

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

December 2013

Vol. XXIX No. 4

NEW LIFE PROPOSED FOR LOBLAWS WAREHOUSE



When it was completed in 1928 the *Toronto Star* described the Loblaw Groceteria Co. Ltd. building at Fleet and Bathurst Streets as “the most modern warehouse building of its type in the dominion.” A triumph of Art Deco design by the architectural firm of Sparling, Martin and Forbes, its four storeys housed administrative offices in addition to manufacturing, packaging and storage facilities.

Seven freight cars could unload at once from the railway siding along the east side, while the loading docks on the west side had space for 23 trucks. It had a garage, carpentry and paint shops, giant ovens for baking cakes, huge drums for blending tea, and massive refrigerators cooled by 22,000 feet of pipe. Such were its mechanical wonders that, during the depression, customers would line up for tours.

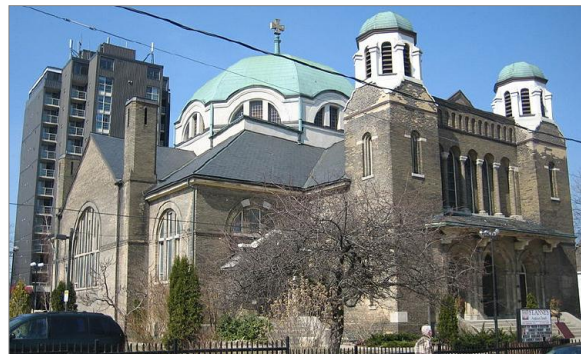
Under the same roof were recreational facilities for Loblaw’s 800 local employees. These included bowling alleys, a billiards room and lounges for playing euchre. There was also an auditorium for concerts and staff-produced plays. At the opening ceremonies for the recreational rooms, hundreds danced to live music performed by the corporate symphony. The “merchant prince” responsible for it all was not there, however. T.P. Loblaw had been thrown by a horse months earlier and was still recovering from his injuries.

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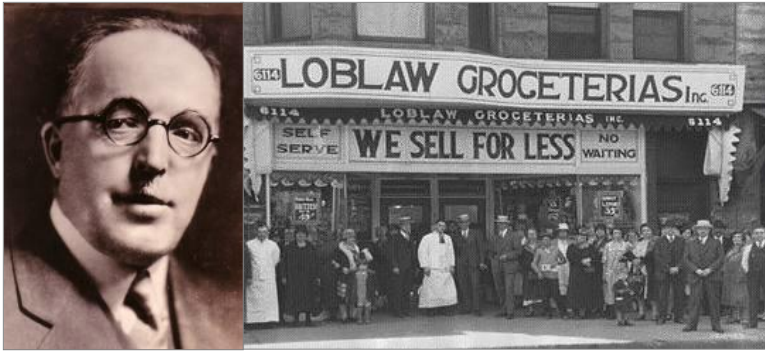
St. Anne’s Anglican – the “Group of Seven Church”

A remarkable cycle of paintings grace the interior surfaces of St. Anne’s church on Gladstone Avenue and led to it being deemed of national historical significance in 1996. These include a crucifixion by J.E.H. MacDonald, a nativity by Frederick Varley, and works by Frank Carmichael – none of whom was known for religious iconography. MacDonald had been commissioned in 1923 by Rector Lawrence Skey to decorate the interior of the then 15-year-old church. He brought in architect William Rae to co-direct the project and enlisted two of his Group-of-Seven friends and seven other artists, including students from the Ontario College of Art, to help complete the work. Based on MacDonald’s designs, the artists worked on canvases in their individual studios and the finished works were then installed in the church.

