

Radiating street plans are quite rare, and are usually confined to a small part of a larger and dominant street grid. Chautauqua's original layout and subdivision of properties, published in 1886, was based on a Hub & Spoke plan for the entire development, and was a truly unique experiment in urban planning. Chautauqua was not planned with streets and roads, but with avenues. Derived from the latin word "venire", it emphasizes the "coming to" or arrival at a landscape or architectural feature. Chautauqua's avenues focused on the centre circle where a three thousand seat amphitheatre was built. This created a focus and also embraced every direction of the compass. The feature that truly makes the original plan of 1886 unique (in the history of urban planning) is that each avenue offered building lots that varied greatly in size and aspect. This encouraged a wide variety of house styles and budgets.

Instead of encouraging uniformity and exclusion, it was an invitation to be different and inclusive.



A HERITAGE PLAN

PAGE 1

Early urban plans using a radial system were based on an idealistic concept of perfection and unity, hoping to provide a solution to the terrible mayhem of early urban centres. Thomas More's book, *Utopia* (1513) introduced the idea of a perfect world, where planning and architecture were instrumental in the betterment of society as a whole.



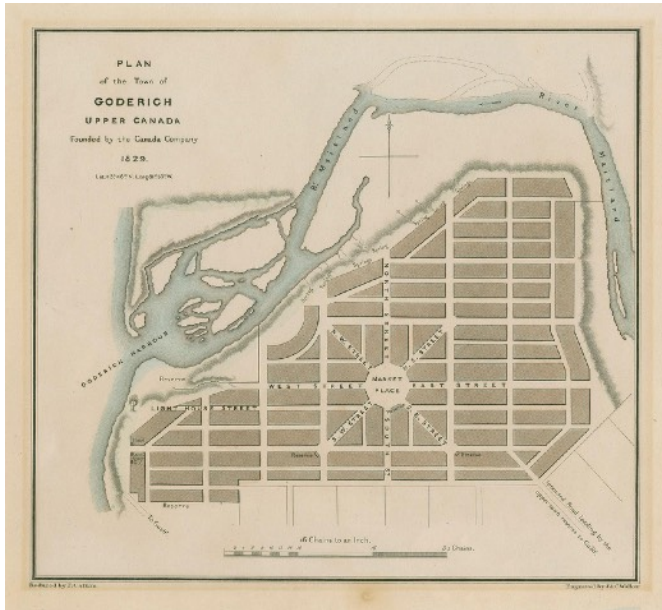
1593 PALMANOVA, ITALY

Famous examples of radial plans are Paris, France (1851) and Washington DC (1791). These grand avenues overlay a rectilinear grid system with uniform lot sizes. They are interventions rather than the main determinant of the street network and subsequent lot sizes.

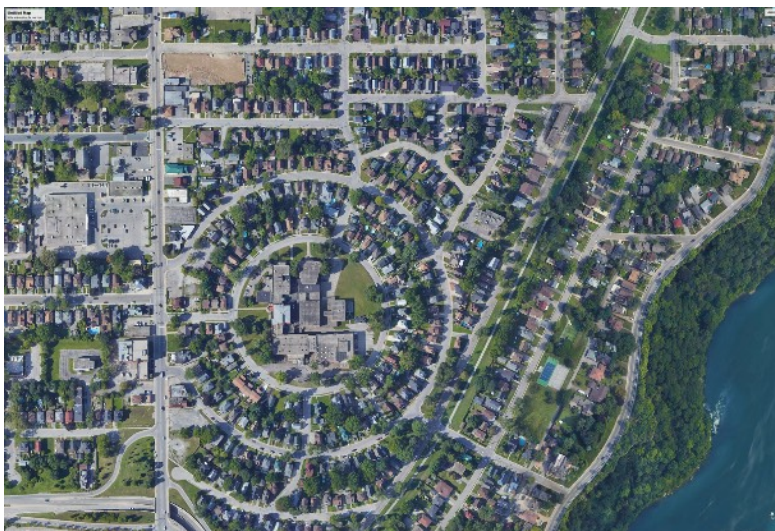


The powerful symbolism of a centre with streets radiating from it looks great in plan, but is difficult to resolve in reality. The problem of odd shaped and different sized lots was treated as an anomaly rather than as the main planning ideology, and the radial plan overlayed a regular grid with uniform sized lots.

