

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

September 2006

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VICTORIA MEMORIAL SQUARE RESTORATION

Victoria Memorial Square, as it has been known since 1905, is just over two acres of green space in the centre of what is now a rapidly growing mixed-use neighbourhood. Originally established as a garrison burial ground by John Graves Simcoe in 1794, it has seen long periods of neglect punctuated

by brief intervals of renewed attention over the course of its two-hundred-year history. Currently, a community initiative that began in 2002 is working to restore the tiny park and enhance the commemoration of those buried on the site.

Sadly, the first person known to have been interred there – when it was just a clearing the bush – was John and Elizabeth Simcoe’s infant daughter Katherine. Despite being a military plot located on the Ordnance Reserve, the square contains the graves of several children and some civilian victims of the cholera scourges of the 1830s.

The park surrounding the graveyard was laid out by Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head in 1837 who named it Victoria Square in honour of the princess and heir apparent. Originally six acres in size, it was paired with the smaller Clarence Square at the other end of Wellington Place, an area intended for “better” residential development.



Wellington Place Plan by Henry James Castle, courtesy of Toronto Public Library

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Last Look at the Old Don Jail?

On May 6 of this year, following the unveiling of a plaque sponsored by the Riverdale Historical Society, a little-publicized tour allowed a few visitors a final glimpse of the historic Don Jail’s interior prior to its renovation by the Bridgepoint Health Corporation for use as an administrative facility. The old jail was closed in 1977, although its modern addition was used for penal purposes until quite recently. The institution’s dire reputation has long overshadowed the building’s magnificent architecture which, at the time of its opening in 1865, manifested the most advanced theories in penitentiary reform and criminological thought. The painting at right gives some idea of what would then have been the jail’s largely rural setting.



Continued on page 8 Watercolour based on a drawing by W. J. Thomson, 1888, courtesy Toronto Public Library

Victoria Square, *from page 1*



1885 photograph courtesy of Toronto Public Library

Although two churches successively occupied a portion of the park from 1858 until the early 1960s, 1863 saw the last burial in the cemetery, which was then declared to be full. The following two decades marked a period of decline for the square. The condition that it be fenced and secured by the lessee from 1871 to 1886 was not met, and contemporary newspaper articles often related sensational accounts of grave robbing and vandalism. John Ross Robertson lamented the loss of the headstones (only 17 remain today) in his *Landmarks of Toronto*, 1894.

In 1884 the city appointed a Military Burial Ground Commission to oversee the preservation of the site. A survey was conducted of the 344 visible burial mounds, after which the ground was raised to improve the drainage and the land once again used as a public park. The remaining headstones were removed to a memorial terrace along its western boundary. Then, towards the end of the 19th century, the Veterans’



1913 (detail), A.S. Goss, City of Toronto Archives

Association began to collect monies for a monument in the square to the fallen soldiers of the War of 1812. A granite pedestal designed by architect Frank Darling was unveiled in November of 1902, and in 1905 the name of the park was changed to Victoria Memorial Square. A bronze sculpture of an “Old Soldier,” by a young Walter Allward completed the memorial in 1907. With his empty left sleeve and care-worn features, Allward’s 1812-era figure perhaps owes something to the veterans of the then-recent Boer War.



From the 1920s onward, industrialization of the area surrounding the park drove away its more affluent residents and it became impoverished along with the neighbourhood. In the 1950s the surviving headstones were set in concrete around the monument and subsequently suffered some weather damage. Then, in the 1990s, when the zoning rules were changed and a new community began to develop, attention once again focused on this hidden gem.



1923, A. Beals, Library and Archives Canada

The current restoration was underway by 2003 when Victoria Memorial Square was declared part of the Fort York National Historic Site. A survey in the fall of 2004 confirmed the boundaries of the burial area and identified the location and depth of the graves – some as shallow as 20 cm – in order to avoid their disturbance during development. The headstones were cut free and placed in protective storage. The land has been re-graded and the design includes new pathways, lighting, trees and plantings, park furnishings and a playground in addition to the reinstallation of the grave markers and the rescued cornerstone of the 1892 Eden Smith Garrison Church.