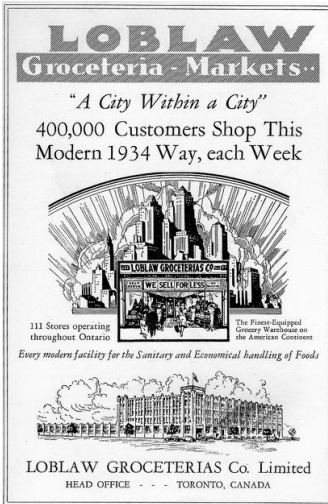


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Loblaws, *from page 1*



According to the plaque on his family farm near Alliston, Ontario, Theodore Pringle Loblaw (1872-1933) arrived in Toronto at age 17 “with twenty dollars and a dream.” An orphan raised by his maternal grandparents, he had earned the money as a ploughman. After tramping the city streets around Christmastime, he landed a job with Cork’s Cash Grocery at 400 King Street East. Young Loblaw worked hard and saved his money, attending night school twice a week and commuting home to the farm



on a bicycle every Saturday night. By 1897 he had saved enough to marry Isabella Adams; by 1900 enough to buy his first grocery store with J. Milton Cork, the son of his former employer. This was the beginning of a lifelong partnership between the two men. That first store was on College Street, the second was at 511 Yonge Street. Loblaw’s idea

was to develop a chain – based on the department-store model – which would allow him to buy in bulk, save money, and pass those savings on to his customers. By 1919 he and Cork owned 19 stores, which they soon sold to W. J. Pentland. These would later become the Dominion Store chain.

Meanwhile, Loblaw was made manager of the United Farmers Cooperative Company, thanks in some part to the support of Premier E.C. Drury. The UFCC wanted to launch a chain of cooperative grocery stores. Loblaw had both the experience and the vision, and he understood farmers. The job entailed travelling through the U.S. where he got to know the self-serve Piggly-Wiggly grocery store chain founded by Charles Saunders in 1916. Here was a whole new way to shop for food: customers selected sealed packages from shelves. All types of food, including meat and dairy, were available under one roof. There was no need to wait while the shopkeeper weighed and wrapped purchases, no need to wait for the delivery boy on his bicycle. This “cash and carry” model had been made possible by the automobile and the icebox.

Resigning from the UFCC, Loblaw took his experience elsewhere. The first Loblaws Groceteria opened in 1919 with Cork supplying some of the capital and managing the store. By 1921, Loblaws Groceterias Co. Ltd. was incorporated and began to expand exponentially throughout Ontario, Pennsylvania and New York State. By the time the Toronto warehouse was built, each clean, brightly-lit, 3,000-square-foot store was expected to bring in a quarter of a million dollars annually. That same year, the Stevenson Memorial hospital opened in Alliston, largely financed by Loblaw and named for his grandparents. The following year he paved Alliston’s streets and gave \$1 million towards the construction of the Toronto Western Hospital. In 1933 he would die there, unexpectedly, following minor surgery.

Like Henry Ford before him, and Sam Walton since, Loblaw “became a millionaire by pioneering a revolutionary concept in merchandising that significantly reduced costs to the consumer” (Ontario Heritage Trust, October 2008). The company he founded continues to thrive and innovate. By the early 1950s, George Weston Ltd. – who had purchased 100,000 shares from J. Milton Cork in 1948 – had a controlling interest. Loblaws has since introduced no-name products (1978), President’s Choice (1984), PC Financial (1998) and Joe Fresh (2006) – an inexpensive line of clothing designed by Joe Mimran, founder of Club Monaco.

Loblaws, from page 2

When W. Galen Weston was appointed CEO in 1972 he decamped the company's headquarters from the warehouse at Fleet and Bathurst. The empty building was eventually given over, rent-free, to the Daily Bread Food Bank. Since 2001 the property has been vacant, but designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The City of Toronto rejected a 2004 proposal by Loblaws to demolish the warehouse and replace it with a superstore. The corporation appealed this decision to the Ontario Municipal Board but no hearing ever took place. Negotiations with the City have continued ever since, predicated on the idea that, if the warehouse was preserved, Loblaws could develop any adjacent vacant land.

