

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

July 2013

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CITY FAILS TO SAVE HERITAGE LANDSCAPE



Photo: Francis Reyes

On June 12, the members of City Council voted 31 to 12 against designating the University of Toronto's back campus a heritage landscape. This will allow the school to accept over \$5 million in federal and provincial funding to go towards the construction of two artificially turfed field-hockey pitches on what has been, until now, a public common. The \$9.5 million project will go ahead despite unanimous opposition from the Toronto Preservation Board, a concerted "Keep the Back Campus Green" campaign, and objections from the likes of the Rt. Hon. Adrienne

Clarkson, historian Margaret McMillan and University of Toronto Alumna Margaret Atwood. Historian Michael Bliss likened the plan to that of paving Harvard Yard or Christ Church Meadow at Oxford (*Globe and Mail*, February 27, 2013). It is likely, however, that by the time you read this the bulldozers will be at work. Deadline: Pan-Am Games, July, 2015.

Detractors of the development were labelled reactionary and misinformed, and accused of eleventh-hour intervention. Special invective, at least in online blogs, was heaped on local Councillor Adam Vaughan, who led the opposition at Council. The fact is, very little was known about the project until November of last year, because the University of Toronto's decision to proceed was made in relative secrecy. Heritage advocacy is always behind the eight-ball. Reliant on volunteer and non-profit forces in concert with a seriously resource-starved department at the City, it cannot afford to be pro-active. Currently embattled on all fronts by condominium developments that threaten to destroy the character of neighbourhoods all over town, who in the heritage preservation community could have foreseen this ambush from the 186-year-old University of Toronto? A plan to build over the back campus in 1892 having been averted, this patch of grass – in a section of town starved for green space – has existed largely untouched ever since.

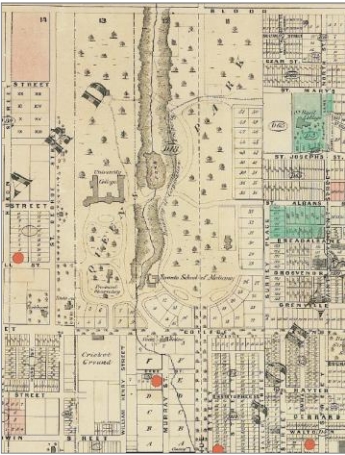
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Post Office Gets New Pictorial Cancel

It's been years since Toronto's First Post Office acquired its first pictorial cancel at the urging of the Greater Toronto Area Philatelic Alliance. Given the demise of Postal Station K, we will soon be the only post office in the City to offer such a thing. With that in mind, staff decided it was high time for a new design, and came up with this one featuring a quill pen and "penny ink" pot. While TFPO does receive the occasional request for cancels by mail, the majority come from local philatelists, tourists, and brides-to-be. While happy to indulge all of the above, we do appreciate it when the stamps we have to hand-cancel have been purchased at the museum!



Heritage Landscape, *from page 1*



Untouched but also unmaintained, it must be acknowledged that the field was a mess much of the time. For several weeks each spring it was barricaded by snowfencing in order to allow the grass to redevelop, and was often muddy again in the fall. Located on a former ravine of Taddle Creek, it was once a wooded area adjacent to McCaul's Pond (created by damming the creek in 1859). This idyllic landscape deteriorated rapidly when the sewage run-off from residential development



to the northwest rendered it a reeking mess. In 1883 the pond was drained and the creek buried in a sewer. The reclaimed land is now the location of Hart House. The field to the west remained, surrounded by now-designated heritage buildings dating from the 1850s on, and still home to some historic English elm trees on its western perimeter.



These trees have borne witness to the field's impressive history. If the elms are to be saved (and that is the plan), they will now overlook a fenced and artificial landscape designed to accommodate elite athletes – a place inhospitable to the majority. Annual maintenance costs are estimated at \$100,000. Use of the hockey pitches will be limited to less than six months a year; the necessary irrigation system must be drained at the first risk of frost. Biocides will be required to counter the effects of nature (leaf compost, algae, bird poop), and these poisons are likely to spread given that the field will essentially be paved, with merely a coating of synthetic turf.