Radial planning at a much smaller scale has been incorporated into city plans, with varying degrees of success. These cautious applications show how easily the meaning and the powerful social potential of radial planning can be lost in translation, and the chance to influence a community is lost.



1829-present GODERICH, ONT

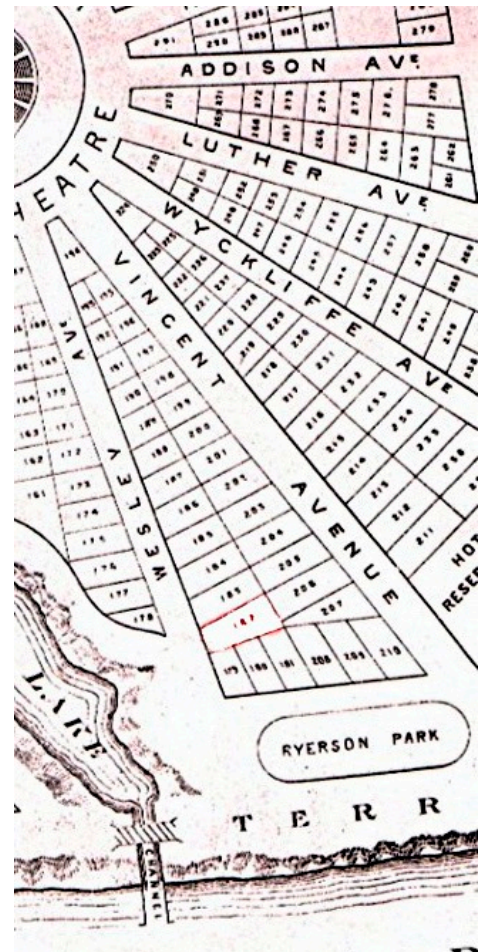
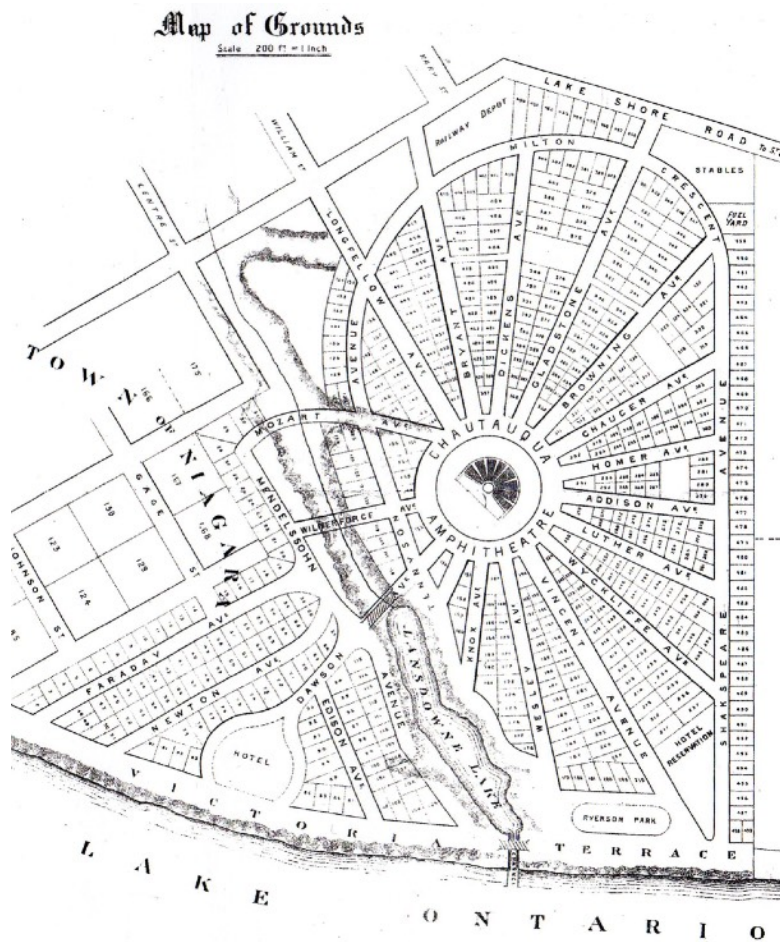


c.1851-present NIAGARA FALLS, ONT



c.1888-present CRYSTAL BEACH, ONT

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES CHAUTAUQUA'S HUB & SPOKE PLAN DIFFERENT, AND UNIQUE...?



