

A Brief History of the City of Oshawa

1400s

The earliest known settlement in Oshawa started in the 1400s when the ancestral Wendat settled near the Harmony Creek.

1700s

Since Lake Ontario was the only means of transportation in the 1700s, early settlement in Oshawa took place mainly along the shoreline. It wasn't until after 1793 when Governor Simcoe planned a road between Kingston and Toronto that settlement started to move further inland. This road is known as Kingston Road (now Highway 2).

1800s

More people moved to Oshawa in the early to mid-1800s. As the population slowly increased, more services and buildings were built, including mills, hotels, stores, churches and a post office. In 1849 Oshawa was incorporated as a village. The name "Oshawa" was chosen to represent the original settlement and translates from native dialect to mean "that point at the crossing of the stream where the canoe was exchanged for the trail."

By 1840 Oshawa's harbour was known as Port Sydenham, named after Lord Sydenham, who was Governor General of Upper Canada between 1839 and 1841. Port Sydenham was located only five kilometres from the centre of town and provided a means of importing and exporting goods to and from Oshawa. However, the railway's arrival in Oshawa in 1856 greatly affected business at Port Sydenham as coal and other supplies were brought in by rail, rather than ship.

In the mid to late 1800s, Oshawa's industry continued to grow, especially with the development of the Grand Trunk Railway from Toronto to Montreal. In 1876, Robert McLaughlin moved to Oshawa and his company, the McLaughlin Carriage Company, quickly developed into the largest carriage works in the British Empire.

1900s

With the automobile gaining popularity in the early 1900s, the McLaughlin family decided to enter the business by contracting with the Buick Motor Car Company of Michigan for use of the Buick engine in the McLaughlin car. Automobile production began in Oshawa in 1907 when 198 McLaughlin automobiles were built.

In 1915, the McLaughlin's acquired the rights to build Chevrolets, creating the Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Canada. Three years later, the McLaughlin Motor Car Company and Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Canada were merged to create General Motors of Canada Limited, a unit of the General Motors Corporation. At the same time, Pedlar People Limited, a metal roofing company grew to be the largest of its kind in the British Empire and by 1920, the number of people employed with industrial jobs in Oshawa grew to over 3,000.

Oshawa continued to grow in size and people. A public water system was created, a public library was built, the Oshawa General Hospital was built and two large parks were created (Alexandra Park and Lakeview Park). On March 8, 1924, with a population of 15,545, Oshawa received "City" status and throughout the late 1900s population and employment continued to grow.

2000s

Today, with a population of over 172,000, Oshawa is the largest municipality in Durham Region. It is home to three post-secondary institutions and is rich in arts and cultural assets, with over 500 cultural businesses, events and festivals.