

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

May 2011

Vol. XXVII No. 1

FEDERAL GRANT SAVES O'CONNOR HOUSE

The Catholic school board had applied to demolish it, but a group of concerned citizens banded together in 2005 to raise \$4 million to restore what remained of Senator O'Connor's once magnificent Maryvale estate. In March of 2010, their considerable efforts were rewarded when Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty announced a \$2.1 million contribution. By June, the TCDSB had kicked in \$400,000 more, and offered the group a 21-year lease on the property at \$1 per annum, with an option to renew. They plan to use the old estate as a place where Irish-Canadian heritage and culture can flourish and be passed on to the not-quite-so-Irish youth of present-day Scarborough. The house is a grand old Colonial Revival home, designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2009 for its rich architectural details. Doric columns, vousoirs and spoolwork aside, the nexus of its true value lies in the legacy of Francis Patrick O'Connor.



Born to Irish immigrants in Deseronto, 1885, Frank O'Connor left school at the age of fourteen to work for General Electric in Peterborough. In 1912, he and his wife Ellen, a young widow from Belleville, moved to Toronto. The following year, they opened the first *Laura Secord Candy Store* at Yonge and Elm Streets with financial help from an old friend in Peterborough. To name the shop after the Canadian heroine had been Nellie O'Connor's idea, as was the simple black and white packaging and shop decor.

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Maclean House Designated Too Late?

In December of 2009, under the pretext of winterizing his vacant property at 7 Austin Terrace, the owner had all the century-old sash windows smashed out and replaced with plywood. Contractors also removed the historic portico from the north façade and other architectural elements that might make the building worth preserving. Why? Because when developer John Todd had purchased the property in October, 2009, he had been told by Councillor Joe Mihevc that a heritage designation for the building was being sought. Todd had paid \$2.3 million for the property in order to tear down the existing structure and build eight townhouses and six rental units. The problem with this plan was that the old stucco apartments (c.1952) had spent the first forty years of their life as the home of J.B. Maclean, which had been designed by architect John Lyle.

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O'Connor House, *from page 1*

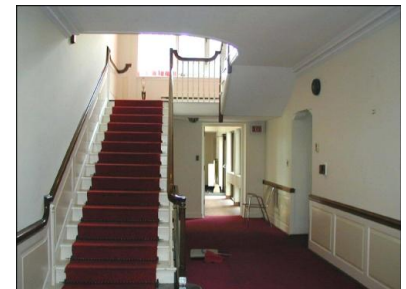
A fresh formula, good business acumen and a policy of treating their employees well (profit-sharing was introduced in 1923) would grow the business into a multinational franchise that made millions for O'Connor. Rich, handsome, staunchly Catholic and Liberal, a shareholder in the Toronto Maple Leafs and a widower by 1931, Frank O'Connor would spend the rest of his short life giving back to this city. It is his philanthropy in the dark days of the Depression for which he is largely known.



The house at Maryvale as it appeared in O'Connor's lifetime.

In 1929 O'Connor provided the full amount of the building fund for St. Michael's College. In 1935 he created an elaborate fund that retired the accumulated debt of the Archdiocese of Toronto and benefited Sick Children's Hospital, the *Toronto Star* Fresh Air Fund, the Christie Street Military Hospital, the Canadian Institute for the Blind, and St. Joseph's Hospital. While his charitable work embraced all denominations, all races and all forms of human suffering, he was especially generous to Catholic organizations, and served as president of the Toronto Knights of Columbus for ten years. He supported the election campaign of Premier Mitch Hepburn in 1934, and that of Mackenzie King in 1935. The latter garnered him a seat in the Senate, where he replaced the late Hon. Charles Murphy.