While we believe that international sporting events can provide cities with needed and long-lasting infrastructure, this appears an ill-conceived idea predicated on nothing more than greed. The University failed to

implement previous landscaping plans for this area dating from 1917 and 1999. The latter, unanimously approved by all levels of UT governance, asserted that "The landscape is one of the University's greatest physical assets...Through the implementation of the Open Space Master Plan we will pass on a remarkable legacy to future generations" (Alex Waugh, Chair of the Open Space Steering Committee in 1999). When the life expectancy of this sports facility plays out in ten years, we can only hope that the investment in drainage fill a metre deep will benefit the reinstallation of natural turf. We now have no choice but to wait and see.

Illustrations, top to bottom: Wadsworth and Unwin's *Map of the City of Toronto*, 1872, showing McCaul's Pond; the pond c. 1880 (public domain); tents of the Royal Flying Corps on the back campus, 1915 (UT Archives); Queen Elizabeth inspecting the troops before presenting the colours (courtesy of the Royal Scottish Regiment); artists' renderings of the landscape from the 1999 Open Space Master Plan "Investing in the Landscape" (left) and the field-hockey pitches being constructed for the Pan-Am Para-Pan games in 2015 (right).



Battle of York Exhibit

When American forces turned their battleships toward the small, isolated town of York in April of 1813, it was clear from the outset who would win the day. York was the capital of Upper Canada and an important port of supply for much of the provincial interior. But it was also an under-defended town of simple wood-frame houses, narrow muddy roads, and fewer than 800 people – including the militia at the garrison. When the enemy arrived at the mouth of the harbour, the



Canadian/First Nations/British defenders were outnumbered by more than two to one. Nevertheless, the combined forces made a valiant attempt to hold the invaders outside of the town.

When they failed to do so, General Roger Hale Sheaffe decided the British regulars should retreat, and ordered the Royal Newfoundlanders to torch the unfinished war sloop HMS Sir Isaac Brock (lest it fall into enemy hands) and to blow up the fort's magazine. The ensuing explosion was one of the largest in British military history to date. In it, the American commander, Brigadier-General Zebulon Pike, was mortally wounded. As the British soldiers began their tortuous overland withdrawal to Kingston, and many townsfolk fled into the woods, the militia and those citizens who remained were left, according to Sherriff John Beikie, "standing in the street like a parcel of sheep."

The exhibit *The Town of York in 1813, The War of 1812* revisits this cataclysmic event. It benefits greatly from the loan of period artifacts – mostly of a military nature – from the private collection of Sheldon Godfrey. It will be on display at Toronto's First Post Office until December 2013.

Stamps Honour Laura Secord, Charles de Salaberry...

In June, Canada Post released two new stamps commemorating the War of 1812 and saluting the heroes and heroines who, "through cunning and personal acts of bravery, changed the course of that war." Little more needs to be said about Laura Secord's arduous overland trek to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon of a secret American plan of attack. Less well known is Lieutenant-Colonel Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry who, despite his forces being greatly outnumbered, turned back an invasion of 4,000 American troops headed for Montreal in October of 1813. On the stamps, de Salaberry is shown as the young man he then was, in his Voltigeurs uniform, while Laura Secord is meant to appear dishevelled and wary – her hair peeking out of her famous white cap.



...Celebrate 250 Years of Postal History

In 1763, New France was ceded to Great Britain under the Treaty of Paris. Philadelphia Postmaster Benjamin Franklin was promoted to joint Deputy Postmaster General (with John Foxcroft) for the British colonies, and opened the first "Canadian" post office in Halifax. Hugh Finlay was appointed Postmaster at Quebec on June 10, and almost immediately established a monthly courier from Montreal to New York to reach the mail packet sailing for Britain. It is Franklin's face that graces this stamp, however, although by 1774 he had been dismissed for his involvement in the American Revolution. Finlay, who replaced him, would go on to provide decades of service and innovation to the postal system but nevertheless died penniless, his children disinherited. Sadly, this issue does little to honour the man who became known as "the father of the Canadian post office."

A TALE OF FOUR FARMHOUSES

The iconic 19th-century Ontario farmhouse is an endangered species. Much of this has to do with the depletion of its natural habitat. As urban centres engulf surrounding farmland, a homestead can find itself in the way of a planned subdivision. Some farmhouses, of historical significance to their communities, are rescued by local historical societies or museums. In such cases, however, they can still suffer the indignity of removal to a heritage “village,” or the degradations brought about through under-funding and subsequent neglect. A happy few become the pet projects of caring individuals with deep pockets and these sometimes appear in the pages of decorating magazines. What follows are brief snapshots of four farmhouses that have been in the news this year.