The avenues of Chautauqua were laid out with a commitment to the Utopian ideal that the plan itself would encourage a diverse and inclusive community. The plan of avenues created a focus, embraced every direction and each building lot varied in size and aspect. This encouraged a wide variety of house styles, sizes and budgets, encouraging inclusivity and diversity... and this is exactly what happened in Chautauqua.

The wide variety of lot sizes designed in 1886, and the size of dwellings allowed by the Official Plan are very sympathetic to each other, either by Contextual Zoning or zoning restrictions. This was enough to encourage sustainable development on the old avenues.



STREETSCAPE - EVOLUTION OF CHAUTAUQUA'S PLAN

The original ambitious 1886 Chautauqua Heritage Plan was implemented and construction began for the Chautauqua Resort opening in 1888... but various obstacles prevented the success of the project.

Competition from newly opened resorts in Grimsby and Crystal Beach, both claiming to be Canadian Chautauqua(s), diluted attendance. The building of the Chautauqua (Strathcona) Hotel was delayed, held up by weather and liens registered by the workers, and by 1889 was still only partially finished.

Unfinished construction, hot weather, mosquitos, rain and poor accommodation kept attendance low for the inaugural season but the next year Chautauqua hosted a full program. By that time, part of the street plan was complete... a special rail spur was built to Lansdowne... eight cottages were built or were under construction and Wilberforce Avenue boasted the only street lights in the Niagara township.

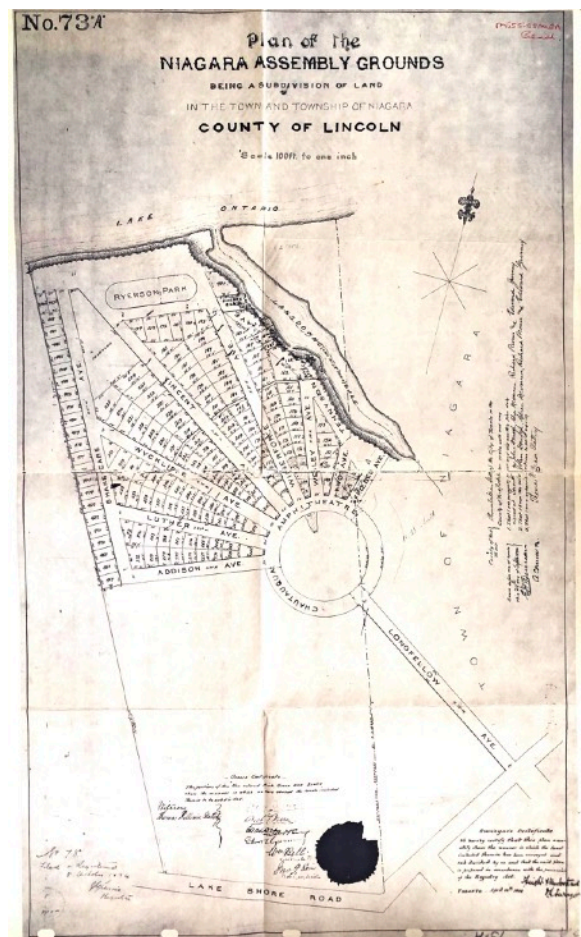
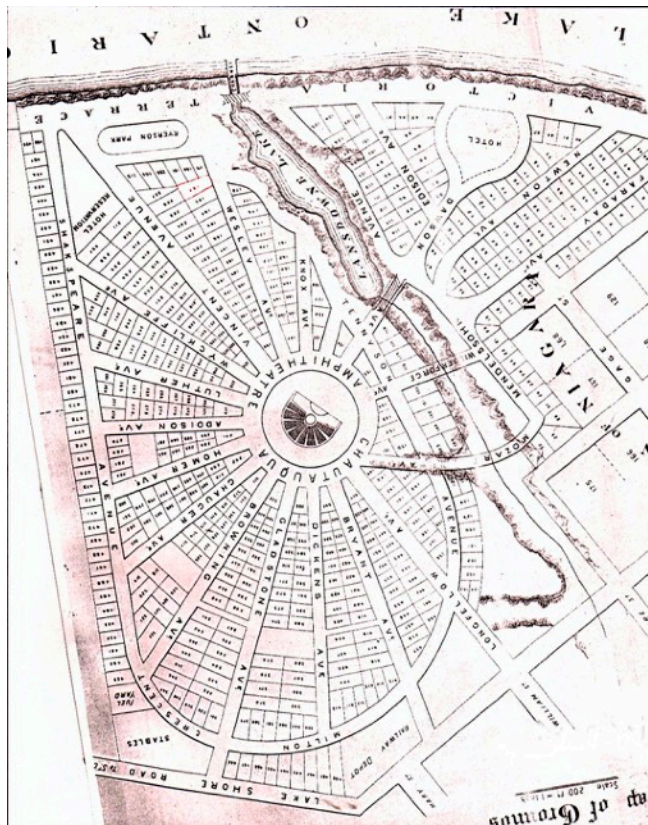
A building lot in 1888 in Chautauqua sold for an average of \$150.

