolution define themes of urban development that can be examined by identifying suitable areas of interest on McKellar Island.

Integration of historic maps enables identification of areas with discrete functions dating to each historical period. In turn, delineation of these areas will enable future archaeological investigation (Figure 4-1 to Figure 4-3). The integrative mapping will also highlight areas of historical and archaeological significance that have been either heavily disturbed or destroyed by the most recent industrial development. This is necessary, as the intensive development of McKellar Island by the oil companies in the twentieth century will likely have obscured earlier points of cultural interest. That being said, with some environmental mitigation and investigations that include excellent stratigraphic controls, there may be the possibility of information recovery in some areas. On the whole, however, the integrative mapping approach will identify localities where future archaeological investigation or oral history investigation might play a role in giving voice to those individuals who have been under-represented in the surviving written record (Figure 4-4).

The integration of data from multiple sources generates a more complete image of the study area that can be used to determine its archaeological potential. Spatial information from map data, fire insurance plans, photographs and sketches are sometimes difficult to integrate. In order to establish an informative and interpretable final product, I first had to reconcile the differences in scale and degree of detail. For this research, I have used Adobe Illustrator™ (vector graphics software), coupled with Adobe Photoshop™ (digital image processing software), to rescale and re-orient the historical cartographic data and

graphically overlay those data on a modern base map of the island (Google Earth™ satellite imagery). Working within these programs, it is evident that McKellar Island has undergone both physical and social transformation. In some areas of the island there is significant shoreline variance between surveyed maps and the modern satellite imagery. In some circumstances, this is a result of the dredging and filling that occurred as the island was renovated and repurposed. With other images, this does not appear to be the case. This made it difficult to identify a series of reference points that could be used to overlay cartographic representations dating to the various phases of island occupation. To resolve this issue, non-shoreline ground-level reference points from the 1875 survey map of McKellar Island provided the means to align the spatial information and layer dated images one upon the other. Of particular value were the originally surveyed street and lot allowances that remain part of the imposed cultural geography of the island. The lots and concessions from the original 1875 survey for the Neebing Additional (Figure 3-20) were used and matched with Arthur Street and 10th Street assignments from later maps which used the same lot allowances.

#### **4.1 The Pre-Contact Period to Early Contact (~9000 BP to 1660 AD)**

Virtually no data exist to document the pre-contact period of McKellar. The artifact recoveries from McKellar Island are anecdotal and, as such, without context. We know from regional archaeological investigations that Aboriginal people inhabited the surrounding area for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Geological and geomorphological surveys have shown that McKellar Island was available for habitation and use after 6,400 BP at the end of the Nipissing highstand. Subsurface

archaeological investigations have the best hope of uncovering material evidence of land use or occupation.

We do not know with certainty where pre-contact Aboriginal activities were focussed on the island. As such, the entire island holds the potential to uncover evidence of occupation. That evidence might come in the form of stone or copper tools, perhaps bone or ceramics, possible hearth features or other evidence of habitation. That being said, we can expect to find more evidence along the original shoreline of the island than in the central portion, and less activity in the swampy areas.

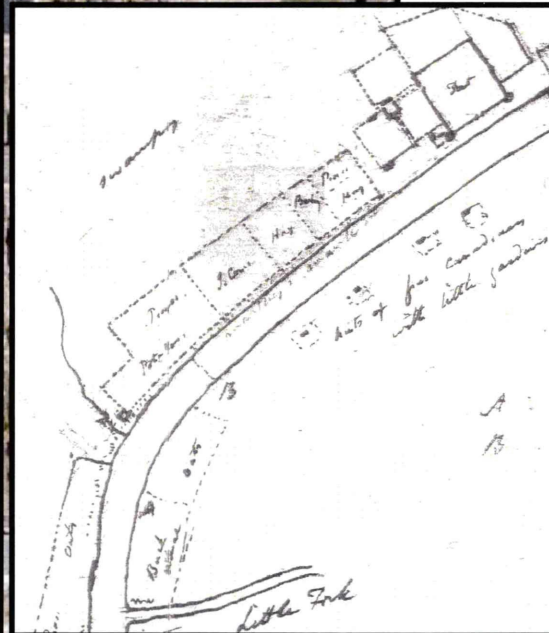
#### **4.2 The Colonial Period (1660 AD to 1855 AD)**

Written information about early Aboriginal-European contact is rare and without detail. We know that there was an Aboriginal presence in the area when Du Lhut established a fortification at the mouth of the Kaministiquia and that he was involved in a trade arrangement with them. The records that do exist represent only a fragment of those activities that occurred within and in the vicinity of the various fur trade establishments of the period. Except for key images, McKellar Island is all but overlooked in the surviving record. Moreover, the existing historical documents were written down by the literate few, often omitting the narrative of the many labourers and Aboriginal participants.