The **Thorbeck-Bell House** is located in an area of Scarborough – the Warden Corridor – recently transformed from industrial park to residential development. Stafford Homes owns the fieldstone farmhouse and has surrounded it with a collection of townhomes and “European Villas.” Built in the 1840s for the Thornbeck family, the house was purchased in the late 19th century by John H. Bell, one of the areas first dairy farmers, whose family occupied it until 1988. It was Bell who added the second storey to the house, following a fire. Now the Georgian and Gothic Revival home is to be divided into two condominium units. Protected by heritage designation, its basement fireplace and bake oven are to be preserved in situ, but will be walled over. Photo: The Scarborough Mirror



The **Eliza Gaby Residence** is in the Mill Pond neighbourhood of Richmond Hill. This is a desirable area and many people have purchased old homes there to tear down and replace with new ones. The owners of this classic Ontario village house – which still wears its original clapboard siding – obtained for it a heritage designation in 1995. In 2012 they applied to have the designation repealed in order (or so they felt) to facilitate its sale, but the municipality said no. The house, which has early 20th century stenciling on the interior walls of the main floor, was built in 1886 by Levi Gaby for his widowed mother. Photo: Sjoerd Witteveen



Bonnie Braes, on what is now Creditview Road in southwest Brampton, was built in the 1840s by master carpenter Alexander Hutton. The “Carpenter’s Gothic” house was in a dilapidated state when it was acquired by Fieldgate Homes, a company that is putting up 1,800 single-family residences in the surrounding area. As part of the development agreement, Fieldgate was contracted to preserve, protect and enhance the old farmhouse, and also to maintain a row of maple trees that line its drive. The house is now in the hands of Dean Babineau, a senior warranty manager with Fieldgate but also a master carpenter, for whom restoring the old home is a labour of love. Photo: Dan O’Reilly for thestar.com



The oldest and perhaps most historically significant of these homes is the **Schoerg Farmhouse** in Kitchener. It sits on land sold by Joseph Brant to Colonel Richard Beasley (UEL), who then sold 261 acres to Mennonite farmer Joseph Schoerg in 1800. The Mennonite Georgian house was built in 1830 by Joseph’s son David, who changed his family name to Sherk. David Sherk is said to have been the first non-native child born in Waterloo County. Protected under the Ontario Heritage Act, the house has been compromised by sandblasting that allowed moisture to seep in. There is some structural damage, and the interior is full of mould. Its owner, Patrick George of JHS Properties Inc., has so far spent over \$100,000 to stabilize the building and is working with the city to find a long-term solution.

Photo: Peter Lee, The Record

Canada Post Sells Mid-Century Marvel for \$159 Million



In January, Vancouver's main post office building on West Georgia was sold to bcIMC, one of the country's largest pension fund managers. Like Postal Station K, recently sold here in Toronto, it has never had municipal heritage protection as the city has no jurisdiction over a building owned by the federal government. Designed by McCarter Nairne & Partners and completed in 1959, the post office is a superb example of International Style architecture, often dubbed a "Taj Majal with escalators." More than just handsome, it was built to withstand whatever the Cold War might have brought. As it exists, the building could certainly support a tower; one appears in the original architectural drawings but was never completed owing to budget constraints. A spokesperson for bcIMC has said, "the status of the existing building will be considered as part of the whole development planning process" (*Vancouver Sun*, Jan. 25, 2013). Photo: Jason Vanderhill

Demolisher to Be Fined

In our April newsletter we mistakenly reported that the hastily demolished commercial building at 267-269 Queen St. East was not on the City's list of heritage properties. Despite not being included in the online inventory, it had been designated of heritage value in 1989 and was supposed to be protected under the Ontario Heritage Act. In what we hope might be a precedent-setting example, the owner (2235434 Ontario Ltd.) and the demolition contractor (Stonehaven Specialty Contracting Corp.) have been served with a summons to appear in court. A conviction of unlawful demolition could result in a fine of up to \$1 million and/or imprisonment for up to one year, according to a City press release of May 24. "It's a pretty significant move," said Rollo Myers of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. "It's always been something that can be done, but I don't recall this happening before." According to thestar.com (May 27, 2013), only five property owners have been successfully prosecuted in similar cases since the Heritage Act was first passed in 1975.



