

## **ROCKCLIFFE PARK, OTTAWA, ONTARIO**

This application for designation of Rockcliffe Park as an Historic District of National Significance follows the format established by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in its “Information Requirements for a Nomination”.

Application for National Historic Site Designation

### **1. Identification of the Applicant**

Community Proponent:

Rockcliffe Park Residents Association on behalf of the Village of Rockcliffe Park  
c/o Russ Gibson, President  
rgg@gibsonslaw.com

### **2. Identification of the Subject**

#### ***Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District***

Rockcliffe Park is situated close to the central core of the City of Ottawa and located in the Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward represented by Councillor Rawlson King. While a separate municipality until amalgamation with the City of Ottawa in 2001, it now forms part of the historic fabric of Ottawa. The Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District comprises the entire former village of Rockcliffe Park and is regulated by both municipal and provincial legislation and policies. These include the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014, the City of Ottawa Official Plan (OP), Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act and the Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District Plan (2016). All properties located within the boundaries of the HCD are designated and regulated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

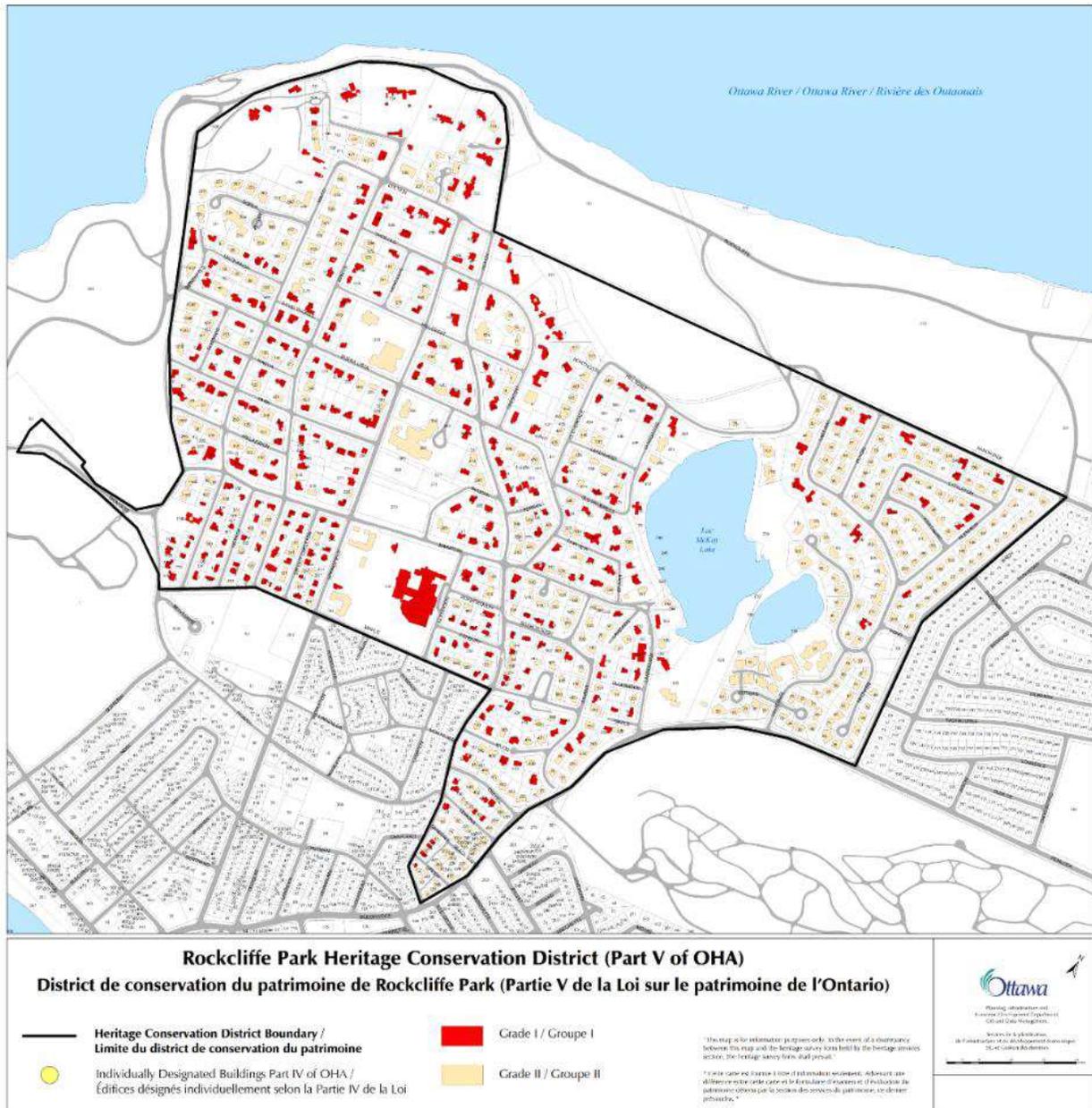
#### **Documentation Provided for the Submission:**

Nomination package accompanied by letter of support from the Community Proponent, the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association

Letter of endorsement from the City of Ottawa (pending)

Statements of support from various citizens of Rockcliffe Park (pending)

## Boundaries of the District



Courtesy of City of Ottawa

## Geographical Coordinates

The geographic coordinates of a central point in Rockcliffe Park are 45° 27' 1.01" N and 75° 40' 41.08" W. Covers an area of 1.765 km<sup>2</sup> (0.681 sq mi).

### 3. | Criteria

#### Criteria for National Historic Significance

**Rockcliffe Park relates in particular to criteria found in HSMBC “Main Criteria and Guidelines”** <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/clmhc-hsmbc/ncp-pcn/evaluation>. An archaeological site, structure, building, group of buildings, district, or cultural landscape of potential national historic significance will:

1a. illustrate an exceptional creative achievement in concept and design, technology and/or planning, or a significant stage in the development of Canada; or

1c. be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with persons who are deemed of national historic importance; or

1d. be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with events that are deemed of national historic importance.”

#### **Rockcliffe Park also relates to the criteria found in section 3.6 of the “Criteria General Guidelines Specific Guidelines for Evaluating Subjects of Potential National Historic Significance” (2017):**

*Historic districts are geographically defined areas which create a special sense of time and place through buildings, structures and open spaces modified by human use and which are united by past events and use and/or aesthetically, by architecture and plan. Historic districts constitute appropriate subjects for commemoration, and those of national significance will include one or more of the following:*

1b) a group of buildings, structures and open spaces, none of which may be of individual historical significance, but which together comprise an outstanding example of structures of technological or social significance;

1c) a group of buildings, structures and open spaces which share uncommonly strong associations with individuals, events or themes of national significance.

2) above all, an historic district of national significance must have a “sense of history”: intrusive elements must be minimal, and the district’s historic characteristics must predominate and set it apart from the area that immediately surrounds it.

# **THE VILLAGE OF ROCKCLIFFE PARK, A HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT.**

## **SUBMISSION TO THE HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD FOR DESIGNATION AS AN HISTORIC DISTRICT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

- I Summary Statement
- II Current Status
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- IV The significance of Rockcliffe Park and its designer
- V Bibliography
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\* *Rockcliffe Park* in italics refers to the parkland adjacent to the Village of Rockcliffe Park. It was once part of the larger Mackay Estate but is now administered by the National Capital Commission.

### **I SUMMARY STATEMENT**

The Village of Rockcliffe Park is a residential neighbourhood located in the City of Ottawa, Ontario. A planned community designed in 1864 by civil engineer Thomas C. Keefer, it illustrates an exceptional creative achievement in concept, design, and planning in the development of Canada, is associated with a person of national historic significance, and is linked to the important event of Confederation. It has ties to Canada's political, cultural, judicial and scientific developments. Rockcliffe Park possesses a high degree of integrity and still features many of the key elements associated with Keefer's highly innovative design. It has benefitted from the legacy of successive generations of residents whose stewardship has helped to ensure its park-like setting and its distinct cultural heritage landscape. In 1997, the entire community of Rockcliffe Park (and with its pre-amalgamation boundaries) was designated a Heritage Conservation District in recognition of its distinguishing feature, its landscape and those related qualities that clearly distinguish it from the area that immediately surrounds it and the careful planning of the public spaces and corridors. It is a community of "surprising visual integrity and sophistication" owing to a combination of planning, architecture and landscape; the result is a significant collection of buildings in a very rich landscaped setting.<sup>1</sup>

From the earliest days, Rockcliffe Park has provided a home for the individuals associated with Ottawa's role as a capital city. It is also a rare example of an innovative Romantic suburb of the mid-nineteenth century, among a handful of surviving planned communities of its type in North America (the most notable being Llewellyn Park, New Jersey and Riverside Park in Illinois.) It still retains key design principles: the curvilinear street plan with no curbs or sidewalks, respect for the natural topography, varied and irregular lot patterns, houses of different architectural styles set discretely within properties where greenscape predominates, associated public park land, and the ideal of an entirely residential community, still upheld today with the absence of

any type of business, store, or manufacturing. The present Village is a distinctive community of predominately private homes within a park setting, together with only schools and a community centre – true to the spirit of Keefer’s original vision.

## CURRENT STATUS 2020

This submission embraces the entire Village of Rockcliffe Park with its original pre-amalgamation boundaries as established in 1908 and confirmed in its 1997 designation as a heritage conservation district. The Village is located 3.2 km northeast of the city center and occupies an area of 1.76 km<sup>2</sup>. Although close to the city’s urban core, Rockcliffe Park has a distinct rural setting. It consists almost entirely of residential and park land uses, with predominately single-family homes and a handful of institutional buildings. It was a separate municipality until amalgamated with the City of Ottawa in 2001. Situated in the Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward, it has a population of close to 2,000 with circa 785 dwellings on an area of 1.76 km<sup>2</sup>. The population density is very low at 1094.7 persons per km<sup>2</sup>.

Rockcliffe Park is bounded by the Sir George-Étienne Cartier Parkway, Hillsdale Road, and Sandridge Road on the north, by Lisgar Road on the west, by Maple Lane, Beechwood Avenue and Hemlock Road on the south, and Birch Avenue on the east (Figures 1 and 2). Outside the boundaries, Rockcliffe is ringed on the north and northwest by the Ottawa River and the NCC-owned parkland also known as *Rockcliffe Park*. Rideau Hall, home to the Governor General of Canada, lies on the western boundary and although outside the Village provides a compatible gateway. Beechwood Cemetery on the southeast and other park areas such as The Rockeries and the Mile Circle provide similar natural areas of green.

The Village retains many important natural and built components from the 1860s. The road network is the most tangible example. Although incrementally expanded over time to 64 roadways, the original road pattern of 1864 is still discernible and, most important, still functions as it was intended. The lack of sidewalks (with a few exceptions in school areas) and the strong verge coming right to the roadway add to the effect. The Village’s rich foliage and abundant tree cover contrast with adjacent communities, a contrast most evident in comparison to the grid-iron plan of neighbouring New Edinburgh, originally built around a mill complex. The neighbouring communities of Vanier, Manor Park, and Lindenlea likewise contrast with the heavily-treed oasis of Rockcliffe. (Figure 3 provides dramatic evidence of this.)

