

HALIFAX COMMON

MASTER PLANNING

9000BP: For many centuries, the Mi'kmaq people occupied the Halifax area in a dynamic relationship to the land. The area known today as the Common, with its waterways and wetlands, was used for fishing and hunting, as well as ceremonial and overnight sites.

500BP - 1800: As European settlement progressed, Mi'kmaq continued to live in and around the area. Mi'kmaq ways of life were significantly impacted, and by the 19th century they had been pushed to the margins of colonial society.



Hibbert Newton Binney's watercolour of a Mi'kmaq encampment in Dartmouth c. 1812.



Wetlands (purple) and streams (blue) on Charles Blaskowitz's 1784 map, based on research and analysis by Mike Reid, 2012. The approximate location of the Common is bounded in red.

1760-1763: Two hundred and thirty-five acres of land for a common was surveyed and granted "for the use of the inhabitants of the town of Halifax as Common for ever" The original Common grant was land was on undeveloped, largely swampy land west of the city. The Common was intended for pastureland and was a source of firewood.

mid 1760's: The North Common became home to a horse racetrack.

late 1700s: The wars and conflicts brought many British soldiers and loyalists to Halifax, and the Common was used for temporary encampments on the slopes of Camp Hill (now the QEII Health Sciences Centre and Common Roots Urban Farm).

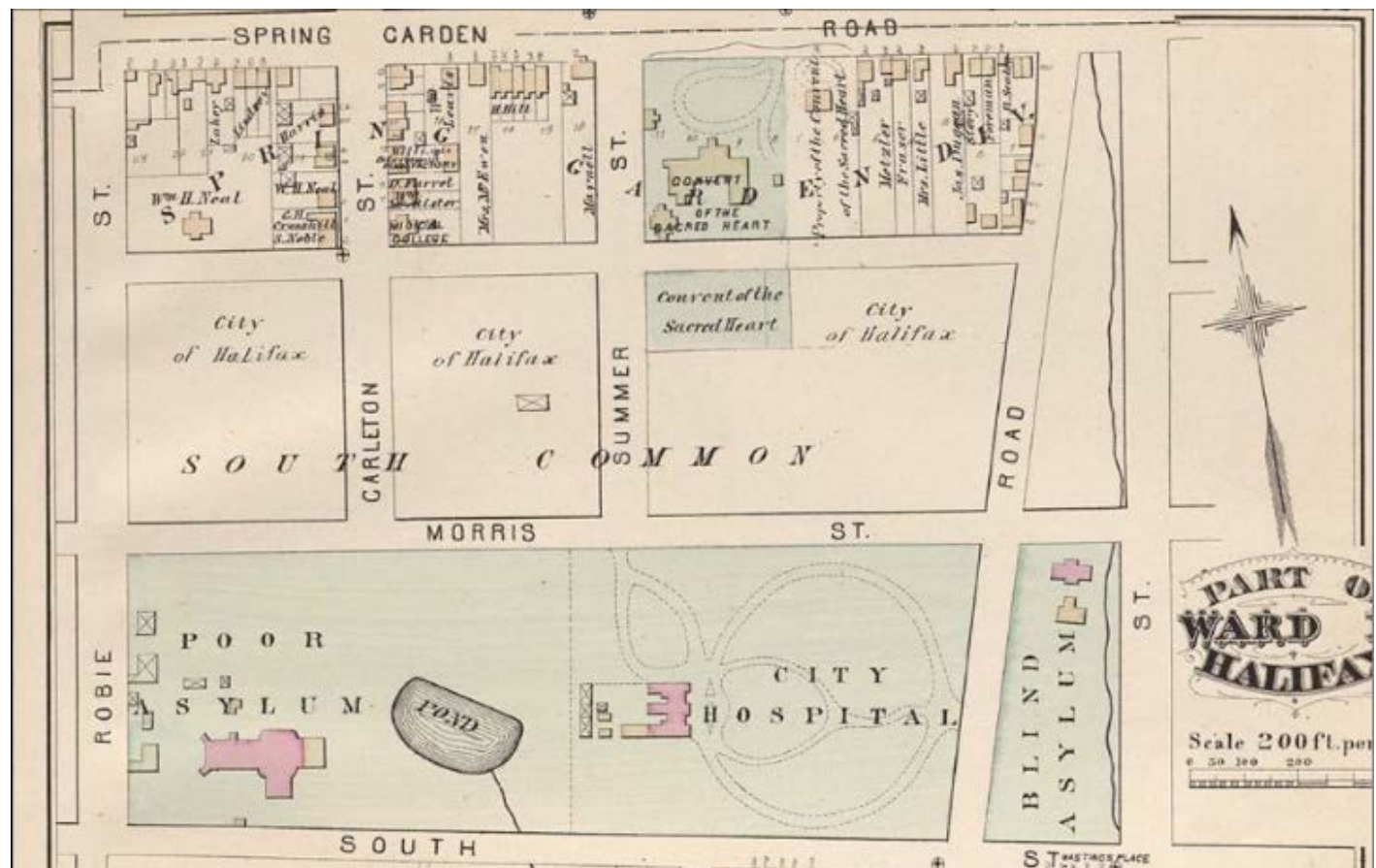
1800 - 1835: Separate interests influenced the Halifax Common. The British Military had dominion over the north part of the Common for use as exercise grounds prohibiting any activity, regulation or rule that would impede the use of the land by the troops. By 1897 contentions between the City of Halifax and the Commander in Chief came to a head over temporary gospel and circus tents erected within the 1800' buffer zone from the Citadel. It wasn't until after WWI that the military conceded that the North Common was no longer needed for the defense of Halifax.

