

On July 26, 2008, the Ontario Heritage Trust, the Englehart Centennial Committee and the Town of Englehart unveiled a provincial plaque at Centennial Park in Englehart, Ontario, to commemorate the Founding of Englehart.

The bilingual plaque reads as follows:

### **FOUNDING OF ENGLEHART**

Englehart owes its beginnings to the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway (T. & N.O.), a colonization line designed by the provincial government to open agricultural lands of the Little Clay Belt to settlement and to provide access to the area's vast timber resources. In 1905 the railway stockpiled equipment and materials on the east bank of the Blanche (now Englehart) River, at mile 138, for the line's first major bridge. This drew entrepreneurs to provide services and amenities to the railway workers gathering there. In 1906 Englehart became a divisional point for the railway and work began to build repair shops and an engine roundhouse west of the river. Town lots were surveyed there and sold at public auction. A post office was established followed by stores, a school and churches. The community was named Englehart in honour of Jacob Lewis (Jake) Englehart, the chairman of the T. & N.O. Commission. In 1908 Englehart became an incorporated town and elected its first Council.

### **LA FONDATION D'ENGLEHART**

Englehart doit sa naissance au Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway (T. & N.O.), une ligne de colonisation créée par le gouvernement provincial dans le but d'ouvrir à l'établissement les terres agricoles situées dans la petite ceinture d'argile et de rendre accessibles les vastes ressources forestières de la région. En 1905, le chemin de fer constitua un stock d'équipement et de matériaux sur la rive est de la rivière Blanche (désormais Englehart), au mille 138, pour y construire le premier pont important de la ligne. Ces activités attirèrent des entrepreneurs, venus fournir des services et des commodités aux cheminots. En 1906, Englehart devint une localité de limite divisionnaire ferroviaire et des ateliers de réparation, ainsi qu'une rotonde de locomotive, furent construits à l'ouest de la rivière. Des lots de canton furent arpentés et vendus lors d'enchères publiques. Un bureau de poste ouvrit, et des magasins, une école et des églises suivirent. La collectivité fut nommée Englehart en hommage à Jacob Lewis (Jake) Englehart, président de la commission

du T. & N.O. En 1908, Englehart devint une ville constituée et élit son premier conseil.

## Historical background

Geology has shaped the human history and economic development of the Englehart region. During the last ice age, 12,000 years ago, glaciers – vast sheets of ice estimated at half a mile (nearly one kilometre) or more in thickness – crept inexorably southward from the Arctic, scouring the land to its bedrock. When the ice retreated it left behind a landscape of bare Precambrian rock. This was the land that Father of Confederation Thomas Darcy McGee would one day call, with remarkable prescience, “the shield of Achilles.”<sup>1</sup>

Retreating glaciers created a large lake known to geologists as Lake Ojibway-Barlow. It extended from present-day Cochrane southward to the lower end of what is now Lake Temiskaming. During the last glacial advance, about 7,000 years ago, the earth’s crust rose further, splitting the large lake into two. Lake Ojibway remained in the north and Lake Barlow (now Lake Temiskaming) to the south, separated by the newly formed Arctic Watershed.<sup>2</sup> This area was part of a vast and intricate network of lakes and rivers flowing from the height of land, northward to James Bay and south to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin. Silt, left from the scouring action of the ice against rocks containing calcium-rich fossils, settled and formed a base of calcium-bearing clay<sup>3</sup> in irregular lowlands, forming what is now known as the Great and Little Clay Belts. The resulting soil layer had a high mineral content and good water-retention abilities, which eventually contributed to a uniquely rich agricultural area.<sup>4</sup>

With the end of the ice age, flora and fauna gradually returned to this rocky landscape, obscuring some of the land’s mineral wealth, but also building up immense tracts of forest and nurturing large populations of fur-bearing mammals. This growing wealth of resources soon attracted the Algonquian peoples. The Englehart area and the lands to the southeast became the preserve of the Algonquin First Nation, while the Cree hunted the lands to the north draining into Hudson Bay, and the Ojibwa occupied the territories to the west.<sup>5</sup> In the post-European contact period, the furs of the beaver and other animals attracted French traders into the region and trading posts, such as nearby Témiscaminque, were established to exploit the trade. European national rivalries led to the founding of British trading posts on James Bay, including Rupert House and Moose Factory, and to the initial exploitation of the water route between the Ottawa River and James Bay. Rival trading empires continued to vie for supremacy along this corridor until the eventual triumph of the Hudson’s Bay Company early in the 19th century.