Their current proposal would consist of three storeys of retail within the gutted warehouse, including a grocery store on the second floor. Five storeys of office space, with a green roof, would sit on top. Two residential towers, 37 and 41 floors respectively, would rise on land recently cleared by the demolition of a 1934 addition to the original building. The plan has yet to be approved but, based on the success of Maple Leaf Gardens, it likely will be. Councillor Adam Vaughan (*National Post*, Aug. 8) said, "The real concern is getting food into that neighbourhood..." The high-end prepared meals demanded by CityPlace condo dwellers are a far cry from the food-bank offerings of the 1990s, but these future shoppers will also largely arrive on foot. Mr. Loblaw himself would likely have foreseen that, and gone for it.



Above: A rendering of Loblaws' current proposal by architectsAlliance. Previous page: Portrait of T.P. Loblaw; one of the first Loblaw Groceterias, 1921; advertisement in *Toronto's 100 Years*, a 1934 book celebrating the city's centennial; aerial view of Bathurst and Fleet Streets, 1950s.

TORONTO'S FIRST POST OFFICE OPEN 30 YEARS



Opening day, December 15, 1983, Front row: Sheldon Godfrey, Judy Godfrey and Bette Shepherd, Back row: Senator Stanley Haidasz; Bob Jamieson, President, Town of York Historical Society; Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Culture, Susan Fish; Lieutenant-Governor John Black Aird.

Thirty years ago on December 15, 1983, over 300 people attended the official opening of Toronto's First Post Office. This had been made possible through the dedication of a small group of public-spirited, historically-minded citizens who had incorporated as the Town of York Historical Society in April of that year. The restoration of the post office, along with three other conjoined buildings, had been undertaken in 1979 by lawyer Sheldon Godfrey and his wife Judy. Looking back on the project as it neared completion, Mr. Godfrey described the endeavour as "close to absolute lunacy" (*Toronto Star*, May 1, 1982). Used as an industrial cold-storage facility for over 40 years, and then left vacant for several years, the post-office building was unrecognizable when Judy Godfrey's research brought its long-forgotten provenance to light.

Among the special guests in attendance on opening day was Judge René Marin, then Chairman of Canada Post Corporation. In a yellowed newspaper clipping from that time, Judge Marin is quoted as saying: "It is most gratifying to all those who cherish our Canadian heritage to see this post office restored... The Town of York Historical Society and its many talented professional friends are to be congratulated on their painstaking research and restoration of this building. I salute you for bringing alive again Canada's oldest surviving post office building. It is a landmark, not only in the history of the postal service but in the history of Canada."



Hooray for the Little Shops on King!

There is very little of this stuff left. The Georgian city depicted in the famous 1856 – 1857 panoramic photographs by Armstrong Beere and Hime is all but gone. Yet, somehow, despite years of abandonment and neglect, these two modest shops on King Street East managed to survive long enough to be appreciated and rescued. We first wrote about them in June of 2007 (*Let That Be a Warning*) when their fate appeared to be that of inevitable demolition by neglect. We revisited them in December

of 2010 (*Extreme Makeover*) when Little Trinity Anglican Church announced its plans to restore the facades and construct new administrative offices and meeting facilities to the rear. That restoration and construction is now complete. The buff-coloured paint has been carefully sandblasted from the bricks. Based on archival photographs, the original windows and doorways have been replaced with as near reproductions as possible. These little shops now stare smugly out at the street with their 1850s faces. So much so, in fact, that one almost expects to be able to rent a room at Scott's Hotel, or purchase a yard of fabric from Francis Beale, the bricklayer turned shopkeeper. You can't of course, but you can still enjoy the view.



Historic George Street Homes Ready for Rescue



We first visited this nearly derelict stretch of George Street in December of 2011, following a three-alarm fire that severely damaged the former “Fegan Boys” home at number 295. At that time, because the block was the subject of a development proposal, Heritage Preservation Services staff at the City of Toronto was in the process of researching and evaluating the properties. Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, a one-time resident of George Street, had always seen the value in these historic properties, despite the condition they were in: “I’d always thought of them as very lovely properties just not in very great shape” (*BlogTO*, April 12, 2012). The by-laws designating 295, 297, 303 and 309-311 George Street under the Ontario Heritage Act were passed on October 4, 2012. The Thomas Meredith House (c.1859) at number 305 has been designated since January of 2008. Now it seems that all these homes are to be purchased by the City and restored as part of a redevelopment of Seaton House, a notorious shelter for homeless men located further north on the same block.