1818: New trustees brought new ideas with hopes to improve conditions of the Common, including the construction of Spring Garden Road and private leases of property on the north and south of the street to fund clearing, draining and filling of some portions of land.

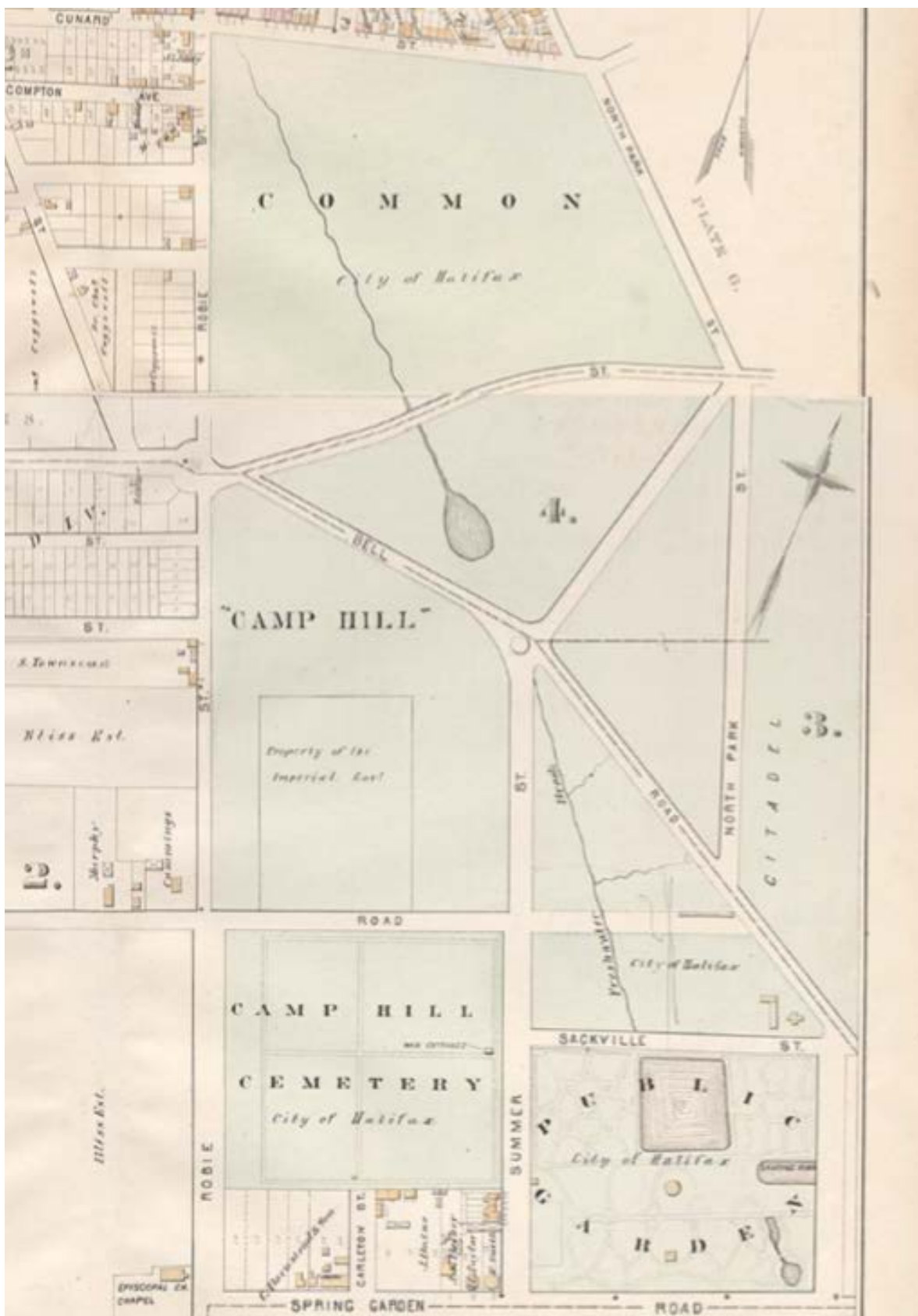
1835 - 1865: The first institutions were built, including the Convent of the Sacred Heart and the City Hospital. Camp Hill Cemetery was also established.

