

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

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HALIFAX HEARTBREAK



The Fishwick Building on Hollis Street in Halifax

On a recent visit to Halifax, your editor was inevitably drawn to these charming little Georgian buildings. Once close enough to read the billboard out front, it became apparent that they, along with two adjacent buildings, were to be demolished. Subsequent research revealed that they constitute one of the only intact blocks of 19th-century

buildings in downtown Halifax, and that one (the Harrington Building) is in fact the oldest remaining commercial building in the city. Its former neighbour to the north, the 1840 “Sweet Basil” building, was hastily torn down by the owner/developer when a clerical error discovered in its heritage registration provided a loophole.

The nature and names of these buildings embody Halifax history. The Fishwick Building (c.1820) is so called after F.W. Fishwick and Co., a freight-express business that flourished in that location, close to the harbour, during the latter part of the 19th century. In an 1871 photograph (page 2), the Fishwick Express sign is visible above the waiting ponies. The Shaw Building, on the corner of Duke Street, served as the head office of successive sugar refineries until the 1950s, which illustrates the one-time importance to the city of the Atlantic sugar trade. Designed in the classical style by architect S. P. Dumaresq in 1903, it too is a municipally registered heritage building. An art deco Imperial Oil building from 1926, constructed on wooden pilings, also faces demolition.

See “Halifax” on page 2

City of Toronto Lights Up the Old Town



With the flick of a switch on the evening of November 6, the facade of St. Lawrence Market was suddenly bathed in light. Then, as local historian Bruce Bell led the assembled crowd on an historical tour of the surrounding neighbourhood, other buildings successively lit up along Front and King Streets, culminating with the illumination of St. Lawrence Hall, whose doorway on that chilly night was flanked by two red-coated soldiers from a bygone era. This event kicked off a weekend of activities celebrating the Market’s 205th anniversary.

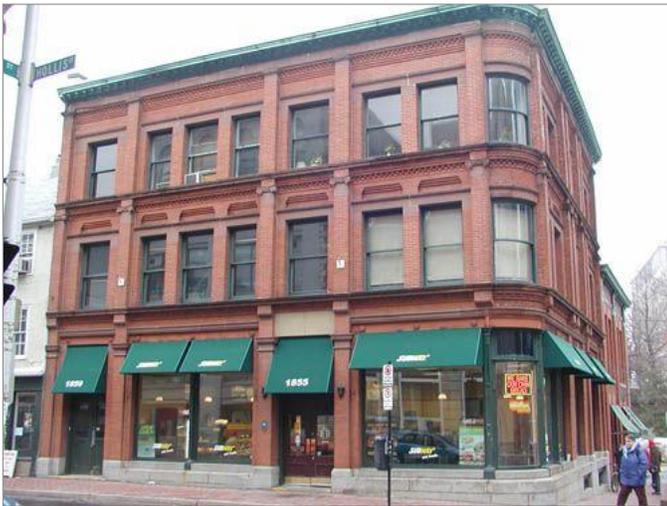


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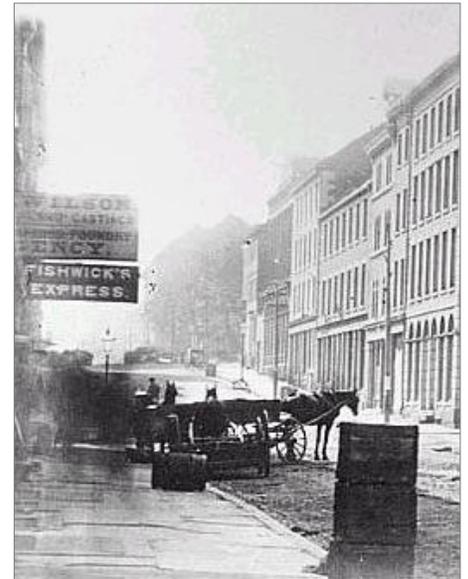
Halifax, from page 1



The Harrington and Fishwick buildings. Although both are covered in stucco, the former (at left) is of freestone and granite construction while the latter is a wood frame building.



A view south on Hollis Street at right shows the ponies and carts outside the Fishwick Express Co. in 1871. At left is the handsome Shaw Building with its elaborate cornices, curved corner panes, and engaged brick columns. At bottom left is the Upper Water Street façade of the Harrington Building when it was the entrance to Sweet Basil's restaurant. The plan below shows the group of buildings to be demolished.