New sod has been laid over the men, women and children buried in the square whose surviving records teach us about life at the garrison and in the surrounding city. The square itself has much to say about the development of an historical self-consciousness in Toronto – from the veterans who rallied in the 1890s to those who, since the 1950s, have gathered annually to honour soldiers who served in the Coloured Corps during the war of 1812. As if to underscore the changing nature of our city, free tai chi classes are held in the park every Thursday evening at 7 p.m., weather permitting.

Plaque Honours Father of Responsible Government

On the sunny morning of June 14 a plaque was unveiled at Front and Frederick Streets to honour the birthplace of Canadian statesman Robert Baldwin. The Town of York Historical Society is pleased to have been one of the sponsors of this tribute. Speakers at the event included representatives of the other sponsors – Paulette Touby, publisher of *The Bulletin* and Alex Waugh on behalf of the condominium owners at 160 Frederick Street – and Councillor Pam McConnell, all of them ably introduced by Bruce Bell, the project’s coordinator.



In his brief speech Sheldon Godfrey (above centre), Vice-President of TYHS, quoted J.C. Morrison, a member of Baldwin’s cabinet, addressing the House on the introduction of the Rectories Act in 1851. The passage of that Bill saw the Anglican Church disestablished as the state religion in this country which Morrison described as “peopled...with persons from all creeds and from all nations equally entitled to the favour and protection of the government.”

When the Maple Leaf had been removed and Bruce had read the plaque (text below left) out loud, the twenty-five-voice choir of St. Michael’s School – all dressed in red and white like so many flags – sang *O Canada* in both official languages. It was a proud moment. Later, during a reception in the condominium lobby, Janet Walters of TFPO presented each child with a print of the building in which Baldwin had been born and from which William Lyon Mackenzie would later issue his *Colonial Advocate*.

On May 12, 1804, Canadian statesman Robert Baldwin was born in a house that stood on this site. A reluctant politician, he is recognized as the father of responsible government in Canada and as the first real premier of this province. His legacy includes the reformation of the judicial and education systems, the foundation of the non-sectarian University of Toronto and the granting, in 1849, of a general amnesty for participants in the rebellion of 1837. Robert Baldwin died on December 9, 1858.



Scavengers Hunt the Post Office

Toronto’s First Post Office is a popular destination for those organizing corporate or recreational scavenger hunts. Pictured at left is the “Green Team,” one of seven who took part in Bentall Capital’s “Concrete Jungle Adventure” on May 10. On August 22, Canada Post used TFPO as a rest and water stop on their team-building race for Rogers Wireless. The Rogers people, unlike their Bentall counterparts, were not required to draught a letter with a quill and seal it up with wax as proof of their visit.

PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE New Faces in the Post Office



The *very* new **Gemma Baptista Diamond** was born on May 25, just hours

after her mother Janet left the post office for a routine check-up. The healthy little girl, only five pounds and seven ounces at birth, had not been expected until June.

Meanwhile, back at the post office, Janet's duties are being handled with care by **Amira Routledge**. An emerging theatre and costume designer with a degree from the University of Victoria, Amira occasionally has to leave her "day job" on hold in order to seize the opportunity to further her career.



Most recently, this saw her attending the Burning Man Festival, a week-long extravaganza of radical self expression and self-reliance in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada. Into this newly formed breach in the ranks stepped **Tanner Harvey**, another graduate of UVic and an aspiring theatre director. While all of this creative energy is good for the place, the challenge in the coming months will be to ensure that the two of them are never recruited by the same production.



New Members on the Board

The Town of York Historical Society would like to welcome the following new Directors to its Board:



Gerald Doyle has for three decades managed and directed the design and construction of several significant developments in both Canada and the United States, including major heritage restoration projects in Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton. The latter involved the readaptive use of an old post office building. He currently operates as a consultant in the development sector.



Cynthia Malik is a writer of short stories whose long-abiding interest in history has recently led her in the direction of historical fiction. Her background is in education. With a bachelor's degree in history and English literature and a master's degree in linguistics from Columbia University, she has taught high-school history and English in Canada and has also taught in India. She currently both lives and works in the "old town."



Jennifer McIlroy is a marketing and communications specialist. She has led teams to create and execute brand-marketing, customer communications and advertising programs for major Canadian firms and public-sector clients. She currently works as a consultant, creating business plans for small businesses in the downtown area where she also lives and is the editor of her condominium's newsletter.

