

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

April 2013

Vol. XXIX No. 1

### DINEEN BUILDING GIVEN NEW LEASE ON LIFE



The Dineen Building on the northwest corner of Yonge and Temperance Streets

For years we have watched the building at Yonge and Temperance and wished for it the salvation that a fairy godmother or handsome prince might bring. Clad in soot-stained yellow brick and cheap vinyl awnings, its fine Renaissance-Revival features were nevertheless still evident. Its ornate iron balconies and corner orientation made it seem both attractive and

open-minded, as if longing for a new relationship with the street. Built in 1897, it was once an elegant retail emporium for men's hats and furs. Fortunately for its survival, it was listed on the City's inventory of heritage properties in 1973, and designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2009. There aren't many happy endings in the build heritage world, so we are very pleased to tell you about this one.

Purchased in late 2011 by the Commercial Realty Group, the Dineen Building – named for its original owner – recently emerged from its scaffolding and tarp cocoon ready to beautifully re-engage the world on many levels. In the architectural conservancy world this is called adaptive re-use. It means that an older building is re-purposed but in such a way that it can continue to tell its own history. Here, the exterior of the building has been restored – thanks to George Robb Architects and Empire Restoration – to its original appearance. The brick has been cleaned and reconditioned, the copper cornices and iron work replaced and the windows replicated with newer, better functioning ones.

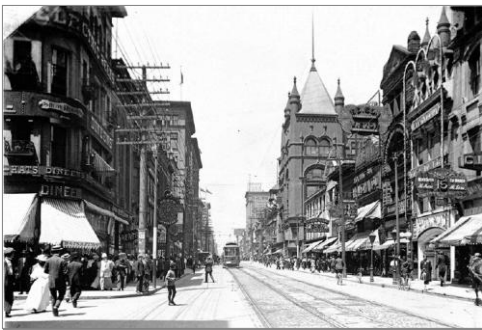
*Continued on page 2*



### Sir Sandford Fleming's Misplaced Plaque

In September of last year we received an e-mail from philatelist and postal historian C.R. (Ron) McGuire, who was then researching an article for BNA topics. Mr. McGuire was searching for the plaque shown at left. Created by the Canadian Philatelic Society (now the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada) to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada's first postage stamp – the three-pence Beaver – the plaque had been unveiled on September 26, 1951, as one of the major events during Canada's first International Philatelic Exhibition (CAPEX). Its location, at 112 Yonge Street, was chosen as being the site where, reportedly at Ellah's Hotel, Postmaster General James Morris had met with Sir Sandford Fleming to discuss the stamp's design. The building at 112 Yonge having been long since demolished, Mr. McGuire wanted to know if the plaque had survived and, if so, where it could be found. His query had gone out to us, to the City of Toronto Archives, and to Alex Avdichuk, supervisor of collections at the City of Toronto.

*Continued on page 8*



Top to bottom: City of Toronto Archives, Yonge St. Looking North from Temperance St., 1903 (F1568, It.311); *Toronto Star*, Dineen 1927; City of Toronto Archives, early 1950s, post subway construction (F1257, S1057, It.8938); for sale, 2011; Craig White, urbantoronto.ca, under wraps, August 2012

## Dineen Building, *cont'd*

Inside, while a more contemporary aesthetic prevails, surfaces have been exposed and other historic features – decorative plasterwork, an old safe, signage listing early tenants – have been rescued and given pride of place. From Yonge Street, the Dineen Coffee Company welcomes you into a space where fluted iron columns support a fifteen-foot ceiling, revealed when five subsequent lower ones had been removed. Huge iron doors from the coal boiler in the basement hang on the bare brick wall and announce their local pedigree: Polson Iron Works, Toronto. Off Temperance Street is the entrance to the iQ Office Suites, who rent dedicated desks and fully furnished offices to small businesses needing a downtown pied-à-terre. Naturally, these are equipped with all the amenities one would ask of a brand-new work space. As Clayton Smith, President of Commercial Realty Group, was quoted as saying in the *National Post* (June 24, 2012), “Sure...it’s lovely looking at old antiques, but don’t you love it when the drawers actually work?”

