

The history of the Mississagua Dam is complex and intriguing and difficult to research. Original documentation on the Trent Canal hardly references the reservoir lakes feeder streams and, indeed, does not use the term 'reservoir' until 1911. Government journals and orders-in-council concentrated on the canal dams, and the preeminent book on the canal is not footnoted sufficiently to identify key documentary sources. Add to that the fact that dam management switched government ownership more than once and at one point was managed by two different levels of government.

We know that there have been three dams, one built in the 19th century, one in the 20th and the most recent in the 21st century. The question is: what kind of dams and when were they built and/or repaired? And, was there a fourth dam? My research is somewhat conjecture but suggests that there was, in fact, a fourth dam.

The first dam was built in the 1850's by a lumberman right at the point where the lake flows into the river.. or, the location of the dam that was just replaced., Whether it was Samuel Dickson or W.H.A. Scott is unclear but Scott did own the Scott tract, a huge section of timber land surrounding Lake Catchacoma. This picture shows the dam from the south and the high water suggests it was either just before and immediately after a log run.

So, what are now known as reservoir lakes were created by lumbermen with the sole purpose of floating their logs down otherwise shallow waters. In our case, the shallow water was the Mississagua River, known then as the Mississagua Creek until April 5, 1933. The Mississagua Lake had also changed its name, in 1924 from Gull lake.

Mississagua Creek was called a creek for a reason ... the loggers built their dams, put all of the stop logs in, stored their logs on the ice on the lakes and when the ice came out, took the stop logs out and never replaced them.¹ It's the reason that early maps only show Gull (Mississagua), Ketchum (Catchacoma) and Eagle (Anstruther).

There simply was no consistency in water levels.²³

From the early days of settlement in the area, a dam could perform one or more of three tasks: as an aid to log drives, milling or navigation⁴. But the third did not get much traction until around 1905.

Until then our dam was not associated with the Trent Severn Waterway. The principal focus of the federal government was the main canal system, a political hot potato for decades, as the future of the canal system was debated at length by both Tory and Grit governments.

The lumbermen changed their tune when the lack of water management resulted in extreme lag times in getting their logs to downstream mills. The solution lay in being able to maintain a steady supply of water in the system, even after the spring freshet had passed.⁵

¹ Reference and Guide Book. The Trent Canal. 1911, p. thirty-five, "When the lumbermen would drive out of the various lakes, there would be an abnormal Canal. The stop logs would remain out unnecessary flow of water come down into the main Canal. The stop logs would remain out until the following spring when the same process would be gone through."

² Department of Railways and Canals of Canada, 1911, p. Thirty-four;

³ Angus, James T, A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent Severn Waterway, 1833-1920. P. 118

⁴ Rawling, Bill, "Pulling Between Old and New: Navigation and Power Development on the Trent-Severn, 1860-1911", *Scientia Canadensis*, Volume 1, no. 1, Spring 1989, p. 41

The province had taken over management of these feeder dams in 1873 and for thirty years built and maintained a network of dams on the major streams and rivers that drained into the Kawartha Lakes.⁶ Burnt and Gull rivers are the two referenced most by Robert Angus, the leading authority on the Trent system and although it is not mentioned by name, we can assume that the Mississagua Creek was a third dam simply kept in good repair.. .

Why was the Mississagua dam not given the same focus and priority?

First, the emphasis on lumbering had switched to Haliburton and that is clearly where the provincial priorities for funding lay

Second because the 1911 federal report showed the Mississgua basin as 7,002 acres, considerably smaller than both Burnt and Gull basins.

Third, because logs were now being directed at mills on the lake, principally the Peterborough Lumber Mill on Mississagua Lake.

And what is even more interesting: my review of Harvey Township Council minutes for this period shows that Harvey Township Council never mentions the Mississagua in its minutes; its focus was only on the flooding at Squaw River and Nogies Creek, both entry points into the main canal..

Is it surprising that the focus was more on the canal than the feeder system? The answer is no. There was a clear jurisdictional clash between the province, seeing water as a source of commercial revenue, and the federal government, with a need for greater flow for both navigation and hydro-electrical capacity.

Although in 1882, the federal government began to concentrate more on navigation and, as well, flood management,⁷ its the focus was on the canal simply because it took until 1906 to complete it. Any funds were, literally, channelled into the canal.

It all changed in 1905 when the Dominion Government assumed responsibility for all dams, signalling the first real attempt at water management across the basin; they called some of the dams, "conservation dams". Between 1908 and 1911, they repaired a number of dams, including the dam at Mississagua Creek. In fact, the Peterborough Manufacturer' Association approved of the government's policy to build new dams and rebuild old ones, including Mississagua Creek.⁸

This is where it gets interesting. The *Report of the Superintendent of Railways and Canals* in 1911 identified 4 new dams, one concrete and three timber, none of which was the Mississagua Dam. We know that, in fact, there was work completed on our dam, that it cost \$636.63⁹ and might not have been a replacement but a repair.

In fact, I contend, it was a new build, not a replacement, and it was meant to be used as a conservation dam, not a water management dam. My conclusion is that a concrete slab was

⁵ Angus, *op. cit.* p. 141

⁶ Angus, *ibid*, p. 142

⁷ Rawling, Bill, *Ibid*, , p. 40

⁸ *Ibid*. p. 56. Cites a document in the Library and Archives Canada, RG43, v 1409, file 6387

⁹ *Ibid*, p.57.

placed north of the original timber dam in the 1908-1911 time frame, it had a cement base and consisted of cement blocks. That would have been achievable for just over \$600. And that this dam was used in 1921 as a coffer dam to build the first fully concrete dam.

Drawings courtesy of the Trent Severn Waterway show that there was a cement dam in place in 1921.[reference drawing]s The 1921 dam had a log chute on the east side and the next drawing we have is 1930 showing the configuration of the dam just replaced [reference drawing].

Documentation on the dam that was just removed is scant. In fact, there is far better documentation on the Anstruther Dam (formerly called Eagle Lake Dam until 1953) To understand fully the evolution of the dam would require reading the Superintendent's report from 1905 to 1930 because expenditures were carefully identified and summaries of work on the Trent Canal, including the reservoir dams, explicit. That's a 2019 research project.

So, in conclusion I am inclined to believe that the first timber dam built in 1850 was repaired in 1870 after a severe freshet or spring runoff, replaced by a conservation dam in 1911 positioned north of the timber dam, and then the site of the original dam used to build the first concrete dam in 1921 That dam was repurposed in 1930 and ultimately replaced in 2017..

So, 4 dams, opposing jurisdictions and competing interests. It's an interesting story.