Doors Open Toronto



Toronto's First Post Office benefits greatly from the exposure provided by Doors Open Toronto. The weekend of May 24-25 saw 867 visitors through the museum's doors. We are always delighted to note how many of these are new to Toronto, or even new to Canada. Staff members are kept busy outlining the city's early history and geography, and explaining the post office's central role in the communications and commerce of the new city of Toronto in the 1830s. Seen at right, Kevin Both holds up a seal and a stick of Scottish sealing wax as he prepares to put them to good purpose on an old-fashioned letter. Dozens of people took the time to record and share their visits in this way. Dozens more simply Instagrammed.



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT Annual General Meeting



The Town of York Historical Society celebrated its 30th anniversary in style on May 13 in the modish iQ Lounge of the newly restored Dineen Building. Early arrivals were treated to a tour given by Linda Fujita, the property manager. A brisk business meeting was then followed by sumptuous snacks catered by the new Fiore restaurant at the western end of the building. All of the arrangements had been facilitated by Emma Verity of iQ Office Suites,



who made everything run very smoothly. Following the break, the assembled were treated to an informal dissertation on naughty Victorian language by celebrated author Maureen Jennings,

pictured here with TYHS stalwart Miriam Smith.

The Sixth Annual Sheldon Godfrey Award was presented that evening to Clayton Smith, President of The Commercial Realty Group. The award is presented to individuals who have excelled in their commitment to promoting, restoring or retaining key aspects of Toronto's heritage. Clayton Smith was selected for his work in revitalizing the Dineen. In presenting the award Sheldon Godfrey said, "This is a superb example of how complete dedication can bring a building back to life."

Photos: Top and centre, Kate McAuley; bottom (Sheldon Godfrey, Clayton Smith and Janet Walters outside the Dineen), Darryl Nicholas.



New Faces on the Board



Having lived in Cabbagetown for 15 years, **Tom Arnold** has a strong interest in the history and heritage architecture of the "old town." In his professional career he has served as a Director of Public Affairs, Communications and Philanthropic Investment for government and the private sector following a successful career as a journalist in Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto. He is a former national president of the Canadian Association of Journalists where he organized conferences, annual awards, fundraising and sponsorships, prepared membership brochures, and oversaw the publication of a quarterly magazine.



Suzanne Kavanagh resides in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood and has served on the Neighbourhood Association's board for five years. She also chairs the local Heritage Conservation District committee. When not working in a city garden, she paddles her kayak in

Lake Ontario. She volunteers at Regent Park, Roots of Empathy, and sits on the Board for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Toronto. Last year, she received the Queen's Jubilee Gold medal for community service. During the day she works for George Brown College as Academic Chair in the Centre for Construction and Engineering Technologies.



Sanford Hersh has a graduate degree in Systems and Information Science from Syracuse University. A software designer and self-styled "solutions creator" or "systems coach," he makes things work better by, as he puts it, "being able to see the

forest for the trees." From 2004 to 2007 he served on the steering committee of the Toronto Software Improvement Network. From 2006 to 2008 he served on the board of the Corktown Residents and Business Association. When not working, he goes sailing every chance he can get. Mr. Hersh has been a member of the Town of York Historical Society for over two decades.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND: Walking Tours

CORKTOWN WALKING TOUR

Saturday, August 10, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Explore the homes, factories, places of worship, businesses and other sites that made Corktown a hub for many newcomers to Toronto. Of English, Scottish, Irish, French, German, Black, Russian, Polish, Italian, Austrian and Macedonian heritage, families arrived here from the late 1700s to the early 20th century. The tour begins and ends at the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse.

Ontario Heritage Trust. \$10 adults, \$8 students, seniors and ETS members.

For reservations call 416-327-6997 or email enochturner@heritagetrust.on.ca.



WORKERS HISTORY OF SPADINA

Sunday, August 11, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm

Follow Craig Heron, one of Canada's most accomplished labour historians, to hear colourful stories of working-class life in and around Spadina Avenue over the course of the twentieth century. Learn about the history of the garment district, including the rise of a variety of workers' organizations, the parades and protests that punctuated the history of the area; the rougher entertainment scene that appeared; and the transition to a vibrant Chinese community.

Heritage Toronto tour. Free, but pre-registration required. To register visit heritagetoronto.org. This tour will also be offered on August 11.

GERRARD INDIA BAZAAR

Thursday, August 15, 6:30 – 8:00 pm

Widely known as "Little India," the stretch of Gerrard Street between Greenwood and Coxwell Avenues became the commercial heart for Toronto's diverse South Asian communities beginning in the 1970s. Take in the sights and aromas of the Gerrard India Bazaar as you learn about the history of this unique area, and about the cultures that have shaped it.