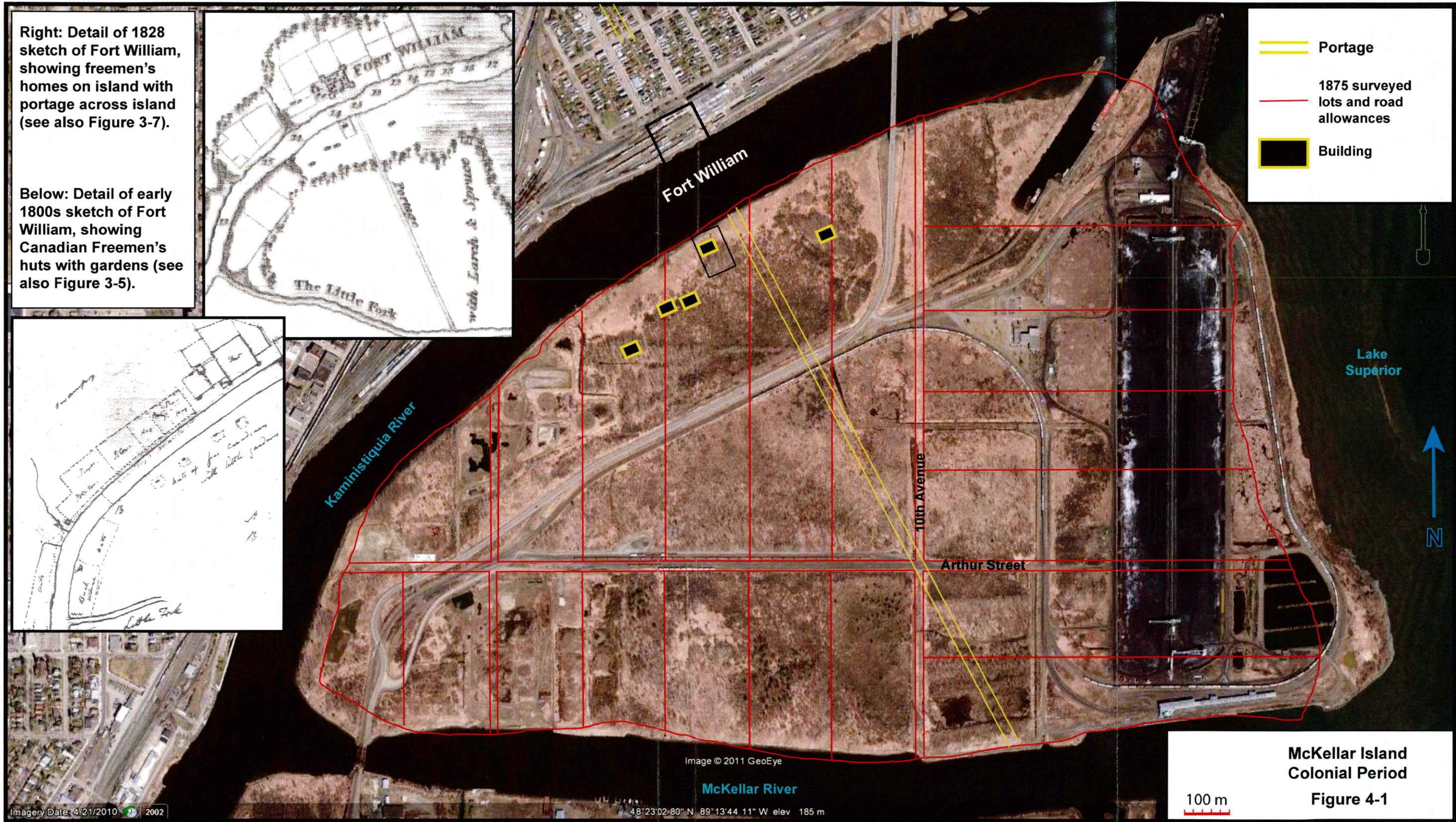
From the maps and sketches of the period, we can discern that McKellar Island was used primarily for freemen residence from 1803 to sometime after 1821 (Figure 4-1).