Mr. Smith is the hero of this story. His respect for the craftsmanship of an earlier era and his willingness to put in the long hours – and the long money – has brought this late-nineteenth-century beauty back from the brink. And the glass slipper that made it possible? Not some generic tower, but a modest, tinted, fifth-floor addition that will house a restaurant with a wonderful view of the street below, from where, by the way, it is not even visible.

*Editor’s note: The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting in the iQ Lounge on the lower level of the Dineen Building on May 13 (see page 7 for details).*

The article above right is a recreation of one that appeared in *The Daily Mail and Empire*, October 25, 1897.

## FINE NEW BUILDING FOR MESSRS. DINEEN.

Contains Features New to Toronto  
And Canada

One of the recent practical evidences of improving trade in Toronto is the new Dineen building, on the north-west corner of Yonge and Temperance streets, which was opened to the public on Saturday last. For twenty-five years Dineens have been without a peer in the hat and fur trade, and the immense growth of their business during that period, combined with a firm belief in Toronto’s future, has resulted in the erection of the handsome structure at the location mentioned. Architect Herbert designed the new building, the exterior of which, while attractive, gives an idea of permanency. It has a frontage of thirty feet on Yonge street and one hundred feet on Temperance street. Part of the building is available for offices, and the location will make them very desirable.

The store is fully in keeping with the handsome exterior. The ceiling is of sheet metal and aluminum – the latter is used for the first time in Canada for decorative purpose – embossed with pure gold leaf. The interior bronze work is perhaps the most elaborate in Canada. The grille work of the elevator, the balustrades of the stairway, the screen around the cashier’s office are all in bronze. All the woodwork on the show cases, counters, desks, and partitions is in solid mahogany, walnut and white oak. Throughout the store is lighted with incandescent lights, many of which twine like giant creepers around richly gilded pillars. A new feature is introduced in the windows. When the window is lit up no light is thrown back into the store. On the contrary, an unusual brilliancy is given to the windows, and a strong light is thrown on the sidewalk. A Sprague automatic elevator is also a feature not to be found in any store in Canada, this being the first time one has been placed in any building outside of New York State. The fur show-room, in the rear of the store proper, is a handsome room, finished in white and gold. In this, as in the store, are a number of large handsome mirrors.

The basement is also fitted up in elegant style, and will be used for store purposes, as will also the second floor of the building. Thousands of people thronged to the store on Saturday and admired very much the harmony and taste displayed in its fixtures and arrangements.



## Now You See It...

The image at right, from Google Street View, is of 269-267 Queen Street East. At the time it was taken, these addresses were occupied by the brother-and-sister vintage shop Upside Dive and the 'green' florist Eco Stems. Both were fairly recent and welcome retail additions to the somewhat seedy strip of Queen Street just east of Sherbourne. Both closed their doors last fall. Then, on Tuesday, November 20th – in the space of a regular working day – the building disappeared.



According to Catherine Nasmith, President of the Toronto Architectural Conservancy, for a building's owner to get a demolition permit from the City of Toronto is "more or less automatic unless it...is on the heritage inventory." This building was not. Neither was it especially remarkable in and of itself, being just another example of Victorian commercial vernacular. It was, however, a piece of the two-to-three-storey red brick fabric – with retail on the ground floor, residences above – that largely defines Queen Street from Roncesvalles to Neville Park.

The building just to the east of 267-269 was torn down a few years ago and the one east of that, the former home of Ontario Paint and Wallpaper, was destroyed by fire in the fall of 2006. One last piece of the row, the building leased by Planet of Sound, remains – but who can say for how long? Meanwhile, that big empty hole on the south side of Queen East looks eerily like a developer's dream.