Maryvale was for many years the site of lavish parties, fundraisers, political meetings and even international ploughing competitions. O'Connor had purchased the 600 acres near Victoria Park and Ellesmere Road in the late 1920s, and named it after his only daughter. The house, completed in 1933, still remains, as does a large coach house and one other small outbuilding. Gone are the extensive greenhouse and the indoor swimming pavilion that converted to a ballroom when the pool was covered with a dance floor. Gone too are the barns and stables for the herd of Ayrshire cattle, the Clydesdales and the racing Thoroughbreds. Gone too soon was Frank O'Connor, dead at age 54 by 1939. In his will he left money to the local farmers' daughters who had helped to host his Maryvale galas. The estate itself he bequeathed to the De La Salle Christian Brothers and the Daughters of Wisdom. Together they would open the city's first co-educational Catholic high school there in 1963 and name it Senator O'Connor. The Brothers lived in the big house until 2000, when the property became that of the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The Board tore down the old school and hired Kearns Mancini Architects to build a new one, which opened in 2005. They also intended to tear down the house which, as a result of having its utilities shut off for some time, had sustained interior damage such as buckled floors, peeling paint and growing mould. Vandalism had also inflicted some exterior damage, and so the windows had been boarded up. It was a rather sorry sight, but with visibly good bones, when *O'Connor Irish Heritage House* incorporated and took the lease. Today, with the exterior renovation completed and new utilities installed, the board works tirelessly to complete the interior work prior to their March 2012 deadline. It's a heartwarming tale of the rescue, restoration and appropriate re-use of a heritage building in the suburbs, and a fitting legacy to a generous man whose history seems to have been left out of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography. No doubt Irish eyes are smiling.



Lamenting Another Lost Hotel

The destruction by arson of the former Empress Hotel in early January of this year was a tragedy of great proportion. The fire made the news for weeks, and ignited discussion of the sorry state of the City's heritage preservation resources – both fiscal and human – and its lack of political clout versus the development aspirations of private property owners. To its credit, the City had listed this building as early as 1974 and, following the mysterious collapse of part of the Gould Street façade last April, refused a demolition request and had the building designated a heritage site by late August. A meeting between city officials and the owners had been set for January 10 to discuss the building's future. By then, however, its charred ruin had been demolished for fear it might collapse.



We are left to consider what we have lost. Built in 1888, the Empress is described in the City's application to designate as "a well-crafted example of a late 19th-century commercial building that blends elements of the Second Empire and Romanesque Revival styles." In 1898, in a city that then boasted a hotel – or at least an inn or a tavern – on almost every corner, the *Evening Star* described it as "one of Toronto's best hotels." But it was as the Edison Hotel in the 1950s and 1960s that it took its place in the storied history of the Yonge Street music scene, hosting shows by the likes of Cab Calloway, Bill Haley and his Comets, and the legendary Bo Diddley

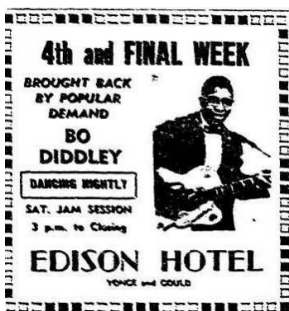
among others. The Edison was part of a musical strip that included clubs such as Le Coq D'Or, Friar's Tavern (now the Hard Rock Café) and even Zanzibar, now known for a different sort of entertainment.



The Edison closed in 1973, and the grand old building would witness the deterioration of its stretch of Yonge into one known for strip clubs and illegal drug activity. Current Ryerson University students will not recall that sordid era, or the glorious one that preceded it, but they mourned the loss of the Salad King, a cheap and cheerful Thai-food restaurant that closed when the north wall of



the old hotel collapsed. The Salad King has recently reopened in premises across Yonge Street. The University is building on the former Sam-the-Record-Man lot across Gould and has always been (and remains) interested in the other corner property, according to Ryerson president Sheldon Levy. Toronto will move on, reinventing itself as it always has. But let us not forget, in the meanwhile, that a crime has been committed here for which no one has yet been brought to justice. We are all victims of that crime. As Catherine Nasmith, architect and editor of the *Built Heritage News*, lamented: "No one will ever build a building like the old Empress Hotel again."



