

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

December 2011

Vol. XXVII No. 4

ANOTHER HERITAGE BUILDING TORCHED



The Century 21 listing for 295 George Street reads: “Land Value Only. Group of parcels being sold as land value only along with parcels 297, 299, 299 rear, 301A and 305 George Street...Ideal opportunity! Rare parcel of land in the heart of the city!!” Clearly the seller, a numbered Ontario corporation, considers the buildings

to be worthless, despite the fact that 305 – the Thomas Meredith House – is a designated heritage property. When chain-link fencing and plywood hoarding went up along the row, a passing filmmaker took notice and contacted City authorities who, she was told, were in the process of designating the house at 295. In fact, Councillor Krystin Wong-Tam was in a meeting with the owners [*ed: stop me if you’ve heard this story before...*] when she learned the building was in flames.

The Meredith House and those at 297/295 George – once the mirror images of each other – were built shortly after George William Allen subdivided Moss Park estate upon his father’s death in 1853. The house at 295 seems to have been a rental property until it was purchased by William Gooderham Jr. in 1884 and turned over to fellow philanthropist J.W.C. Fegan. Fegan was an Englishman who operated several homes for destitute boys in the old country. It is likely that he added the mansard roof and sizeable rear addition to the house at this time, and in 1887 it opened as the Canadian Boys’ Distributing Home.

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National Historic Site to Be Dismantled or Demolished



The Toronto Island Airport Terminal Building built in 1938 – and designated a National Historic Site in 1989 – has been declared redundant by the Toronto Port Authority (TPA). Furthermore, it is an impediment to the construction of a proposed \$45 million pedestrian tunnel for the use of commercial airline passengers. TPA has offered the City of Toronto \$250,000 towards the building’s relocation, and City



staff have agreed to assist in the search for a third party that will continue to operate it “in a manner consistent with its heritage status.” In light of recent events, one could be forgiven for thinking that one prospective partner, namely Downsview Park, might not be interested in preserving this piece of Canada’s aviation history.

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295 George Street, *from page 1*

James William Condell Fegan (1852-1925) had been raised a member of the Plymouth Brethren. He had taken it upon himself not only to house, feed and clothe homeless boys, but to educate them in the ways of the Lord and to equip them for a future. In the early 1880s he determined that, for some of them at least, that future lay in Canada. From 1887 onward, with a hiatus during the First World War, as many as 130 mostly teenaged boys from the British Isles would arrive in Toronto each spring. They were housed in the dormitory at 295 George Street, managed by W.H. Brace, until they could be found work placements on Ontario farms. By 1911 Fegan had himself purchased a farm, albeit at Goudhurst in Kent, England, and there had built a barn similar to those he had seen here. With machinery donated by Massey Ferguson, he proceeded to educate prospective young emigrants in the ways of Canadian farming. “Fegan” boys continued to come to Canada until 1939, by which time about 3,000 of them had woven their lonely ways into the fabric of this province. Christmas reunions regularly saw 50-60 in attendance. Fegan boys were still holding reunions as recently as 2004.



By then, their former “home” was in fairly sorry shape. It had been occupied for some time by the Society for Crippled Civilians (now GoodWill) but its capacious dormitories were later used as a warehouse – at one point for sheep remains, which earned it the local nickname of “the lamb slaughterhouse.” In this century, a renovation of its roof was begun and abandoned, leaving it open to the elements and subject to demolition by neglect. In 2009, photographs of its interior appeared on BlogTO, including one by Timothy Neesam, taken the year before, of a graffito based on Francisco Goya’s *Third of May* (at left). In January of 2011 its façade graced the cover of *The Globe and Mail*’s Toronto section under the headline “Still standing, but left in limbo.”

Limbo might be too nice a word for the state it’s in now. Ironically, one of the reasons cited for the abandonment and decay of this house and its neighbours is the location on the street of Seaton House, a shelter for homeless men with over 500 beds. If we do not pay attention to (our Dickensian) history, it would seem we are doomed to repeat it.