By 1850, the leading edge of the timber trade had moved up the Ottawa River to Lake Nipissing and entrepreneurs in the Province of Canada (present-day Ontario and Québec) were beginning to look to the great expanses of land to the north and west. Confederation in 1867 helped turn these dreams into reality. In 1870, the vast territories of the Hudson's Bay Company were placed under the jurisdiction of the Dominion of Canada, and in the ensuing decade Ontario claimed an extension of its borders to James Bay, a claim finally recognized by the federal government in 1898. In the interim, Ontario pressed its claims in more tangible ways. The Ontario-Quebec boundary was defined in 1874 and provincial survey parties ventured into "New Ontario" in the 1880s, surveying the land to the west of Lake Temiskaming. These surveys hinted at the possibilities of mineral wealth and recommended agricultural settlement in the newly discovered rich clay belt to the west and north of the lake. By the mid-1890s, the communities of Haileybury and Liskeard (incorporated as New Liskeard in 1903) were taking shape on the western shore of Lake Temiskaming. Though connected by water to the south, they were quite isolated in the winter and soon began petitioning the government at Toronto for a year-round rail connection. Railway entrepreneurs were unwilling to back such a venture, but several factors soon came together to make the north-south railway a reality.

Late in 1899, Sir George William Ross was elected premier of Ontario, leading a Liberal government that had been in power for 26 years. In part to show that the government, despite its years in office, remained vigorous and far-sighted, Ross began to focus on northern development in New Ontario. He and other Ontario politicians and businessmen were also aware of Quebec's dynamic efforts to settle its new northwestern territories and there was concern that French and Catholic settlers would flood into Ontario's English and Protestant hinterland.<sup>6</sup> Ross initiated another survey of the province's northern resources in 1900 and, following its positive findings in 1901, determined that the government would build and operate a railway to the north. The railway was announced in 1902 as a colonization effort not unlike the colonization roads of the 1860s that attempted to open the areas between the Ottawa River and Georgian Bay. Established under a government commission, the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway (T. & N.O.) was to be the province's first public utility, predating the Ontario Hydro Commission by three years. Initial plans called for the new railway to connect North Bay on Lake Nipissing with New Liskeard, a distance of 113 miles (181.9 kilometres).

Despite several positive developments, including the discovery of silver by construction crews at Cobalt in 1903 and the federal announcement the same year of yet another northern transcontinental railway that the T. & N.O. could possibly link up with, the government found it difficult to arrange financing. Nevertheless, by 1905, when the Ross government was defeated by the Conservatives under Sir James Whitney, the railway had reached New Liskeard. While Whitney had advocated a privately operated railway when in opposition, he accepted the arrangement he had inherited from Ross and breathed new life into it by appointing Jacob Lewis

Englehart to the commission in charge of the railway.<sup>7</sup> Englehart, an energetic and successful entrepreneur in the newly developing oil industry and a founder of Imperial Oil Ltd., soon became chair of the commission, a position he would hold for 13 years.<sup>8</sup>

In Englehart's skilful hands, and with the fortuitous mineral discoveries made during its initial stages, the T. & N.O. flourished. Whitney sanctioned the railway's extension northward and, by the end of 1905, the head of rail stretched 138 miles (222.2 kilometres) northward from North Bay and had reached the east bank of the White or Blanche (now Englehart) River. A year later, it was in full operation southward to North Bay.<sup>9</sup> The line continued to press northward, reaching the junction of the Northern Transcontinental Railway at what would become Cochrane in the summer of 1909. In the meantime, at the Blanche River the railway's engineers faced their first major technological challenge as the river gorge required a bridge. In the fashion typical of railway building at the time, equipment and supplies were gathered at the river in anticipation of the bridge construction. This concentration of men and material attracted ancillary services and soon some semblance of a community, initially referred to simply as White River Crossing, appeared in the wilderness. If geography was the initial spark for the new community, the decision in 1906 to make it a railway divisional point ensured its future. The decision was not universally embraced. Railway workers were reportedly disappointed that New Liskeard, with more amenities and housing available, was not chosen. The *Toronto Globe*, no friend of Whitney's Conservative government, offered the following opinion:

One cannot help but feel that the T. & N.O. commissioners made a mistake in selecting Englehart as a divisional point instead of New Liskeard. Englehart is only 25 miles [40.3 kilometres] further on, and that is not very much to add or to subtract from a train's run. At New Liskeard there are a splendid site and many facilities which Englehart will lack for years to come.<sup>10</sup>