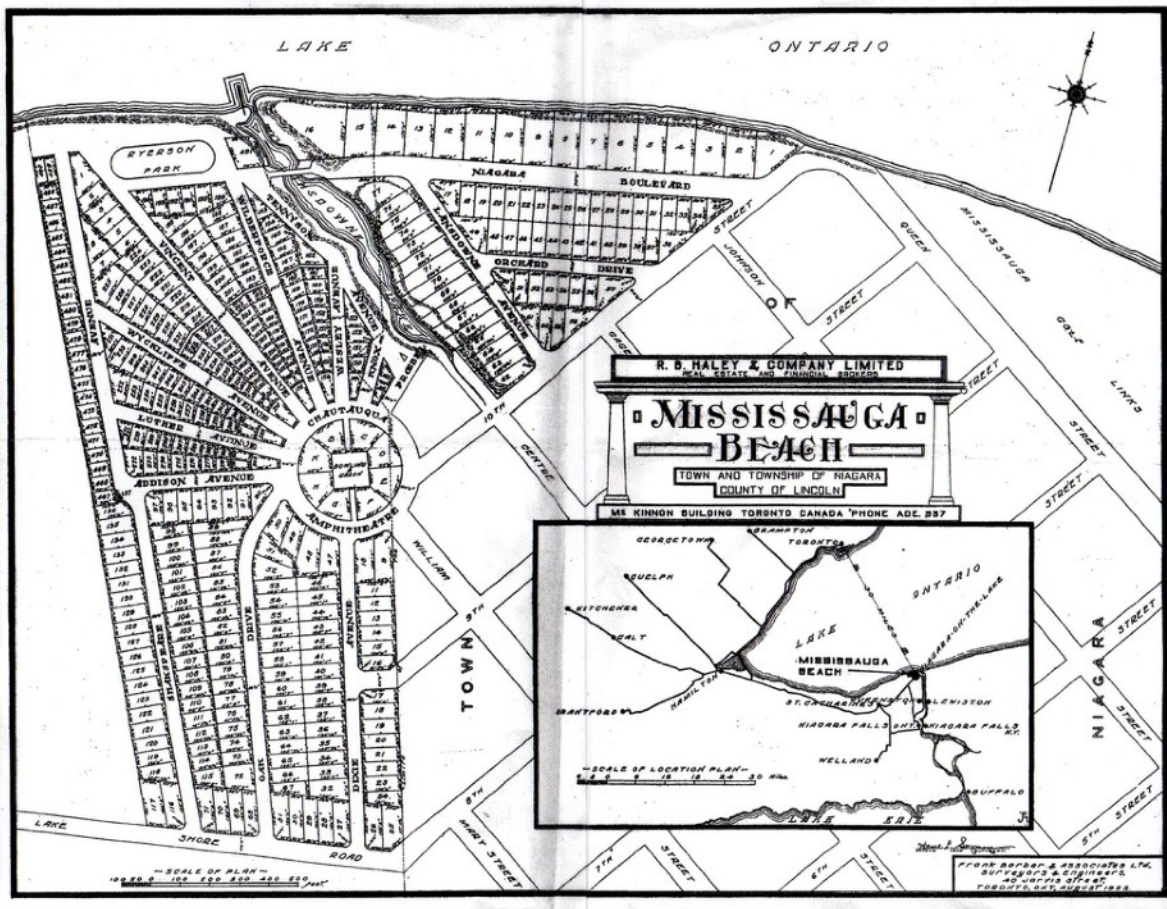
The Panic of 1893 is almost forgotten in history, but it lasted until 1897 and was (at the time) the worst depression that North America had experienced. Unemployment levels in New York hit 45%.

