

LEARNING MODULE #5

RIDEAU CANAL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Learning Objectives

To Learn:

1. How to use primary sources in many different disciplines of study
2. How to be creative in your research
3. How primary sources are more than the written word
4. How primary sources are historical evidence

Introduction

Most individuals are accustomed to asking a question and then picking up a book or performing a web search to find answers. Important information, however, can be gained by looking at other media as well. Primary source material can take on many different forms, such as maps, drawings, paintings, photographs, and architectural plans. All are included as evidence in the history of the Rideau Canal.

Learning Module

When studying the history of the Rideau Canal, one is likely to encounter plans, maps, and drawings. These tools were used by the Royal Engineers when they were surveying the land, submitting cost estimates, and proposing the engineered structures of the locks and dams that would eventually become the Rideau Canal. After the canal was completed, many plans, maps, and drawings continued to be made as land developers, governors, and citizens sought to document the changing residential, commercial, and geographical landscape of the area. These images are excellent historical evidence of the construction period of the Rideau Canal, and help supplement the many “written word” reports contained in printed accounts, correspondences, and official government documents.



R I Pilkington (ill.). 'Plan shewing the Lot, tinted yellow, applied for by Mr Augustus Keefer'. 1850. The National Archives of the UK. #MPH1/1150/1.

- What do you notice about this map?
 - It is a hand-drawn and watercolour map by Lt. Col. John By, a Royal Engineer. Did you know that the Royal Engineers were trained in the neoclassical style of Beaux-Arts Architecture? This map could be used as a primary source on the Beaux-Arts in an art history study, perhaps one having nothing specifically to do with the Rideau Canal.
 - Notice the handwriting—this map could be also used for a palaeographic study of nineteenth-century English handwriting.
- This map pre-dates modern use of cartography technology: what do you notice about it?
 - Notice the scale of the map and the use of “Chains” in reference to scale. This is an early British survey measurement.
 - The map accurately includes major landmarks.
 - The map is being used to convey information other than geographical information.
 - This map could be used for a study of early Canadian geography or the cartographic practices of the Royal Engineers.