On the west bank of the Blanche River, a town site was laid out and surveyed into lots that were sold at public auction in May 1906. The special train that brought dignitaries and prospective buyers to this auction was also the first one, other than work trains, to cross the new bridge. Soon a post office was established and construction began on stores, a school and several churches. A new railway station complete with railway offices and a restaurant was planned. In 1906, the first calls were made for the community to be incorporated as a town. The name chosen was Englehart, in honour of the new chairman of the T. & N.O. Commission. The following year saw the completion of the train station and the construction of car repair shops and a large engine roundhouse. By the summer of 1908, southern newspapers were routinely publishing the railway's schedules.<sup>11</sup> Englehart soon boasted a railway-operated greenhouse established to showcase the range of crops that could be grown that far north.

The continued requests for control of local affairs bore fruit in January 1908 when Englehart was proclaimed a town and the local Crown Lands agent, Williams Hugh, was directed to hold a municipal election. Englehart's first mayor, Dr. Roy C. Lowrey, was sworn in, unopposed, on January 8, 1908, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> some 203 electors chose J.C. Kennedy, Henry A. O'Grady, J.R. Dreany, L. Gartshore, Thomas S. Woollings and Samuel Errett as councillors.<sup>12</sup> The new council met for the first time at the schoolhouse on January 20, 1908.

Jacob Englehart remained an unflagging advocate of New Ontario, losing no opportunity to extol its future possibilities. The products of the government-sponsored greenhouse at Englehart were especially close to his heart.<sup>13</sup> To him they hinted at the bountiful crops that could be grown at a latitude where, further west, new farms were already producing bumper crops of wheat for export. The fact that the temperature could reach -40 F (-40 C) in December was noted without comment.<sup>14</sup> Englehart also promoted the timber and mining wealth awaiting exploitation and the delights awaiting tourists interested in fishing and hunting.

In 1910, a reporter noted: "Four years ago the lots on the town site of Englehart were put up for sale. To-day [sic] the town boasts of three business streets."<sup>15</sup> When the first census was compiled in 1911, Englehart had a population of 670. Though it lost out to Haileybury in its bid in 1912 to become the seat of the district court, the community continued to prosper.<sup>16</sup> A serious fire in 1913, not uncommon in the wooden communities of the north, destroyed much of the business section, but the setback was temporary and the properties were soon rebuilt.<sup>17</sup> A century later, in 2008, as "the little town with the big heart" celebrates its centennial, Englehart's population stands at 1,500. While the turn-of-the-century mining fever has long waned, forestry and agriculture remain staples of the town's economy. Two of the town's major employers are the Ontario Northland Railway and Grant Forests Products Corp.<sup>18</sup> Recreational tourism, with an emphasis on wilderness experience, hiking, camping, hunting and fishing, has grown in recent years.<sup>19</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> W.L. Morton, ed., *The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> G.L. Cassidy, 'Arrow North: The Story of Temiskaming' (Cobalt: Highway Book Shop, 1976), pp.18-20.

<sup>3</sup> Calcareous.

<sup>4</sup> G.L. Cassidy, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations; a History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 15 and 42-45.

<sup>6</sup> Charles W. Humphries, *'Honest Enough to be Bold: the Life and Times of Sir James Pliny Whitney* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 145-48.

<sup>7</sup> Humphries, *Life and Times of Sir James Pliny Whitney*, p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Tucker, "Jacob Lewis Englehart," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?Bioid=42261&query=englehart](http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?Bioid=42261&query=englehart).

<sup>9</sup> Albert Tucker, *Steam into Wilderness: Ontario Northland Railway, 1902-1962* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 25 May 1906, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 26 June 1908, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Bud Colquhoun, "Englehart Echoes," 19 Dec. 2007; *New Liskeard Speaker*, 9 Jan. 1908; *Agricultural Temiskaming*, (New Liskeard: Temiskaming Board of Trade, 1910).

<sup>13</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 28 May 1910.

<sup>14</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 13 December 1906 and 11 September 1909.

<sup>15</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 28 May 1910.

<sup>16</sup> *Toronto Star*, 3 January 1912.

<sup>17</sup> Tucker, *Steam into Wilderness*, pp. 77-80 and *Toronto Globe*, 5 May 1913.

<sup>18</sup> Grant Forest Products Corp. owns and operates a lumber mill that produces oriented strand boards and is advertised as the largest operation of its type in the world.

<sup>19</sup> Town of Englehart website: [www.englehart.ca/siteengine/activepage.asp?PageID=22](http://www.englehart.ca/siteengine/activepage.asp?PageID=22).