Editor's note: Should you wish to learn more about the Yonge Street music scene, *Toronto Rock & Roll Stories*, a three-part documentary which premiered on Bravo! last month, can be viewed online at bravo.ca/events/yongestreet/index.asp.

Paul Oberman, 1957 - 2011



Real-estate entrepreneur and developer Paul Oberman died on March 7 when the small plane on which he was a passenger crashed somewhere in remote Maine. He will be sorely missed by the built-heritage community and those organizations – such as the Architectural

Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) and Heritage Toronto – with whom he often worked closely. Although perhaps best known for the restoration and redevelopment of the Gooderham (“flatiron”) Building (below) and the former CPR Station that is now the Summerhill LCBO, his interest in the adaptive re-use of historic structures extended beyond the projects undertaken by Woodcliffe



Landmark Properties, the development company he founded in 1981. At the time of his death he was actively involved in the Canadian Air and Space Museum’s battle to save some World War II hangars

at Downsview – an effort which proved futile but garnered him an award from the ACO, which he can be seen receiving from Lloyd Alter, ACO President below right. In Oberman’s own words:

“If we don’t care about renewing our historic buildings, if we don’t care about preserving them by finding new uses for them, what will we care about? How will we create a vibrant urban environment consisting of exciting and remarkable built forms if we turn our backs on the great achievements – and even the mere survivals – of our past? If we don’t value our heritage, how will we create anything of value in the future?”

“Design as Renewal,” *Design Is Intelligence Made Visible*, (Toronto, 2010) Teknion, 16.115



New Genealogy Resource

In March, the Toronto Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society celebrated the completion of a two-decades-long project to transcribe and publish the grave markers at St. John’s Norway Cemetery. Originally established as an Anglican churchyard in 1853 – on three acres of land donated by Charles Coxwell Small – it is now interdenominational, and has expanded to occupy some 35 acres at the north-west corner of Kingston Road and Woodbine Avenue.

Published in CD format only as a fully searchable PDF, the transcription is over three thousand pages long and contains about 55,000 names in its index. It is available from the Toronto OGS website for \$30 plus \$2.⁵⁰ postage and handling.

Victoria Memorial Square Restoration Now Complete



The restoration of Victoria Memorial Square in Wellington Place, which we wrote about in September, of 2006, is finally complete with the interpretation of the

site. Affixed to each well-worn headstone is now an aluminium plaque bearing its original inscription, as found in a notebook prepared by the Military Burial Ground Commission in the 1880s and located in the City of Toronto Archives. The cornerstone of Eden Smith’s 1892 Church of St. John the Evangelist, often called the Garrison Church (demolished in 1963), has been installed in the park, as has a series of panels explaining the significance of the park, the cemetery, and the various artifacts it contains.

PHILATELIC CORNER

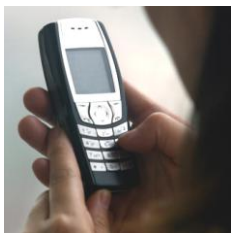
Faithful Marianne

An exhibition of stamps, *Marianne, Symbol of Liberty in France*, will be on display at the Canadian Postal Museum in Ottawa until July 31 of this year. It will examine the various incarnations of 'Marianne,' whose image has appeared on French postage since 1935. Her name and the Phrygian cap she wears are the two constants in philatelic portrayals that range from formal to abstract, and include those by Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau.



There is no historical figure on which this symbol of the Republic and its values – liberty, equality, fraternity – is based. Rather, this enduring icon dates back to the French Revolution when caps similar to those historically worn by freed Roman slaves became emblematic of the people's movement. The name Marianne, a popular one at that time, was also 'common' in the sense that it was considered vulgar by the aristocracy. Busts of this humble peasant girl now adorn city halls all over France, and Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve are among the women who have posed for them.

