

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

May 2006

Vol. XXII No. 1

CONSTRUCTION CREW FINDS BURIED WHARF

In early March of this year, while digging out for the foundations of a condominium tower near Bathurst Street and Lake Shore Boulevard West, workers unearthed the massive crib-works of what once was one of the busiest commercial piers on Toronto's shoreline. Queen's Wharf, as it was later named for the young Victoria, was built in 1833 to enlarge an earlier structure that had served Fort York since the 1790s.

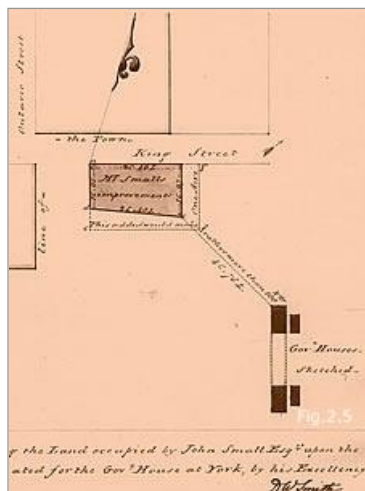
The white pine timbers of which it was made were, 170 years later, surprisingly well preserved. What was perhaps even more remarkable, from today's perspective, was their sheer size; at ten inches square, a number of them measured over forty feet in length. The excavated framework proved to be overall 140 feet long and nearly 40 feet wide and is believed to be part of the transverse section from



the southern end of the wharf that once extended into the harbour at the foot of Bathurst Street. It had been built by laying the squared timbers horizontally and pegging them together with wooden dowels to form boxes, or cribs, which were then tied together with iron spikes.

Continued on page 2

First Parliament Site Now in Public Hands



It was announced on December 21 of 2005 that the Ontario Ministry of Culture, in partnership with the City of Toronto and with the strong support of local heritage groups, had brokered a deal that saw two thirds of the site of Upper Canada's first parliament buildings revert to public ownership. The former owner of the lot at Front and Parliament Streets, Sylvester Chuang, agreed to an exchange in which he received property across Front Street to the north on which to relocate his Porsche dealership, and an additional plot east of Parliament. The Ontario Heritage Trust (formerly the Ontario Heritage Foundation) has been given stewardship of the first parliament site and will guide all future negotiations regarding its development. "This is a tremendous victory for all of the individuals and organizations who have worked long and hard to see this first step become a reality," said Peter Carruthers, Chairman of Heritage Toronto.

← 1805 Survey Sketch by D. W. Smith

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Queen's Wharf, *from page 1*

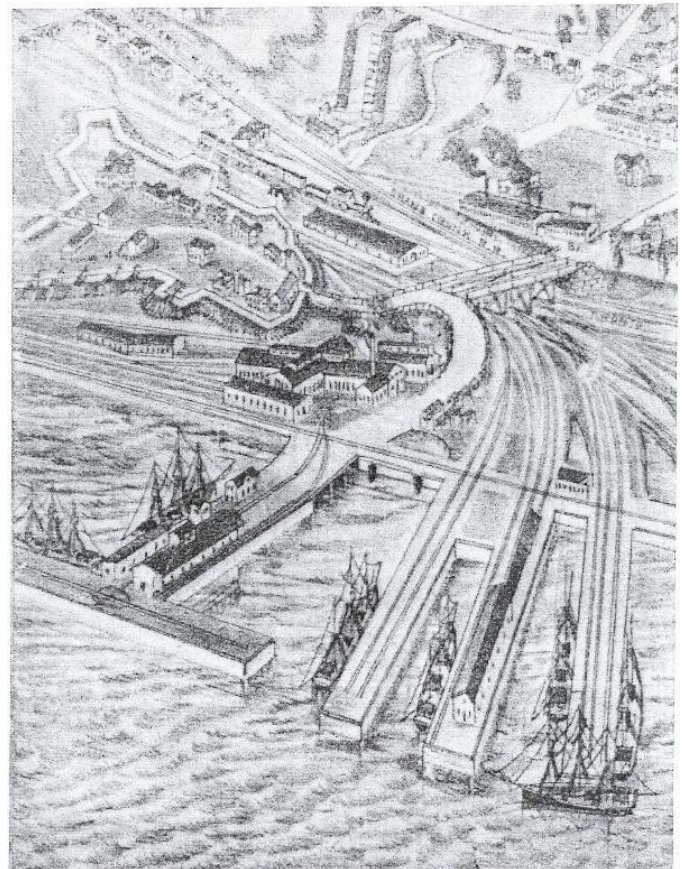
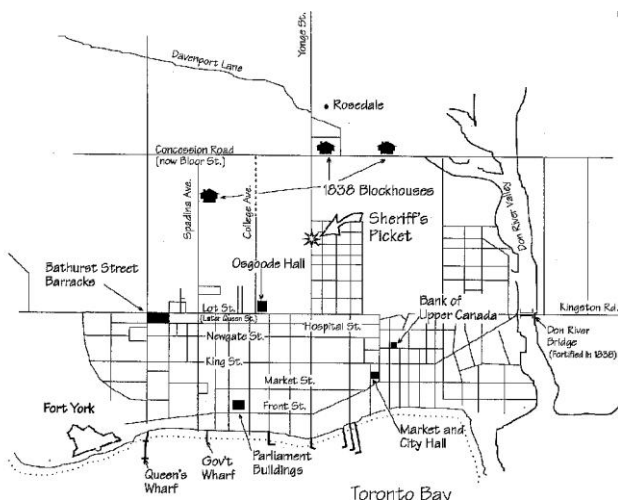