Within the Village boundaries are McKay Lake, formerly known as Hemlock Lake, and the adjacent Pond formed from a quarry (Figures 4 and 5). An historic stone bridge crosses the outlet of the lake that drains down to the Ottawa River. There are formal park areas: the Jubilee Gardens and the Village Green (with an outdoor skating rink) and the Caldwell-Carver Conservation Area bordering the lake. The sole institutional buildings within the Village are three schools (Rockcliffe Park Public School, Ashbury College, and Elmwood School) and a combined community centre and library. Private residences of national importance such as Stornoway, the residence of the Leader of the Opposition, and many diplomatic residences reflect Ottawa’s role as a capital city and express its continued link to symbols of government and ceremonial offices. It continues to provide a suitable environment for most of Ottawa’s

diplomatic corps, enhancing Canada's presence on the international stage and reflecting the national and international functions of a capital city.

The former Village boundaries, established in 1908 and in place until amalgamation with the City of Ottawa in 2001, are still reflected in its heritage conservation district designation. The major boundaries are now evident thanks to a community initiative that placed plaques inset on glacial boulders at major gateways into the Village (Figure 6). Other roadside markers indicate the geological history of the area. Most of the original street names are unchanged, including those honouring the Keefer family (Thorold, Kinzua, Coltrin, Mackinnon), those named for various governors general and thus symbolizing the close relationship with Rideau Hall (Minto, Buchan, Lansdowne) or those highlighting the tree population (Acacia, Beechwood, Oakhill, Hemlock) or schools (Ashbury and Elmwood).<sup>2</sup> Some of the very first roads named by Keefer have a possible link to American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (see page 6).

The recurrent use of low stone walls (with dry stone or rounded glacial boulders often found on site) and flagstone walkways add to the informality and naturalness (Figures 7 and 8). Cedar hedges help to demarcate properties rather than hard landscaping such as wrought iron fencing. Retaining walls between house lots or along streets are common in steeply-sloping areas. Tree-lined streets, many not meeting at right angles, in some cases exhibit the signature triangles promoted by Frederick Law Olmsted.

Rockcliffe Park exhibits distinctive elements not only in the subdivision plan and landscape architecture but also in its domestic architecture. The housing stock includes a variety of revival and modernist styles (most notably Tudor and Gothic Revival) and exhibits a consistently high degree of quality in design and construction. It spans 130 years (from the 1880s to 2020) with the oldest house being Crichton Lodge, built by MacKay family members circa 1885 and now the Norwegian ambassador's residence. The Manor House, originally dating to 1837 and extensively modified, became Keefer's own home and is now home to the Papal Nuncio, the Holy See's representative to Canada (Figure 9).

Many prominent architects, both national and international, are represented and include Allan Keefer, Werner Noffke, A.J. Hazelgrove, Hart Massey, and A. J. Ames. Some homes have received recognition or awards, most notably the Hart Massey House on Lansdowne Road North, designated a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 2018 (Figure 10).<sup>3</sup> Individual properties may be outstanding examples of landscape design or the work of master landscape designers such as Frederick Todd (see 9 Crescent Road). Others built in the early years of the Village's history are still extant (see 245 Sylvan Avenue, built 1909 Figure 11). Landscape architect Humphrey Carver (1902-1995), a long-time Village resident, contributed to a deeper understanding of Rockcliffe Park, characterizing it as a "place apart" and defining a number of sub-areas that are still apparent today, each with its own distinctive character and architecture (see Carver's *The Cultural Landscape of Rockcliffe Park Village* 1985.)

In 1997, the entire municipality of Rockcliffe Park with its original borders dating to 1908 was designated a Heritage Conservation District and a district plan was prepared at that time by conservation architect Julian Smith and historian Victoria Angel (*Village of Rockcliffe Park*

*Heritage Conservation District*, Ottawa. October 1997).<sup>4</sup> The management guidelines of the 1997 study were updated in 2016 although the original Reasons for Designation remain the same.<sup>5</sup> They are:

- The significance of its original design intentions;
- The continuity in its evolution;
- The richness of its current urban condition;
- Its relationship with its wider setting, and
- The importance of its historical associations.

In their report, Smith & Angel inventoried the defining landscape features that remain from Keefer's original plan: a consistent emphasis on village character within a larger urban setting deliberately curved roads without curbs or sidewalks, and the careful planning of the public spaces and corridors. It is a community of "surprising visual integrity and sophistication" owing to a combination of planning, architecture and landscape; the result is a significant collection of buildings in a very rich landscaped setting.

At present, two key organizations, the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association (RPRA) and the Friends of the Village of Rockcliffe Park Foundation, provide an effective voice for Rockcliffe residents and for preservation of its unique qualities. The evolutionary process is still in progress, with Keefer's planning principles serving as a point of reference for subsequent development. Although augmented internally over time, his original plan remains intact and is clearly evident today. It displays the soundness of his vision but also the active participation of residents whose high degree of participation has helped to preserve and promote these important cultural assets.

### **III Historical Development**

Rockcliffe Park's historic characteristics prevail and still have a strong sense of history. In 1864, Thomas Keefer created a new type of suburban village to known as Rockcliffe Park. It was carved out of the MacKay Estate, the 1,100-acre domain belonging to his father-in-law, Thomas McKay. A land owner and early industrialist, McKay had amassed a considerable fortune from work on the Rideau Canal and embarked on a number of enterprises including a mill complex at New Edinburgh and the building of Rideau Hall in 1838, which through the active negotiations of Keefer would be purchased by the federal government as a residence for the governor general.

As executor to the MacKay Estate, Keefer was tasked with saving the family fortunes following the death of his father-in-law in 1855. He began to sell off the estate property. Using his skills as a civil engineer and surveyor, Keefer divided up the land into "Park, Villa and Village" lots (Figures 12 and 13). The smaller Village lots were set aside for the mill complex of New Edinburgh. The various Park lots along the Ottawa River were earmarked for parkland; and the spacious Villa lots (200 by 200 ft.) would be carved out of the Rockcliffe lands, presaging the future growth of the Village. Keefer had a particular vision for this rocky and hilly land, deemed unsuitable for little else but grazing cattle. He prepared a topographical map of the estate indicating over 40 villa sites and highlighted their proximity to the attractions of nearby Ottawa— the steamboat wharf, the New Edinburgh mills and stores, and the Parliament Buildings, which officially opened in 1866. Keefer was helping to prepare Ottawa for its new

role as the permanent capital of the Province of Canada and for the imminent wave of civil servants, politicians, and merchants who, he anticipated, would swell the ranks of new home-buyers in post-Confederation Ottawa.

Rockcliffe Park began to take shape as a suburb. Keefer stated that it was to be exclusively residential; no industrial, commercial or retail uses were allowed. Buyers had to agree “not to erect any manufactory or tavern upon the Estate, and not to place any out-building upon the front of any avenue.”<sup>6</sup> They were required to improve their property and to “plant the road fronts” within twelve months. (Tree planting was a requirement for purchase and subject to financial penalties.) In agreeing to these conditions upon purchase, prospective buyers were faced with a new concept, one that called for restrictions but also guaranteed a certain way of life. Very few would challenge the conditions, as seen throughout the history of Rockcliffe Park.

The most enduring design principle left from Keefer’s time and the hallmark of these types of innovative suburbs is the road layout, which often required the design expertise of a master landscape architect or engineer. Keefer used his skills as a civil engineer to lay out a network of roads and avenues, with the avoidance of right angles where possible.<sup>7</sup> The curving roads in what is now parkland of the adjacent *Rockcliffe Park* were equally part of his plan and provided the pleasing drives that were touted to would-be buyers. An 1866 map (revised 1886) noted close to 20 thoroughfares in Rockcliffe Park and three in the parkland of *Rockcliffe Park* (Figures 14 and 15). This was a new type of plan in contrast to the prevailing form of design, the standard rectilinear grid plan, which was intended to maximize the developer’s profit. The grid pattern of New Edinburgh, in stark contrast to the flowing, serpentine lines of Rockcliffe Park, demonstrates the transition that had taken place from the earlier part of the century when mill owners like Thomas McKay lived close to their mill operations.

In Canada, a few mid-century subdivision projects might have provided cursory inspiration for Keefer but none had the sophisticated breadth of his Rockcliffe Park plan. The subdivision of Montreal’s old family estates – McGill, Mactavish, and Redpath’s “Terrace Bank” – pointed the way for country living close to the city core and to the use of deed restrictions.<sup>8</sup> In Toronto, an 1854 plan for the “Moss Park Estate” featured two curved streets, noted as being “rare” for the time.<sup>9</sup> Comparisons are often made to Rosedale, which began as a small-scale subdivision known as “Rose-Park” to develop the Jarvis estate in Toronto in 1854. Rosedale evidently was the first area in Canada to have curved streets (Figure 16). Its winding, serpentine roads (four in all) were similar to Rockcliffe Park’s but it was not associated with any particular individual nor any single cohesive philosophy or design.<sup>10</sup> In fact, there was no vision beyond the road structure and it evidently had little, if any, of the philosophy developed by Keefer that defined these communities; there were no restrictions or covenants (such as compulsory tree-planting). A 1908 curvilinear plan devised by the Olmsted Brothers for Uplands in Oak Bay, British Columbia, cited as the first “large-scale Canadian subdivision to break away entirely from ... the rectangular grid,” employed a concept found in many North America subdivisions by that time.<sup>11</sup>

As is evident, there were few, if any, examples in Canada that could have provided a model for Rockcliffe Park at that time.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Keefer likely looked for inspiration to the very first Romantic suburbs beginning to appear in the United States in the 1850-60s. Keefer spent time in Boston and New York in the early 1850s, perhaps learned of these new communities and was likely the first to directly import the concept to Canada. There were earlier prototypes: Glendale, Ohio (1851) said to be the first planned subdivision in America and “laid out according to the topography”<sup>13</sup> and Lake Forest, Illinois (1857) which featured a park-like plan of curvilinear streets and irregular plots.