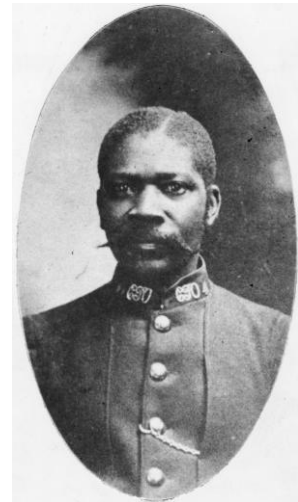
Text-Message Postage



Sweden and Denmark have both recently introduced a new form of postage that arrives by cellular phone and is paid for as part of your monthly phone bill. Customers send a text message to the post office and an automated reply provides them with a special code. This code is then transcribed onto the envelope in place of a stamp. The postal services in both countries simply want to make it easier to purchase postage, convinced that even "texters" will continue to send real letters. TFPO's Assistant Curator Kate McAuley is sanguine about the concept, seeing it as a return to the manuscript postage that preceded these newfangled stamps. Whatever we think of such postage, no doubt it will be coming our way soon.

Albert Jackson: Toronto's First Black Postman

Albert Jackson was appointed to the position of letter carrier by federal authority in May of 1882. But, when Jackson showed up for work, none of the other postmen would show him the rounds. Conveniently for Toronto Postmaster T.C. Patterson, the hall porter was off sick. Jackson was given the porter's job in the hope that the whole situation would just iron itself out. It did not.

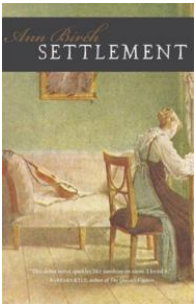


Instead, it became a polarizing issue in the press and on the streets of the city. Letters to the *Telegram*, the *Globe* and the *World* weighed in on everything from phrenology to the rights of British citizens. Newspaper editorials were generally supportive of Jackson, but the issue remained so contentious that "coloured folks" were occasionally taunted and harassed on the street or at their places of business.

It was an election year and in the riding of Toronto Centre the Liberal candidate was accused of using the controversy to woo Black votes and unseat the Conservative incumbent. Postmaster Patterson, an ally of John A. MacDonald, wrote to the Prime Minister to assure him that it was only the illness of the hall porter that was preventing Jackson from being given a delivery route. He assured Macdonald that Jackson would be carrying letters within a week, information that the P.M. was able to pass on to the group of "African voters" who met him on his arrival in Toronto. After June 2, once Jackson was out delivering mail, the Conservatives exploited the fact that Jackson's appointment had been made by their government.

Albert Jackson was one son of Ann Maria Jackson, who had fled slavery in Delaware and escaped to Canada in 1858 with seven of her children. Two other children, who had been sold away from their parents, would later rejoin the family here. Albert, who lived on Brunswick Avenue, would continue to deliver mail in Toronto until 1918.

New in the Gift Shop

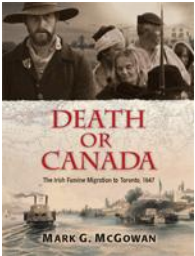


Settlement

By Ann Birch

Dundurn Press (2010), 328 pages, \$22.95

In this fictional retelling of Anna Jameson's brief visit to Toronto, Anna becomes attracted to Sam Jarvis, a married man already living beyond his means. While the author puts words in each of their mouths, and passion in their hearts, she also vividly and accurately recreates the world around them. By the end of this book, you feel that you too have spent time studying and rambling in 1830s Canada.

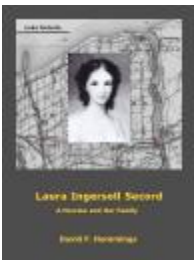


Death or Canada

By Mark McGowan

Novalis (2009) \$24.95

This book focuses on one year in the history of Toronto, a place known for its welcome to immigrants. In the summer of 1847 this city, then only 20,000 people, saw twice that number of Irish arrive on its wharves – many of whom were deathly ill with typhus. This is the story of how that challenge was met and overcome.