The gilded age of the 1880's were over. The ambitious development by the Niagara Assembly had been started too late and couldn't survive the economic downturn. The Canadian Chautauqua developers had not paid their taxes and by 1894, the Town of Niagara foreclosed on the property and the official Chautauqua designation for the summer resort at Mississauga Beach was removed.

By 1894 a plan of the developed streets shows less than half of the development complete, and no bridge connections across One Mile Pond.

1886 Chautauqua Heritage Plan





In 1917-1918 the property, formerly owned by the Niagara Assembly was sold to a developer that had the land subdivided into more uniform lot sizes. Because many of the lots from the 1894 plan had been sold already, Addison, Luther, Wycliffe, Vincent, Wilberforce, Wesley, Knox, Froebel Avenues and the Circle... with their peculiar lot sizes were retained in the new plan published in 1922.

Development of the new subdivision stalled. In 1927, just before the Great Depression, a building lot was \$450. But by 1940, 60 lots on the original avenues were sold for \$800 (\$13.33/lot). An early aerial photograph from 1934 shows little evidence of progress.

The Town of Niagara would not climb out of this recession until the Shaw Theatre came in the 1960's.

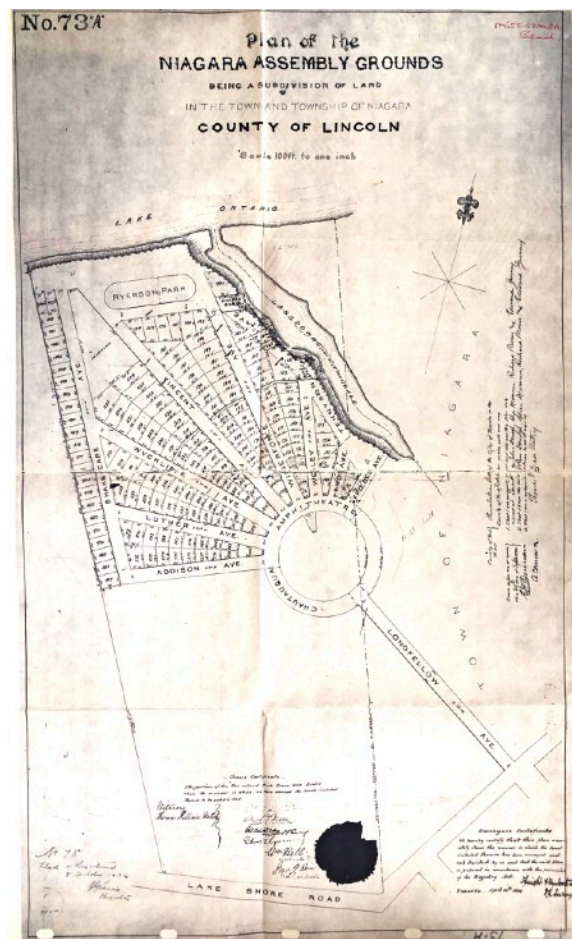


The AVENUES of CHAUTAUQUA c.1888

Chautauqua in Niagara-on-the-Lake has a planning heritage that is valuable and fascinating on many levels. There is ample proof that the original 1886 Chautauqua Heritage Plan is a rare and unique experiment in planning that cannot be found anywhere else. Today there is only a fraction of this experiment left, and it is these avenues of the original 1886 Plan that are facing the greatest development pressures.

These pressures threaten both the intentions of the original planners, and the qualities that today's residents feel are most valuable.

Mistakes are not easily undone. The present construction of new homes with extreme massing and deep basements is quickly transforming Chautauqua into a neighbourhood of large houses of uniform size, most of them crammed onto properties that were meant for much smaller buildings. It is not difficult to realize that very quickly the original intentions of the Chautauqua Heritage Plan can be gone for good, and a rare planning experiment will be less and less recognizable. Combined with the removal of mature trees to make way for larger construction, the new basements are built in such close proximity to each other, that it is altering the water table, resulting in even more of the existing century trees dying at an alarming rate. A century old planning experiment, just like the century old tree may become impossible to replace as inappropriate development prevents either from growing to maturity.



The remaining avenues of the 1888 Niagara Chautauqua Assembly Plan



There is no place like this place.