Right: Detail of 1828 sketch of Fort William, showing freemen's homes on island with portage across island (see also Figure 3-7).

Below: Detail of early 1800s sketch of Fort William, showing Canadian Freeman's huts with gardens (see also Figure 3-5).



- Portage
- 1875 surveyed lots and road allowances
- Building



McKellar Island  
Colonial Period  
Figure 4-1

Imagery Date: 4/21/2010 2002

Image © 2011 GeoEye

48°23'02.80" N 89°13'44.11" W elev 185 m

The freemen lived in huts with associated small gardens near the shore opposite Fort William. It is difficult to say what type of structure the huts may have been. They might have simply been huts like those built by the Aboriginal people, or something slightly more substantial - perhaps small log cabins. This area opposite the fort was the only reported location of settlement, with access to the fort being the significant factor in the placement of the structures. Contemporaneously, an area on the south-western tip of the island was dedicated to the cultivation of buck wheat and oats. The eastern portion of the island was predominantly swampy ground thickly wooded with larch and spruce (Figure 3-7). A portage across the island allowed persons access between the landing area opposite the fort and an area near the southeast of the island on the bank of the river across from Mission Island (Figure 3-7).

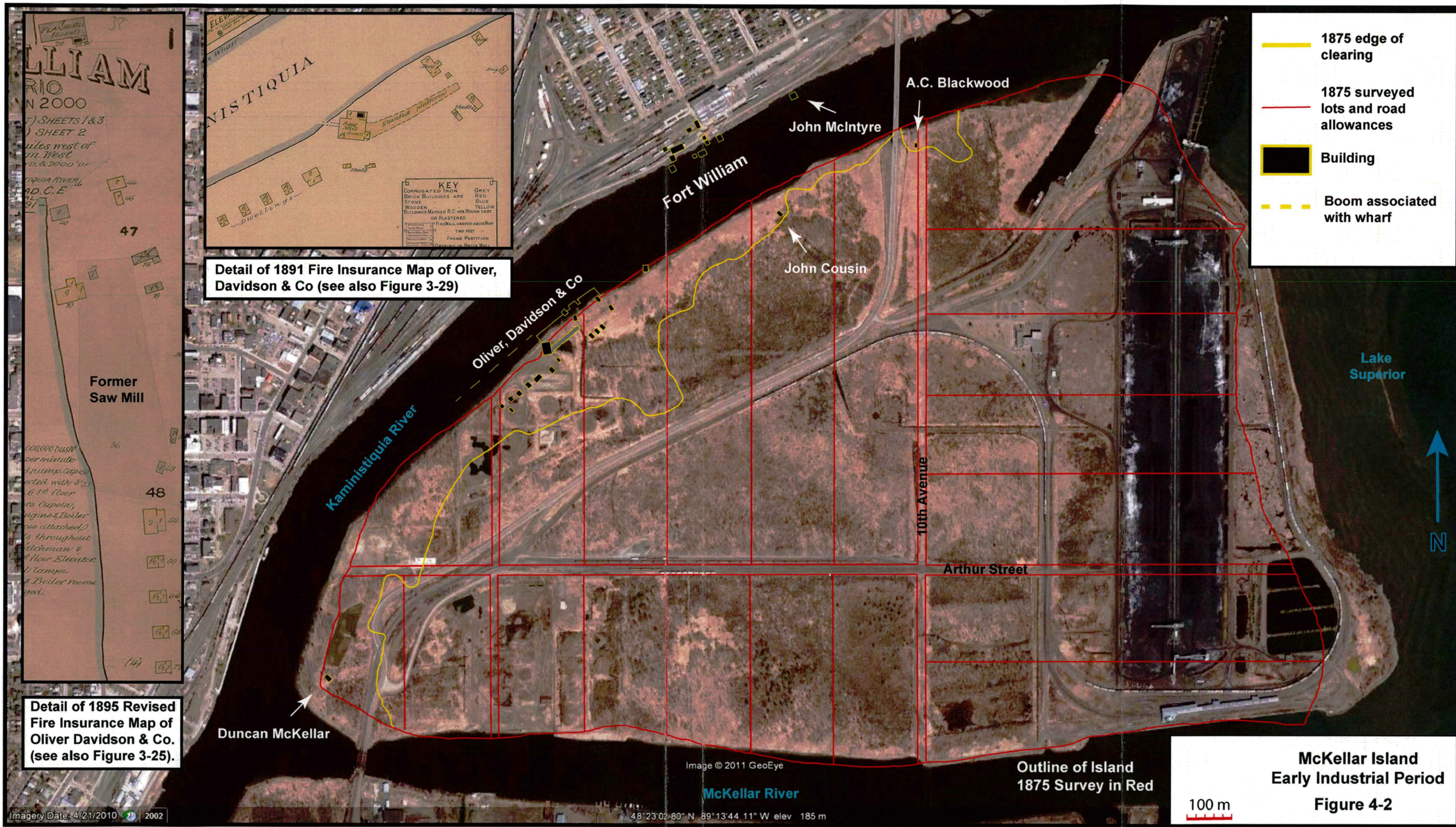
Archaeological investigations in this area would seek to locate one or more of the freemen's huts to discuss the lifeways of the island's early inhabitants. The terminus of the portage that once crossed the island might also reveal some evidence of activities. With only fragments of history appearing in the archival records, a broad archaeological survey of the island might offer the best chance to uncover as yet unknown "hot spots" of early fur trade habitation and land use.