Laura Ingersoll Secord: A Herione and Her Family

By David F. Hemmings

Bygones (2010), 167 pages, \$19.00

In 1813, while James Secord lay recuperating from wounds he had suffered in the Battle of Queenston Heights, his wife would walk thirty kilometers to warn Lieutenant James Fitzgibbon of a surprise attack by the Americans. She would spend much of the rest of her life petitioning the British colonial authorities, with Fitzgibbon's support and testimony, for recognition of this deed.



Retro Fridge Magnets

Canadian Culture Thing, \$4.00

Some of our fabulous retro postcard images are now available as magnets for your refrigerator and white board. They also make great souvenirs or mementos for visitors and guests. Look for new postcards and other nostalgic items arriving this summer.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Puzzles and Pinpricks...

Participants in this year's Valentine's Day workshop show off the elaborate puzzle purses they created. Popular as Valentines in early 19th-century England, puzzle purses are made by folding square pieces of paper into thirds in both directions to form a grid of smaller squares, and then twisting the creased paper gently into a packet. The many panels were often numbered in order to provide the recipient with a sequence in which they should be read.



Karen Millyard, centre, with dancers and members of Playford's Pleasure.

...Music and Dancing

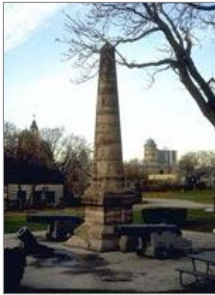
March 6 saw us once again at St. Lawrence Hall to celebrate Toronto's birthday in style. Brick Road Creations premiered a theatrical workshop based on correspondence – *Then and Now: A Poetic Landscape of Toronto*. After a brief but nourishing intermission, dance mistress Karen Millyard and friends performed a number of English Country Dances to the spirited accompaniment of the trio Playford's Pleasure. At the conclusion of the formal program, audience members were welcome to join the dancers in a workshop. This led to all but a few of those in attendance getting to their feet and, with varying degrees of success, attempting Regency-Era decorum while having the time of their lives.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

DANCING THROUGH TIME: Toronto's Dance History from 1900-1980 Until July 2

Curated by Dance Collection Danse, Canada's largest archives and research centre for theatrical dance history, this exhibition outlines the development of the city's dance scene by exploring influential touring artists and vaudevillians, the evolution of ballet and modern dance, and the growing diversity of dance forms in the late 20th century. It features costumes, photographs, playbills, programs, posters, designs, video and more. Many of the exhibition items have been rarely seen, and have not been showcased at other museums.

The Market Gallery, 95 Front St. E., 2nd Floor, open Tuesday to Friday 10-4, Saturday 9-4.



TOUR DE FORTS BICYCLE TOUR Saturday, June 18, 1:00 pm

Cycling is a unique way to explore Toronto's military history. Beginning at the Old Mill Subway Station, this Bike Month ride will begin with a visit to Teiagon, the site of the 17th-century Seneca Village. Following the Humber Bicycle Trails, stop and explore the sites of Toronto's forgotten French forts then continue along the Martin Goodman Trail to Fort Rouille, the last French Fort. The tour will conclude at Fort York with free admission.

Old Mill Subway Station, 2672 Bloor St. West, 416-392-6907 ext. 100 for more information.

RESHAPING TORONTO'S WATERFRONT

Monday, June 20, 7:30 pm

Large-scale development is once again putting Toronto's waterfront at the leading edge of change. The past 150 years have also seen a multitude of government agencies and developers managing waves of change. In this edition of *Parler Fort*, **Wayne Reeves**, Chief Curator, City of Toronto, will moderate a lively conversation with several contributors to the timely new book, *Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront* including editors Dene Desfor and Jennefer Laidley. Wayne's slide show of historic waterfront maps and photos will begin at 7, so come early!

