

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

April 2014

Vol. XXX No. 1

WHAT'S TO BECOME OF THE SPADINA HOTEL?



Spadina Hotel, 1954, James Victor Salmon, courtesy of Toronto Public Library.

After having provided travellers to Toronto with a place to rest – and a watering hole – for 140 years, the old hotel on the northwest corner of King and Spadina sits empty and dark. Global Village Backpackers, which had occupied the building since 1997, closed suddenly in January. Residents and guests of the city's largest hostel were given the weekend to find alternate accommodation. Its founder and president, Richard McCarron, died of cancer in Ottawa last December.

McCarron, himself a former backpacker, majored in communications at the University of Ottawa. The name “Global Village” is a Marshall McLuhan reference. While the hostel catered mostly to youth travelling on the cheap, some found a home there, and stayed for months or even years. Young people in Toronto on work visas from as far away as Kurdistan and Croatia were living there when it closed.

Samuel Richardson, who first opened a three-storey frame hotel on that corner in 1875, was also no stranger to travel. A decorated military veteran, he had served 11 years in “foreign lands” with the 13th Hussars, a British Cavalry regiment. He expanded “Richardson House,” as the hotel was then called, twice in the following decade, with two four-storey brick additions to the north along Spadina Avenue. The rooms were \$2 per day, and boasted hot-water heating and gas lights. One of the young guests at the time, 24-year-old James Macdonald, made the news when he rendered himself “insensible” with fumes from the latter. Macdonald, from a tiny farming community near Barrie, was characterized in the press as unaccustomed to neither the temptations nor the technology of the big city.

Continued on page 2

Coachhouse Is Yours If You Can Move It

In September of 2011 we told you about this doomed yet charming coach house, designed by architect George Martell Miller and built in 1898 for clothier William R. Johnston. It now seems there is a chance to save the building, and *you* could be the one to do it! On April 1, Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam famously tweeted: “Free Toronto coach house approx 3000 SF built in 1889 is yours if you can move it. Seriously. Email me. #119 Isabella.” Although a number of brick structures have been moved in Toronto – memorably Campbell House in 1972 – the L-shape of the coach house would likely require it to be split and moved in two sections. The process involves inserting a temporary steel framework under the structure for support, then elevating it off the foundation using hydraulic jacks. Hydraulic dollies can then move a building a short distance; a flatbed truck would be needed for a longer move. However, as architect Scott Weir noted in *The Toronto Star* (April 1), “The moving of the building wouldn’t be as hard as finding a place to put it.”



Spadina Hotel, from page 1



Richardson died in 1904, and in 1906 hotelier Robert Falconer took over and renamed the establishment after himself: The Falconer Hotel. Then, in 1913, it became (Charles) Ziegler's Hotel, a name that did not survive the anti-German sentiment in the first World War. A mortgage foreclosure in 1917 listed the value of the building at \$12,500. Although briefly occupied by a "temperance hotel," it was, by the 1920s, the Hotel Spadina – a place where young Ernest Hemingway was reputed to raise the occasional glass during his tenure at the *Toronto Star*.



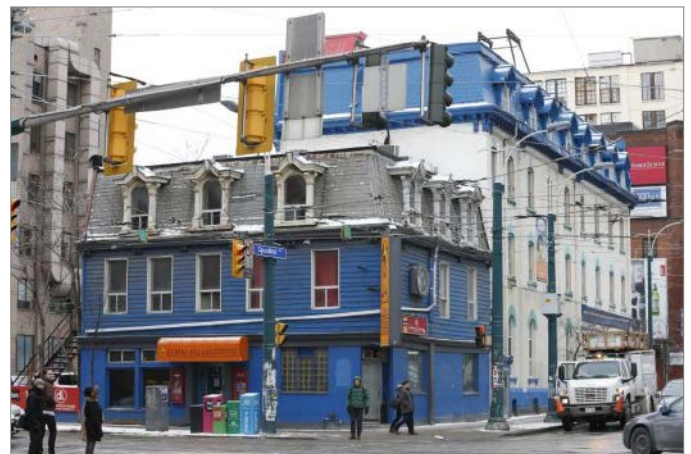
A renovation in the 1950s saw the hotel dining room restored to its 1880s wood-panelled splendour but, perhaps more importantly, resulted in the beach-themed Cabana Room bar on the second floor with nightly live music. This would become a hangout for avant-garde and iconoclast artists – mostly faculty and students from the Ontario College of Art. In the ensuing decades, the hotel's guest list included the likes of Leonard Cohen, the Rolling Stones and the Tragically Hip. In 1973 the Spadina Hotel itself became a sort of star when it was featured in the movie *The Last Detail*, with Jack Nicholson.



