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## WELLAND

Welland is located in the centre of Niagara. Within a half hour or less, residents can travel to Niagara Falls, Niagara-On-The-Lake, St. Catharines, Port Colborne and Buffalo. It has been traditionally known as the place *where rails and water meet*, referring to the railways from Buffalo to Toronto and Southwestern Ontario, and the waterways of Welland Canal and Welland River, which played a great role in the city's development. The city is separated by the Welland River and Welland Canal which links Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

The city is particularly notable for its large francophone population. Welland is one of few communities in southern Ontario where the percentage of Franco-Ontarians exceeds the overall provincial average. This, however, is proportionately speaking, as English still predominates. Many schools, churches, banks, business and other institutions operate or offer services in French.

The city was first settled in 1788 by the United Empire Loyalists. On 19 October 1814, Canadian forces led by George Hay, 8th Marquess of Tweeddale, met an American raiding party, numbering approximately nine hundred, near the eastern edge of the present community during the Battle of Cook's Mills. After an intense skirmish, the Americans retreated to Buffalo, New York. Cook's Mills was the second to last engagement of the War of 1812 on Canadian soil.

The Welland Canal is involved in the history of the area ever since the First Welland Canal was extended to reach Lake Erie in 1833. A wooden aqueduct was built to carry the Welland Canal over the Welland River at what is now downtown Welland, and the area became known as simply Aqueduct. A lock to cross from the canal to the river and vice versa was also built. A small shantytown soon developed around the facility, providing essential services in what was a convenient stop-over location.

The growing town was later named Merrittsville, after William Hamilton Merritt, the initiator of the Welland Canal project. This name is still reflected today in the name of the Merrittville Highway (Niagara Road 50), which served as the primary north-south route in central Niagara before the construction of Highway 406. Welland gained its present name when it was incorporated on 24 July 1858. It became a city in 1917.

In addition to the presence of the canal itself, one of the few railway crossings across the canal was also located near Welland. The two factors contributed greatly to the development of heavy industry in Welland.

The Plymouth Cordage Company was the first major industrial company to open a plant in Welland in 1906. By the 1930s, Welland was an important industry location in the region and was developing rapidly.

In the 1960s, the city was starting to outgrow the canal passing through its core. The Welland By-Pass project, started in 1967 and finished in 1973, provided a new, shorter alignment for the Welland Canal by removing it from downtown Welland to the outskirts of the city. With the completion of the bypass, the east end of Welland (and the former town of Crowland) became a virtual man-made island, lying between the new and old canal channels.

Originally, this was viewed with enthusiasm as the constant traffic on the canal was interfering heavily with transportation within the city. The old alignment of the canal was renamed the Welland Recreational Waterway with the purpose of developing several recreational facilities and tourist attractions along its shores. The original plans called for fishing platforms, water slides, boat rental points, as well as marine and rail historical exhibits.

The effects of the canal relocation were compounded by the gradual, but steady move of industry out of Welland as a trend for global manufacturing was developing. As a result, there was much deterioration in downtown Welland in the years immediately following the project. Many businesses relocated to the north end of the city, where a retail hub was being developed in and around the Seaway Mall. The City of Welland is working to revitalize the downtown core through an ongoing community improvement plan. Integral to the program is the use of incentives to promote revitalization and redevelopment.

.....from Wikipedia











