

HISTORICAL AIR PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS RESEARCH CENTRE

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One of the most important acquisitions of the ETRC Archives in 2001 is the collection of approximately four thousand aerial photographs of the Eastern Townships donated by the Department of Environmental Studies and Geography of Bishop's University.



Source : ETRC

Aerial photo of Sherbrooke — c. 1945.

While the ETRC Archives has extensive holdings of conventional photographic records relating to many aspects of Eastern Townships social, cultural and economic history, this is the first major aerial photographs collection of the region to become part of the Archives' holdings. It is an extremely valuable research resource.

The use of aerial photographs is to gain a view and perspective of landscapes not available from ground level has a history almost as long as photography itself. Early cameras were taken aloft in balloons and the resulting photographs likened to 'bird's-eye views' of familiar scenes. Advances in aerial photography, culminating with contemporary satellite imaging capability, have a close association with warfare and military applications. The American Civil War saw the widespread use of aerial photography as a means of gathering information about enemy installations. The application of aircraft to aerial photography in World War I resulted in vast quantities of aerial reconnaissance photography. The techniques and technology of aerial photography were further advanced in World War II and subsequently in the Cold War.

Despite, however, the close developmental association between aerial photography and military applications, there are a host of applications of these photographs. They are, first and foremost,



Magog aerial view, 1933.

historical records of the landscape. Just as the century-old portrait photograph preserves the likeness of an individual, so does the aerial photograph of a portion of the Eastern Townships landscape taken in 1933 record a permanent image of that landscape and everything in it at that point in time. It merely does so from a different perspective than that of the ground observer.

The first vertical black and white aerial photographs in the Eastern Townships were produced in 1933 when the shoreline of Lake Memphremagog was photographed from an altitude of approximately 4000 feet. Following World War II, in 1945, the first systematic aerial photographing of the whole of southern settled Canada was undertaken and, at intervals since then, aerial photographs have been produced within the Eastern Townships for a variety of special purposes.

The applications of aerial photography beyond the military are many. Aerial photographs have become the indispensable tool of the forester, the geologist, the farmer, the hydrologist, the ecologist, the geographer and, not least, the historian. Whereas maps provide a selective representation of reality, aerial photographs contain an image of everything that is visible to the camera's lens. Not only do they provide direct visual evidence of the landscape but they may also be studied stereoscopically, providing a three dimensional view of the earth and its features.

The collection of aerial photographs donated by the Department of Environmental Studies and Geography contains photographs from several time periods beginning in 1933. The most extensive part of the collection is comprised of 1945 photos while additional coverage from 1950, 1960, 1965 and 1978 is included. The later coverage was flown at progressively higher altitudes as the technology of aerial photography improved.

The photographs are indexed by means of flight line numbers and photograph numbers and these are, in turn, summarized on regional maps of the Eastern Townships showing the individual numbered flight lines that were flown. The flight line maps will be stored in the old library's map cabinet, where researchers can browse through them in order to request the specific aerial photo they wish to view. The full indexing of the collection will be completed by the Spring 2002 and the photos will be available for reference at that time.