Jane Jacobs Chairs Installed in Victoria Memorial Square



Jane Jacobs was an early supporter of the Wellington Place community’s efforts to restore the square, and in 2002 wrote, “Victoria Memorial Square will be an urban jewel, rescued from a wasteland of neglect and forgetfulness. It beautifully ties the city’s earliest roots into a living, caring and revitalized community. The whole city is made richer by this enlightened act of stewardship.” These words are now inscribed in one of two chairs donated by Jane’s friends Ken and Eti Greenberg and installed in the park in Jane’s honour. Designed by Montse

Periel and Marius Quintana, they were produced by the Barcelona firm of Escofet, known for the quality and elegance of its street and park furniture. The chairs were unveiled during a ceremony on September 20 attended by the Greenbergs, Councillor Adam Vaughan and Jim Jacobs. Located in the southwest corner of the park under a canopy of trees, they provide a quiet and contemplative place to sit and watch the life of the square.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT Catherine Nasmith Elected President of Toronto ACO



Strong leadership and fresh resources mean you can expect great things of the Toronto Architectural Conservancy in the coming year. At the annual general meeting, September 20, architect Catherine Nasmith (former ACO president and editor of the Built Heritage News) was elected President. Plans include a long-awaited history of Rosedale, a book on Toronto's Art Deco buildings, and a possible crowd-sourced database of Toronto's heritage buildings. It is hoped the latter will enable researchers to expand the City's inventory of heritage properties.

The Toronto Architectural Conservancy will be greatly assisted in these endeavours by a large bequest from long-time member and life-long teacher Donald McKillop. The entirely volunteer-run organization has produced many award-winning publications in the past, of which Mr. McKillop was justly proud. In the words of out-going TAC President Alec Keefer, "[Don's] generosity will put us on a firmer footing and allow us to upgrade our products that will, we hope, attract new audiences and supporters. From little acorns and from *not-so-little* acorns..."

Shawn Micallef's *Stroll* Wins Heritage Toronto Award

Our friend Shawn Micallef, looking natty as usual, is seen here with artist and illustrator Marlena Zuber on stage at Koerner Hall. The occasion was the Heritage Toronto Awards ceremony on October 4, at which Shawn's book, *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto*, garnered an Award of Merit. A senior editor of *Spacing* magazine and a co-founder of *murmur*, he is currently a Canadian Journalism Fellow at Massey College. During the 2010 municipal election, his then-anonymous "Rebel Mayor" tweets embodied the spirit of William Lyon Mackenzie.



Skills for Change G.E.T.U.P. and Go to the Post Office



Tolu Aniemena and Rownak Chowdhury visited Toronto's First Post Office as part of the *Greatest Ever Toronto Urban Pursuit* (GETUP) organized by Skills for Change. Skills for Change is an organization that

provides courses and other training opportunities for immigrants and refugees. Its programs are designed to equip newcomers with the tools they need to fully participate in the wider community. On September 16, students, along with staff, volunteers and family, had an opportunity to discover the city, meet new people and put their teamwork skills to the test as they raced around Toronto on the TTC and completed a series of challenges. (www.skillsforchange.org)

Pal-Sac Celebrates Year One at Toronto's First Post Office

Pal-Sac, the Post-a-Letter Social-Activity Club, opted to celebrate its first birthday at Toronto's First Post Office. Yes, there was cake at the September 18



event, but despite the celebratory nature of the gathering, club members were focused on their *raison d'être*: hand-written correspondence. They were most attentive during a brief talk on the history of the first post office. However, it was when they were given quill pens to write with that they seemed most like early-birthday celebrants. By the end of the evening the cake was gone, but there was a pile of letters to be sealed and sent out the next day. We look forward to seeing Pal-Sac again soon. Meanwhile, check out the latest coverage and photo gallery at: www.thestar.com/living/article/1092701--in-praise-of-handwritten-notes#article.