1847: After a few years of incremental land allotment, the Horticulture Garden was amalgamated with the city garden creating the Halifax Public Gardens known today.

1851: A Committee of the Common was established and began tackling improvements with clearing, draining and filling in portions for use as gardens, horse races and military reviews.



Hopkins' 1878 map of the South Common, showing the institutions along the south and private buildings along Spring Garden Road.



Hopkins' 1878 map of the Common north of Spring Garden Road.

Late 1800s: Institutional development continued to evolve on the South Common, including the Poor House and Asylum for the Blind. Land was leased to Wanderer's Amateur Athletic Club, and over many years of modifications, Freshwater Brook was channeled through underground pipes, becoming a sewer. Griffin's Pond located in the Public Gardens is the only part of the water system that is visible today.

1818: A portion of the Halifax Common was parceled into 51 half-acres lots to be leased to private citizens around Spring Garden Road.

1863: A covered skating rink opened in the Horticultural Gardens. This rink was initially accessible only to members and it was demolished in 1889.

1871: Formerly leased lands on Spring Garden Road were commuted, to encourage development and limit costs to the public.

1874: The city's garden and the Horticultural Gardens were amalgamated creating the Halifax Public Gardens known today.

1879: A publicly accessible rink was opened in the Exhibition Building on the main floor. This large room was also used for exhibiting displays, agricultural exhibits, craft shows, carnivals, concerts and events in the fall, summer and spring. In the winter the space was used as a public skating rink, where ice dancing, carnivals and masquerades were held. But it was short lived, and in 1906 the property was sold to the St. Luke's congregation for the construction of the All Saints Cathedral.



The interior of the Exhibition Building show the rink during rest of the year.



The exterior of the Exhibition Building on Tower Road.

1886: Dalhousie University was granted land on the South Common in trade for the existing Dalhousie building, now the Halifax City Hall. In the same year, land is leased to "Wanderer's Amateur Athletic Club."