We also know very little about the fishing industry that developed after the amalgamation of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. If such operations occurred on the island, we can assume that they likely occupied the shoreline zone, and probably were in the vicinity of the fort site. This suggests that the most probable location

for such facilities would be in much the same area as the earlier fur trade occupation. With this in mind, future archaeological reconnaissance should address whether there is evidence of commercial fishing activities on the island. What was the role of the Aboriginal people in this industry? Did the social relationships change after Fort William was reduced in economic importance?

#### **4.3 The Commercial Revolution to Post Confederation (1855 AD to 1872 AD)**

This period of history is characterized by early land survey, land speculation, mining, and slow population growth. The dominant figures in this period were the McKellar family. Archaeological investigations would focus on the dwelling area established on the island by Duncan McKellar and the mining activities carried out on the island by Peter McKellar. The dwelling was located on the south-western tip of the island, an area known as McKellar Point (Figure 4-2). McKellar Point was not heavily impacted by the industrial period, making this area a prime candidate for archaeologists to explore. McKellar Point is a key location in the City of Thunder Bay's proposed plans for commercial and residential development on the island (City of Thunder Bay 2010). Bruyere's location of the "Old French Fort" on the mainland south of the 1803 North West Company post (Figure 3-3) suggests that McKellar Point may have been afforded the same land use options exercised by the more northerly shore of the island during the North West Company occupation. Excavations in this area might encounter early Aboriginal cultural materials, and evidence of the cultivated plots of the early fur trade era. A search for the remnants of the McKellar farmstead further back from the shoreline on McKellar Point might prove useful in shedding light on the lives of the local family



**McKellar Island  
Early Industrial Period  
Figure 4-2**

for which the island is named. However, it was not the only dwelling from this period. Others, such as those owned by John Cousin and A.C. Blackwood (situated in the northwestern and northern areas of the island respectively), should also be investigated. The early homesteads of John Cousin and A.C. Blackwood might have been impacted by industrial development, so a closer examination of the locations will be needed to allow for an accurate assessment of their archaeological potential. A comparison of the three known nineteenth century homesteads from McKellar Island with contemporary domestic sites on the mainland might highlight differences in features, function or method of construction.