Artwork on VÜ

Toronto's official plan recommends a minimum of one percent of gross construction costs for any significant development be allotted for public artworks. With the assistance of City planning staff and the Toronto Public

Art Commission (a citizen advisory group) the Public Art Plan ensures that developers identify appropriate public art opportunities on the site; a feasible budget and project schedule; and a fair and professional method for art/artist selection. In the case of the Vü condominium development, boarded by Adelaide, Jarvis, Richmond and George streets, this has fortuitously resulted in two stellar installations that acknowledge the building's proximity to Toronto's First Post Office.

The first to be installed was *Palimpsest*, a 26-foot-long photo montage by Calgary artist Dianne Bos. The word palimpsest refers to a manuscript, often of some substantial material such as parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible. In Bos's work, the term references even more layerings. Background images of local landmarks such as the Cathedral Church of St. James and St. Lawrence Hall were shot using a vintage-style Diana camera, their double exposures the result of not advancing the film between apertures. These are overlaid by a negative detail from an 1826 cross-written letter in the collection of Toronto's First Post Office. Its author, a teenaged Henrietta Sewell, was not recycling an earlier manuscript in this case, but rather conserving paper and the cost of postage for a letter to her brother Henry (*My dear, dear, Hank...*), then at Oxford. The resultant artwork, described by Leah Sandals in *The Toronto Star* (January 2011) as "a love letter for local heritage," is perhaps best viewed at night when backlit by LEDs. However, in daylight it is further overlaid by reflections of the surrounding sky and buildings. Bos's work, often created using pinhole cameras, is concerned with time, memory, and capturing the essence of a place.



Joanne Tod's *Return to Centre* was intended to "create an eye-catching flourish, directly referencing Toronto's First Post Office." Images of twelve postage stamps (all but one being Canadian) are etched onto an undulating steel ribbon that appears to float in front of the cedar hedge in a planter on Adelaide Street, just west of George. The various stamps (see page 5) commemorate milestones in Canadian history such as the jubilee of Confederation, the first native-born Governor-General and, more locally, York/Toronto's bicentennial in 1993. A single fanciful stamp affixed to the planter below, featuring a long perspective of the Vü condominium, provides the title, *Return to Centre*, which is a play on the post-office term "return to sender." A directional arrow identifies the site of Toronto's First Post Office and acknowledges that the post office is still in operation. Post office staffers and their neighbours at Vü could not be more pleased with this outcome.

The photograph of *Palimpsest* is by Dianne Bos. Those of *Return to Centre* are by Joanne Tod.

Stamps Featured in *Return to Centre*



QUEEN VICTORIA, \$3.00, JUNE 19, 1897 Issued on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, this stamp features two portraits of the monarch. The one on the left is from an 1837 painting by Alfred Edward Chalon also featured Canada's first 12¢ stamp issued in 1851. The second image is based on a photograph by Alexander Bassano.



THE FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION, 2¢, JUNE 29, 1927 From an original oil painting by Robert Harris, this stamp was issued to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Of interest is that the stamp is bilingual, including both "Post" and "Postes."



BLUENOSE, 50¢, JANUARY 8, 1929 This iconic stamp belonged to the first series to depict Canadian scenes of geographical or industrial interest from coast to coast, which met with instant public approval. It still appears on glassine envelopes produced by Canada Post.



VICTORY ISSUE, 3d., 1946 King George VI himself chose the design for this British stamp from several submitted to him although neither he, nor the designer – Reynolds Stone – was a Freemason. The king had resigned all Masonic offices when he took the throne.

WHITE TRILLIUM, 5¢, JUNE 30, 1964 Designed by Harvey Thomas Prosser, this stamp, with one featuring the white garden lily of Quebec, were the first in a series illustrating the provincial flowers of all ten Canadian provinces.



ROYAL VISIT, 5¢, OCTOBER 5, 1964 (AT RIGHT) This stamp was issued to commemorate the visit of Her Majesty to Charlottetown, P.E.I., and Quebec City on the 100th anniversary of the conferences in 1864 that led to the passing of the British North America Act and the creation of Canada.



