

The Rideau region before the Rideau Canal

There is archaeological evidence of human presence in this area from 9,000 to 8,000 BC. Two fluted projectile points were discovered in the region. These people hunted a variety of animals such as squirrels, deer and moose. They also ate fish and plants such as lily and cattail roots, wild rice and a variety of berries and wild fruits. The people of the Rideau region were known as Algonquin. A "hunter-gatherer" culture, they used the region as a source of food by setting up hunting and fishing camps throughout the region.

It is estimated that at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, the native population in Ontario was about 60,000 people. The arrival of the Europeans in the early 1500s brought about huge changes in the native way of life. Several things happened in the first century after European contact. Many native populations were decimated by European diseases. Old world diseases such as the common cold, measles, influenza, and smallpox became deadly epidemics in native communities. Native populations had no immunity against these diseases, never having been exposed to them before. Fur trapping was introduced and became an economic foundation for the tribes. In order to acquire coveted European-made items (e.g. flintlock muskets, iron axes and knives, brass kettles), native groups started large scale trapping, in conjunction with European trappers, to provide the European market with the furs it wanted. Trapping led the natives to form allegiances with the major European players of the day, the French and the British. The Algonquin natives allied themselves with the French, and the Iroquois with the British.

European Settlement

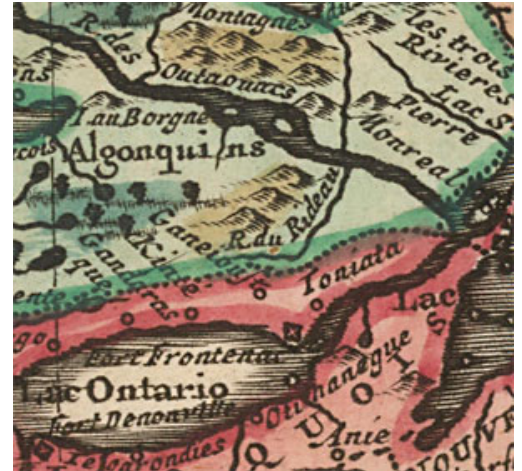
Ontario, a word which is believed to be derived from the Iroquois word "Skanadario", which means "beautiful water" was first settled by Europeans in the 1600s. The first European to see Ontario may have been Etienne Brulé, who was sent in 1610 by Samuel de Champlain, the great French



explorer and cartographer, to live with the Huron Indians and learn about the land they lived in. In 1613, Champlain himself made a journey up the Ottawa River and into the Ottawa River valley. In 1632, Champlain published the first map of Canada showing the Great Lakes.



In the Rideau region, the first community was Kingston, created by Count Frontenac in 1673 as a fur trading post and a fort. Fort Frontenac was captured by the British in 1758. Kings Town, as it was then known, became the capital of the region and later became the "Upper and Lower Canada united" capital from 1840 to 1844.



When Colonel By arrived in the area to begin the construction of the Rideau Canal, he established Bytown's plans. In 1850, it was incorporated in the city; changed its name and became Ottawa in 1855 and in 1859, it was chosen by Queen Victoria as the site of Canada's national capital. The Rideau Waterway and its 47 locks, intended for military use, has become a dynamic commercial waterway linking the communities of the region to foreign markets. In addition, in its early years, thousands of immigrants destined for Upper Canada traveled by boat through the Rideau Canal. The nineteenth century saw continued commercial use of the canal for the transportation of products from local sources: agriculture, forest products, mining, cheese factories, distilleries and other small businesses in the region.