## National Hotel Update



Completely gutted, and with its immediate neighbours demolished, this mid-nineteenth century hotel's façade awaits incorporation into the King+ condo development pictured at right. The 17-storey tower, designed by Tact Design, is being developed by Terracomm.



E.R.A. Architects are the preservation consultant for the historic structure, while Mike Niven Interior Design holds sway inside. Sales have been open for two years as of this writing, offering "all the pluses of downtown living, plus a whole lot more." A secret tunnel to Toronto Island? Membership in the Spoke Club? Free Netflix? Just what the extra 'plus' is, enquiring minds want to know.



**Did you know** that on April 9th the **Town of York Historical Society** marked thirty years since its incorporation? The officers named on the original papers were Robert Jamieson, President; James Mitchie, Treasurer; and Sheldon Godfrey, Secretary. Other Directors were Anthony Adamson, Elizabeth Elliott, Michael Filey, Judith Godfrey, Leonard Harman, Charles Hopkins, John Laschinger, Karen McMillan, Bette Shepherd, Bryan Vaughan and George Waters.

# Masonic Temple Faces Uncertain Future



In November of last year Bell Media announced that it would be relinquishing its six-storey landmark at Yonge and Davenport and consolidating its production facilities on Queen Street. Refitting the former Masonic Temple was just not feasible. According to a company spokesman, “No decision has been made on the future of the building.”

CTV (now owned by Bell) bought the building in 1998. The previous year a developer had planned for a 19-storey condominium; rumour has it he was hoping to capitalize on the lucky 888 address. The threat of demolition brought about the Temple’s official designation under the Ontario

Heritage Act, in this case based on both exterior and interior features. Untouched since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the meeting rooms on the upper floors have Masonic emblems and symbols in the millwork and tile patterns of the floors. The “Scottish Rite” room, with its gothic thrones and dark-wood paneling, is also deemed of heritage significance.

The cornerstone of the Masonic Temple was laid on November 17, 1917. By that time, Freemasons in the City had been meeting in numerous locations since confederation. The decision to pool their resources and build a grand edifice had been in the works since 1906, the fundraising spearheaded by John Ross Robertson. Initial plans had been for a building at 16 Spadina Road but Robertson, with local architect W.J. Sparling, came up with an idea for a less expensive proposal on the Yonge Street site. The framing of the building was very unusual for the time: the auditorium is spanned by one large reinforced concrete truss, 78 feet long, carrying two other 67-foot trusses, making the space entirely free of columns.



City of Toronto Archives, F1244, It.8005

The auditorium – designed for concerts, dances and banquets – was intended as a source of rental income. While the flu epidemic of 1918 created an initial setback, the Temple was in good shape by 1920 and operated profitably for decades. Then, in the late 1960s as the City spread out, Masonic tenants relocated to be closer to their memberships. The auditorium was leased out and operated as *The Rockpile* for the next decade. In 1979 a new manager was appointed and a mortgage taken out to upgrade to code and improve the hall’s appearance. Interest rates were so high at that time, however, that the organization never really recovered. As *The Concert Hall*, it operated at a loss throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, despite hosting shows by such luminaries as David Bowie, Iggy Pop, the Pixies, the Ramones and, once, a concert featuring Cyndi Lauper and Weird Al Yankovic on the same bill.



In 1994 the building’s remaining Masonic tenants removed their assets. In his essay *A Tale of Two Temples*, W. Bro. Paul R.A.E. Skazin concludes, “A building, however lovingly regarded, does not make a Mason. Masons have met and still do in all kinds of places. While the loss of 888 Yonge is regrettable... Those who have fond memories of this fine old structure and the events, in which they participated, will carry these memories until time shall be no more.”

For some of us, the fondest memories of the place will be the *Rockpile* years, especially the night of August 18, 1969, when Led Zeppelin played to a sold-out house while 2,000 other fans stood outside.