1842 watercolour by Henry Bower Lane

There are perhaps parts of the world in which such a discovery would have brought construction to a halt, at least for the time being, but Toronto is not one of them. The developer, Malibu Investments Inc., did however agree to cut free a corner section comprising five layers of the 10-inch beams, which they then hoisted by crane onto a flatbed and delivered to Fort York for further examination. Now that the wood is exposed to light and air it may not survive another century and a half, but at least it will last long enough to be studied and, it is hoped, to become part of an exhibit that might be developed on the history of the wharf.

The westernmost and one of the largest piers on Toronto's waterfront, Queen's Wharf was, in the mid nineteenth century, a major waypoint for both commercial and military vessels plying the Great Lakes. Used by schooners, steamers and navy frigates to load and unload goods, it later (see below) supported a spur of the Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway in order to facilitate the movement of commodities.

The lighthouse at its tip marked the western gap at the narrow entrance to the harbour – a lighthouse that was preserved by moving it some distance west to near the old Molson Brewery plant where it now commands the TTC's "lighthouse loop." The wharf itself began to be buried in the 1920s with landfill imported in order to move the shoreline south. For a brief time this spring a fortunate few were afforded the sight of it and a glimpse into a time when gigantic white pine trees forested much of Upper Canada in what must have seemed limitless abundance.



First Parliament, *from page 1*

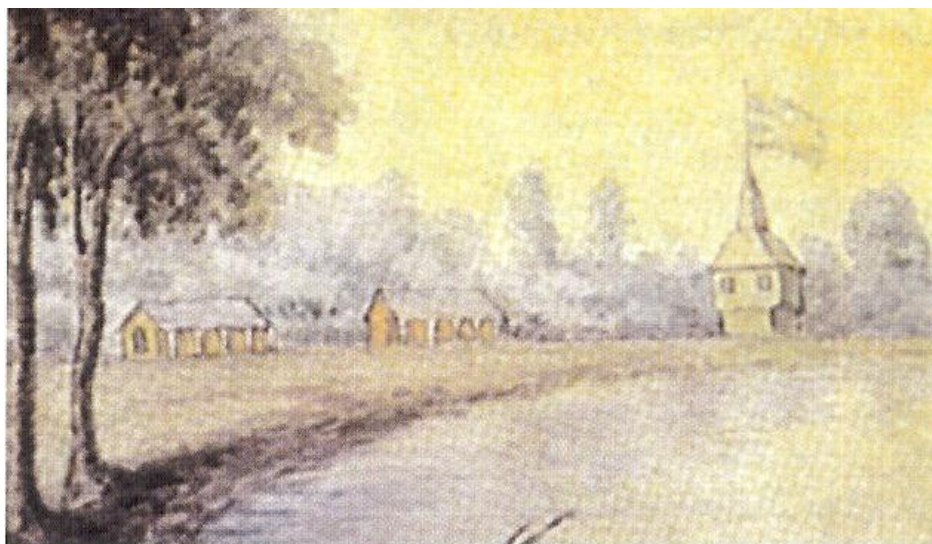
The first parliament buildings were situated in an area between the original town of York and the Don River, then known as “The Park.” While Governor Simcoe would have preferred the seat of government to be located in what is now the city of London, Ontario, the importance of naval defence in the aftermath of the American revolutionary war meant that the settlement of York was of primary concern. Erected in 1797 and intended as the wings of a central government house, the two houses of parliament were the first brick buildings in town. Separated by 75 feet, each measured 24 by 40 feet and their construction was supervised by William Graham, a master carpenter. Graham had also drawn up the plans which, unfortunately, do not survive. The southern building housed the Legislative Council and the one to the north the Assembly, but they also served as courtrooms and, until 1807, for church services. Immediately to the east of them were two 30-foot-long frame constructions that were used for committee meetings.



