



DUNDAS  
MUSEUM &  
ARCHIVES

# DISCO

“I learn!”

## GRADE 8 HISTORY: Creating Dundas: 1837 – 1869

*This education module complements Strand A: Creating Canada, 1850-1890.*

If there is one human dynamic that threads its way through most of history, it is the quest for independence. Much like the natural evolution in the relationship of a child to her parents, communities and nations alike have, through the course of history, have sought freedom from the dominion of their “parent” and the power to make the decisions that most directly affect them.



I John Graves Simcoe –  
Governor of Upper Canada

Following the American Revolution and the battle fought by the Thirteen Colonies for independence from Britain, the settlements of what was soon to be the country of Canada had to fight to maintain independence from the United States in The War of 1812. Against the backdrop of creating the Confederation of Canada in 1867, *Creating Dundas: 1837 – 1869* presents the story of a young town yearning to govern itself. The struggle is a long one which began before the turn of the century with Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe’s plans for a military garrison stationed at what was then Coote’s Paradise.

Here, your students will learn of the beginning of Governor’s Road and its military significance.

Emphasizing the theme of responsible, active citizenship, your students will appreciate that Coote’s Paradise was blessed with the inspirational vision and leadership of citizens like Richard Hatt and Peter Desjardins. The early 1800’s saw many written petitions from these men to incorporate Dundas and elevate it to be the county town, the administrative centre for the newly formed District of Gore. How was it that this thriving community

lost out to Hamilton?

There were many setbacks in the quest for incorporation:

the distraction of The War of 1812, the untimely deaths of both Hatt and Desjardins, and the



II Model of Desjardins Canal: The Golden Age of Dundas

Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 led by Dundas resident and former mayor of York (Toronto), William Lyon Mackenzie. Your class will learn of the fugitive's Dundas hideaway – Mackenzie's Cave – and trace his escape route through the town to the United States.

Surveying a large scale model, your students will discover the key role played by the Desjardins Canal in the journey to incorporation. Finally completed in 1837, ten years after the death of the man who envisioned it, the canal became a trading route to Lake Ontario for the abundance of goods from the many mills and farms in the Dundas area.

The young community persevered. On July 3, 1846, Robert Spence, Editor of the *Dundas Warder* newspaper wrote the following:

*"Dundas has lost its village appearance, but it still has that patriarchal mode of government which prevails in small settlements, and in which former days kept little boys in order. We have the prosperity and the population, but we need the means of keeping good order. Our Town is a family without a head. We need a corporate body. Now is the time."*

His words proved prophetic. After more than half a century, the Village of Coote's Paradise became the Incorporation of the Town of Dundas—population 1,925—on Wednesday, July 28, 1847. Just two years later, the majestic Town Hall was opened.

What does it mean for a village to become "incorporated?" What would be the advantages? The drawbacks?

The unit will conclude by fast-forwarding to 2001 and the loss of Dundas' political independence. Students will have an opportunity to share their response to the essay, *Why Dundas Matters* by Theodore Plantinga, and discuss whether or not there is value in preserving Dundas as a distinct political entity.



III Dundas Town Hall

### **Pre-visit activity**

Students will be given an opportunity to read the essay, *Why Dundas Matters* by Theodore Plantinga and address some questions dealing with amalgamation and independence.

From *The Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7 & 8, 2013*, this Education Module offered by the DMA addresses the following expectations: A1.1,3; A3.1,2,3,5. (pp. 148-151).