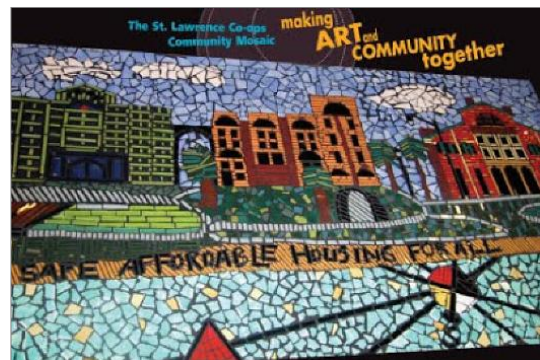
# The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood after All These Years



The St. Lawrence neighbourhood, at the mature age of 35, was recently described in *The Globe and Mail* as the “best example of a mixed-income, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, sensitively scaled, densely populated community ever built in the province” (Dave LeBlanc, 6 Feb. 2013). This can be attributed to the investment of public funds in long-term collaborative planning during the late 1960s, when many North-American city centres were being abandoned as living spaces by all who could afford to leave.

At that time there were 18 hectares in downtown Toronto – roughly framed by Yonge and Parliament, Front and the Gardiner – of industrial wasteland. Key to their redevelopment was David Crombie, an urban reformer who was elected to Toronto's city council in 1970, and was Mayor of Toronto from 1972 to 1978. Jane Jacobs, perhaps the most influential urban theorist at the time, had moved to Toronto in 1968. When Jacobs' neighbour Michael Dennis, the City's Planning Commissioner, asked her advice, she suggested architect Alan Littlewood to head up the planning team. The vision was for a new community where families could live safely, convenient to schools and other amenities. Key design elements were the extension of the street grid into the site, and the construction of buildings – mostly townhouses and mid-rise towers – that would relate to those streets and new ones in between. There was to be a mix of social and market housing, with an emphasis on co-ops. Lastly, any existing heritage buildings on the site were to be placed in the hands of those who would restore them.

Today the St. Lawrence neighbourhood is surrounded by new development as condo towers rise on all its perimeters. Extensive roadwork has begun on many of its streets, and parks are being redesigned. One holdover from the bad old days with its car wash and rental parking lot – the First Parliament site – is finally back in public hands. A new library and interpretive centre will be built there and, a few blocks west, a new building will house the farmers' market on the spot it's been held since 1803. St. Lawrence BIA Chair George Milbrandt suggests taking a few pictures of the neighbourhood, as it will be significantly altered over the next four years. He adds, “It is our responsibility at the BIA to...protect our valued heritage while ensuring the continued growth and health of our community for generations to come.”



Postcard design by Tariq Sami.



## Heritage Conservation District Study: Call for Volunteers

The City of Toronto has given the go-ahead to a Heritage Conservation District Study for the St. Lawrence neighbourhood and volunteers are now needed to research properties in the area. The raw data collected in this manner will be used to determine the eligibility of the area as an HCD, and thus deserving of special care

and attention in the planning process in order to ensure its ongoing protection under the Ontario Heritage Act. According to the City's guidelines for HCDs, a district must have “values that identify it as a significant heritage area and it must possess sufficient integrity to communicate those values.”

Volunteers must be able to commit to a total of 35 hours of work over a five-month period and must be able to attend a mandatory training session given by Heritage Preservation Services to take place on Wednesday, May 8, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at George Brown College, 200 King Street East. A basic knowledge of Excel is desirable. Anyone interested should contact the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association at [HCD@slna.ca](mailto:HCD@slna.ca).

## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT A Visiting Postmaster



In what has become an annual event, Bernice Black's grade-three students from Bedford Park Public School visited the Post Office at the end of January. As we have been led to expect, they showed up in bonnets and braces, pinafores and waistcoats, as they take their study of early settlements in Upper

Canada very seriously. Each had also taken on the identity of someone from a pioneer community, such as a blacksmith, merchant, minister or teacher. We were delighted to learn that Fenton Buckman had assumed the role of postmaster, and had him pose for a photograph behind the postal counter, reaching for a ring of keys to signify his authority.

## Some Funny Valentines



Photo: Dennis Hanagan

For many lovers of all things Regency, the bicentennial of the War of 1812 is so...well, so "last year." 2013 marks the 200th anniversary of the publication of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and celebrations focus on the more pastoral, romantic and intellectual pursuits of the same period. A Valentine in that era would have been painstakingly handcrafted, and often its interpretation was, quite literally, a puzzle. Cryptic verses were concealed beneath complicated paper folds and flaps, challenging the recipient to determine not only the nature of the sentiment being expressed, but often the identity of the sender. Here Devon Stocks, Devon Taylor-Black, Miriam Smith and Karen Millyard show off the early-19th-century style Valentines they created in a workshop held at Toronto's First Post Office on February 10.

## Ontario Heritage Trust Marks Heritage Week



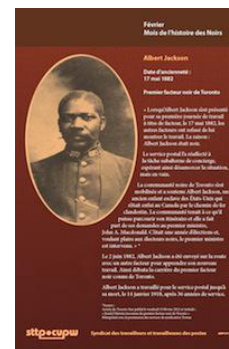
In keeping with this year's theme of *cultural expressions*, the keynote speaker at the launch for Heritage Week was Marshall Pynkoski,

Co-Artistic

Director of Opera Atelier. The event on February 15 was held at the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres – celebrating their hundredth anniversary in 2013 – where Mr. Pynkoski's company performs. Also on hand were cultural explorers Sue and Jim Waddington who, since the 1970s, have been photographing the wilderness and urban sites represented in paintings by the Group of Seven. Lastly, we heard from the steel pan band of the Regent Park School of Music. Photograph courtesy of the Ontario Heritage Trust.

## CUPW Commemorates Albert Jackson

This year during Black History Month, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers commemorated Albert Jackson, Toronto's first black postman, and distributed a poster to create awareness of his life and work. On March 24 the union made a special presentation to Jackson's living descendants during an event at the Ontario Federation of Labour building. It was impossible to get a clear photograph of the entire family, but most of them can be seen below, including two of his now elderly grandchildren seated in the front row. Mr. Jackson was a letter carrier in Toronto from 1882 until his death in 1918.





# THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: Mark Your Calendars

## **BUILDING A CITY: People, places and life in Toronto 1845 – 1899**

**March 9, 2013 – September 14, 2013**



The Market Gallery is the former council chamber of Toronto's first purpose-built City Hall. Here important issues and decisions were hammered out throughout the second half of the 19th century, a time of tremendous growth and change. Comprising historical maps, photographs and original portrait paintings dating back to the 1850s, this exhibit takes place where it all transpired.

**Free, The Market Gallery, 95 Front Street East, 2nd Floor.**

**The gallery is open Tuesday to Friday: 10–4, Saturday: 9–4.**

## **Great Guns, Brown Bess, Supply Wagons, Poor Old Soldiers and Jolly Tars: The Art and Science of Warfare during the War of 1812** **Wednesday, April 24, 7:00 pm**

Major John Grodzinski (RMC) explores the strategy and technology of military operations during the War of 1812. Major Grodzinski regularly conducts battlefield tours examining the development of fortifications in Canada in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His 2002 M.A. thesis on the War of 1812 on the Upper St. Lawrence River was nominated for the Governor General's Gold Medal for Academic Excellence.