POST BOXES FOR RENT

The postal boxes at 260 Adelaide Street East are historical reconstructions of the originals built by James Scott Howard in 1833 and once held by such notables as Mayor William Lyon Mackenzie. At the time of this printing, two of these boxes had become available for rent. Anyone interested should contact the post office at 416-865-1833.

Summer Housekeeping



Thanks to a grant from the Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations program, the Town of York Historical Society was able to engage the services of **Ian Gibson** for twelve weeks this summer to catalogue the Society's library collection.

A previous history graduate, currently enrolled in the Faculty of Information Studies program (formerly Library Science) at the University of Toronto, Ian was more than up to the challenge having spent the previous summer cataloguing the library of the Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor. While his academic credentials were impeccable, additional weight was given to his time spent as a volunteer gunner at Fort Malden and to the fact that he plans to attend his own wedding, in the spring of 2007, wearing a kilt.

Having completed the cataloguing job in record time, Ian took the remainder of the summer to redesign the web-site on which he would post the library's searchable database, and to install the hardware necessary for a new high-speed Internet connection. The new site also hosts a digitized version of *Toronto 1837: A Model City*, a 1995 publication of Toronto's First Post Office.

Kate McAuley, whose qualifications were outlined in the December 2005 newsletter, has meanwhile spent the summer addressing the shortfalls in the collection records and storage she identified last fall, as well as creating new housing and records for a recent and considerable donation of artifacts. Kate's work these past months was made possible by a generous donation from a former post-office employee who is also a lifetime member of TYHS.



Heritage Canada Honours Two of Our Friends

On July 31 the Heritage Canada Foundation announced the winners of its 2006 awards program, the country's most prestigious recognition for achievement and excellence in the field of built-heritage conservation.

Margaret (Peggy) Kurtin is the winner of the Lieutenant Governor's Award for her years as a dedicated volunteer working tirelessly to preserve Toronto's built heritage. She is a founding member of the Cabbagetown Preservation Association and led the successful effort to establish the Cabbagetown Heritage Conservation District, a thriving community of 1,500 properties.



Catherine Nasmith, an architect and Vice-Chair of the Toronto Architectural Conservancy, is the winner of the Journalism Prize in recognition of her regular contributions to the *Globe and Mail* and for producing the *Built Heritage*

News, a bi-weekly electronic newsletter on current conservation issues which she distributes, free of charge, to over one thousand subscribers.

These two and the winners of three other awards will be honoured at a special ceremony to be held at the historic Government Conference Centre (former Union Station) in Ottawa on Friday, October 13.

Citizens for Riverdale Hospital



The CHR is an organization formed to fight the proposed demolition of the 1963 Chapman and Hurst hospital now affectionately known as the "half-round building." The CHR is currently fundraising towards retaining legal counsel to assist with the case before the Ontario Municipal Board. For further information, go to the Toronto Architectural Conservancy website (www.torarchcons.org) or contact Penina Coopsmith at peninac@sympatico.ca.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Important Heritage Forum for Mayoral Candidates



Where do the candidates for mayor stand on heritage issues? The Toronto Historical Association will pose this question at a public forum on **Wednesday, October 25, 7:30 pm**, in the west hall of historic Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street (south of King just east of Parliament Street). David Miller and Jane Pitfield are attending.

Each candidate will deliver prepared responses to three questions given to them in advance by the planning committee, and then questions will be entertained from the floor. In order that all THA members' concerns are addressed, representatives are invited to contact Ann Rowan beforehand (arowan04@sympatico.ca) with their suggestions.

The Toronto Historical Association is an umbrella group representing over 50 heritage organizations, but they (we) need your support. Please plan to attend. Moderating the forum will be Jennifer Lewington, Toronto City Hall Bureau Chief for the *Globe and Mail*, who has a particular interest in heritage issues.

Research Your House

Gerald Whyte will explain how and where on Tuesday, September 19, at 6:30 p.m. in the Riverdale Public Library. Hosted by the Riverdale Historical Society. \$4 or free for RHS members.

Tour of Religious Archives



Friends of the Archives of Ontario presents a unique series of visits to five religious archives in Toronto. Each Tuesday in October a host archivist will provide a tour of his or her facility and collection, highlighting some of the treasures held within.