Fort York, 250 Fort York Blvd., \$10, free for students, pre-register at 416-392-6907 ext. 221.



SPADINA'S FIRST ANNUAL GARDEN PARTY



Sunday, June 26, 12 - 4:00 pm

Inspired by the parties held here during the Jazz Age, Spadina Museum welcomes the coming of summer with music, games and period-appropriate refreshments. Do the Charleston with the Sugar Shakers. Tap your toes to the jazz rhythms of the Bezant Rosenman Duo. Create an artwork, solve a murder mystery and have your fortune told. Let your inner Martha Graham emerge and dance around the Maypole.

Spadina Museum, 285 Spadina Road, \$5 per person, refreshments extra.

EMANCIPATION DAY BUS TOUR

Saturday, July 23, 8:00 am - 9:00 pm



Join the Ontario Black History Society on the freedom trail. First stop is the St. Catherine's Museum to take in the award-winning exhibit, *Follow the North Star*. Other sites in St. Catherine's include the Anthony Burns gravesite and the St. Catherine's British Methodist Episcopal Church, rebuilt in 1855. Then it's on to Niagara Falls and another Episcopal Church, built in 1836 and later named after the renowned composer Robert Nathaniel Dett, its organist from 1898 to 1903.

Departs from the Yorkdale Mall, \$75 or \$65 for OBHS members, rsvp by June 22 to 416-867-9420.

Maclean House, from page 1



J.B. Maclean and Horace Hunter in 1947



Seen at left in happier days, 7 Austin Terrace now sits boarded up behind a chain-link fence, a rare stop order on its defacement having been issued under the Ontario Heritage Act. By February of 2010, the City had designated the property under that same Act. Little can be done, however, other than to enforce maintenance on it in its current condition. Furthermore, the owner actually holds a demolition permit on the building, despite the fact that two others were refused. Somehow, when the Casa Loma Residents Association weren't looking (or maybe they were?), he managed to get a building permit for a three-story house on the property. As a result, the city was obliged to issue the demolition permit required to build that house, although it seems generally understood that the developer is only interested in building the townhouses. While the demolition permit is so gummed up with red tape as to be unusable, the building could eventually suffer the tumbledown fate of Walnut Hall, or the mysterious fiery fate of the Empress Hotel. As Chris Selley wrote in the *National Post* (a direct descendant of Maclean's own *Financial Post*) this February: "If we are in fact fighting a hopeless battle for Toronto's heritage buildings, it's time to either rearm or surrender."

The Town of York Historical Society

Individual Membership	\$25
Family Membership	\$40
Lifetime Membership	\$250

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

John M. Lyle (Royal Alex, Union Station) originally designed the building at 7 Austin Terrace as the gatehouse for an estate that Maclean never completed. Instead, the original building was expanded with a service wing and southeast edition in 1934. John Bayne Maclean would live in this house, down the street from Casa Loma, until his death in 1950, just one day prior to his 88th birthday. Maclean was a reporter, editor and publisher. His first magazine, *The Canadian Grocer*, launched in 1887, and he started the *Financial Post* in 1907. He renamed another of his existing publications *Maclean's* in 1911 and went on to build a publishing empire in its wake. The company was renamed Maclean-Hunter in 1945 in recognition of Maclean's collaborator Horace Talmadge Hunter. Lieutenant-Colonel Maclean, who earned his military title commanding the Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars in the Boer War, was lucky to have engaged John Lyle at a period when the architect still accepted residential commissions.

Seen at left in happier days, 7 Austin Terrace now sits boarded up behind a chain-link fence, a rare stop order on its defacement having been issued under the Ontario Heritage Act. By February of 2010, the City had designated the property under that same Act. Little can be done, however, other than to enforce maintenance on it in its current condition.

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

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ISSN 1481-8922

Hours of operation:

Monday to Friday: 9-4

Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed May 22-23 for the Victoria Day long weekend and July 1 for Canada 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.