#### **4.4 The Industrial Period (1872 AD to 1970 AD)**

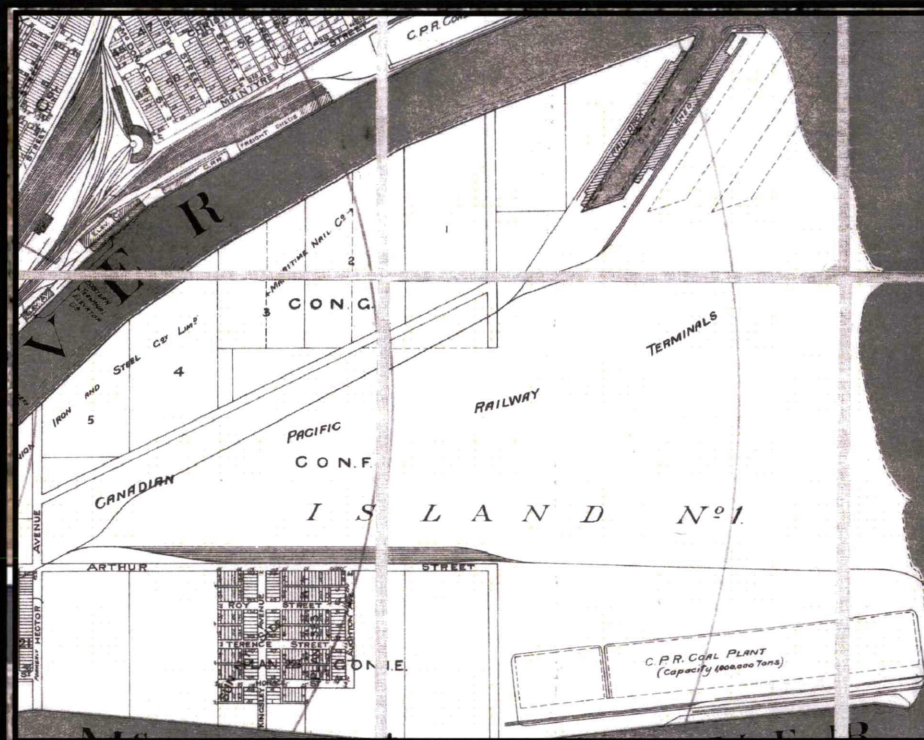
This period of McKellar Island history is characterized by an influx of people following the decision by the Dominion of Canada to establish the terminus of the transcontinental railroad at Fort William. Boosterism was the overwhelming factor in the choice to do so. On the island itself, the structures of the Oliver, Davidson & Company sawmill are of great value in the discussion of the early part of this period. Maps and fire insurance plans clearly show the central mill and nearby sheds and dwellings (Figure 3-22 and Figure 3-29). Several of these structures appear to be on-island residences for employees. Intra-site comparison of the residential establishments might allow some interpretation of their function and perhaps distinctions between workers and their families, and the supervisory staff. The quantity and the quality of the artifacts uncovered at the site might assist in reconciling structures with class divisions and allow the archaeologist to piece together a sense of social groupings. An investigation of the sawmill site would also



allow archaeologists to discover how the lumber industry developed locally and evaluate its impact on the emergence of urbanization. Strategically, each section of the mill complex would be excavated based on the expected finds. The dwellings would be examined for physical structure and for refuse from activity (such as the possible presence of kitchen middens, for example). The sawmill and planing mill would be examined in a similar way, but with emphasis on a technological comparison with other mills from the same period.





Agriculture and industry were the two components associated with McKellar Island. In the early decades of the 1900s, the island was defined by its unrealized potential. As the city of Fort William grew, the prospects for McKellar Island were high to become a location of intense industrialization. Instead, a shift in the economy focused urban development to the mainland. Farming was able to sustain itself on the island alongside the CPR Coal Dock and Freight Sheds. How many small farms existed on McKellar Island and what was the social status of the farmer?

The industrial footprint of the early twentieth century is poorly represented in the historic records. The Dominion Iron and Steel Company and the Maritime Nail Company once had holdings on the island, but no record of built structures can be located (Figure 4-3). Many small businesses also were purportedly located on the island, but the building locations are unknown. This is consistent with limited information about residential occupation of the island after the turn of the century. Although there are names associated with residences on the island, the locations of the dwellings are not recorded.



Above: Image of the island showing early industry and proposed residential areas (see Figure 3-36).



-  Streets
-  1875 surveyed lots and road allowances
-  Building
-  Areas of industry

Imagery Date: 4/21/2010 2002

Image © 2011 GeoEye  
48°23'02.80" N 89°13'44.11" W elev 185 m

Outline of Island  
1875 Survey in Red

100 m

**McKellar Island  
Industrial Period  
Figure 4-3**

A broad ground-level pedestrian survey and sub-surface testing might assist in locating evidence of building foundations which could then be independently researched. The aerial photographs and satellite imagery give some evidence of ground disturbance possibly related to establishments, but do not show built structures.

