

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

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THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD!



The entrance to the Baby Point enclave, Toronto's first gated community. The Crown sold the tract to architect Robert Home Smith in 1900.

A century-old turreted pink cottage in the beaches was reduced to a pile of rubble at the end of June. A signature 1920s arts and crafts home in Baby Point awaits a similar fate, as does the 1928 home of architect Forsey Page (1885-1970) in Lawrence Park. Each of these demolitions is to make way for a new house desired by the owners. Together they highlight two serious dilemmas facing Toronto's

unique neighbourhoods. The first is that huge areas of residential Toronto have yet to be surveyed for heritage listings or designations by the City. The second is that development pressure is now coming to bear on older, treed communities with more character and shorter commutes to downtown than remote suburbs. This problem is not unique to Toronto; the city of Austin, Texas, has had to introduce interim rules limiting the size of any new single-family home to be built on a previously developed lot.

Heritage Preservation Services, our City's watchdog department in this regard, has been eviscerated to the point – with ten staff and only one researcher – where it can no longer be pro-active in seeking buildings to protect. Instead, it can only react to submissions by concerned community groups in response to demolition requests. This results in last-minute battles between property owners and heritage defenders in which the latter come across as shrill and reactionary obstacles in the way of development and individual rights.

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Speaking of which...



You'd be correct in thinking there's something familiar about the architectural rendering at left: the Post House Condominiums are coming to the parking lot directly behind Toronto's First Post Office. Designed by Wallman Architects for the Alterra Group of Companies, Post House will feature

designer colour schemes, retro-chic common spaces, saunas, a yoga/pilates studio and twenty-four-hour concierge service among other amenities. Curious? The sales office is now open at 317 Adelaide St. East, or you can visit posthousecondos.com for more information. While understandably nervous about the construction phase of the project, the post-office staff is cautiously optimistic about this new development and the partnerships it will engender.

Neighbourhood, *cont'd*

Local politics has played out very differently in each of the three cases mentioned above. In The Beach, the local councillor tried to fast-track a designation despite very little opposition to the demolition and a great deal of support for the owners' plans. In Baby Point, the Councillor voted in favour of the demolition despite the



204 Beech Avenue as it existed prior to June, and as envisioned by Altius Architecture.

This latter Georgian Revival house, influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, has a very steeped roof that embodies a certain French-Canadian aesthetic. The Baby Point house, which also harkens back to Arts and Crafts, is the centrepiece of a seven properties developed along the curve of Baby



66 Baby Point Road

Point Road by architect Robert Home Smith. Despite differing architectural features, these seven homes – in their harmony of size and shape and in the visual apertures between them – speak to a model of urban planning at the time. The so-called “McMansion” destined to replace the middle house has a footprint (5,900 square feet) almost 90% greater than the existing structure which, like its neighbours, backs onto a ravine on the south bank of the Humber River.

Below: 79 Dawlish Ave., Lawrence Park



As for the Beech Avenue demolition, while one mourns the loss of an example of early Balmy Beach development, one has to applaud the contemporary design – by Altius Architecture – of the new home that will replace it. The owners are former beach residents who, when one member of the family was suddenly confined to a wheelchair, searched long and hard for a lot large enough on which to build a liveable home that would not overshadow its neighbours. They also took care to ensure, prior to purchase, that the property was neither listed nor designated as historically significant.

But if Torontonians value the special characteristics of their various neighbourhoods – and we believe that they do – then consideration must be given to the creation of more Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) such as the one in Cabbagetown North. How differently things are playing out at number 7 Wellesley Cottages (below), where the owner has rescued the last of a row of 1887 workers' houses, even as he constructs a new home behind and beneath it. (Stay tuned; we will be featuring this story in a future issue.) A recent study of 32 well established HCDs undertaken by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, with funding from the Trillium Foundation, clearly indicates that they are successful on many fronts, not the least of which is that they have been shown to increase property values. Restoration and renovation are greener – and create more jobs per dollar spent – than new construction. So what are we waiting for?



FALL HERITAGE EVENTS

Death in the Victorian Era



This seminar takes place in the Ireland House at Oakridge Farm near Burlington. Built between 1835 and 1837, this was the home – and place of death – for many

Ireland family members, and it will be dressed in mourning for the occasion. Tour the house, and learn about some of the bizarre funeral traditions that were practiced in the Victorian era. A warning: the program is for adults only, as some content may not be appropriate for younger audiences.

When: Friday, October 22, 7:30 p.m.