1897: Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee attracted about fifteen thousand people who crowded around the big square on the North Common.

1898: Earliest reference to Victoria Park appears in city minutes. By the early to mid-20th Century various statues and fountains added to the park. These include the Robbie Burns statue, Sir Walter Scott Statue and William Alexander Monument.



Ruger's 1879 Panoramic View of the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, north at right, showing military exercises at the North Common and the various institutions present at the south end of the Common.

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Early 1900s: The Halifax City Works Shops were located on Bell Road; the main building was transferred to the Halifax Junior Bengal Lancers in the '30s. The barn is now a municipally registered heritage property.

1890's to 1930's: – Egg Pond (now the skate park) was a popular location for boating and water play. It was improved with a stone retaining wall, boathouse and canteen. The Central Common was also a popular children's play space with swing sets.



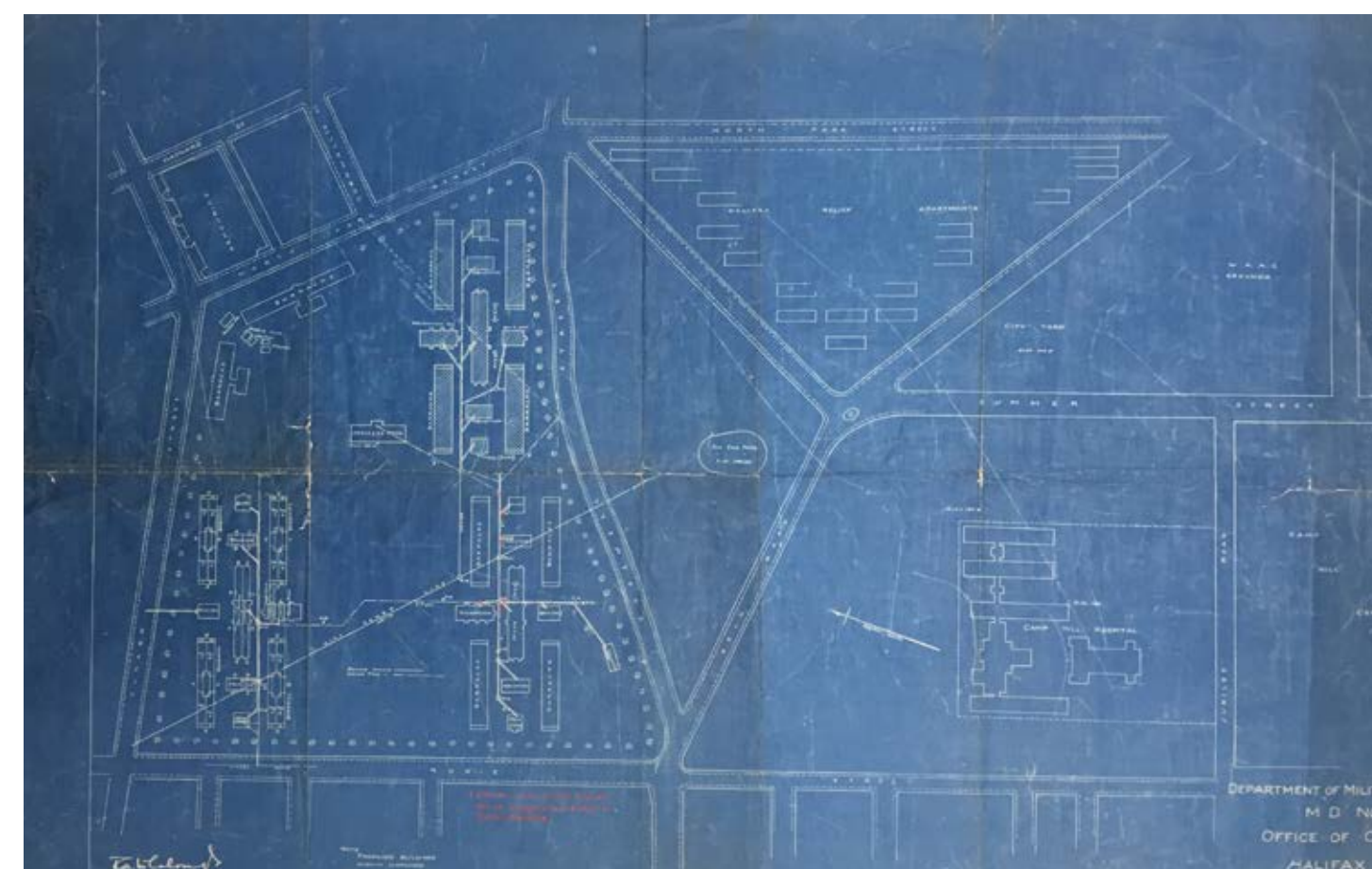
Photograph of the Egg Pond dated to roughly 1923. Note the stone retaining wall with a north-facing opening directed towards an unidentified building. The later combination boat house and canteen would be built just out of frame to the right.