The oil companies established an indelible legacy on McKellar Island. The location of the refineries and tank farms are clearly indicated on the fire insurance maps, and their presence is readily identifiable in the satellite imagery. The three areas of oil activity are located in the south-western quadrant of the island as indicated in Figure 4-3. The physical impact that the oil companies had on the island might restrict archaeological investigations. The oil company properties likely represent disturbed areas. The same can be said of the Canadian Pacific Railway properties of the early to mid industrial period as indicated by restricted areas in the north-eastern and south-eastern quadrants of Figure 4-3. The Thunder Bay Terminals property currently in use would also be restrictive in studying the archaeology within its boundaries. The footprint of the Thunder Bay Terminals can be clearly seen in the Google Earth™ satellite imagery, along with the current roadways and existing railway tracks. However, archaeological investigations should not avoid those areas entirely; only understand the limitations on context.

#### **4.5 Deindustrialization and the Post-Industrial Period (1970 AD to Present)**

This period is characterized by a decline in waterfront industrial usage and a shift towards commercial and residential development on McKellar Island. Modern cleanup of the former oil industry sites has mitigated many of the environmental barriers to habitation. However, the removal of the tank farms during the cleanup efforts involved another round of ground disturbance.

An examination of the former industrial sites may provide a benchmark for analysing those other areas of the island that have been impacted by industry, and provide a detailed foundation for future archaeological investigations on those lands. Establishing a new base horizon for far-future archaeology might be a valuable by-product of the examination. If any standing structures still exist within the deindustrialized zones, they would require investigation in coordination with engineers and architects to discuss the process of deindustrialization. More than forty years have passed since the amalgamation of Fort William and Port Arthur. The opportunity to conduct interviews and gather personal accounts from those persons who lived and/or worked on McKellar Island is limited. Our best opportunity to provide context to the archaeological and historical research requires this additional process.

## 4.6 Key Questions

The analysis of the five historical periods has given us the general locations and broad boundaries of those areas that might benefit from future archaeological investigations (Figure 4-4). A study of local urbanization must fundamentally include a discussion of its participants. In order to recover the most information from the investigations of those areas identified by the study, the archaeological focus should address, at minimum, the following themes:

What role did Aboriginal people play in the urbanization of the Lakehead?

What physical evidence of farming do we have on the island?





- Can we discuss ethnicity, social structure or labour force composition by examining the material record?
- Where were the residences located on the island? What was their relation to the other activities on McKellar Island?
- Is the social history of McKellar Island one of unrealized potential, or the search for the historically marginalized? Or both?

These themes must be applied to each of the historic periods discussed in this thesis.

Upon examination of Figure 4-4, it is evident that there is the potential for a high density of archaeological sites along the western shore of the island. This is not unexpected, given that many of the establishments of concern were constructed with proximity to the mainland as a primary consideration. One of the general observations of this chapter has been the absence of information about inland functions and establishments. Although it is recognized that farming, small industry, and dwellings were present during the development of McKellar Island, their location has been obscured by the lack of information in the available historical record.

This figure illustrates the areas of archaeological potential for the Colonial Period and the Industrial Period, while indicating a disturbed area that reduces the possible context of recoveries.

Although the interior of the island is also of interest, little is known about the structures (dwellings and businesses) which existed.

-  Portage
-  Colonial
-  Industrial
-  Restrictive



**McKellar Island  
Archaeological Potential  
Figure 4-4**

100 m

A broad property inspection of the island might be beneficial in helping to identify the remnants of cultural activity for the central portion of the island. As well, the former CPR establishments in the north-eastern and south-eastern quadrants, now supplanted by the Thunder Bay Terminals operations, might still have left an archaeological footprint. That being said, the western shore of the island provides the best access to areas that will afford the most value to a discussion of the local voiceless past and a systematic heritage value assessment of the island must begin with the archaeological investigation of these areas of interest. A property inspection should be carried out to document the disturbed areas and to determine if there might still be small areas of archaeological potential to be included in the assessment. Following the property inspection, for those areas where there has not been deep ground disturbance, I would advocate a systematic test pit survey be completed for the key areas identified by this thesis. The goal of the survey is to document the archaeological resources of those key areas and identify sub-surface stratigraphic issues that will inform subsequent investigations. The most difficult charge to the archaeologist is to determine the limits and extent of each site uncovered. An assessment of historical and heritage value must be made when evaluating recoveries.

Locating the site of Ken Dawson's 1968 excavation on McKellar Island might be a logical starting point. His examination of the island occurred as part of the background research to the archaeological investigations he was to undertake at the original site of the Fort William fur trade post (Figure 4-5). His cursory search for evidence of the freemen's huts of the colonial period produced only limited data. It would be valuable to enhance

the original report and better define the site extent. It would also be useful to assess the site's periodicity in light of the information provided in this thesis.