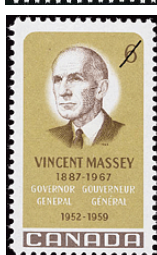
ALOUETTE II, 5¢, JANUARY 5, 1966 Alouette II was designed to augment and extend the work of Canada's first satellite, Alouette I, launched in 1962, namely to listen to low-frequency noise, and to measure the occurrence of certain particles outside the earth's atmosphere.



GREENLAND MOUNTAINS, 15¢, FEBRUARY 8, 1967 (AT RIGHT) This stamp, one of Canada Post's Centennial Issue series issued between 1967 and 1971, was based on a c.1930 painting by Lawren Harris that is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Other stamps in the series were taken from original artworks by A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thomson, James Wilson Morrice, J.E.H. Macdonald, John Ensor and Henry George Glyde.



VINCENT MASSEY 1887-1967, GOVERNOR-GENERAL 1952-1959, 6¢, FEBRUARY 20, 1969 Vincent Massey, Canada's 18th Governor-General, was the first native-born Canadian to serve in that office. This had been preceded in 1926 by his appointment as the first Canadian Ambassador to the United States. Massey was also among the first Canadians to receive the new Order of Canada.



LOUIS RIEL, 6¢, JUNE 19, 1970 (AT RIGHT) Designed by Reinhard Derreth, this stamp was issued on the hundredth anniversary of the year widely recognized as the apex of Riel's career. His stand in the Red River Rising of 1869-1870 led to the creation of Manitoba. Riel would later be hanged in Regina for his participation in the Northwest Rebellion.



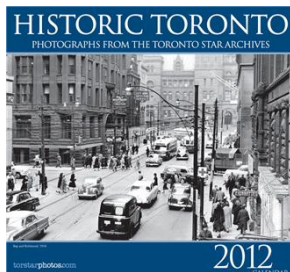
IDOLA SAINT-JEAN, 17¢, MARCH 4, 1981 This stamp's design is the work of Muriel Wood. It was one of a series of four based on portraits of remarkable feminists. Idola St-Jean was a French language teacher who strove to gain the vote for women in Quebec provincial elections. The other three women recognized in this series were Emily Stowe, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Edwards.



TORONTO 1793-1993, 43¢, AUGUST 6, 1993 Issued to mark the bicentennial of the founding of York by John Graves Simcoe in August of 1793, this stamp offers a view of the modern City of Toronto's skyline, including the world's tallest free-standing structure – the CN Tower.

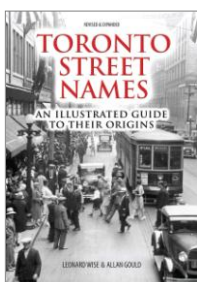


Christmas in the Gift Shop



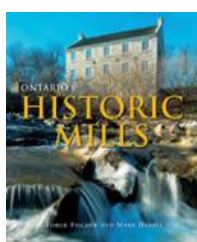
Historic Toronto Calendars from *The Star* Archives
\$16.95

This year we have four new calendars to choose from: *Historic Toronto*, *Toronto Now and Then*, *Historic Canada*, and *Historic Hockey*.



Toronto Street Names: An Illustrated Guide to Their Origins
By Leonard Wise and Allan Gould
Firefly Books (2011), 272 pages, \$24.95
Back in print at last, this new edition has been thoroughly updated and expanded to include four walking-tour maps and an historical index.

From the grand estates of Toronto's early upper class to the villages and homes that immigrants left behind, Toronto's street names tell many stories.



Ontario's Historic Mills
By George Fischer and Mark Harris
Firefly Books (2011), 224 pages, \$29.95
This richly illustrated guide features photographs and detailed descriptions of 70 of Ontario's most remarkable mills. Some were chosen for their fascinating histories and some for their architectural beauty. All evoke Ontario's charming 19th-century past.