Sketch by William Leney, 1812



On the 27th of April, 1813, the U.S. army and navy attacked York, occupying it for four days during which they set fire to a number of public buildings. While many believe that the parliament buildings burned to the ground, this is not the case, although that fate did befall the neighbouring blockhouse. In fact the parliament buildings were repaired and used as barracks for the British troops stationed in York following the war, and later as temporary housing for newly arrived immigrants.



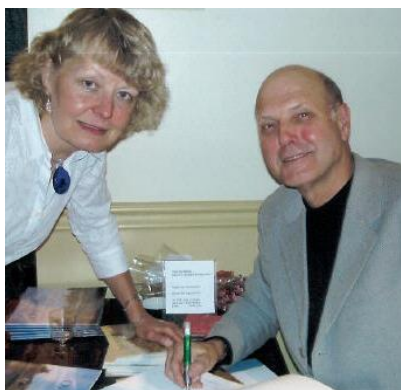
Above are two plans showing the location of the first parliament buildings. The one on the left includes the blockhouse to the south. The one on the right, from 1814, notes the buildings as “Barracks/220 men.” Below them is a detail from an 1804 view of York by Elizabeth Francis Hale.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Humber Book Launch



A capacity crowd was on hand December 7 for the launch of Ron Fletcher's book, *The Humber: Tales of a Canadian Heritage River*. It was a three-course evening with tunes from singer-songwriter and banjo player Danny Bakan for openers. Following selected readings from the book, Mr. Fletcher signed copies during a small wine and cheese reception at Toronto's First Post Office. He is seen here autographing a book for new TYHS member Marilyn Prole. The book, which retails for \$34.95, is available in the gift shop at Toronto's First Post Office.



Christmas Open House



Lisa Niemetscheck enjoyed a cup of mulled cider by the fire in the post office's reading room during the annual Christmas Open House on December 8. Lisa, far from her Vancouver home, had just received a parcel in the mail from her mom, which turned out to contain the cozy yet fetching piece of headgear she is seen modelling here.



Bruce Bell and Mike Filey at St. Lawrence Hall

No, that's not Bruce Bell and Mike Filey pictured above. Rather, it is two of the numerous notables who – as those in attendance at our celebration of Toronto's birthday on March 6 learned – have graced St. Lawrence Hall with their presence during its century and a half of history.

Two of our volunteers from that evening (and thank you, *all* of you), back in the Great Hall on April 25 for the Annual Trillium Book Award presentation, found themselves giving impromptu history lessons to the assembled literati based on what they had learned from two of Toronto's most popular historians at our annual fund-raiser.

Toronto Dollar Party



Once a year, St. Lawrence Market hosts a customer-appreciation night and Toronto Dollar Party at which local community organizations are invited to host tables promoting their programs and services. This year's event was held on the evening of April 6 and Toronto's First Post Office was well represented. Pictured above, TFPO Education Assistant Miriam Smith invites members of the crowd to attempt writing with a quill pen.

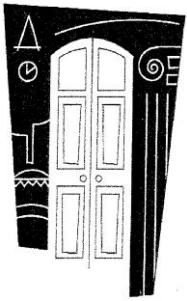
UPCOMING EVENTS

May is Museum Month



On Tuesday, April 25 at the Textile Museum, Rita Davies (City of Toronto Culture) read Mayor Miller's proclamation of May as Museum Month. Ontario's new Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco, was also on hand, as were Ontario Museum

Association personnel and authors Michael Redhill and Michael Winter. These writers, along with others such as Margaret Atwood and Ian Brown, will be contributing their memories of museums to *The Insider's Guide to Ontario Museums*. This OMA publication, in addition to its editorial content, will contain museum listings, museum gift ideas, advice and learning-experience suggestions for families, tourists and all avid museum-goers. It will be released in May and distributed through the *Globe and Mail*, and participating museums.