There were others as well but Rockcliffe Park’s design, in particular, points to a direct link to Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, regarded as the first romantically-planned suburb in the United States, and also to Riverside Park outside of Chicago.<sup>14</sup> Remarkably, Rockcliffe Park pre-dates Riverside Park by five years. Llewellyn Park Historic District (1855) in West Orange, New Jersey is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Created in 1857 by Llewellyn Haskell and Alexander Jackson Davis<sup>15</sup> and located twelve miles west of New York City, it was planned for people doing business in New York but “desirous of a country lifestyle.” Like Rockcliffe it was entirely residential.<sup>16</sup>

Llewellyn Park (Figures 17 and 18) was not simply a speculative venture but marked the first attempt to plan a suburban development “with any kind of deliberation around what might be called a philosophy.”<sup>17</sup> There was an appreciation of the land as more than a commodity.<sup>18</sup> Although influenced by English landscape traditions, Llewellyn Park was a uniquely North American response to the topography and was located on a rocky mountainside, deemed unsuitable for any purpose including agricultural. It might have been these similar circumstances that piqued Keefer’s interest. He, too, had been faced with the prospect of developing rocky ground with little economic viability. There were other similarities, including the lithographed promotional map and literature<sup>19</sup> and the design featuring a layout of curvilinear roads and a common natural park, called the Ramble. Deed restrictions controlled architecture and landscaping, and banned all industrial, commercial trade, and business uses.<sup>20</sup>

Riverside Historic District (1869), now a National Historic Landmark, is often cited as a very early precedent in American suburban planning, presaging the master-planned communities of 100 years later.<sup>21</sup> Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and architect Calvert Vaux (Figure 19), it is recognized as the first clearly documented example in the United States where the principles of landscape architecture were applied to the subdivision and development of real estate. Keefer’s concept for Rockcliffe Park provides a direct link to the planning vision of Frederick Law Olmsted, who is regarded as the America’s first landscape architect.<sup>22</sup>

All of these Romantic suburbs, including Rockcliffe Park, had common features that set them apart. First, they were more than simply a real estate development and offered a way of life that was guaranteed. More than isolated country retreats, they were a unique combination of city and country. The ideal of suburban life in a parklike setting provided the best of city and country living while eliminating the disadvantages of both. It was not entirely urban nor entirely rural thus “having the advantages of both without the ills of either.”<sup>23</sup> They provided seclusion without

isolation. A common factor in the rise of these suburbs was access to convenient transportation. Keefer, too, set up the first transportation link to bring visitors out to his new park and to carry commuters to his Villa lots in Rockcliffe. He served as President of the Ottawa City Passenger Railway, a horse-drawn railway begun in 1870.

In apparent homage to Olmsted, some of the first road names Keefer assigned to his new community – Prospect, Buena Vista, Riverside and Mariposa – have direct reference to Olmsted’s career. Prospect Road (now Old Prospect) may simply denote its “prospect” over McKay Lake but consider Olmsted & Vaux’s “Prospect Park” in Brooklyn (1866). Buena Vista Road recalls Olmsted’s proposed pleasure ground in San Francisco, known as “Buena Vista” (1866). Riverside Road, the now-abandoned drive in Keefer’s own pleasure ground in *Rockcliffe Park* brings to mind Olmsted’s community of Riverside Park, for which he is most famous. Mariposa Avenue has a more intriguing connection to Olmsted. From 1863-1865, Olmsted was superintendent of a gold mining venture in California at the Mariposa Estate, previously owned by John Fremont (through the active intervention of Olmsted, the estate became the nucleus of Yosemite Park, North America’s first national park.) Interestingly, Keefer was also offered an assignment at Mariposa around this same time.<sup>24</sup> Possibly Olmsted, or Fremont, sought Keefer’s renowned expertise in municipal waterworks. Little known is that Olmsted was hindered by an inadequate water supply at Mariposa as well as a lack of finances. Therefore, Keefer was no doubt aware of Olmsted and perhaps had closer ties than previously thought.

Like Olmsted and Vaux, Keefer knew that the topography of the site must dictate the road layout for Rockcliffe Park. Thus, the design of the roads winds around knolls, depressions, even valuable trees, often avoiding uses of right angle intersections.<sup>25</sup> The curving streets and avoidance of right angles at intersections formed what were called “triangles,” a device actively employed by Olmsted at Riverside Park (he used 46 triangles in all). The most prominent of the triangular islands that appeared on Keefer’s 1864 plan is the junction of Princess Avenue and Lisgar Road. Strategically placed at an important gateway to the Village, it was removed by the City of Ottawa a few years ago. Another at Mariposa Avenue at Springfield Road also was removed. Olmsted advocated the use of native plants over imported species and the use of cedar hedges to demarcate boundary lines instead of fences. Keefer, too, showed a preference for indigenous plantings well adapted to the climate. These are still key features of the Rockcliffe Park landscape.

Another signature feature of these Romantic suburbs was the creation of public parkland as an adjunct to the residential areas. Olmsted & Vaux advocated the reservation of public space to safeguard the best scenery and to be kept forever free of buildings. At Riverside, Olmsted set aside 40% of his plan to public park land. Haskell reserved the most picturesque land for use as a “pleasure ground” at Llewellyn Park. Keefer, too, devoted a generous portion of the best lands on the Mackay Estate to create a “pleasure resort” at *Rockcliffe Park*, eventually selling it to the City of Ottawa in 1897.<sup>26</sup> Another common feature of these suburbs (and which made them so successful) was the emphasis placed on cooperation and on tacit approval for covenants and restrictions. In exchange for giving up some of their freedoms, residents were guaranteed a certain lifestyle. These restrictions “legitimized the idea that private owners would surrender some of their individual property rights for the common good.”<sup>27</sup> In Rockcliffe Park’s history,

there have been few challenges to the notion of a purely residential neighbourhood and to other limitations imposed by later by-laws.

As early as 1895, Rockcliffe Park was listed as a separate suburb in the Ottawa City Directory and called “a private park ... with suburban residences.” Land sales on the MacKay Estate were carefully controlled by the Keefer and MacKay families. As the largest property holders, they were aware of the need to sell land but they also wished to retain the park-like setting. Until the 1930s, three generations of Keefers figured prominently in the Village. They oversaw the estate and commissioned some of its signature Gothic Revival residences. Keefer’s son, Charles, also a noted civil engineer, lived in Rockcliffe Park and served as a Village trustee. A grandson, the MIT-trained architect Allan Keefer, would directly import (on a smaller scale) the styles of American tastemakers and their country estates, particularly those of New England. Many of his homes for the industrial elite, including the Japanese Ambassador’s residence (Waterstone, for Frederic Bronson), are now preserved as ambassadorial residences.

Rockcliffe Park became a Police Village in 1908 and Village trustees continued the tradition of excluding businesses, allowing only single detached dwellings. Rockcliffe’s boundaries were set down at that time. In 1922, trustees moved from the era of restrictive covenants to by-laws, banning all commercial pursuits, however small.<sup>28</sup> In 1911, New York investors were eying Rockcliffe Park as a “model” community. “Great care was being exercised in the planning of the various properties and the placing of proper building restrictions on all streets.”<sup>29</sup> The incorporation of the Village as a municipality in 1926 brought more restrictions. The Village was even made a Crown Game Preserve in 1929 to protect birds, mammals, flowers, and trees and to prevent hunting (Figure 20).

Following the Second World War, Rockcliffe Park continued the single-family-home policy. The first Official Plan of 1972 reinforced the concept of a “residential neighbourhood of tree-lined roadways and single-family houses, set in a well-preserved natural landscape” and continued the exclusion of industry, stores, arterial roads, and apartment buildings.<sup>30</sup> At the initiative of Rockcliffe Park residents a combined Community Hall and Library (Figure 21) was completed in 1974. In the tradition of their predecessors, Village residents have remained instrumental in preserving Rockcliffe Park’s greatest hallmark, its park-like setting. With amalgamation in 2001 it has been left to City of Ottawa officials (along with input from the Residents Association) to continue these key ideals and to enforce the provisions of its Heritage Plan under the Ontario Heritage Act, with varying success. The fact that the general pattern of Rockcliffe Park remains strongly intact is, in large part, thanks to Keefer’s foresight in planning a lasting framework for the Village.

#### **IV SIGNIFICANCE OF ROCKCLIFFE PARK AND ITS DESIGNER**

##### **Thomas Keefer: a person of National Historic Significance**

Thomas Coltrin Keefer (1821-1915) was designated a person of national historic significance in 1938 for his achievements as a hydraulic engineer and for his design of the Hamilton Water Works, built by the City of Hamilton in 1856-9. Keefer was also a civil engineer, a land surveyor, and a cadastral surveyor (dealing with real property boundaries and the legal creation

of properties). He had a practical knowledge of mills, canals, railway surveying, navigation, water power, land management, and early conservation.<sup>31</sup> With his engineering skills, his familiarity with railways and their anticipated impact on society, as well as his visionary outlook, Keefer brought an impressive skill set to work in designing and laying out Rockcliffe Park.

Keefer was born in Thorold, Upper Canada in 1821. His father had come from New Jersey in the 1790s and rose to become the chairman of the Welland Canal Company. Keefer apprenticed on the Erie and Welland Canals and gained prominence in 1850 through his publication of *Philosophy of Railways*, a visionary essay promoting railways. His municipal water works, particularly at Hamilton, Montreal and Ottawa, established his reputation as a hydraulics engineer and highlighted his personal crusade for clean drinking water when it was deemed unfashionable and unrealistic.

Due to his engineering profession, Keefer led a cosmopolitan life and was in touch with leading thinkers and cutting-edge technologies of the day. He often travelled to the United States and Britain. In the 1850s, he was involved with the U.S-Canada trade reciprocity and was appointed a commissioner to the first international exhibition in England in 1851, followed by the 1862 World Exhibition in London and the 1878 Paris Exhibition. A founding member and first president of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, he was also president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and made a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1890 (and its president 1898-99.)<sup>32</sup>

One example of Keefer's visionary thinking was his 1859 plan to transform the rugged upper portions of Montreal's Mount Royal into a public park.<sup>33</sup> Although never achieved, his proposal presages a remarkably similar approach taken 15 years later by Frederick Law Olmsted when developing that same Mount Royal mountainside. By the early 1860s, it is apparent that Keefer had come in contact with the new and progressive design philosophies present at Llewellyn Park and with Olmsted's ground-breaking achievements at Central Park and his forthcoming Riverside Park outside Chicago. He was probably the first to bring these to Canada.

### **Significance of Rockcliffe Park**

Rockcliffe Park illustrates an exceptional creative achievement in concept, design, and planning in the development of Canada. As a creative achievement in design it is one of the earliest, and most successful, examples of a planned community and may be among a few surviving examples of its kind in Canada from the nineteenth century – a purely residential suburb with all the hallmarks of what were termed Romantic or Picturesque suburbs. It falls within a pattern of Romantic suburbs that arose in the 1850s and 1860s in the United States. The romantic landscape movement, often called the Picturesque, provided a compelling image of life in a semi-rural village where dwellings in a host of revival styles blended into a horticulturally rich, naturalistic landscape.<sup>34</sup> The use of the term “romantic” refers to an informal, naturalistic and, above all, picturesque, manner of laying out grounds.<sup>35</sup> Its origins can be traced to the eighteenth-century suburbs of London and to the Romantic landscape movement of the mid-nineteenth century in the United States.

As well, Rockcliffe Park has strong links to a theme of national importance, the idea of Confederation and the creation of Ottawa as the nation's capital. Keefer had envisioned Rockcliffe Park as a suitable place for those moving to the capital. With its informal country atmosphere, large lots and privacy, Rockcliffe Park eventually became the neighbourhood of choice for diplomats and for others coming to Ottawa to work in government, agencies, commissions, boards, crown corporations, as well as in cultural institutions, cutting-edge science and conservation, or influencing Canada's role on the international stage. Rockcliffe Park grew hand in hand with Ottawa, becoming a microcosm of the capital at large. One hundred and fifty-five years later it continues to serve that role.