Wong-Tam feels strongly about preserving the heritage fabric of this once elegant and genteel street, but she also wants to set a precedent: “I believe it is extremely important that the city leads the way in heritage restoration, so when developers come to us and say that they can’t do it, I want to be able to demonstrate to them why you can do it. Because the city is going to do it here.”

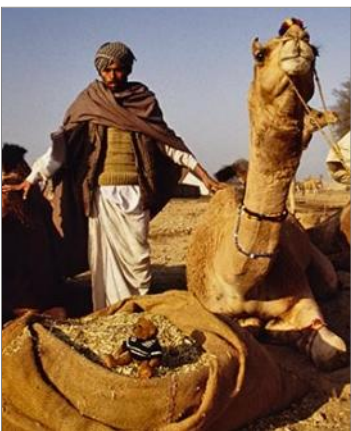
Above, left to right: The Robert Armstrong Houses (311/309), a pair of three-storey semi-detached homes in the Second Empire style, built in 1887; The Thomas Meredith House (305), c. 1859, an Italianate style home with extended eaves; The Frank Beecroft Houses (303) dating from 1911 and typical of the Edwardian Classical style of that era; The Salvation Army Rest Home (297), built in 1856 and a rare surviving residential structure from the mid-19th century. It and its southern neighbour, the former Fegan Boys home, were identical to each other when first built for Thomas Meredith.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT A Well-Travelled Bear



On a chilly day in early November, Boomer the Bear visited Toronto's First Post Office. Boomer, who hails from Montreal, is one of approximately 50 peripatetic bears in the Travelling Teddy Bear Program, a collaboration between the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) and elementary schools across North America. Since 1994, SATW's professional travel journalists, photographers, and publicists have taken Travelling Teddies with them as they cover the globe, sending postcards, souvenirs, and travel journals home to the young students.

During the school year, SATW members coordinate with elementary school teachers to sponsor one or more Travelling Teddy Bears for a selected class. The students name their bears, who then begin globetrotting with SATW members and their friends and families, sending back written and photographic records of their exploits. Teachers reference the correspondence against a world map to spark discussion and research into geography and international cultures.



SATW members keep the bears on the road during the school year, passing them from one traveller to the next. In the spring, each bear returns to the schoolroom, laden with mementos and a journal full of memories to share.

Above: Boomer at Toronto's First Post Office (photo: Nancy Wigston). Left: Charles Lindbear at the Nagaur Camel Fair in Rajasthan.

Rush First-Day Covers a First-Class Success

In our last newsletter we told you about a fund-raising effort involving the sale of autographed first-day covers for the Rush stamp released this past summer. We are pleased to report that this project has been a complete success. After giving our members a week's head start, we sent out a general press



release and sold the remaining covers by closing time the same day. Not only are *we* happy, it seems we have made ten people – from across the continent and as far away as Wales – very happy as well. Matt Sanders, pictured above with his early Christmas present, was the lucky recipient of the first in the numbered series of ten. Toronto's First Post Office would like to thank Sam Dunn of Banger Films and Meg Symysk of SRO Management Inc. for their generous help with this venture.

Another New Face at TFPO

Gabriele Cole is a museum professional with degrees in Art History, Fine Arts, Archaeology and Museum Studies. She has accumulated experience at some of the largest cultural institutions in the province, including the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum. This past summer, Gabriele was a project manager at the Quinte Educational Museum and Archives, based in a one-room schoolhouse in Ameliasburgh. There she instructed children in the fine art of letter writing (and also taught them how to kill zombies). Gabriele will be assuming the position of weekend postal clerk recently vacated by Mary-Rose Sutton. Mary-Rose has taken on a role at the Koffler Centre, where her extensive knowledge of Canadian contemporary art will no doubt be highly valued.