- October 3** The Salvation Army Archives: Canada and Bermuda Territory
- October 10** Archives of the Presbyterian Church of Canada
- October 17** Jewish Archives of Ontario
- October 24** Archives of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto
- October 31** Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto

The tours will be given twice each day, at 2–4 p.m. and again at 7–9 p.m.. The cost of the series is \$100, or \$25 per individual visit. As numbers are limited, preference will be given to those who register for the complete series. Visit www.friendsarchivesontario.com to find the registration form. Mail it to FAO, P.O. Box 27, 260 Adelaide Street East, Toronto, M5A 1N1. Registrants will be given directions to the venues in their confirmation packages.

All proceeds will be used to support the FAO grants program which assists small archives in the province.



The West Toronto Junction Historical Society's annual house tour will be held on Sunday, September 24, from 1 to 4 p.m.. Tour the grand houses of High Park Avenue including, among others, that built for Daniel Webster Clendenhan in 1887, the Herman Heintzman house and 204 High Park Avenue, both built in 1891.

Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 the day of the tour. For tickets or information, call 416-763-3161 or e-mail westjunction@bellnet.ca.

Historical Walking Tours

This fall, a number of free walking tours of Toronto neighbourhoods are offered by the Royal Ontario Museum (ROMwalks) and Heritage Toronto. For more information on any of the following, contact: www.rom.on.ca (416-586-8097) or www.heritagetoronto.org (416-338-0684).

Saturday, September 23 at 1:30 p.m.

The Howards' High Park

Explore the lives of architect John Howard and his wife Jemima, who deeded High Park to the city, and hear how their legacy continues to affect us today. Heritage Toronto, Leader: Catherine Raven
Meet at: Colborne Lodge

Sunday, September 24 at 1:30 p.m.

Colourful Corktown

One of Toronto's oldest neighbourhoods, Corktown retains a rich stock of domestic and industrial heritage buildings as well as a great many stories. Heritage Toronto, Leaders: Shirley Hartt and Catherine Raven
Meet at: Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

Wednesday, September 27 at 6 p.m.

Historic Toronto

Learn about the city's origins as the town of York, whose inhabitants lived, shopped, banked, mailed their letters and went to church in this area. Royal Ontario Museum, Leader: Luisa Giacometti
Meet at: Toronto's First Post Office

Saturday, September 30 at 1:30 p.m.

The Beach

Learn about the personalities, institutions and landmarks that have contributed to the rich history of this neighbourhood connected to Lake Ontario. Heritage Toronto, Leaders: Barbara Myrvold and Neil Macdonald
Meet at: Toronto Public Library, Beaches Branch

Sunday, October 1 at 1:30 p.m.

South Rosedale

This prestigious area, named after the estate of Sheriff William Botsford Jarvis and his wife Mary Powell, is set amongst wooded ravines. Heritage Toronto, Leaders: Elaine Campbell and Janet Langdon
Meet at: Ramsden Park, opposite Rosedale Subway

New Books in the Gift Shop



Behind Bars: Inside Ontario's Heritage Gaols

By Ron Brown

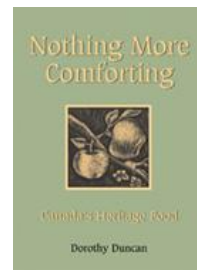
Natural Heritage Books, 157 pages, \$22.95
Ranging in size from single-cell lockups to impressive architectural monuments, the province's nearly 50 heritage jails are visited in this book, which also tells of the many hilarious escapes, gruesome hangings, hauntings and unusual trials which often brought these institutions to the centre of public attention.



Brewed in Canada: The Untold Story of Canada's 300-Year-Old Brewing Industry

By Allen Winn Sneath

The Dundurn Group, 480 pages, \$24.99
Predating Confederation by 200 years, Canada's brewing industry is now a ten-billion-dollar business whose one constant is change. In these pages are stories of individual power, colourful characters, family rivalries, prohibition, bankruptcy, takeovers and the challenges of Free Trade.



Nothing More Comforting: Canada's Heritage Food

By Dorothy Duncan

The Dundurn Group, 220 pages, \$26.99
Each chapter in this wonderful book focuses on one particular food or ingredient, giving historical facts and traditional recipes for such things as maple syrup, fiddleheads, Saskatoon berries, asparagus, corn on the cob, McIntosh apples and rhubarb – known as pie plant to our ancestors.