Capital cities normally have political, administrative, cultural, and symbolic roles that differ from other major cities. At the same time, they must provide appropriate and agreeable surroundings for those coming to live and work. Capital cities are doubly bound "to be good physical environments where people live out ordinary lives, as well as symbolically rich cities that capture the qualities a state wishes to portray to the wider world."<sup>36</sup> As a unique neighbourhood within the capital, Rockcliffe Park has long attracted civil servants, heads of agencies and politicians – including prime ministers and ministers. They worked for institutions that help to define the country: the House of Commons, Bank of Canada, National Research Council, the CBC, or Canada Mortgage and Housing. Some were close to power in the Prime Minister's Office and Privy Council; or in External Affairs (now Global Affairs Canada), Finance, and the Geological Survey of Canada.

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rockcliffe has attracted a wide range of government specialists who pushed the frontiers of scientific knowledge in Canada, of exploration (especially the Geological Survey), culture, law, and community planning. There were notable civil servants such as Sir Arthur Doughty, Charles Camsell, J.H. Parkin of the National Research Council, Humphrey Carver, and scientists such Dr. Gerhard Herzberg.<sup>37</sup> The famous group of mandarins under O.D. Skelton - Norman Robertson, Brooke Claxton, A.D.P. Heeney, and Graham Towers guided Canadian policy-making and led the country through significant developments – the Second World War, the creation of NATO, the Cold War, and Canada's growing acceptance on the international stage.

This collection of colleagues and friends dominated Canadian policy-making from the Depression to the 1960s. Some made the leap into politics, like Pickersgill and Pearson. Others, such as Donald Gordon, Dana Wilgress, Alex Skelton, John Read, A. D. P. Heeney, Wynne Plumptre, John Deutsch, Escott Reid, and Hume Wrong, were leaders of this generation, known today as the "golden age of the mandarins." Numerous politicians have been well represented, as well as former prime ministers who owned homes in Rockcliffe, including Lester Pearson, John Diefenbaker, Joe Clark, and John Turner.<sup>38</sup> As the host for national institutions (museums, arts and cultural centres) for which the federal government is responsible, Rockcliffe Park has attracted individuals such as Hamilton Southam, who have been active in these spheres.

In summary, Rockcliffe Park has a strong sense of history, intrusive elements are minimal, and the district's historic characteristics set it apart from the area immediately surrounding it.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The original Heritage Conservation District Plan was updated with a revised heritage district plan in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Edmond, *Rockcliffe Park. A History of the Village*. Ottawa, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> The 2018 designation of the Massey House by Parks Canada reads in part: “an iconic example of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modernism in residential architecture in Canada, and a Canadian example of International Style because of its sensitivity to its natural surroundings,”

<sup>4</sup> Julian Smith & Associates and Victoria Angel, *Village of Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District*, Ottawa October 1997, a study commissioned to determine if the entire Village of Rockcliffe Park should be designated a Heritage Conservation District, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> City of Ottawa, *Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District Plan*. 2016. <https://rockcliffepark.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Final-2016-RPHCDPlan.pdf>. In 2016, the City of Ottawa approved a revised heritage conservation district plan that addresses the conservation of existing houses, the issues of demolition and new house construction, and preservation of the public realm and natural features such as the rich tree canopy and existing pattern of lot sizes.

<sup>6</sup> “All purchasers will be bound” Keefer wrote in his prospectus, “to enclose their lots and plant the road fronts of the same within twelve months after purchase and to covenant not to erect any manufactory or tavern upon the Estate and not to place any out-building upon the front of any avenue.. or erect anything objectionable or inconsistent with the maintenance as a park for private residencies.” See Edmond, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> As Keefer wrote, the roads “have been made as much like private avenues as possible, by preserving the trees, and by adopting curved lines; thus they convert the greater portion of the Estate into a large park, with a pleasing drive...which will be increased.” See Edmond, p. 20

<sup>8</sup> Roderick Macleod, “The Road to Terrace Bank: Land Capitalization, Public Space, and the Redpath Family Home, 1837-1861.” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Volume 14, Number 1, 2003. p. 166. When developing “Terrace Bank” on Mount Royal, John Redpath, a former business partner of Thomas McKay, proved a master at selling a vision of suburban life. Like Keefer, he was developing his own land but, unlike Keefer, employed the quadrilateral street plan then in favour. Redpath adopted tree-planting and owners were enjoined to set houses well back from the street, to build open rail fences (and only this type), and to refrain from placing any outbuildings, stables etc. on the fronts of the lots.

<sup>9</sup> Civil engineer John O. Browne’s 1854 plan for suburban Villa lots at the 100-acre Park lot owned by William Allan, the “Moss Park Estate,” featured two curved streets, Wilton and Wellesley Crescents.

<sup>10</sup> Rosedale was the product of many developers and countless subdivisions over many decades as it grew outwards (between 1854 to 1910 twenty-nine subdivision plans were registered by parties involved in speculative building).

<sup>11</sup> See Larry McCann, *Imagining Uplands, John Olmsted’s Masterpiece of Residential Design*. Brighton Press Victoria. 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Rockcliffe is often compared to Wychwood Park, a planned artists colony built 25 years later and now a heritage conservation district. It was by no means novel for the time and did not embody the principle of city and country life. Thus, there was no need for transportation linking it to the city, a hallmark of the other Romantic suburbs. Its covenants were primarily aimed at controlling the architectural conformity of the housing stock, that being Arts and Crafts. The landscape design reflected the “natural landscape movement” and design principles of the later 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, namely William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll.

<sup>13</sup> John Archer, “Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 42, no. 2 (1983). pp. 139-156. The original plan included curvilinear streets that followed the contours of the land and a 200-acre subdivision designed by a civil engineer in 1851 adjacent to commuter rail service to Cincinnati. <http://www.glendaleohio.org/history.html>. See also U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Bulletin, *Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places*, 2002.

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<sup>14</sup> Keefer also might have become aware of Llewellyn Park from articles highlighting this new type of community, among them an 1859 supplement to Downing's *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* or an 1857 article that appeared in *The Crayon*, an influential magazine of the arts in America.

<sup>15</sup> Davis was the author of *Rural Residences* (1838), a popular book of house patterns for architects and builders. His ideas were influenced by his friend and frequent collaborator, Andrew Jackson Downing, whose *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) were the most widely read books on domestic design of the era.

<sup>16</sup> In 1855, a group of well-to-do businessmen hired an architectural firm to design a rural retreat, Llewellyn Park, near Orange, New Jersey. This was a planned community with an imitation English gate lodge that marked the entrance to a 400-acres development, complete with curved roads and hidden drives, and fifty beautifully landscaped and sited houses. *The American Family Home*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Henderson, "Llewellyn Park, Suburban Idyll", *Journal of Canadian Garden History*, vol. 7, No. 3, p. 221. See also Steven Conn and Max Page, ed., *Building the Nation: Americans Write About Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Landscape*. Univ. Pennsylvania, 2003. p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Estate managers had firm directions to go around trees when building roads.

<sup>19</sup> Advertisements for Llewellyn Park were remarkably similar: "Country Homes for City People" compared to Rockcliffe's "City Water and Country Air."

<sup>20</sup> David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America*, John Hopkins University Press, 1988. p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> Statement of Significance (as of designation August 29, 1970) for Riverside Park reads: "Designed in 1868-69 by Olmsted and Vaux, Riverside was the first planned model community in the country arranged so that open spaces and parkland would be a part of urban living."

<sup>22</sup> Martha Edmond, *Rockcliffe Park*, op.cit.

<sup>23</sup> Kyle Boot, *Cultural Landscape Report of Irvington*.

<sup>24</sup> As written in 1865, Keefer "recently declined an offer from Major-General Fremont to go to California, with a munificent salary, on a professional engagement in connection with the Mariposa mines." See Henry Morgan, *Sketches of Celebrated Canadians and Persons Connected with Canada* Montreal, 1865, p. X.

<sup>25</sup> As Calvert Vaux wrote, "We want far less formality and restraint in the plan of our new villages and the roads should wind in graceful, easy curves, and be laid out in accordance with the formation of the ground and the natural features of interest. A winding road is far more attractive and agreeable than the harsh, straight line ... scored like a railway track clear through the undulating surface of the property... A single existing tree ought often to be the all-sufficient reason for slightly diverting the line of a road..." See Calvert Vaux, "Hints for Country House Builders" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1855 Vol. 11, p. 766.

<sup>26</sup> *Rockcliffe Park* was later turned over to the Ottawa Improvement Commission (NCC). In 1948, a proposal to build a "Royal Residence" in the parkland of *Rockcliffe Park* for King George VI (to occupy during visits to Canada) was dismissed by City of Ottawa officials. Selling this land for private purposes, they suddenly realized, contravened T. C. Keefer's original stipulation that the land was intended for park purposes only and for "the enjoyment of the public."

<sup>27</sup> Marc Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning*. New York, 2002, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> By-law 23 restricted land use to "detached private residences, churches, schools, seminaries of learning and ... outbuildings" (other than the three existing schools.)

<sup>29</sup> *Ottawa Journal*, 15 May 1911, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Edmond, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Edmond, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. IV. "Thomas Coltrin Keefer".

<sup>33</sup> *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY). 24 March 1859. Keefer's plan for Mount Royal included a grand boulevard and a 50-mile carriage road to the top of the mountain to capture the "magnificent views" over the city and thus secure "to Montreal and to Canada a park and a drive which cannot be equalled by any city in America." He also had hoped to include a mountain park, water reservoir, and observatory.

<sup>34</sup> See John Archer, "Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb," *Journal of Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 2, May 1983; Mary Corbin Sies, "The City Transformed," *Journal of Urban History* 14, no. 1 November 1987, pp. 81-111.

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<sup>35</sup> Archer, p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> Enid Slack and Rupak Chattopadhyay, *Finance and Governance of Capital Cities in Federal Systems*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> See Martha Edmond, Chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>38</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935-1957*. University Toronto Press. 1983.