Heritage Toronto Honours Rollo Myers with Special Achievement Award

On October 15, Heritage Toronto once again honoured those who have made outstanding contributions to the conservation and promotion of the city's heritage. This year's Special Achievement Award went to Rollo Myers. For over four decades, largely in a volunteer capacity, Mr. Myers has worked tirelessly and modestly as an advocate for community building with heritage at the foundation. He served six years on the Toronto Historical Board and was a founding member of Citizens for the Old Town, the West Donlands Committee and the Friends of Fort York. His current "day job" is managing the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.



It is widely acknowledged that Myers's greatest gift is his ability to help others see what he sees: the rich potential in our often forgotten or neglected past. His restoration of four homes in a once-derelict neighbourhood called Cabbagetown is but one illustration of his remarkable foresight. Today that area is one of the largest preserved collections of Victorian housing in North America.

Introduced by his friend and former Cabbagetown neighbour George Rust-D'Eye, Myers used the awards stage to highlight one of his current passions: the site of Ontario's first parliament buildings. Myers first pinpointed their location over 15 years ago using two centuries' worth of map overlays. His conviction that remains of the buildings might still exist led to a fruitful archaeological dig in 2000. In the years since, he helped snowball the forces that have brought this site into public hands. Where others saw a car wash, Myers saw the birthplace of our society and its most cherished public institutions. As for what that might look like in another 15 years – just ask him.



Left: Rollo Myers, Joe Pantelone and Joe Gill celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Friends of Fort York in 2009.

New in the Gift Shop



Patriotic Greeting Cards

These charming greeting cards from *Mum's Creations* bear an assortment of Canadian fall and winter themes in early 20th-century depictions. While the individual note cards (\$3) are ideal for sending secular season's greetings, a set of *Canadian Winter Women 1900–1910* – with four each of five images packaged in a keepsake metal box for only \$24 – would make the perfect gift for anyone on your list that still sends hand-written thank-you cards and other correspondence.



Seeking a Better Future:

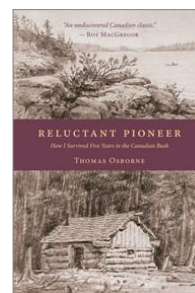
The English Pioneers of Ontario and Quebec

Lucille H. Campey

Dundurn Press (2012), 528 pages, \$29.⁹⁹

While copious emigration studies have been undertaken on the Scots and the Irish, very little has been written about the English in Canada.

Challenging the assumption that emigration was primarily a flight from poverty, Campey reveals how the English were strongly attracted by the greater freedoms and better livelihoods that could be achieved through relocation to our central provinces.



Reluctant Pioneer

How I Survived Five Years in the Canadian Bush

Thomas Osborne, Roy MacGregor

Dundurn Press (2013), 264 pages, \$24.⁹⁹

At sixteen, Thomas Osborne and his younger brother joined their luckless father who, in 1875, had decided to make a new start for his family in the bush east of the pioneer village of Huntsville. Many years later, he wrote a graphic memoir that has become, in the words of author and journalist Roy MacGregor, "an undiscovered Canadian classic."

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

GATHER TOGETHER, OUR WINTERS OF OLD

Saturday, December 14, 7:30 pm

The Irish Choral Society of Canada invites you to join them for their Christmas concert, directed and choreographed by Sinead Sugrue. They will be celebrating Christian and Pagan traditions through song, music and dance. Joining the choir will be the talented Joseph Angelo on piano, Rose Bolton on fiddle, Jacob McCauley on bodhran. The evening will also feature a silent auction and raffles.

Ada Slaight Hall, Daniels Spectrum, 585 Dundas Street East. Adults \$25, seniors \$20, children \$10. To purchase tickets call 416-759-2124 or e-mail info@irishchoralsociety.com.



ELIZABETH – DARCY: AN ADAPTATION OF PRIDE AND PREJUDICE December 14 – 29, matinées (2:00 pm) and evenings (8:00 pm)

Hallie Burt and Kate Werneburg present a holiday remount of their sold-out Fringe Festival hit. The two women play all the parts in this romantic comedy described as “the Jane Austen you love with a squeeze of lemon.” As you move through the house, you will find yourself caught up in the story, alternately swept away or laughing out loud.

