

Hilary Wasserman
Ontario Heritage Trust

The Ontario Heritage Trust is the only legislated heritage organization in Canada responsible for the identification, protection, renewal and promotion of Ontario's rich and diverse built, cultural and natural heritage. It is the Government of Ontario's trustee for properties of provincial heritage interest. It also acts as an important advisor to the Minister of Tourism and Culture on issues relating to heritage conservation in Ontario.

My main task as a research assistant was to research and write Statement of Significance reports for properties protected by an easement. SOS reports contain five sections: description of historic place, historic value, architectural value, contextual value, and character defining elements (which is a bullet-point list of all historic features). SOS reports are currently used only internally; however, once a SOS has been completed for each property, the reports will be added on to the federal website historicplaces.ca. The Trust has around two hundred built heritage easements. Writing SOS reports is a good way of familiarizing oneself with what the Trust does and its properties. SOS reports are extremely beneficial because once they are completed they are loaded on to Sharepoint (our internal documents sharing system) and are used by everyone at the Trust to assist them with various tasks. In my department, Acquisitions and Conservation Services, SOS reports are very important for when a property owner calls and wants to repair or change a feature on his or her property. Since the last section of a SOS report contains a bullet-point list of all the heritage features, our heritage planners can quickly respond to an owner's request because he or she will know if the

feature that the property owner wants to change is historic or not. For my research I went through old Trust files, traveled to archives, and contacted local heritage groups.

During my time at the Trust I visited several properties and sites. For our all-staff day we went to Glassco Park in Kleinburg, Ontario. Glassco Park is 200 hectares of partly forested land in the valley of East Humber River. The park was donated to the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1968 (changed to the Trust in 2005), making it the first place to be owned by the Trust. On the tour, we learned about the current process of repatriation for the Aboriginal burial site. I also got to attend the plaque unveiling for the fiftieth anniversary of the Ontario Human Rights Code. In addition, I participated in Doors Open Toronto at 265 Parliament Street East, the site of the first purpose-built parliament buildings in Upper Canada, which were burnt down by the Americans in 1813. Due to being an agency rather than a ministry, the Trust assists citizens and different levels of government with their heritage endeavours, often acting as an advisor. I experienced a mixture of public history in the private and public sphere by taking part in the Trust's daily work and observing meetings with local landlords and ministry officials. My time at the Trust was a good first step as a public historian.