The live music in the Cabana Room was, in the 1970s and 1980s, part of the same circuit that comprised Lee's Palace and the Cameron House. Toronto's burgeoning punk scene collided and then colluded with the visual and performance art movements centred in the Queen Street West and Spadina neighbourhood. The Cameron was the beating heart of a phenomenal art and music community whose influence spilled out into theatre and politics – political theatre and even theatrical politics when the Hummer Sisters trio entered the mayoral race in 1982 with the campaign slogan *Art Vs. Art*. (Their major competitor was Art Eggleton who did win that year.)

In 1985 the Spadina Hotel was listed on the City's Inventory of Heritage Properties for architectural reasons. It has yet to be designated. And, while we value cornices, lintels and mansard roofs as much as (nay, more than) anyone, the hotel's cultural heritage should, and must, be taken into account as we move to preserve this important landmark of Toronto history.

Above top to bottom: Hotel Falconer, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1568, Item 0282; Spadina Hotel in the 1980s, from colour slide by F. Ellis Wiley, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, File 2, Item 97; Global Village Backpackers as a welcoming beacon to world-weary travellers and, at right, as it appeared this winter after closing (Carlos Osorio, *Toronto Star*).



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT Christmas Open House



December's PAL-SAC (Post a Letter Social Activity Club) meeting was rolled into a revival of Christmas Open House at Toronto's First Post Office. A fire once again warmed the hearth under a mantle garlanded with cedar boughs and berries. The scent of clove-studded oranges filled the air and the apple cider was hot and well spiced. Kate Akerfeldt (same Kate, new name!) laid on enough art supplies to gladden the heart of any crafter, and all afternoon long people made, wrote, addressed and posted Christmas cards.

Addresses were also made available for Canadian troops abroad, for veterans at Sunnybrook Hospital, and for an elderly couple in Prince Edward Island whose son had put out a Facebook request for cards. Mark Enman wanted to bring some Christmas joy back into the lives of his parents who had recently been placed in a long-term care home.



The Postman Project

On February 15, your editor was one of about fifty lucky people invited to see the results of a two-week writing workshop for a new play called *The Postman*, based on the life of Albert Calvin Jackson, Toronto's first black postman. In order to finance the workshop, director David Ferry had raised \$30,000 from Canada Council for the Arts, Obsidian Theatre Company, and the Arts and Culture Program of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. The hope is to eventually produce a play that will be performed next summer on twelve front porches, beginning in the recently named Albert Jackson Lane, and making its way to Brunswick Avenue where Jackson lived until his death in 1918. If the still somewhat rough-hewn production seen in February – which drew a standing ovation from a supportive crowd – is any indication, this is going to be a first-rate show and a fitting tribute to a man who deserves to be a household name in this city.

Above: Laurence Dean Ifill, who plays letter-carrier Albert Jackson, and is perhaps best known for his role as Bronco Davis on *Degrassi Junior High*, goes through lines with Claire Armstrong during a rehearsal of scenes from *The Postman*. Below: Members of the ensemble cast perform one of the musical numbers from the show.



Soldiers of Song



The cast, left to right: Jim Armstrong, Patrice Barbanchon, Lorne Brown (seated), Jason Wilson, Marcus Ali and Andrew Knowlton.