Doors Open Toronto

The City of Toronto Culture Division is proud to present the 7th annual Doors Open Toronto on **Saturday and Sunday, May 27-28.**

This is the one weekend, once a year, when over 140 buildings of architectural, historic or cultural significance open their doors to the public for a citywide celebration. Step inside hidden gems, modern landmarks, places of worship, halls of learning, boardrooms, bedrooms, mansions, museums, 'green' roof gardens, theatres, national historic sites, centres of rail and air travel, banking halls, architects' offices and more. Many of these buildings are not normally open to the public.

No ticket or pre-registration is required and admission is free to all buildings. The official program guide will be available in *The Star* on Thursday, May 18, 2006.

Annual General Meeting

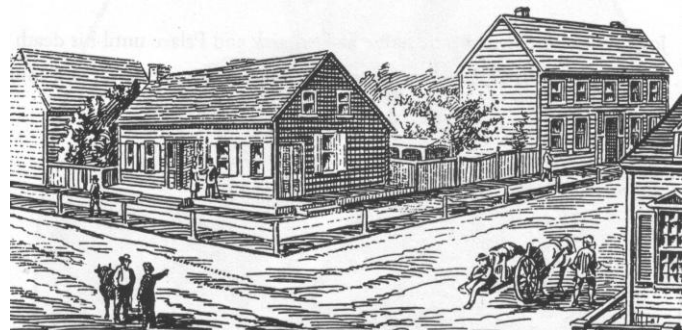


The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting at 7 p.m. on May 15 in the magnificent ninth-floor boardroom of the 1914 Dominion Bank building at 1 King Street West. Reports will be given and the elections of officers will take place. Following the meeting, Bruce Bell will recount the history of James Austin, a one-time printer's apprentice who became a prosperous merchant and President of the Dominion Bank. Seating is limited so please RSVP at 416-865-1833.

Plaque to Honour Birthplace of Robert Baldwin

On Wednesday, June 14, at 10 a.m., a plaque honouring the birthplace of Canadian statesman Robert Baldwin will be unveiled on the southwest corner of Front and Frederick Streets. Councillor Pam McConnell will be in attendance. Reception to follow; RSVP at 416-865-1833.

The Town of York Historical Society is one of three sponsors of this Bruce Bell History Project for 2006. Robert Baldwin, 1804-1858, is known as the father of responsible government in Canada.



New Books in the Gift Shop



The Canadian Housewife – An Affectionate History

By Rosemary Nearing

Whitecap Books, 256 pages, \$29.95

This book brings you the stories of women at the centre of domestic life through the centuries in both peaceful and turbulent times. After reading this account of how Canadian pioneers triumphed over the tribulations of running a household, you may never look at your broom closet or stove in quite the same way again.

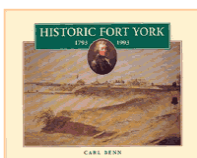


A Gentleman of Substance: The Life and Legacy of John Redpath (1796-1869)

By Richard Feltoe

Natural Heritage Books, 224 pages, \$25.00

Born to humble circumstances, Redpath emigrated to Canada in 1816 to become a stone mason. In two years he had his own building and contracting firm. The author traces his upward mobility through the ranks of business, politics and the church and his acceptance into elite society. Redpath was also the founder of the Canada Sugar Refinery.



Historic Fort York 1793-1993

By Carl Benn

Natural Heritage Books, 191 pages, \$29.95

This well-illustrated book explores the dramatic roles Fort York played in the frontier war of the 1790s, the birth of Toronto, the War of 1812, the rebellion of 1837 and the defence of Canada during the American Civil War. It also describes how this important heritage site came to be preserved as a tangible link to Canada's turbulent military past.



Toronto: A Pictorial Celebration

By Bruce Bell, with photography
by Elan Penn

Sterling, 160 pages, \$19.95

Walk the fascinating streets of Toronto. Explore great churches and government buildings; check into luxurious hotels; go through Toronto's universities; seek out the biggest, tallest, and oldest attractions and stroll the most elegant neighbourhoods – all in one enjoyable visit.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Walking Tour of Corktown



On Sunday, June 18, Shirley Hartt and Catherine Raven will lead a two-hour walking tour of one of Toronto's oldest neighbourhoods and one that still retains a rich stock of 19th-century heritage buildings. Corktown is home to the first parliament site and also boasts many fascinating stories such as that of escaped slaves Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, the owners of Toronto's first taxicab company. This up-and-coming area has been "discovered," but still maintains its considerable charm.