**Figure 4-5** 2007 Google Earth™ image of McKellar Island showing the 1968 Fort William excavation site DcJh-8 on the mainland (Pin). Site of the McKellar Island excavation is unknown.

In Dawson's record of the Fort William excavations, he noted:

A brief investigation of the shore of the island opposite the site was made in an attempt to locate remains of the voyageurs' log houses reported to have been located there. (Wallace, p.17) If these huts could be located, they would give some indication of the relative position of the Fort, for the far bank, while eroding has not been drastically changed since the days of the post. Remains of a log dwelling were found but again, nothing was recovered to link it definitely [sic] to the period of the Fort. All material appeared to be from the recent period. The first phase of the research concluded with an aerial examination of the site. This also proved unrewarding. [Dawson 1968: 46]



Later in his paper, K.C.A. Dawson again refers to the McKellar Island investigation and reported on the test pit recoveries. Unfortunately, there is no datum recorded in his notes to link his excavation with a known geographic point. Of the test pits on McKellar Island, Dawson writes:

A brief investigation of the opposite bank of the river was made to determine if any remains of "voyageur huts" mentioned in the historical records could be found. The shore across from the post is about five feet above the present water level. Fallen clumps of grass and earth that have slid waterwards [sic] attest to the continuing erosion. The island is very swampy with low scrub brush growth. Raspberry bushes grow in profusion in the clear area between the bank and the brush. Since such vegetation frequently grows on ash deposits and since there was some suggestion of a low hummock possibly marking a building foundation, a trench was opened. The remains of a wooden building were uncovered.

Although the investigation was limited, it did indicate that further excavation would be profitable. [Dawson 1968: 73]

In addition to the discovery of a wooden structure, Dawson uncovered at least thirty one smaller artifacts during his investigation of McKellar Island (Table 4-1).

**Table 4-1**  
Recoveries from the 1968 Excavations on McKellar Island

Category	Number	Description
Beads, trade	1	Small, white
Bone	6	Large mammal, sawn ends
Brass	1	Fragment
Copper	1	1/4' wire, fragment
Glass	-	Window, fragments
	15	Bottle, fragments
Iron	5	Unidentifiable fragments
	1	Stove leg
Pipe	1	Stem, fragment

Source: Dawson (1968: 73)



**Figure 4-6** 1968 aerial photograph of the north-western shore of McKellar Island, showing the island as it would have been encountered by Dawson. Mainland and CPR Yards on the left, McKellar Island on right (Campbell 1976: 23).

The archaeological reconnaissance completed by K.C.A. Dawson indicated a need for further investigations. It is evident that by retracing Dawson's steps, the archaeologist might be able to uncover material in the same area to add more detail to the brief investigation performed in 1968. The cursory nature of Dawson's investigations further emphasizes a need to establish a controlled and systematic survey of the area. His recoveries are suggestive of a dwelling but, in the absence of spatial and stratigraphic controls, it is difficult to determine what structure he may have encountered and to what period it can be ascribed.

Following an investigation of Dawson's site and surrounding area, McKellar Point would be the next likely location for archaeological work. The City of Thunder Bay's interest in developing this area should first include a strategic survey to allow the development of heritage themes and to better define the local urban phenomenon.

In defining the urban phenomenon, it can be stated that "individuals, groups, and institutions exist and interact in natural and human environments that occupy space over time" (Siebert 2000: 538). The surviving historic record leaves many questions unanswered. The absence of information about the residents of McKellar Island is the greatest void. Who were the residents of the island and what were their social relations of production? How does class and social position fit into the residential areas? Was there a working class residential neighbourhood on the island? Where might those places be so that future archaeological research might evaluate the material situation of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers versus other socio-economic sectors of the community who might have lived there?

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This thesis outlines the results of the archival historical research carried out on McKellar Island that was conducted in 2010 and 2011. It contextualizes the results with reference to five key eras of development in order to draw attention to principal locales for future archaeological survey. The transformational processes taking place on McKellar Island throughout these broadly defined eras is considerable, but not well understood.

Archaeology, as an investigative method, has the best opportunity to address the gaps found in the historical record. It will add value to the substantive discussion of McKellar Island's past and contribute to the City of Thunder Bay's waterfront-centred development plan to revitalize its former industrial shoreline.