Heritage Toronto tour in English or Hindi. Free, but preregistration required. To register visit heritagetoronto.org.



THE TOWN OF YORK AND THE WAR OF 1812



Saturday, September 7, 1:30 – 3:30 pm

In the spring of 1813, York (now Toronto), was occupied by the American army. Hear the dramatic stories of the men and women who lived here during the war. Visit the former sites of a military hospital, homes and businesses pillaged by victorious American soldiers, and the parliament buildings burned during the occupation on this walk through the oldest section of Toronto.

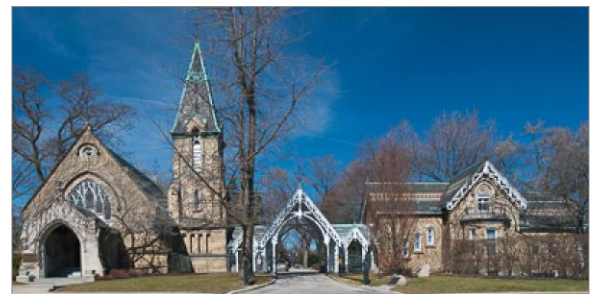
Heritage Toronto tour in English, French or Mandarin. Free. Meet in St. James Park, just east of the fountain.

THE NECROPOLIS

Sunday, September 8, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Visit Toronto's oldest non-denominational burying ground to hear the stories of Father of Confederation George Brown, rebels William Lyon Mackenzie, Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, oarsman Ned Hanlan and dinosaur hunter Joseph Burr Tyrell.

ROMwalk. Free. Meet at cemetery entrance, 200 Winchester Street, at the northeast corner of Winchester and Sumach Streets.





New Faces in the Post Office

A recent graduate of McGill University with a major in Canadian history, Mary-Rose Sutton joined the staff of Toronto's First Post Office this month. She has taken over the weekend position recently vacated by Kevin Both. In addition to her sound knowledge of local history, Mary-Rose's experience as a summer camp counsellor in Algonquin Park will serve her well in dealing with open flames and molten sealing wax at the post office. When not with us, she works afternoons during the week at the Katzman Kamen Gallery and also volunteers at the Gardiner Museum.

Expanded weekday hours at the post office (we're now open until 5:30 weekdays) have necessitated an expansion of our staff, and Cara Patterson will be on afternoon duty until closing every Monday to Friday. Cara has an Honours B.A. in history from the University of Guelph, as well as a post-graduate certificate in Culture and Heritage Site Management from Centennial College. Her four-month field placement for the latter landed her at the Ontario Heritage Trust (10 Adelaide Street East), so this former Burlington resident is well acquainted with the "old town" neighbourhood of the city. Cara also volunteers at the Design Exchange and at the Evergreen Brick Works.



Each of these young women brings intelligence, enthusiasm and a background in customer-service excellence to our establishment. Please make them feel as welcome as we hope they make *you* feel at Toronto's First Post Office.

POST BOXES FOR RENT

At the time of this printing, a few of the iconic postal boxes at 260 Adelaide Street East were available for rent. Anyone interested should contact Toronto's First Post Office at 416-865-1833 or tfpo@total.net.

WHY NOT JOIN US?

Help us tell the story of the Town of York and early Toronto through research, exhibitions, interpretation and outreach, education programs and more!

As a member you will receive (in the mail, of course!) the TYHS newsletter and invitations to all events sponsored by the Society or held at Toronto's First Post Office. Membership also entitles you to a 10% discount in the museum's gift shop and in-house use of the Society's library. Your tax-deductible membership helps in ways that exceed its nominal cost. It declares your belief in the importance of Toronto's history and the preservation of its built heritage!

The Town of York Historical Society

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

Directors: Tom Arnold, Patricia Braithwaite, Sheldon Godfrey, Sanford Hersh, Suzanne Kavanagh, Judith McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy (President) and Councillor Pam McConnell.

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

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Hours of operation:

Monday to Friday: 9-5:30
Saturdays: 10-4
Sundays: 12-4
Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed August 4-5 for Simcoe Day and September 1-2 for Labour Day.

Toronto's First Post Office is a museum and National Historic Site. The Town of York Historical Society is a legally incorporated non-profit organization and registered charity. Gratefully acknowledged is the support of the City of Toronto; the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.