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## VI ILLUSTRATIONS

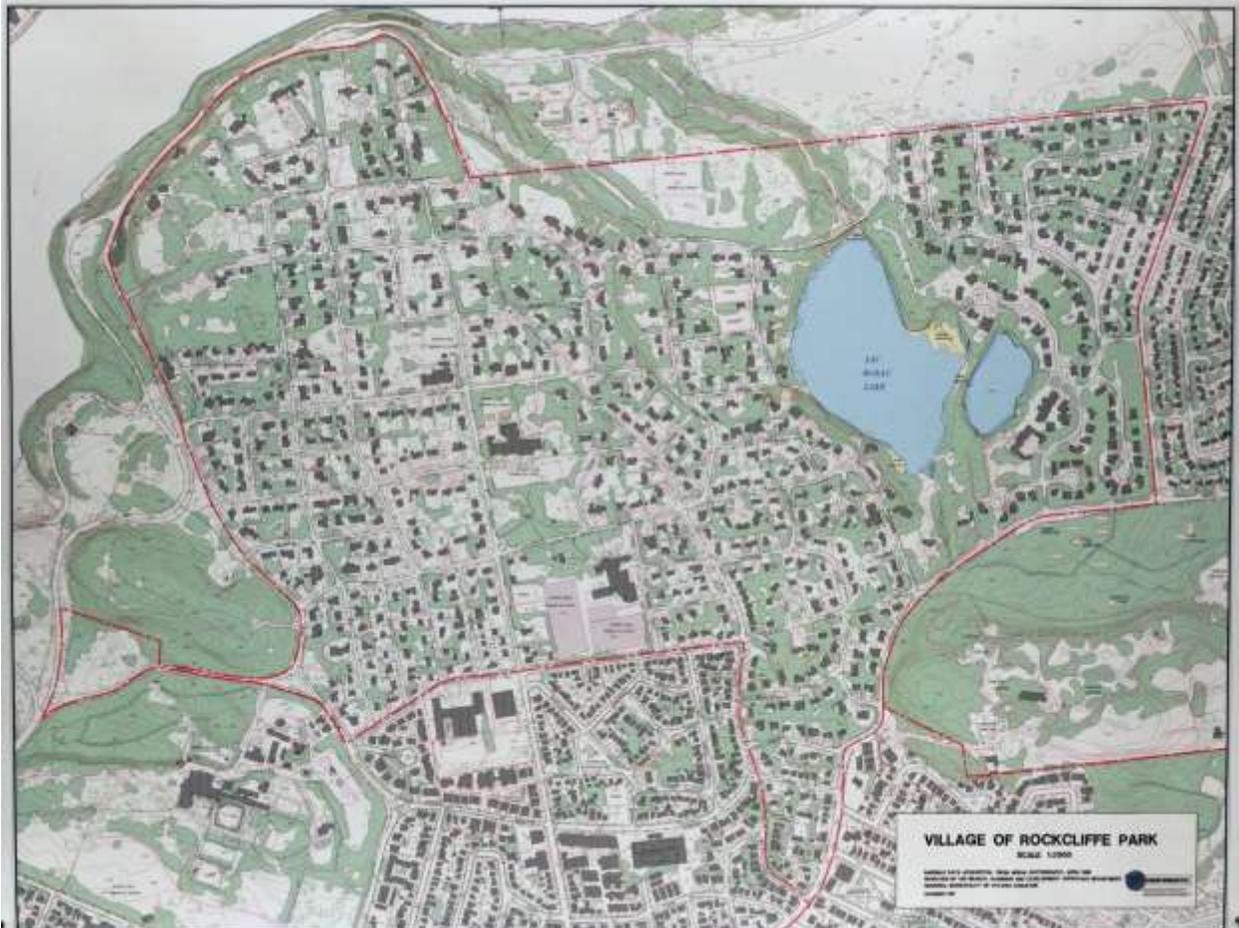


Figure 1. Map of Rockcliffe Park showing the original Village boundaries that existed from 1908 to amalgamation with Ottawa in 2001.

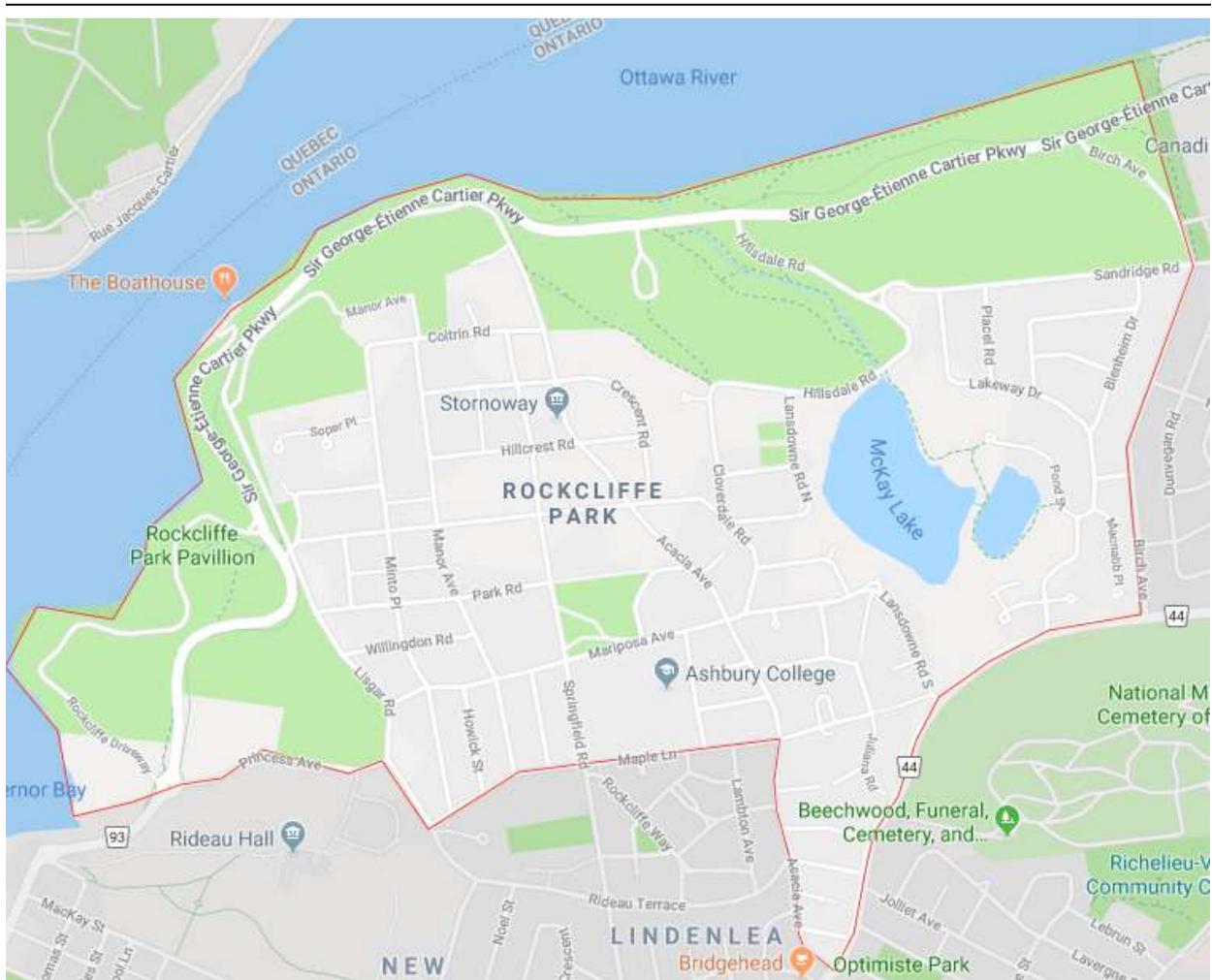


Figure 2. The Village of Rockcliffe Park and the adjacent NCC-owned parkland (to the north and west) known as *Rockcliffe Park*.

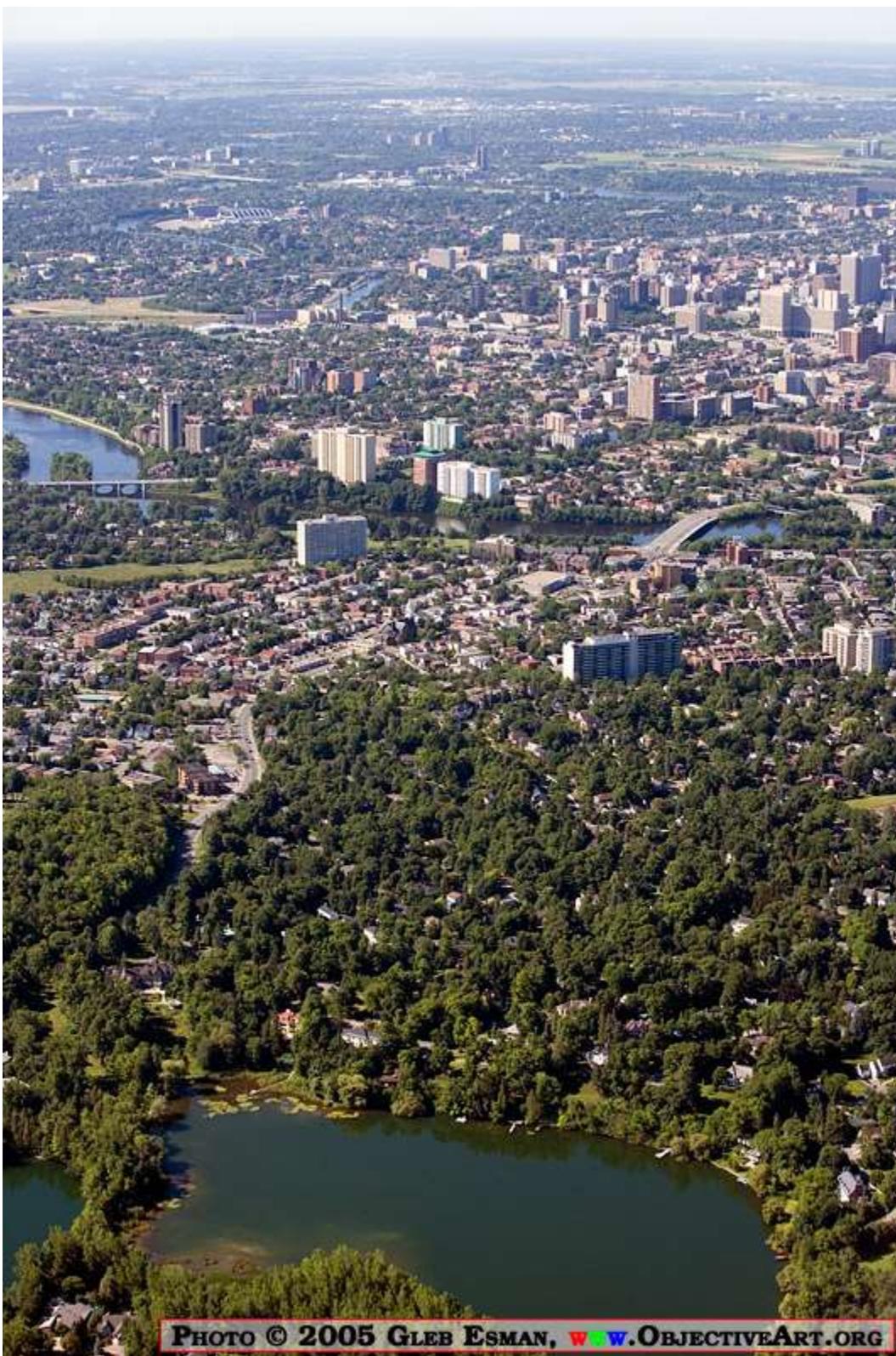


PHOTO © 2005 GLEB ESMAN, [www.ObjectiveArt.org](http://www.ObjectiveArt.org)

Figure 3.

Figure 3. View of McKay Lake and the heavily treed area of Rockcliffe Park Village that clearly distinguishes it from the surrounding communities. By Gleb Esman, 2005.



