

LEE DICKSON GENEALOGY: Goad Fire Insurance Plans offer insight into the history of buildings

Lee Dickson

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When researching the Toronto City Directories, the Goad Fire Insurance Plans are an essential tool for genealogists.

These large-scale aerial drawings detail outlines of buildings and streets including such information as building use, occupancy, size and construction and so on. The ward name, street property, registered plan, original lot and concession numbers are recorded: such information is essential to the research of land title, deeds, assessments and other related records.

Established in 1875, the Charles E. Goad map making company of Montreal produced their first 1880 Fire Insurance Plan of Toronto. In the form of a volume of numbered plate sheets, these plans were leased to subscribers, specifically, the insurance companies. Over the years, paper overlays pasted on to the sheets reflected construction changes: thus every four to five years a new edition was drawn taking into account the previous amendments. They are a fascinating look into the history of the city's ever changing face.

The City of Toronto Archives' digitized collection contains years between 1880 and 1924, available online at [www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?](http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=98da757ae6b31410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=9f53226b48c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD)

[vgnextoid=98da757ae6b31410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=9f53226b48c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD](http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=98da757ae6b31410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=9f53226b48c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD)

While the image quality is exceptional and plate details can be downloaded, viewing is limited to PCs using a free plug-in in conjunction with Windows and Internet access using Internet Explorer or Firefox.

Fire Insurance Plans for Toronto - www.torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/local-history-genealogy/2012/05/map-it-maps-for-genealogy-and-local-history.html - is a useful guide and a good access point to the Toronto Public Library's collection of digitized Fire Insurance Plans. The plates can be downloaded in JPG format. Identified by neighbourhood name rather than plate number, a great deal of clicking on thumbnails is required to find you want.

The Toronto Reference Library holds the collection. Photocopies are available on the second floor, and/or on microfilm. PDF images can be downloaded using computer/printer scanners. The originals are found in the Baldwin Collection of Canadiana, the Marilyn & Charles Baillie Special Collections Centre, fifth floor.

The Library and Archives Canada has digitized its collection of Goad Fire Insurance Plans. An Archives Search - www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/search/arch_adv - using "fire insurance plan" and TORONTO will help refine the search. The plans, in JPG format, are grouped by volumes and the sheets are identified by plate number.

Nathan Ng's blog "Recursion" includes Goads Atlas of Toronto - www.skritch.blogspot.ca/2012/04/goads-atlas-of-toronto-online.html

Using plans from the Toronto Public Library and the Library and Archives Canada, he has married the better parts of the above-mentioned viewing systems. One can click on an overall city map with inscribed plate numbers (similar to the format used by the City of Toronto Archives, but without the need of a plug-in), which in turn displays the plan sheet in JPG format.

All these sites have their advantages and disadvantages and are well worth investigating.

Toronto Artist Lee Dickson has been a practicing artist since the '70s. She is also a professional general and visual records researcher and a genealogical specialist in Ontario Land Records and the United Empire Loyalists. She can be contacted at www.leedickson.ca and research@leedickson.ca



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