Campbell House Museum, 160 Queen Street West, \$20. To purchase tickets or for further information, call the Campbell House box office at 416-597-0227, ext. 2.

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, December 15, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Mark Sunday, December 15th with a big red circle for TFPO's Holiday Open House! We'll be making mail art and papery crafts, remembering Christmas traditions from Old York, finishing our Christmas cards (the deadline for domestic mail is December 17th!), enjoying some festive nibbles and libations, warming up by the fire, and looking forward to the New Year ahead. Do join us!

Toronto's First Post Office, 260 Adelaide Street East, free. For more information, please call 416-865-1833.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A Reading by the East Side Players

Sunday, December 15, 2:00 pm

The award-winning East Side Players have been engaging audiences for decades. Their twofold mission is to present engaging and affordable theatre (in a comfortable space) and to offer individuals the chance to participate in community theatre productions. Join them for a very special afternoon, and enhance your festive mood, as members of the company read from Dickens' beloved holiday classic.

Papermill Theatre, Todmorden Mills Heritage Site, 67 Pottery Road, \$12 adults/\$5 children. For tickets and further information, please call 416-396-2819.

HOGMANAY! A TRADITIONAL SCOTTISH CELEBRATION

Sunday, December 29, 7:00 to 9:00 pm

In celebration of the coming New Year, Mackenzie House will be hosting an 1800s “open-house” style party. Visitors are invited to discover Hogmanay traditions, enjoy delicious Scottish food and take a gaslight tour of the house, which will be decorated for the holidays. The popular band Gin Lane will perform the music of Ontario's early Scottish settlers.

Mackenzie House, 82 Bond Street, \$22.50 plus tax. Reservations and pre-payment are required; telephone 416-392-6915.



St. Anne's, *from page 1*

Although these works are clearly linked to the Arts and Crafts movement of the day, and the revival of mural painting that began in the late 19th century, their motifs, palette and artistic conventions were informed by Byzantine art in order to complement the architecture of the church. Its Byzantine Revival design, by architect William Ford Howland, had been chosen by Skey to suit his ecumenical vision of the Christian church and to evoke an era prior to its division into various denominations. Its large, open interior, which allowed everyone to see and hear, aligned with his egalitarian outlook for the working-class neighbourhood in which St. Anne's was located. With a 21m-high central dome and two domed bell towers it is unusual for an Anglican church. Its Greek-cross plan was influenced by the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, which Rector Skey had discovered on a year-long sabbatical taken in 1905 for the express purpose of sourcing inspiration for a new church. Built in 1907-08, the current church replaced a small neo-gothic building that had served the parish for the hamlet of Brockton since 1862. Once the new church was built, the old one was demolished and replaced by a parish hall in 1912.

Perhaps owing to Rector Skey, whose tenure ended in 1933, there has been an enduring relationship between St. Anne's and the arts. The St. Anne's Music and Drama Society (MADS) for example, is known for its productions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Visual art exhibitions continue to be held in the Ministry Centre and in the Skey Room. Currently, and until December 22, artist David Blatherwick's video and audio installation, for which he recruited members of the St. Anne's choir, will fill and transform the sanctuary. Blatherwick videotaped five members of the church's excellent choir as they whistled transcriptions of real birdsong, then mounted the results in various corners of the sacred space.



The interior of St. Anne's church from torontosavvy.me. For the record, other contributing artists were Thoreau MacDonald, Neil Mackechnie, Arthur Martin, H.S. Palmer, H.S. Stansfield, Frances Loring and Florence Wyle.

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.

The Town of York Historical Society

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

Directors: Tom Arnold, Sheldon Godfrey, Sanford Hersh, Judith McErvel, Jennifer McIlroy, and Councillor Pam McConnell

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

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Saturdays: 10:00 – 4:00
Sundays: 12:00 – 4:00
Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will close December 25-26th for Christmas, January 1 for the New Year, and February 17 for Family 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.