Where: 2168 Guelph Line, Burlington

Cost: \$10 per person

Information and Registration: 905-332-9888

Spadina House Re-opens



Spadina House has recently undergone an extensive restoration to reflect the period between the two world wars, with a focus on the “roaring twenties.” Originally built in 1866, Spadina was

home to the prestigious Austin family for 116 years. It was enlarged many times between 1898 and 1913, when the family’s renovations and additions to both house and grounds were completed. The decision to restore the interior to the 1920s was partially based on the fact that the house currently appears as it did at that time. Most important, however, was to create an authentic environment – using reproduced materials and original family artifacts – in which visitors can explore life during an era that brought dramatic changes to Toronto.

When: Sunday, October 24, 1-4 p.m.

Where: 285 Spadina Road

Cost: Admission is free

Information: 416-392-6910

The Women in Our Past: Strategies and Resources for Researching Female Ancestors



The Toronto Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society and the Canadiana Department of the North York Central Library have joined together to sponsor an all-day workshop that will explore new and varied approaches to researching those often elusive women in

our families. With expert speakers from across Ontario, this event will offer participants a deeper understanding of the circumstances that governed and shaped the lives of our female ancestors – from family relationships, domestic service and the justice system to the fur trade, migration and world war. Find out how and where to search for relevant records and learn about the latest research techniques.

When: Saturday, November 6, all day (9:00-4:45)

Where: North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge St.

Cost: \$45, or \$40 for OGS members

Information and Registration: 416-733-2608

Parler Fort

Fort York Debuts a New Speakers Series

Award-winning historian Jack Granatstein will launch the series during Remembrance week with a presentation focused primarily on his newest book, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History* (co-authored with Dean Oliver). Published by Oxford



University Press Canada in association with the Canadian War Museum, this lavishly illustrated volume includes over 200 rare photographs, historic works of wartime art reproduced in colour and original wartime maps – many never published before now. Entries cover biographies from James Wolfe to Rick Hillier, key military and political issues, famous battles and lesser known conflicts.

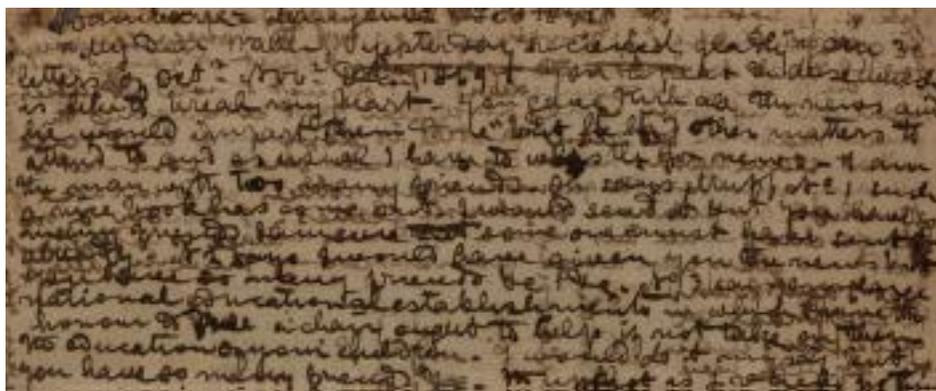
When: Monday, November 8, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Fort York, 250 Fort York Boulevard

Cost: \$10

Information: 416-392-6907

1871 David Livingstone Letter Deciphered



"...as usual I have to whistle for news – I am the man with too many friends – Oh says Muff No 1 such a nice book has come out – I would send it but you have so many friends I am sure that someone must have sent it already – N2 says I would have given you the news but you have so many friends &c &c ...The upshot is I receive nothing."

So wrote explorer David Livingstone to his dear friend Horace Waller, from a village in what is now Congo. Bed-ridden, feverish and despondent, he

confessed doubt that he would live to see Waller again. Written on pages torn from books and newspapers, in ink made from berry juice, the faded and indecipherable letter first resurfaced at an auction in 1966. This past summer, a new spectral imaging technique finally enabled its transcription, allowing an intimate glimpse into the thoughts of one Victorian and, by its details, a then-contemporary perspective on Europe's exploration and exploitation of Africa.

So much of what is known about the private thoughts of 19th-century personalities is through their correspondence. Misgivings and biases expressed in letters to colleagues and loved ones are often absent from their published works. These are now the stuff of blogs and tweets, and *everything* is published. Check this out: www.emelibrary.org/livingstoneletter.

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 10–11 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 Tourism and Culture; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.

WANTED

**YOUR VOTE ON
OCTOBER 25**

**PLEASE TAKE HERITAGE INTO
CONSIDERATION WHEN CASTING
YOUR BALLOT IN
THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION**

Consider the track records of incumbents
and the promises made by fresh faces

AND PLEASE VOTE



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, Ewa Jarmicka, Cynthia Malik, Judith McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy, Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg and Elaine Tipping.