Figure 4. McKay Lake and the adjacent body of water known as the Pond. Gleb Esman. 2005.



Figure 5. McKay Lake. By Neville Poy, 2005.



Figure 6. A community initiative marks major Village boundaries with plaques inset on glacial boulders.



Figure 7. A sample of drystone walls found throughout Rockcliffe Park.



Figure 8. An example of stone walls made of rounded glacial boulders, adding a note of informality.



Figure 9. The Manor House or Papal Nunciature, originally dating to 1837 and extensively modified, is now home to the Papal Nuncio, the Holy See's representative to Canada. By Neville Poy, 2005.

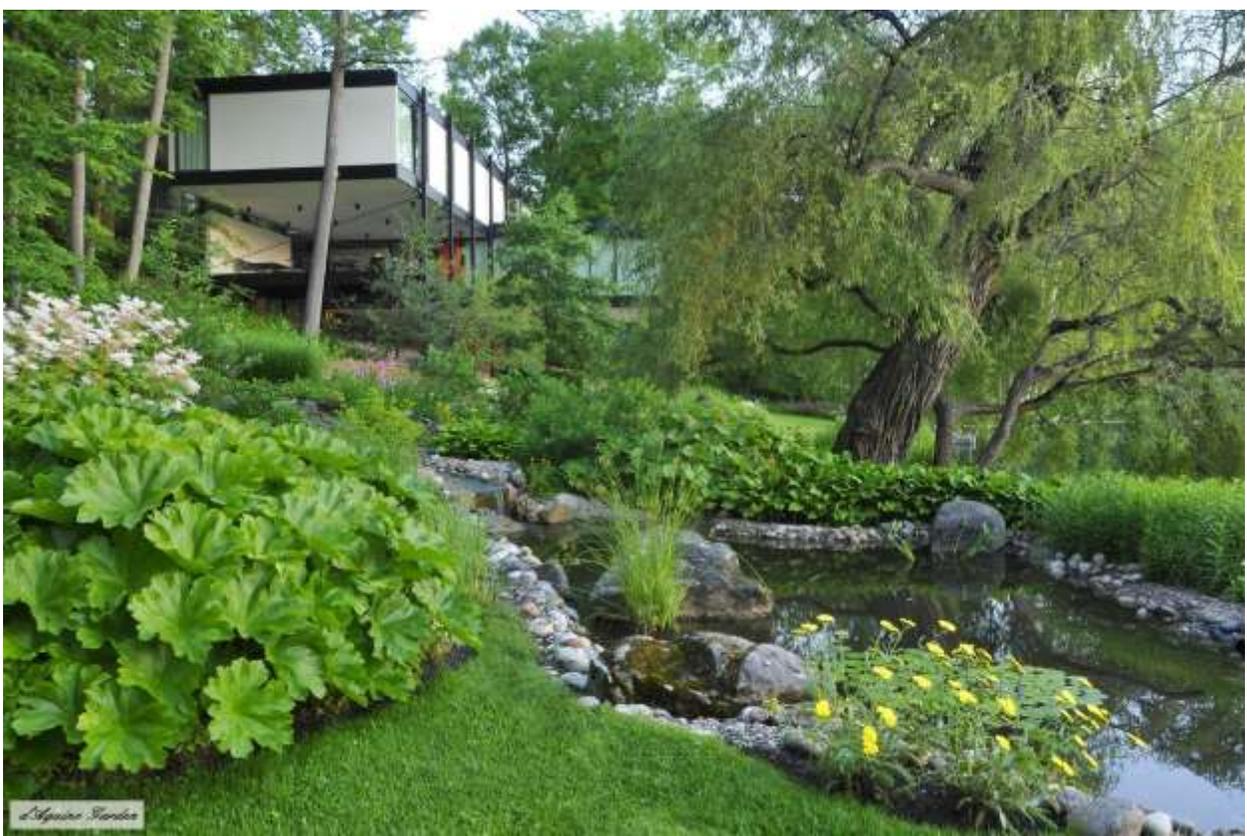


Figure 10. The award-winning Hart Massey House, a National Historic Site. Lansdowne Road North. Designed by Hart Massey in 1959. Photo by Adrienne Heron.



Figure 11. An early house in Rockcliffe Park dating to 1909. 245 Sylvan Avenue. By Neville Poy, 2005.



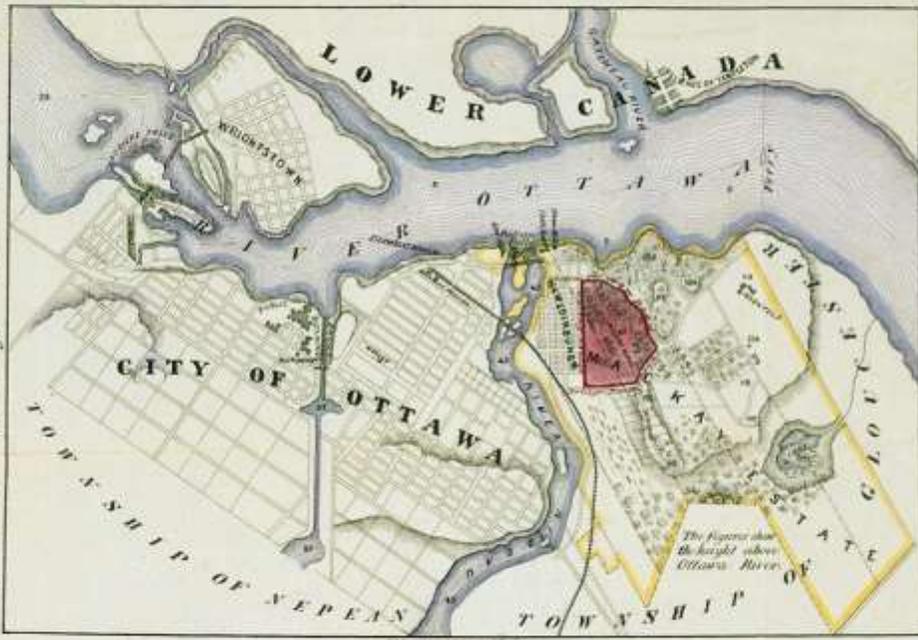
Figure 12. “Topographical Map of the Mackay Estate. Park, Villa, and Village Lots.” The Villa lots were earmarked for the future Village of Rockcliffe Park. Drawn by T.C. Keefer, 1864. Library Archives Canada, NMC-17613.

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# PARK AND VILLA LOTS

ON THE

## MACKAY ESTATE AT OTTAWA.



Have reference to an earlier issue of the Spectator and the Ottawa Free Press. The Mackay Estate is bounded on the north by the Mackay Estate, on the west by the Mackay Estate, on the east by the Mackay Estate, and on the south by the Mackay Estate.

THE EXECUTORS to the Estate of the late HONORABLE THOMAS MACKAY have laid out several hundred Acres, being the most desirable portions fronting upon the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers, into Park and Villa Lots for Private Residences.

This Estate embraces upwards of ONE THOUSAND ACRES *en bloc*, in Gloucester, immediately adjoining the City of Ottawa but in a separate municipality in which there is but a nominal taxation. It has a frontage of more than a mile upon each of the Rivers Ottawa and Rideau, the latter entering the former, upon the Estate, by a perpendicular fall of forty feet, forming a curtain, from whence the name *Rideau* is derived.

The grounds offered for sale have commanding situations, at elevations sixty to one hundred and twenty feet above the water level of the Ottawa River, giving fine views of the City of Ottawa and Parliament Buildings, the Hull Mountains, the Gatineau River, and of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers in both directions. Many of the sites are wooded with evergreen and deciduous shrubs and trees; and in rear of most of the lots parties desiring it can obtain arable or pasture land at reduced rates. The Estate contains excellent materials for building, planting, and road making. Limestone, and sand of the best quality are found upon it; and the Mills at the Rideau Falls supply every description of lumber and timber, planed boards, flooring, doors, sashes, shingles, lathing, &c. For planting, nearly every description of evergreen and hardwood belonging to the climate is found upon the Estate. For roads there is an abundance of excellent gravel of different qualities, coarse and fine, and also of Utica slate, a shale which affords the best material for walks and avenue roads.

The Executors have expended several thousand dollars, under the direction of THOMAS C. KEEFER, Esq., Civil Engineer, in laying out and forming roads which give access to the different terraces, blocks and highways, as well as to the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers. These roads have been made as much like private avenues as possible, by preserving the trees, and by adopting curved lines; thus they convert the greater portion of the Estate into a large park, with a pleasing drive some four miles in extent, which will be increased with the extension of the roads.

The position of this Estate is more advantageous than that of any other suburban property about Ottawa, as a reference to the map will readily show. It is not only much nearer to the RAILWAY STATION and the STEAMBOAT WHARF than any other property exempt from city taxation, but is nearer to these—the only points of arrival and departure East and West—than many parts of the city of Ottawa itself; nearer in fact than any part suitable for detached and elevated residences.

The Village of New Edinburgh contains mills, stores, and mechanics, where almost every want may be supplied; and bids fair soon to possess a Post Office, Railway Station, and Steamboat Wharf of its own.

Two road bridges and one railway bridge already connect the city of Ottawa with the Estate, and a third one, midway between the former (and upon a most favorable site) is proposed, by which communication from the centre, as well as from both ends of the Estate, will be secured.

Lots will be sold upon favorable terms to parties agreeing to build thereon. One-fifth of the purchase money is to be paid at the time of sale; the remainder may remain at six per cent. interest until the end of TEN YEARS, provided that the interest thereon be paid semi-annually (in January and July), and that improvements to the extent of at least ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS in value have been made upon the lot within two years from the day of sale.

To cash purchasers a liberal discount will be made; and from those not prepared to improve their property within the time specified a larger present payment, and shorter term for the balance, will be expected. All purchasers will be bound to enclose their lots and plant the road fronts of the same within twelve months after purchase, and to covenant not to erect any manufactory or tavern upon the Estate, and not to place any out-building upon the front of any avenue or leading road, or erect anything objectionable or inconsistent with the maintenance of the Estate as a park for private residences.

Application for the purchase of lots, according to the above conditions, may be addressed to THOMAS C. KEEFER, Esq., Toronto; or to ROBERT SURTEES, New Edinburgh, Ottawa, from whom any further information can be obtained, and who will accompany intending purchasers over the grounds.

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Figure 13. Promotional Plan by T.C.Keefer for “Park and Villa Lots” on the Mackay Estate.  
1864. Library Archives Canada, NMC-43167.