**Free, Todmorden Mills, 67 Pottery Road. Register by calling (416) 396-2819.**



## **BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION OF THE BATTLE OF YORK**

**Saturday, April 27, various events from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**



From a solemn sunrise ceremony, at the site of the American landing, hosted by the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, to the rededication of 1934 plaques attended by the original presenting organizations – the Daughters of the War of 1812 and the IODE – this day will have something for everyone. There will be re-enactments and other activities throughout, including a huge military parade from Queen's Park to Fort York with soldiers and sailors from a number of regiments and naval installations massing in the streets.

**Free. More detailed information is available from the Friends of Fort York at [www.fortyork.ca](http://www.fortyork.ca).**

## **JANE'S WALKS**

**Saturday and Sunday, May 4-5**

Jane's Walk honours the ideas and legacy of urbanist Jane Jacobs by getting people out exploring their neighbourhoods. Held on the first weekend of May to celebrate Jacobs' birthday, these free walking tours are led by locals who share what matters to them in the places they live and work. Inaugurated on May 5, 2007 in Toronto by a group of her colleagues and friends, Jane's Walk has been successfully exported and adapted to 75 cities in 15 countries.

**Free. For more information, to lead a walk or to otherwise volunteer, please go to [www.janeswalk.net](http://www.janeswalk.net)**



## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Monday, May 13, 7:00 pm**

The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting this year in the iQ Lounge at the recently restored Dineen Building (see page 1). Following the business meeting, author **Maureen Jennings** will give a talk on *Whirlygigs, Diddies and Knee-tremblers: Vulgar Language in Victorian Canada*. **Free for TYHS members (\$10 for non-members), 140 Yonge Street (at Temperance). Please RSVP to Toronto's First Post Office, 416-865-1833 or [tfpo@total.net](mailto:tfpo@total.net).**



## Sandford Fleming, *from page 1*

The Archives came up empty. Ms. Avdichuk didn't have the plaque, but she pretty much debunked the notion that Ellah's Hotel, albeit peripatetic, was ever located at 112 Yonge Street. Meanwhile, we each contacted Gary Meidema at Heritage Toronto (HT). I also spoke to

tour guide Bruce Bell, who had seen the plaque within the year on the southwest corner of Yonge and Adelaide. In the end it was Kaitlyn Wainwright at HT who was able to reassure Mr. McGuire that the plaque was now affixed to one of the pillars of the TD Bank at 110 Yonge and clearly visible on Google.

Mr. McGuire's article was published in Volume 69 of BNA Topics, part 9 of a series on "My favourite stampless covers." From it we take this excerpt from a letter Fleming wrote to Morris's son, also James, in January of 1888:

*"You ask me to inform you of the circumstances. I was then a young man about 24, ready for anything whatever. I had been making designs of some sort for Sheriff Rutten an intimate friend of your father. Your father had, in conversation, mentioned what he had in view with the issue of three pence postage stamps. The Sheriff referred him to me as a person who would make a design. I was sent for and was introduced to your father (PMG Morris) one morning at Stone's Hotel (actually Ellah's Hotel, ed.) on King Street, now occupied by the Romain Building. According to my recollection you were present, 37 years younger than you are now. The design was made, engraved, approved and used for years. The first proof taken from the plate by the engraver is as I have stated in my collection of scraps. Wishing you a happy new year and all other good things. Yours Very Sincerely Sandford Fleming."*



First plate proof of the 1851 3d Beaver stamp, from Sandford Fleming's personal scrapbook. (Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.)



Fleming with his grandchildren, 1893.

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

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Newsletter Editor: Janet Walters  
**ISSN 1481-8922**

### **NEW hours of operation (as of May 1):**

Monday to Friday: 9-5:30  
Saturday: 10-4  
Sunday: 11-4  
Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

**The Post Office will be closed May 19-20 for Victoria 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, Tourism and Sport; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.

### **The Town of York Historical Society**

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

Directors: Patricia Braithwaite, George Fells, Sheldon Godfrey, Sanford Hersh, Meredith Hogan, Ewa Jarmicka, Judith McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy (President), Councillor Pam McConnell and Melville Olsberg.