A Toronto Album: Glimpses of the City That Was

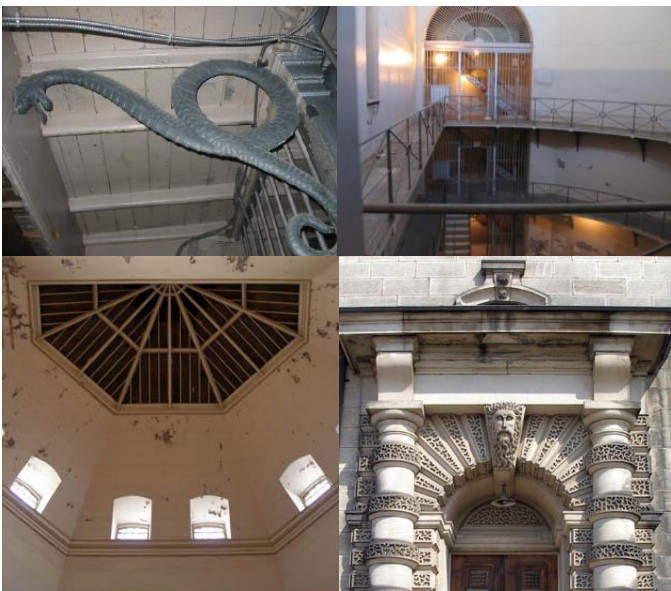
By Mike Filey

The Dundurn Group, 120 pages, \$24.99
This volume along with its sequel, *A Toronto Album 2*, comprise one of the most interesting visual archives of the city's history. Scenes of public life from 1860 to 1950 illustrate how dramatically the urban fabric and environment have changed. It will appeal to anyone interested in the evolution of this still-growing city.

Don Jail, *from page 1*

In the early 19th century, jail terms in British North America tended to be brutish but brief, the conditions in most jails being so appalling as to render them unfit for long-term habitation. A prisoner was detained only until an appropriate punishment could be meted out. Serious offenders were usually executed summarily or else expatriated to penal colonies in further flung corners of the Empire. Gradually the notion of incarceration itself as punishment evolved and the equally inhumane condition of isolation superseded deprivation in prison design. During the Victorian era, enforced contemplation gave way to reform through labour and prisoners were now assigned tasks to perform, such as farming their own food, which mitigated the cost of their upkeep. Nevertheless, the Don Jail witnessed seventy hangings, the last of them being the double execution (Canada's last) in 1962 of Arthur Lucas and Ronald Turpin for separate crimes.

The Renaissance Revival building designed by William Thomas for the Don Jail was modelled on the Pentonville Reformatory in England. Light and airy, it had a three-story atrium with a grand skylight and ventilation to the outdoors. The intricate iron balconies surrounding the rotunda are supported by gryphons, while those in the prisoners' wings depend on serpents. Other symbolic details include a stone carving of old father time on the lintel of the main entrance, which is flanked by columns that appear to be bound by ropes. The cells, albeit only 1.3 x 2.5 metres in size, were considered quite large at the time and were placed back to back inside a circulating exterior corridor. The walls of each of these hammock-sized enclosures are integral to the structure of the building, narrowing the possibilities for its adaptive re-use. Since its closure, however, this unique location has attracted many Hollywood film productions, including the award-winning musical *Chicago*.



Photographs: Ron Fletcher, President, Riverdale Historical Society

The Town of York Historical Society

Individual Membership	\$15
Family Membership	\$25
Lifetime Membership	\$150

Directors: Bruce Bell, Patricia Braithwaite, Richard Fiennes-Clinton, Gerald Doyle, Sheldon Godfrey, Cynthia Malik, Judith McErvel, Jennifer McIlroy, Councillor Pam McConnell, Joan Miles (President)

Toronto's First Post Office is administered by the Town of York Historical Society

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Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed October 8-9 for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Toronto's First Post Office is a museum and National Historic Site. The Town of York Historical Society is a legally incorporated non-profit organization and registered charity. Gratefully acknowledged is the support of the City of Toronto; the Ontario Ministry of Culture; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.