

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

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BISHOP'S BUILDINGS IN PATH OF DEVELOPMENT



Vancouver-based Westbank Developments is planning to build a five-star hotel and condominium complex on University Avenue at Adelaide Street. It is to be 700 feet tall and sit on eight storeys of underground parking. The billboards show a sweeping aerial view with a gleaming tower rising above the manicured

lawns of Queen's Park in the foreground and dwarfing the CN Tower in the distance. There is, however, one small obstacle. On the southwest corner of Westbank's property sits a white elephant – an old tavern, boarded up for decades, that comprises two remaining units of five row houses built between 1829 and 1833 by the English butcher John Bishop.

When the city planners recommended approval for the "Shangri-La" development in May of this year it was contingent upon the retention of the south and west facades of this historic landmark and their integration into the new building. Subsequent engineering studies have indicated that the old walls, albeit constructed with three wythes of masonry, will not survive the excavation required for the project which entails the removal of bedrock – part of the "Georgian Bay Foundation." Neglected and leaky, the building has suffered damage to its mortar joints and its sides have shifted and bulged to some extent. The current recommendation is for dismantling, storage and reconstruction.

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Rideau Canal Becomes Ontario's First World Heritage Site

On June 27 it was announced in Ottawa that the Rideau Canal, along with Kingston's Fort Henry and four Martello towers, had been inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. Built between 1824 and 1832, the 202 kilometre canal was built primarily for strategic military purposes, to provide a safe supply line for the British colony of Upper Canada in the fight to control the north of the American continent. The Rideau is the best preserved example of a slackwater canal in North America and the only one dating from the great canal-building era of the early nineteenth century that remains operational along its original line and with most of its original structures intact. It was designated a National Historic Site in 1924.



FALL PROGRAMMING



Image courtesy of Peter Higginbotham, www.workhouses.org.uk

“Strange and Idle Beggars” A History of Childhood and Labour in Victorian Times

Come and enjoy a late afternoon tea and history talk at Toronto’s First Post Office presented by Muddy York Walking Tours. Learn what the life of a child was like before public schooling was available. The presentation details the nature of child labour and of workhouses in the 1800s, and concludes with the introduction of reform and free education for all.

If you are bringing children, let us know and we can provide them with some special entertainment. An interpreter will demonstrate examples of games and toys that children played with in the 19th century.

Dates: Saturdays and Sundays September 22–23 and 28–29. Please arrive at Toronto’s First Post Office by 4:00 p.m.

Cost: \$35 per person. Please be advised that reservations are essential as space is limited.



Menu: Tea sandwiches, scones with butter and jam, and an assortment of cakes, pastries and tarts served with your choice of tea, coffee or apple cider.

Call 416-487-9017 for further information or to make reservations. Private parties and children welcome.

FROM TOWN TO CITY The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood in the 1830s

Heritage Toronto Walking Tour
Sunday, September 30
Meet at the Market Gallery, 1:30 p.m. (Free)

A lot happened to Toronto in the 1830s. Despite two serious cholera outbreaks, steady immigration saw the population increase five-fold over the course of the decade. The town incorporated as a city in 1834 and three years later witnessed armed rebellion. This tour focuses on the ten-block site of the original colonial outpost as laid out in 1793 by Governor Simcoe. By the 1830s this had become the commercial, financial and mercantile hub of a bustling capital. The market, the cathedral, the post office and the bank are just some of the sites to see.



Daniel Brooke Building, northwest corner of Jarvis and King Streets
Photo: Alan L. Brown, torontohistory.blogspot.com



Mystery Bride

Can anyone help us to identify the woman in this photograph, who appears to be wearing a late-Victorian bridal gown? There is a stamp on the back that identifies the print as coming from the “Ontario Archives.” Please contact us (416-865-1833, tfpo@total.net) if you recognize her.