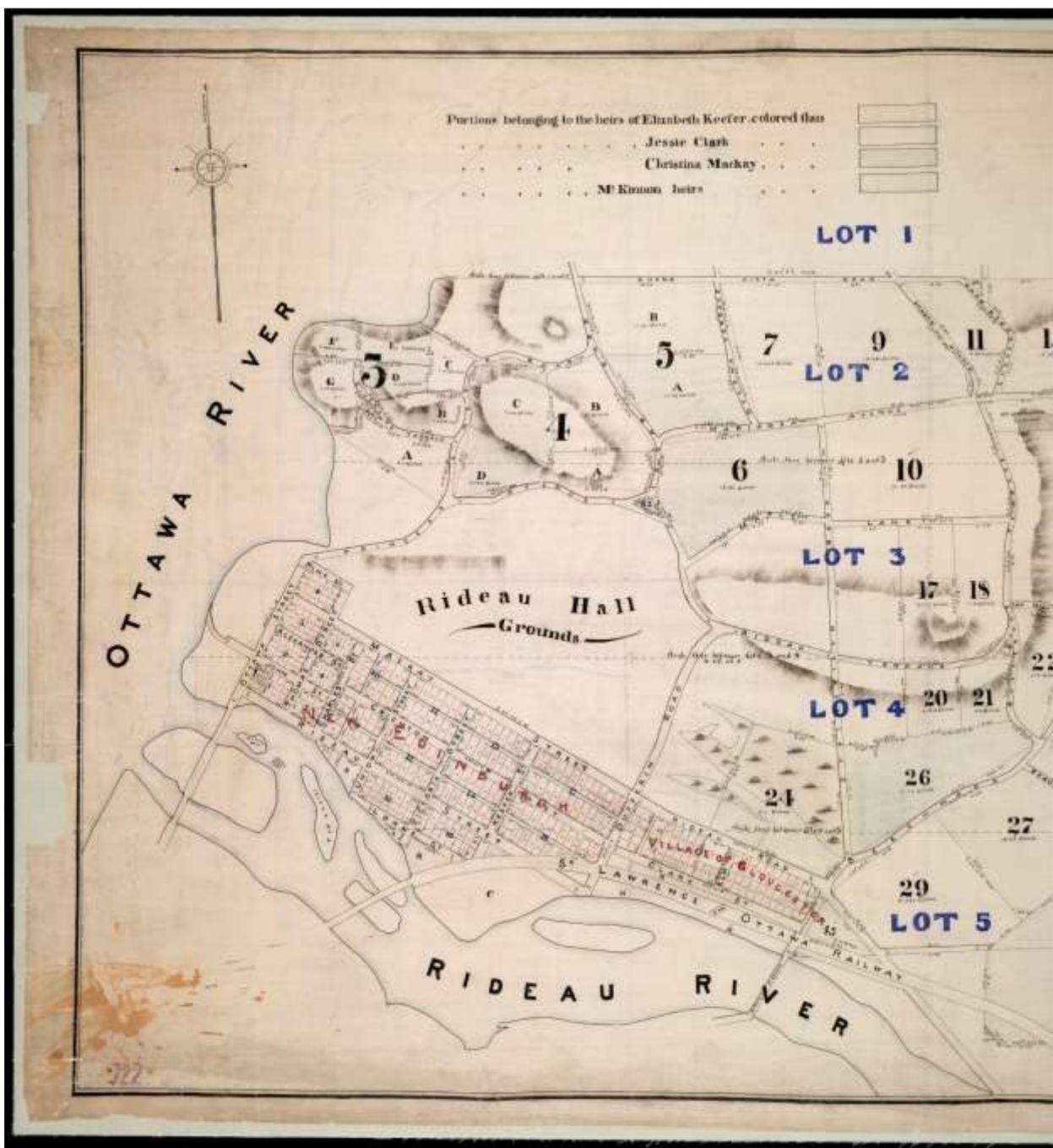


Figure 14. Plan of the Mackay Estate. Part I. 1866. Library Archives Canada, NMC21396.

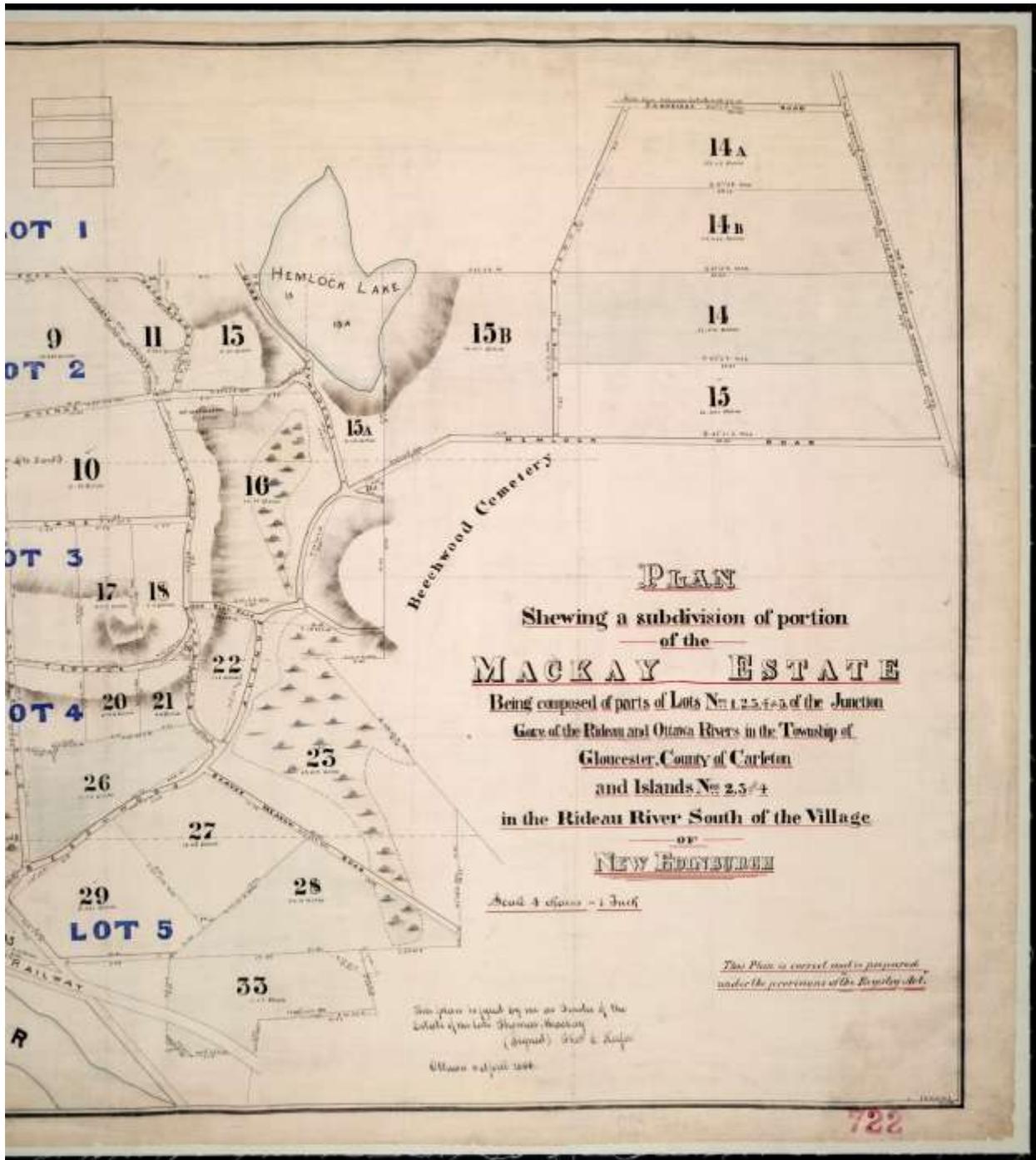


Figure 15. Plan of the Mackay Estate. Part 2. 1866. Library Archives Canada, NMC21396.



Figure 16. Plan of Rose-Park, a subdivision of the Rosedale Estate, adjoining the City of Toronto. 1854. Drawn by J. Stoughton Dennis. Toronto Public Library, TRL, Special Collections, MsX.4. Reproduced from the Toronto Public Library website <http://www.tpl.toronto.on.ca>.

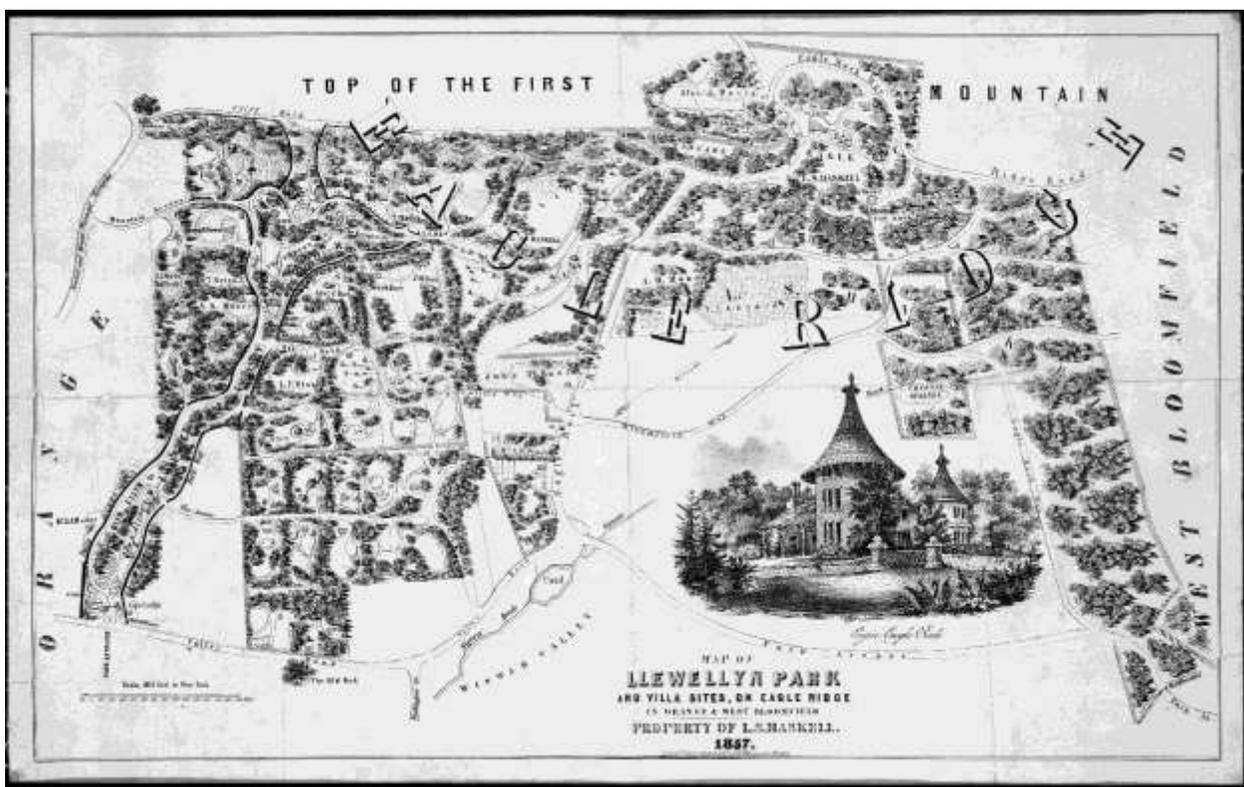


Figure 17. Map of Llewellyn Park and Villa Sites, New Jersey. Dated 1857. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 24.66.1433.

