

Company Towns of the Bat'a Concern

Batawa: the Bat'a town comes to Canada

Stephen Fai¹, Todd Duckworth², Nevil Wood², Katie Wurts²

(¹ Director, Carleton Immersive Media Studio; ² Research Associate, Carleton Immersive Media Studio)

In 1939, faced with the impending Nazi occupation, Thomas J. Bata Jr., heir to the Bata Shoe empire, left Czechoslovakia. His destination was Canada. Later that year, he purchased 600 hectares on the Trent River in south-eastern Ontario and began the development of a factory town modelled on his father's form of benevolent capitalism that had proved so successful in Zlin. By 1999, the factory fell victim to the not-so-benevolent nature of global capitalism and the village of Batawa faced an uncertain future. In 2008, Sonja Bata, the wife Thomas Bata Jr., purchased what remained of the village from the Bata Corporation with the intention of re-establishing Batawa as a model community and an international example of social responsibility and environmental stewardship. In 2009, Sonja Bata was approached by Carleton University with an offer to work with her in rethinking the constitution of a "model village" in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Since May 2009, the Carleton Immersive Media Studio (CIMS), the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, the School of Industrial Design, and the Faculty of Public Affairs have been collaborating on an interdisciplinary project to address this question. This paper will present a brief history of Batawa and our work to date for the future of this community.

Working with AutoDesk Research Canada and the Batawa Development Corporation, the Carleton Immersive Media Studio has developed an innovative building information model (BIM) for Batawa. This BIM incorporates diverse sources of data, from quantitative assets (including historic architectural drawings, topographic surveys, and planning proposals) to significant qualitative assets (historic photographs, first-hand accounts from residents). Our BIM does not represent a frozen moment in Batawa's history, but leverages the capabilities of BIM software to provide a navigable timeline that chronicles tangible and intangible changes in the past and the future of this Bata company town.