The tour will begin at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street, at 1:30 p.m. and wind up at the Dominion Tavern for a well-deserved pint. There is a \$5.00 registration fee. Please call 416-863-0010 for further information.

Other Walking Tours

From now until the early autumn, a number of scheduled walking tours of Toronto neighbourhoods are offered by both Heritage Toronto and the Royal Ontario Museum. For further information:

www.heritagetoronto.org (416-338-0684)

www.rom.on.ca (416-586-8097)

St. Lawrence Market Food and History Walking Tours operate Wednesdays to Saturdays and run from 10 to noon. Tickets are \$20; call 416-392-0028 to reserve.

Private tours for small or large groups are available through both www.brucebelltours.com (416-350-1295) and www.muddyyorktours.com (416-487-9017).

Philatelic Mystery Sheds Light on Aviation History



†TORONTO POST OFFICE
STATION R – 2 LAIRD DR
TORONTO ON M4G 3T0

†Available until December 2005 only.

On January 9 a request for pictorial cancellations arrived by mail at Toronto's First Post Office. That this had first been opened and then forwarded by Station R seemed odd, but the postmistress had inked cancel in hand when she noticed a small scrap of paper peeking out of the torn envelope from Germany. On it was the image shown at left – seemingly a regulation Canada Post pictorial, but not our own. Clearly what was asked for was this other cancel, ascribed to Station R. Why then had this been sent to us? Perhaps it was because the year-end had passed and Werner Hildebrand's letter, postmarked December 28, had arrived too late.

Sensing an injustice, we rang Station R only to be informed that they had never had a pictorial cancel and only used "date stamps." The facts just didn't add up. The depicted cancel plainly said "R" on it, but 1903 to 2005 does not make 100. And why the 75th Anniversary? Why the King-Kong-sized blimp and the skyscraper?

This was a job, we thought, for Peter Butler, President of the Greater Toronto Area Philatelic Alliance and the man who had helped us obtain our own pictorial cancel. But Peter was as mystified by it as we were. Undaunted, he took the image up to Station R in person, only to meet with the same response as we had: they had never laid eyes on it, hadn't ordered it and didn't even know such a thing was possible.

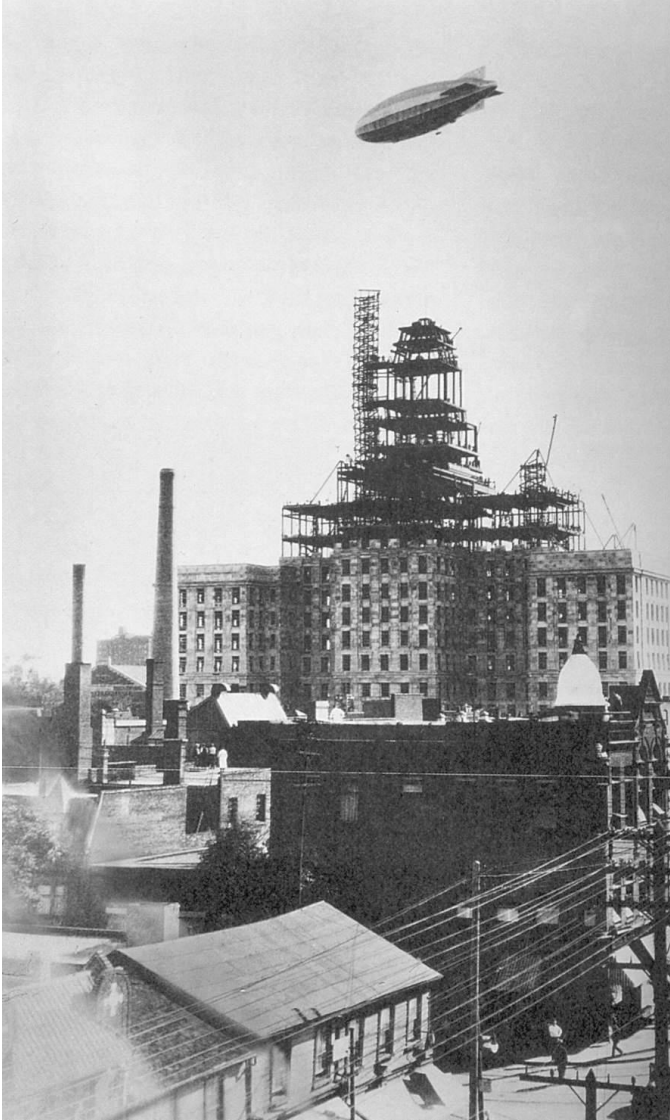
One thing they did know: they had been receiving requests for cancellations since last summer and, for lack of a better idea, had been forwarding them all to Station K. Just before Christmas, one of the clerks remembered, she had been busy and had delegated a colleague to send some of them "downtown." This was how Mr. Hildebrand's picture of the cancel had ended up at TFPO and in the hands of our two intrepid sleuths, one of whom – now *Inspector* Butler – set off for Canada Post headquarters in Ottawa to get to the bottom of things.