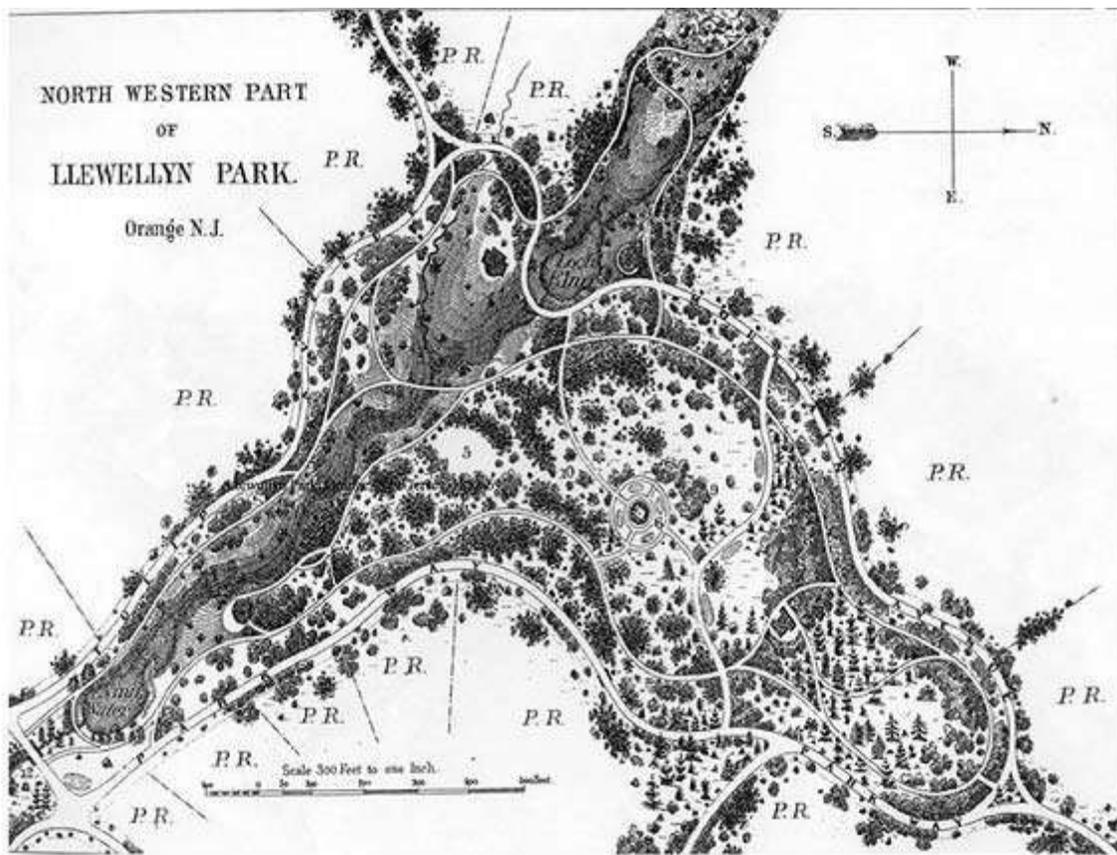


Figure 18. Plan for northwest part of Llewellyn Park, New Jersey. From A. J. Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, adapted to North America; with a view to the Improvement of Country Residences ... with remarks on rural architecture*. 1859.

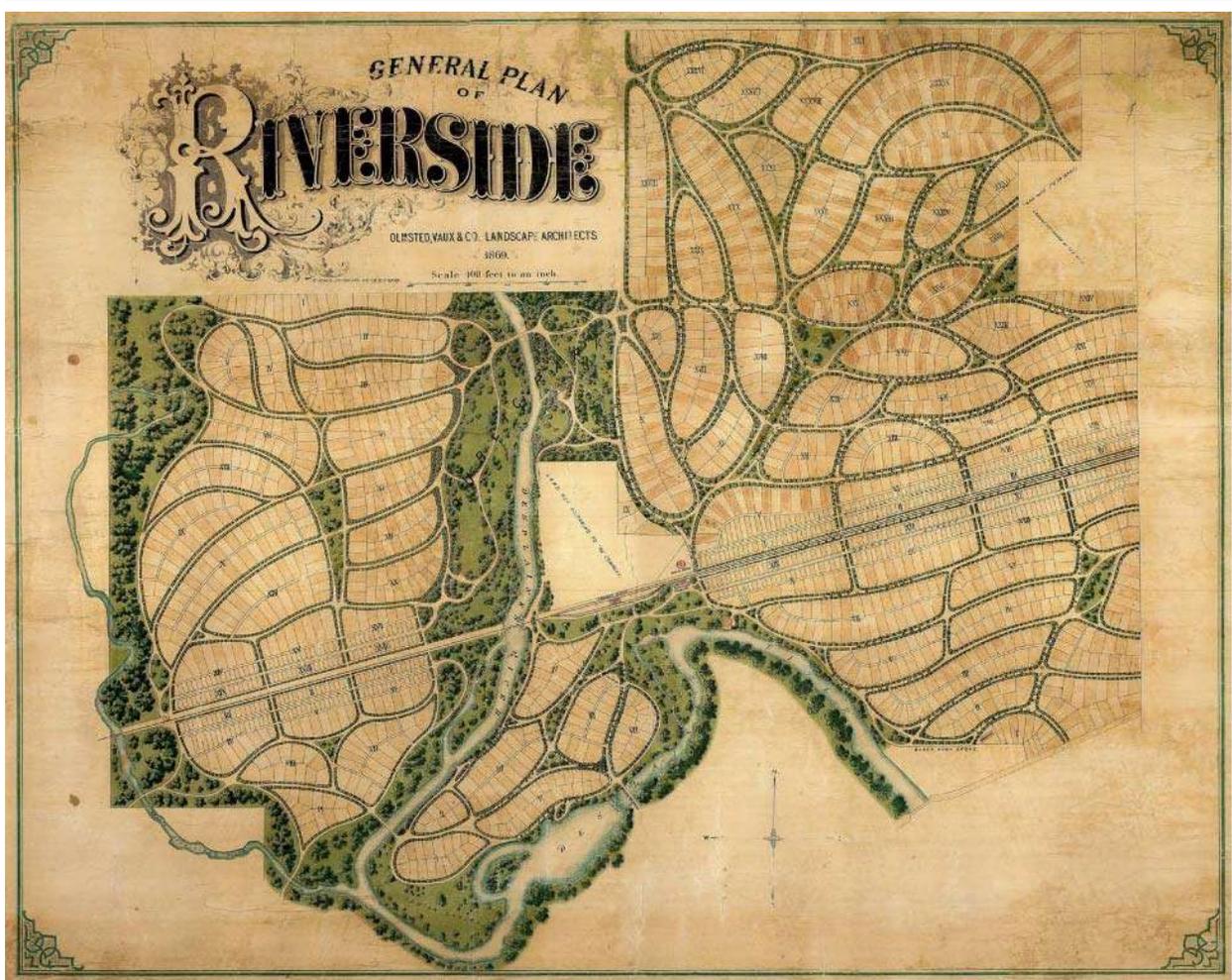


Figure 19. *General Plan of Riverside* by F.L. Olmsted. Dated 1869. Source: [www.Olmstedsociety.org](http://www.Olmstedsociety.org)

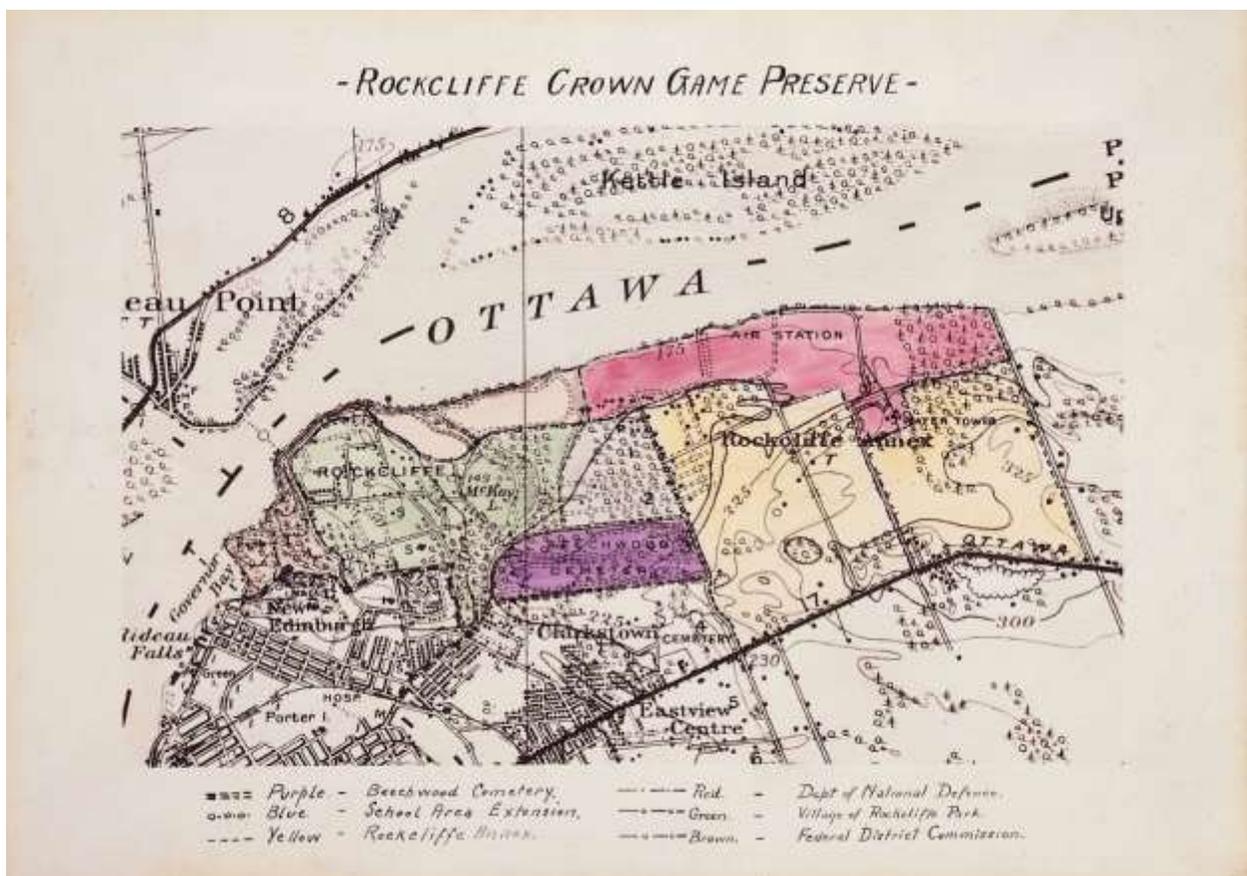


Figure 20. Rockcliffe Park was designated a Crown Game Reserve. 1931.



Figure 21. A community initiative, the Community Hall and Public Library, opened 1994.