Puzzles, Pinpricks and Knots

Early nineteenth-century valentines were much more *complicated* in many ways than the often comic ones available today. And of course they were made by hand! You can learn how to make three different kinds of historic paper valentines at Toronto's First Post Office.

Date: Sunday, February 12, 1–3 pm.

Cost: \$20, or \$15 for members, all supplies included.
Ages 12 and up. Please call 416-865-1833 to register.

Toronto's Birthday Party



We might have lost the Battle of York, but this town survived to become the City of Toronto on March 6, 1834. As usual, the Town of York Historical Society will be celebrating Toronto's birthday with style in the magnificent ballroom of St. Lawrence Hall. Get a jump-start on the War of 1812 bicentennial commemorations by participating in an evening that will take you back to the time of that much-debated conflict. This event will be lively, theatrical, musical and – best of all – will raise much-needed funds to support the operations of Toronto's First Post Office museum. If you are not a member and you wish to receive an invitation, please call 416-865-1833.

Snowflakes and Ginger Cakes

Do you know what *scherensnitte* means?

TORONTO'S FIRST POST OFFICE wants you to rock this Christmas like it's 1837!

Come learn about pre-Victorian Christmas traditions in Upper Canada, and how to make cornucopias, "Amelias," and all sorts of crafty old-fashioned things.

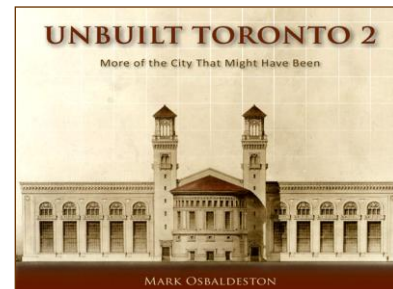
December 11, 10:30 a.m. to noon, \$15
Ages 7 and up. Space is limited, so please pre-register by calling 416-865-1833.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

TORONTO: BUILT AND UNBUILT

Monday, December 12, 7:30 p.m.

What gets built in Toronto and what doesn't? Why? What are the results? Recent controversies over long-term transit and waterfront plans have made these questions more relevant than ever. Join author, critic, and journalist **John Bentley Mays** as he discusses "Toronto: Built and Unbuilt" with **Mark Osbaldeston**, author of *Unbuilt Toronto* and *Unbuilt Toronto 2* and **Phil Goodfellow**, co-author of *A Guidebook to Contemporary Architecture in Toronto*. This discussion is part of the ongoing series, **PARLER FORT: Exploring Toronto's Past, Present and Future**. **Fort York, 250 Fort York Blvd., \$10, students admitted free.**



HOLIDAY SEASON TOURS AT MONTGOMERY'S INN

Tuesdays to Sundays, November 29 to January 8, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

During the holiday season, visitors to the Inn will enjoy a guided tour through the many period room settings designed to reflect a Victorian household and bustling business. The sitting room and dining parlour, bedecked with greenery, recall the festive traditions and customs of 1840s Etobicoke. The barroom, assembly room and the many bedchambers for overnight lodgers present a snapshot of life in a country inn.

Montgomery's Inn, 4709 Dundas Street West, regular admission applies, 416-394-8113.



CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE DROP-IN AT ZION SCHOOLHOUSE

Saturday, December 17, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Go back to school, way back, by exploring Zion's 1910 schoolroom. Get to know this wonderful educational resource right here in your community! Try your skills at turn-of-the-century school activities such as writing on a slate or participating in a spelling bee and enjoy hot chocolate and biscuits while singing carols around the schoolroom piano.

Historic Zion Schoolhouse, 1091 Finch Avenue East, free, 416-395-7435.



TO THE NEW YEAR: A GIBSON HOUSE HOGMANAY DINNER

Friday and Saturday, December 29 and 30, 7:00 p.m.