The entire block was saved from demolition in the 1970s when heritage advocates thwarted a proposed harbour-front expressway. Subsequently, its upper floors were



occupied by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, with retail and restaurants at street level. Since NSCAD's departure in 2007, Ben McCrae, the owner and principal of Armour Group Ltd., claims an annual operating loss on the premises of almost \$250,000. Armour's planned "Waterside Centre" is a \$16-million, nine-storey retail and office complex incorporating the partially reconstructed facades of four heritage buildings. Opponents have described this as "deplorable Disneyfication." They argue that Nova Scotia's annual \$600-million tourist industry (and the province's largest) depends on maintaining an authentic Halifax cityscape. Under the city's weak heritage laws, however, and provincial legislation that

protects only facades, the Waterside Centre, with its looming glass tower, is a done deal. One wonders: is this the inevitable fate of our National Hotel?





National Hotel Update

On November 17 the Toronto East York Community Council overturned a decision by the Toronto Preservation Board (TPB) to permit the demolition of the National Hotel. Councillor Pam McConnell moved to heed the previously ignored advice of city staff that demolition is premature, pending a planned Heritage Conservation District study for the area, as the building is sound and has potential for re-use. McConnell also moved that a peer review be undertaken of the demolish-and-rebuild approach recommended by ERA Architects. Her motions passed with an overwhelming majority. “My head is still spinning,” writes Catherine Nasmith in *Built Heritage News*. A battle may have been won, but not the war. The developer will appeal to the OMB (Ontario Municipal Board), a body not known for decisions in favour of heritage conservation.

War of 1812 Victory Party



Laura Secord was spotted in Toronto on the weekend of November 6-7, as were a number of other characters seemingly transported here from 1815, including Colonel James Fitzgibbon, John Strachan, Richard Pierpoint, Tecumseh, and one Henry Smith. They first appeared among the guests at a sold-out banquet at St. Lawrence Hall organized by the Old Town Toronto (Promotional) Alliance. Brick Road Creations will be developing this theatre workshop production, written and directed by Ryan Symington and Jessie Shearer, over the next three years in preparation for the bicentennial of the war of 1812.

Come for tea! *Learn About the History of Toronto's Christmas Traditions*

Muddy York Tours presents late-afternoon high tea and a talk by the fire at Toronto's First Post Office on December 12, 13, 19 and 20 at 4 p.m. The cost is \$35 (or \$50 for an adult and child). Reservations are essential as space is limited. For the menu and other information, or to make a reservation, please call 416-487-9017 or e-mail richard@muddyorktours.com.



Don't Forget the Gift Shop this Holiday Season



The gift shop at Toronto's First Post Office has a wonderful assortment of books for all the Toronto-philos on your list. Greeting cards from *Canadian Culture Thing*, such as the one above depicting the University of Toronto women's hockey team circa 1912, come in boxed sets of ten for only \$19.99. Single cards are also available, for \$4.50 each.

Heritage Lighting, from page 1



The lighting of the south market building and others in the neighbourhood is part of a larger heritage initiative for Old Town Toronto which began with a stakeholders' workshop held at *C'est What?* pub on October 29, 2008. The Town of York Historical Society, as one of the interested parties, has been involved since that inaugural meeting. Subsequent sessions at City Hall have allowed stakeholders to offer feedback on the work of consultants hired by the City's Heritage and Preservation Services.

Designed by the firm Gabriel Mackinnon, the light show on November 6-7 consisted of both permanent and demonstration installations. The market's Jarvis Street facade, the facade of the Gooderham building, St. Lawrence Hall, and those of heritage buildings on the south side of Front Street will be lit from now on. Temporary installations included those on St. James Cathedral, the north facade of St. Lawrence Market and the architectural highlights of the Gooderham Building. These served as both a test case and an impetus for the future expansion of the program.

Lighting, in cities with long winters, is a way to animate the public realm. Here, it also serves to showcase some of Toronto's most important heritage buildings. "Lighting is a valuable method of interpreting history for the public. It reveals the richness of our built heritage, improves the appearance of the streetscape at night and creates a sense of public safety and comfort," said Sherry Pedersen of Preservation Services. One shining example of this is an older section of current "it" city Copenhagen,

which increased its tourism by 30% in a few months simply by lighting up. When the lights were turned on St. James Cathedral the other night, a woman in the crowd was overheard to say, "Why bother going to Paris?" It looks as though City Planning might be onto something here.

At right, TFPO Director/Curator Janet Walters and TYHS President Jennifer McIlroy join Bruce Bell on the walking tour. All photos, except that of the Gooderham Building (p.1) are by Brad Smith.



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

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**The Post Office will be closed December 25 – 28 for
Christmas and January 1 for New Year's 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 Corporation.

The Town of York Historical Society

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

Directors: Bruce Bell, Patricia Braithwaite, Richard Fiennes-Clinton, Sheldon Godfrey, Cynthia Malik, Judith McErvell, Jennifer McIlroy (President), Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg and Elaine Tipping.