In my view, the research indicates a need for archaeological survey on McKellar Island to identify sites of historic and heritage value. Site functions, social composition, and the differentiation of buildings between those used for businesses and those used for habitation, are all exciting hooks for future archaeological investigations. One could examine the structures in light of aboriginal land use, the early French occupation of the area and the changes under the subsequent British domination. The materials gathered as part of archaeological investigations will contribute to the analysis of McKellar Island's history and allow us to piece together a more complete picture of land use and occupancy and allow for a greater understanding of the social-evolutionary dynamics of the area.

McKellar Island can truly be seen to reflect a microcosm of key themes in Canadian urban social and industrial development, with its development a reflection of the colonial and post-colonial history of North America. Gaps in the primary historical record need to be filled in by further archaeological research and field work to further assert the historical and heritage significance of the area.

This thesis has shown the benefit of utilizing social history and urban history to perform an archaeological background study. The history informs the archaeology that will, in turn, supplement the historical record. However, both disciplines hold dominance in this relationship and each approach to the study of McKellar Island will mutually inform the research.

In terms of contributions of new knowledge to the study of the area, the thesis has uncovered historical documents and images related to McKellar Island that had yet to be discussed in terms of local history. Map interpretation and document transcription has provided valuable insights into the early colonial experience. Overall, the application of archaeological planning to the discussion of the history and heritage values of McKellar Island is an entirely new concept. Waterfront revitalization benefits from the detailed background survey and the delineation of key zones of historic activity.

Based upon this study of McKellar Island, I recommend that future researchers ensure that Oral Histories are sought out to include in their analyses and, when undertaking further archaeological investigation of McKellar Island, focus their initial archaeological

investigations on the lands facing the Fort William waterfront and subsequently perform an inland survey to investigate prehistoric and early historic land use on the island.

A holistic approach calls for personal experiences and discussion to be included in the overall results. The scope of this research does not extend to this essential component. Follow-up research must be advocated and individuals and organizations with oral or written information about the historical land use of the research area must be consulted. Groups such as the Fort William First Nation, long-term businesses associated with the islands, and former island residents must all be included in the interview process to adequately elucidate the narrative under discussion.

In the absence of oral histories, the social history of McKellar Island and surrounding area can still be discussed with reference to known developments in technology and historical cultural influences. However, the picture that we have of McKellar Island history and development is incomplete. Beginning with aboriginal land use and settlement of the area, to key questions of land use by the early European settlers from freemen to farmers, the complete story is eluding scholars. Drawing upon the historical data, it is essential that archaeological investigations be undertaken to fill in the gaps in our knowledge about McKellar Island's use and development. A comprehensive archaeological investigation with very stringent stratigraphic controls of both McKellar and Mission Islands is recommended. Key areas for investigation should include the area immediately opposite the original site of the Fort William trading post, as well as an inland survey. The discovery of evidence relating to Aboriginal occupation and the

discovery of freemen's huts would be of considerable value. To downplay the role of urban archaeology in the waterfront development process would obscure the valuable insights that the discipline would bring to the discussion of Thunder Bay's past, and the role of McKellar Island. The images presented in this thesis represent the history of McKellar Island and its evolution. A comprehensive archaeological inquiry will add a new dimension to past lifeways at the mouth of the Kaministiquia and situate McKellar Island in Canadian social history.

McKellar Island has always played a supplementary role in the history of Fort William. This, in spite of the fact that it may have once served as a seasonal occupation for early Aboriginal people, it was occupied by freemen during the fur trade and possibly during the post 1821 commercial fisheries period, it was the location of early mining ventures and agriculture, and it earned its place in the industrial age with the establishment of the area's first sawmill on its shoreline. During the 1900s, the island was host to industrial establishments such as the Maritime Nail Company and international oil refineries and tank farms. Today, the easternmost portion of the island supports the Thunder Bay Terminal's coal-handling facilities and the shore of McKellar Island across from the Thunder Bay mainland is vacant.

Without archaeological investigations to complete the narrative, the social history of McKellar Island shares little more than fragments of the past. If Thunder Bay is looking towards a renewed commercial and residential plan for the island, it must embrace the heritage resources that give the area its character and assert that the people who lived and

worked to build the city represent our past. Studies of local heritage must not simply reinforce an imagined past, they must embrace new insights. Urban archaeology offers a means of uncovering the past and enhancing our knowledge of early Canadian life on McKellar Island.



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