Gather at historic Gibson House for a special evening inspired by Hogmanay, a traditional Scottish celebration. Share a scrumptious dinner with familiar and new friends. Be lulled by the fire and moved by the music. Take an imagined journey through story and drama to a New Year's Eve of another time. As the evening closes, come together with staff to welcome our First Footer, celebrate last year's passing and bring luck and best wishes to Gibson House Museum for the New Year ahead.

Gibson House Museum, 5172 Yonge St., \$42.50 plus tax, pre-registration and pre-payment required, 416-395-7432, gibsonhouse@toronto.ca.

MEET ME AT THE MARKET

To February 25, 2012, Tuesday to Saturday until 4:00 p.m.

Savour the Market's food history at an exhibition of photographs, maps, art and artifacts highlighting the history of the St. Lawrence Market and neighbourhood – a food and shopping destination for over 200 years where, in the 19th century, one could buy bear meat, wild swan and deer with the antlers still attached. This exhibition will show how St. Lawrence Market has kept urban consumers connected to local producers while food production has become a global operation.

The Market Gallery, 95 Front Street East, 2nd Floor, free, 416-392-7604.

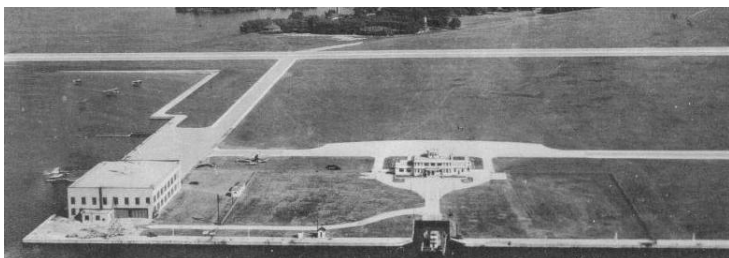


Island Airport, *from page 1*

The two-storey, wood-frame, clapboard-clad, “moderne” style terminal dates from the formative years of air passenger travel and is a rare surviving example of its kind. It was designed to accommodate facilities for passenger and baggage handling, airmail and customs, administration and air-traffic control – all under one roof and with an unobstructed view of the landing strip. The only alterations to its exterior aspect are the sloping vitrines installed in the central control tower during the 1950s. Enough of the interior finishes and layout remains to have warranted its designation. Its near identical contemporary (see postcard views at right), built in the small town of Malton northwest of Toronto, no longer exists.

The Malton airport thrived and expanded to become Pearson International. The island airport, built on 215 acres created by dredging sand and silt from the harbour, had nowhere to go. It was used by the Royal Norwegian Air Force for training purposes in the early years of WWII, and later served small aircraft and a flight school. In the 1980s, pressure for commercial passenger use went toe-to-toe with residential development in the former industrial area across from it on the mainland. The Tripartite Agreement of 1983 – between the City, the Toronto Harbour Commission (now TPA) and Transport Canada – precluded a fixed link and limited aircraft to turboprops such as the Dash 8, with short take-off and landing capabilities. During the 1980s and 1990s, several commercial airlines offered flights from the island to Ottawa, Montreal, and Newark, New Jersey, with varying degrees of failure. Then, in 2006, Porter Airlines moved in with a twenty-five-year lease. Porter’s success has been such that they have since built a new terminal and plan to replace the historic ferry service with a passenger tunnel requiring the relocation of the original building.

It is interesting to note that, when planning the airport in 1935, the City got approval from Prime Minister R.B. Bennett for a one-million-dollar tunnel across the gap. The Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, elected that fall, reversed the decision and the tunnel project was cancelled.



An aerial view of the island airport from a 1944 postcard, showing the ferry at the slip and Hanlan's Point in the background.

The Town of York Historical Society

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

Directors: Patricia Braithwaite, Sheldon Godfrey,
Meredith Hogan, Ewa Jarmicka, Judith McEvel, Jennifer
McIlroy, Councillor Pam McConnell and Melville
Olsberg.



Toronto's First Post Office

is administered by the

Town of York Historical Society

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Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays
preceding them.

**The Post Office will be closed December 25-27 for
Christmas, and January 1-2 for the New Year.**

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.