Meanwhile on January 13 when regular customer Mike Piette arrived at the post office the story was shared with him. Not having the image of the mysterious cancel at hand, the postmistress sketched it out over an imprint of our own as best she could and, as the thing took shape, a light dawned in Mike's eyes. "Why, that's the R100," he said without missing a beat. "The British airship. It flew over Toronto in 1930. It was a *very* big deal." So there it was; both the image and the 75th Anniversary were explained. Obviously the "1903" was a mistake and one that might have led to the cancel never having been released. Barely able to contain her excitement, the postmistress rang Peter Butler and left a long, incoherent message about British dirigibles. Two questions yet remained: who had ordered the cancel if not Station R, and where had our German friend seen it?

On March 7, at the funeral of their mutual friend, Peter Butler ran into Dick Malott who gave him a few possible leads, from the ranks of Canadian aerophilatelists, towards answering the first question. In the end our man turned out to be Barry Countryman, a resident of Leaside (he lives just around the corner from Station R) and the author of *The R100 in Canada*. Mr. Countryman had not only commissioned the cancel, he had ordered picture postage and had printed a number of postcards bearing the image of the airship docked at St. Hubert. He had never received the cancel – it had been destroyed when the error was discovered and a promised replacement never produced. As for the second question, at some point the cancel must have appeared on the Canada Post website as that is where Mr. Hildebrand told us (by e-mail) he had seen it. Evidently, others had too.

Last August, as the 75th Anniversary of the R100 flight loomed, Mr. Countryman was faced with the dilemma of what to do with his postcards. The intended cancel had meant to show the airship flying above the 1929 Bank of Commerce building at 25 King Street West, then the tallest building in the British Commonwealth but still shorter, by 218 feet, than the R100. He therefore decided to get his cards serviced at the postal outlet in Commerce Court, the PATH-system mall underneath the bank building. The unflappable Mr. Countryman was gracious enough to see the error in this fall-back cancel – it reads COMMERCT COURT – as "charming."

For the record, the R100 was one of two rigid airships designed by Barnes Wallis and intended for commercial transatlantic passenger service. Canada agreed to build a mooring for them and August 1, 1930, saw the arrival of the R100 at St. Hubert military base near Montreal after its inaugural crossing. Over one million people went to see it there, following which it took a 24-hour “local” flight over Ottawa, Niagara Falls and Toronto, passing over this city on the morning of August 11. The visit of the R100 has been described as “the single greatest air event, in terms of capturing the interest of the public, that ever occurred in Canada.”



Above, the R100 is seen flying over the Canada Life building, then under construction, at University Avenue and Queen Street. It would be completed on March 16, 1931.

At the Peterborough stamp show, on April 1, Peter Butler was recounting this story over lunch to another of the show’s judges when an older gentleman sitting nearby overheard and asked if he might interrupt. He told them he had seen the gigantic airship as a very small boy. It had flown directly over his street in Peterborough on its way from Ottawa to Toronto. He said he’d never forget the R100. And neither will we.

At right is the picture postage Barry Countryman ordered for the 75th anniversary of the flight. Thanks to Inspector Butler, the special cancel will at last be made available at Station R for a limited time later this month.



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 21-22, July 1,
August 6-7 and September 3-4..**

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, Sheldon Godfrey, Judith McErvell, Councillor Pam McConnell, Joan Miles (President)