A 1918 photograph of the central commons showing swing sets as well as punts on Egg Pond (surrounded by trees, upper left).

1917: The Military used portions of the North Common as temporary accommodation and opened Camp Hill Hospital, during the Great War. These accommodations were expanded to accommodate citizens displaced by the Halifax Explosion.

1940s: Queen Elizabeth High School was built at the corner of Robie Street and Bell Road, on the area formerly known as Camp Hill, and the Halifax Country Vocational School was built soon after, on the current Citadel High site.



1918 Department of Militia & Defence map showing the military buildings on North Common.

1970s: Older institutional buildings on the South Common were demolished, and multiple new medical buildings are constructed. In the central Common, the Museum of Natural History was built, replacing public works garages and sheds.

1960s: Pathways, landscaping and the softball fields were built on the North Common, and on the Central Common, the outdoor swimming and wading pools were constructed just north of the Egg Pond.

1967: The Centennial fountain was installed on the North Common to celebrate Canada's one hundredth birthday.



Canada 150 celebrations on the North Common

1969: The baseball diamond on the Central Common was built for the 1969 Canada Games.

1984: Pope John Paul II visits Halifax for a youth gathering on the Common.

1992-1994: Through public consultation the City of Halifax develops a Plan for the Halifax Common. It is approved as a guiding document for decisions regarding the Common.

1990s: The existing Halifax Infirmary was built.

2000s: The North Common undergoes changes, with new lighting and maintenance, and installation of the skating oval. Common Roots Urban Farm was introduced, and two roundabouts were constructed.

2006: The Rolling Stones rock the Common. Then came Paul McCartney, KISS, Keith Urban, and the Black-Eyed Peas.

2008: The land for the QEII high school was traded to the Province for expansion of the hospitals. In return, the municipality got land on Spring Garden Road for the Halifax Central Library. Currently the Common Roots Urban Farm operates on the site now owned by the NS Health Authority.

2008: The Halifax Vocational School was demolished in 2005 and made way for Citadel High School. The Bengal Lancers corral was relocated across the street beside the Natural History Museum.

2010: Queen Elizabeth II visits the North Common to take part in the Mi'kmaq cultural event marking the 400th anniversary of the baptism of Grand Chief Henri Membertou.



400th anniversary of the baptism of Grand Chief Henri Membertou

2011: A temporary long-track speed skating oval built on the North Common for the Canada Winter Games

2012 to 2014: Public campaign to "Save the Oval" swayed Regional Council to make the skating oval a permanent venue. Subsequent years saw the construction of a plaza and Oval pavilion building.

2014-2016: North Park's intersections were improved with the construction of modern roundabouts. The street renewal included new paths, plazas entrances, lighting, public art and landscaping on the Common.

2017: Canada 150 celebrations were held on the North Common attracting one of the largest crowds for Canada Day. The event included a free concert headlining DeadMau5.

2017: The Halifax Public Gardens extend their hours over the Winter.