EXHIBITIONS

David Thomson: Map Maker, Explorer and Visionary



Fur trader, astronomer and surveyor David Thomson mapped more of North America than anyone else. By canoe, dog sled, on horseback and on foot

he travelled a distance equivalent to that of twice circling the globe. Thompson's maps, letters and journals provide a detailed account of the fur-trade business, the native peoples he encountered and the lands he explored. They also record personal milestones such as his marriage to Charlotte Small, the births of thirteen children, and the many later careers he pursued as a merchant, farmer and writer.

The year 2007 marks the 150th anniversary of Thompson's death and the 200th anniversary of his first crossing of the Rockies. **This exhibition**, organized and circulated by the Archives of Ontario (where can be seen his great map of the west) explores Thompson's accomplishments and legacy. **It will be on display at Toronto's First Post Office October 2-30.**

The Bank of Upper Canada



Organized by Assistant Curator Kate McAuley, this showcase exhibit, featuring rare artifacts recently donated to the post office museum's collection, will be on display **at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from September 28 until February 28, 2008.** The former head office of the Bank of Upper Canada still stands on the corner of Duke (Adelaide) and George Streets where its construction was completed in 1827.



"A Victorian Christmas"

A History of Toronto's Christmas Traditions

Learn about the history of early Toronto and the Victorian origins of our Christmas traditions. Come in from the cold and warm yourself by the fireplace before settling in to relive the spirit of Toronto Christmas past. The program includes

- the founding of the town of York
- the Battle of York
- Toronto's Rebel Christmas, December 1837
- Charles Dickens, Toronto and *A Christmas Carol*
- a Christmas ghost story by Robertson Davies.

Dates: Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from November 28 to December 30. Please arrive at Toronto's First Post Office by 4:00 p.m.

Cost: \$35 per person. Please be advised that reservations are essential as space is limited.

Menu: Tea sandwiches, scones with butter and jam, and an assortment of cakes, pastries and tarts served with your choice of tea, coffee or apple cider.

Call Muddy York Tours at 416-487-9017 for further information or to make reservations. Private parties and children welcome.

Bishop's Buildings, *from page 1*

John Bishop originally built the houses on then fashionable Newgate Street (now Adelaide) as comfortable yet affordable homes for gentlemen. Among these was, briefly, Robert Sympson Jameson, Attorney General of Upper Canada. The centre house was once occupied by Madame Griebell's school for young ladies, and that to the east of it by a Mrs. E. Nuttall, grocer. The most easterly house was demolished in the 1930s, but four survived into the 1970s, the westerly two having become the Adelaide Hotel by the 1850s. (Bishop's son, upon inheriting them, had mortgaged the buildings in 1846 for £450.) The hotel was later known as O'Connor House and, by 1923,



Bishop's Buildings c. 1890, Toronto Reference Library

as the Clarke Hotel. The Pretzel Bell Tavern, which opened there in the 1960s, hosted a performance by Rita MacNeil and was a favoured watering hole of hockey player Eddie Shack. Meanwhile, Madame Griebell's school had become a Chinese restaurant.

Today only two of Mr. Bishop's houses remain – a tavern since the 1880s. Where the others once stood is a parking lot and, until November, the site of an archaeological dig. As the lot has never been seriously affected by subsequent development it is effectively a time capsule of the lives of its early inhabitants. An old wood-lined cistern, later turned to use as an in-ground refuse bin, has offered up shell buttons, clay marbles, pen knives, broken china (including dolls), inkwells and leather shoe soles. The former privy, now just a square of dark soil at the rear of the property, will no doubt yield further information about early Torontonians.

Still, what of the houses themselves, once home to the likes of Congregational Minister John Roaf, and champion oarsman William O'Connor? The "Bishop's Block Social History Project," including York University historian Craig Heron, wants to save more than just the facades. They argue that, as the city's oldest surviving hotel, the building ought to become a centre honouring the history of Toronto's hospitality industry. It is unlikely, however, given the evidence presented in a June 12 letter from ERA Architects to the city's preservation office, that even the facades will survive as originally built.

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

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Monday to Friday: 9-4

Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed October 7-8 for Thanksgiving and November 11 for Remembrance Day.

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.

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 (President), Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg.