

Landmarks & Destinations



Ottawa has long been home to a variety of fascinating landmarks and travel destinations. From buildings that are decades old to more recent gems, and from cubbyholes along the Rideau Canal and other secret locations to the treasures offered by the city's numerous neighbourhoods each with its own character, Ottawa offers a strange and wonderful mixture of big-city trappings and small-town charms.

City on the Ottawa

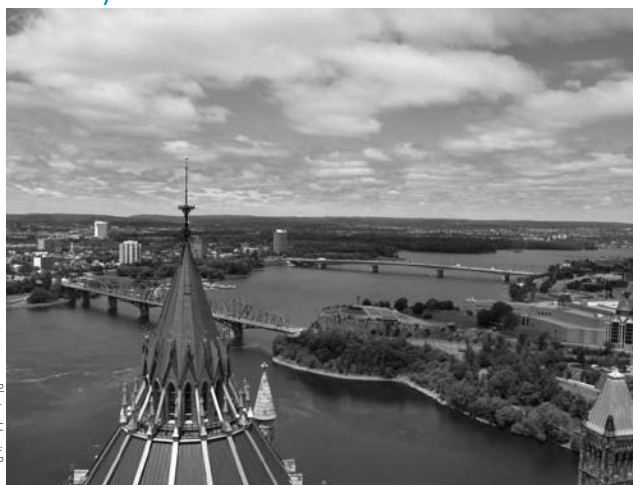


Photo: Horati Boyot

According to some histories, our city was named to commemorate the bicentenary of an event of historical significance: the opening of the **Ottawa River**, once called Grand River, or the “River of the Algonquins” (as Samuel de Champlain, “the father of New France,” called it), or *Kit-chi-sippi* (as the Algonquins themselves named it). In 1654, the French and the Iroquois

signed a truce, which accorded the **Peoples of the Big Ears** (the *Outaouais*, an Algonquin tribe) the right to settle along the River of the Algonquins, where they could trade furs to Montreal and live a peaceful existence. The waterway soon became known as *Rivière de l’Outaouais*, the Ottawa River. Two hundred years later – long after the Peoples of the Big Ears (named for the heavy earrings they wore that stretched out their earlobes) had left the area – the citizens of **Bytown**, as the municipality was then called, were seeking selection as the permanent capital of the Province of Canada. They considered the suffix *-town* inappropriate for their petition; they wanted a name that carried more significance, something that would reflect the increasing importance of this growing lumber centre. Some of the names considered were **Sydenham** (after Lord Sydenham, Governor of Canada), **Aberdeen** (in honour of George Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen), and **Queensburg** (for Her Majesty Queen Victoria). Others suggested an Aboriginal name would be more appropriate to convey the character of the community. In 1853, Mayor Joseph-Balsora Turgeon obtained the agreement of municipal council to adopt the name of Ottawa to mark the 200th anniversary of the opening of the River of the Algonquins for peaceful navigation by the Outaouais.



Photo: Charles Earl

With the help of local guides, French explorer **Samuel de Champlain** reached the present-day site of Ottawa on June 3, 1613, portaging two days later past Chats Falls on the upper Ottawa (then the Grand River), and paddling along Lac des Chats up to what is now **Arnprior**, **Braeside**, and **Sand Point**. In 1915, a monument to de Champlain – depicting him gazing wisely through an astrolabe – was unveiled at Ottawa’s **Nepean Point**, which is behind the **National Gallery of Canada** (just west of Sussex Dr. and St. Patrick St). Unfortunately, the sculptor Hamilton MacCarthy had de Champlain holding the instrument upside down (it took years for anyone to notice). Nepean Point also boasts a lovely view of the area, including Gatineau, Quebec, and Chaudière Falls. The Astrolabe Theatre (just behind the Gallery; 239-5000) at the point features a 700-seat amphitheatre and is the scene of concerts and shows throughout the summer.



THE DEPARTMENT OF MISSING MONUMENTS

In 1966, the Department of the Secretary of State proposed four monuments for Parliament Hill. Two of them – tributes to Prime Ministers Mackenzie King and Louis St Laurent – were commissioned, and can be easily found on the Hill. But what happened to the other two, built for lesser-known prime ministers of the 20th century, **Arthur Meighen** and **Richard Bedford Bennett**? The first, for Meighen, was completed in 1970 but never received final approval by the government and remained in storage for years before finally being installed in 1987, in Lind Park, in the town of St. Marys, Ontario, the town nearby to his birthplace and where he was eventually buried. The Bennett statue was rejected at the model stage not, as then-Secretary of State Judy LaMarsh explained, for a lack of artistic merit, but because the work wasn’t suitable “as representations to future generations of the statesmen of the past.” Prime Minister John Diefenbaker’s words on the two statues were far more specific, referring to the Meighen statue as “the greatest monstrosity every

produced – a mixture of Ichabod Crane and Daddy Longlegs,” and the Bennett model as a “mummy.” With these monuments now hidden somewhere in the National Capital Commission storage, it is unclear if replacement statues of the two will ever be commissioned.

CATTLE CASTLE

The **Aberdeen Pavilion** on the Exhibition grounds is named after John Hamilton-Gordon, first Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, Governor General from 1893 to 1899, and is known informally as the “Cattle Castle.” Said to be the last surviving Canadian example of a Victorian exhibition hall (used mostly for agricultural shows), it was used as a military structure during the war, and was even the home of Lord Strathcona’s Horse (now an armoured regiment of the Canadian Forces) before they left for the Boer War. Designed by Moses Edley, and built for the exhibition grounds in 1898, the building survived a fire in 1907 and was even scheduled for demolition in 1991, becoming a central issue in the 1991 Ottawa election before it was finally restored in 1992–94. It is now a National Historic Site.

The City across the Ottawa

Part of the informal Ottawa-Gatineau region, the **City of Gatineau** (which was, before amalgamation in 2002, called Hull) sits on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, directly across from Ottawa. Gatineau was founded by American lumber baron **Philemon Wright** in 1800 (making it a few decades older than Ottawa), after he built the first mill at the Chaudière Falls. It was originally called Wright’s Village, then Wrightsville, then Wrightstown before becoming Hull (named after the original Wright family home town of Kingston-upon-Hull in England). Gatineau is currently home to some 242,000 people (a predominantly francophone population) and boasts a number of notable sites, including the **Museum of Civilization** (see p.xx), **Casino du Lac Leamy** (*1 Boul. du Casino, 819-772-2100, casino-du-lac-leamy.com*), and the 363 square kilometres of Gatineau Park (*canadascapital.gc.ca/gatineau*), as well as various federal government buildings and a branch of Library and Archives Canada (*Preservation Centre, 625 Boul. du Carrefour; see collectionscanada.gc.ca*).

A Museum Fit for a King



Photo: John W. MacDonald

In addition to part of Mackenzie King’s legacy as the 10th Prime Minister of Canada are the “fake ruins” he built in the Gatineau Hills of his summer home, which he called “Moorside.” Now a museum and historic site, the **Mackenzie King Estate** sits in the midst of Gatineau Park, where he decorated the grounds of his estate with bits from other sites, including the British Bank of North America (demolished in Ottawa in 1936) and the original Parliament Buildings. Future Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, then a diplomat at Canada House in London, England, was even asked to send him fragments of the bombed Palace of Westminster during World War II. How can you say no to such a request from your wartime PM? Pearson complied, and the pieces were sent back to Canada by submarine. A magnificent sight in the midst of the Gatineau Hills, it’s become a haven for wedding parties and photographers. *819-827-2020; follow links for directions and hours at canadascapital.gc.ca*

Small Islands, Big Kettle

Chaudière Falls and **Chaudière Island** sit (along with neighbouring Victoria Island) on the Ottawa River just west of the downtown Ottawa core, where the Booth Street Bridge passes from the western end of Centretown into Gatineau. Exploring the area in 1613, Samuel de Champlain originally recorded the Algonquin name for the site of the falls as *Asticou*, meaning “kettle” or “cauldron,” which became translated by the French as *Chaudière* (what the English then called “the Big Kettle”). It was considered a sacred place to gather, trade, and celebrate for thousands of years before European arrival.

One of the earliest buildings in the area was built at the foot of the Falls, on the south shore of Nepean Point, where the general store tavern had been constructed by Jehiel Collins in 1809 and soon became known as Collins Landing. The name was later changed to Bellows Landing when Collins sold to Caleb Bellows a few years later. In 1818, some of the families traveling from Montreal to settle at Richmond (about a 20-minute drive west of the current city, sitting on the Jock River) chose instead to settle at Bellows Landing.

In the late 1800s, a mill that would produce pulp, paper, and matches was opened at Chaudière Falls and Chaudière Island by Ezra Butler Eddy (yes, the Eddy Matches guy). Over a century later, in 2005, the now Domtar-Eddy site announced mill closings, which meant the city would lose one of the last links to Bytown’s beginnings as an important 18th-century lumber town. To this day, rumors persist about transforming the area into a major tourist attraction, opening up the land to the public, and encouraging multiple uses, similar to Vancouver’s Granville Island, encompassing historic sites associated with First Nations, early settlers, and industrial pioneers.



Photo: Harif Bayart

FLAME ON

At one second past midnight on January 1, 1967, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson launched Canada’s centennial by lighting, for the first time, the Centennial Flame, informally known as the “eternal flame.”

The shields surrounding the flame correspond to the years when each province or territory joined Confederation, and the water from the fountain symbolizes Canada’s unity from sea to sea. An Act passed by Parliament in 1991 ensures that all the coins thrown into the fountain go to fund research by and about Canadians with disabilities.

WATERY LITERATURE

There was a joke that you weren’t a real Ottawa poet around 1900 unless you had written a poem about the Chaudière Falls or Rapids. Who are we to argue with history? In the fall of 2006, one local group (including this author) latched on to the literary significance of the Falls by founding Chaudiere Books (chaudierebooks.com).