“Oh what a lovely war!” Rather, what a lovely time was had on March 6th when the Town of York Historical Society once again celebrated Toronto’s birthday at St. Lawrence Hall. In recognition of the centenary of the start of World War One, this year’s program featured a tribute to *The Dumbbells*. The original *Dumbbells*, a sketch comedy and musical ensemble, recruited from the Canadian Army’s Third Division, bolstered troop morale during WWI with live “concert parties” featuring irreverent humour that often skewered senior officers and the military itself. They later toured Europe and Canada, and had an extended hit run on Broadway. This tribute show grew out of the research of Dr. Jason Wilson (a Juno-nominated musician) and the memories of storyteller Lorne Brown. Attending on



Photo: Zenaira Ali, The East York Observer

March 6th was Joyce Crook (seen at left) who shared fond memories of being taken by her father to see *The Dumbbells* at the Royal Alex – in 1929 at the tender age of three! In addition to the show, a successful silent auction and fabulous food at intermission and made the evening truly a night to remember.

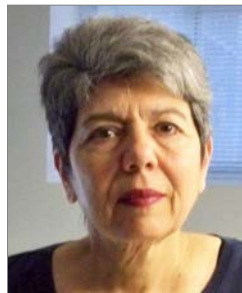


New Faces on the Board

These wonderful people were appointed to the TYHS Board of Directors in February to fill vacant positions.



Kevin Both graduated in 2010 from York University with a degree in Urban Sociology. For three years he worked weekends as the face of Toronto’s First Post Office, as well as educating school groups about the site’s unique history. Kevin continues to be very passionate about Toronto’s origins and leads walking tours through many of the city’s neighbourhoods. Kevin’s position on the board comes out of his desire to contribute to the protection of Toronto’s built heritage, and to booster the city and its image every chance he can.



Luisa Giacometti worked in a government agency for over 30 years. She has always believed in the importance of giving back to the community and has volunteered for many organizations over the decades. One of these was the first suicide-prevention centre established in Ontario, at the Toronto East General. Luisa is currently Chair of the ROMwalks and ROMbus programs at the Royal Ontario Museum, and Program Chair of the Culinary Historians of Canada. A strong community advocate, she is happy to contribute to the continuing growth and development of the Town of York Historical Society and Toronto’s First Post Office.

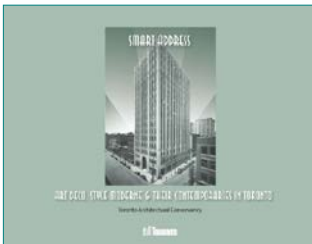


Susan Grav brings over 35 years of experience as an educator, volunteer and union representative to the Board of Directors. Her appreciation and respect for historical architecture has been informed by having lived in Toronto, Victoria, Halifax and Ottawa as well as through extensive world travel. Educated at the University of Toronto, and having married a Torontonians, Susan has a long-standing love for the City. Her enthusiasm and respect for Toronto’s cultural milieu as well as its architectural heritage make Susan a valuable asset to the historical society.

Nancy Wigston is a freelance critic and travel writer who lives in Toronto. She is a member of the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW), the Travel Media Association of Canada (TMAC), and the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA). Nancy has a PhD from the University of Toronto and has taught English literature at both the high school and university level. As a neighbor and frequent user of Toronto's First Post Office, she is passionate about its continued success as an integral part of Toronto's downtown community.



New in the Gift Shop

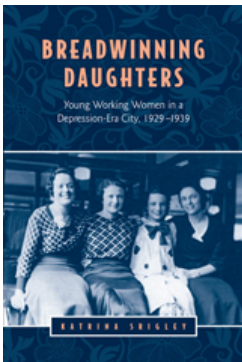


Smart Address: Art Deco, Style Moderne and Their Contemporaries in Toronto
Alec Keefer

Toronto Architectural Conservancy (2013), 142 pages, \$24.⁹⁵

Lavishly illustrated with black and white images

of buildings, many of which are no longer standing, this book examines the changing face of architecture in Toronto during the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. It was a tumultuous time. According to the book's author, "these two decades – more than any other period in the country – were so aggressively opposite each other." The book documents an exhibition by the same name, which showed at the City of Toronto's Market Gallery from October 25, 2013 to January 25, 2014.



Breadwinning Daughters: Young Working Women in a Depression-Era City, 1929-39

Katrina Srigley

UT Press (2013), 206 pages, \$26

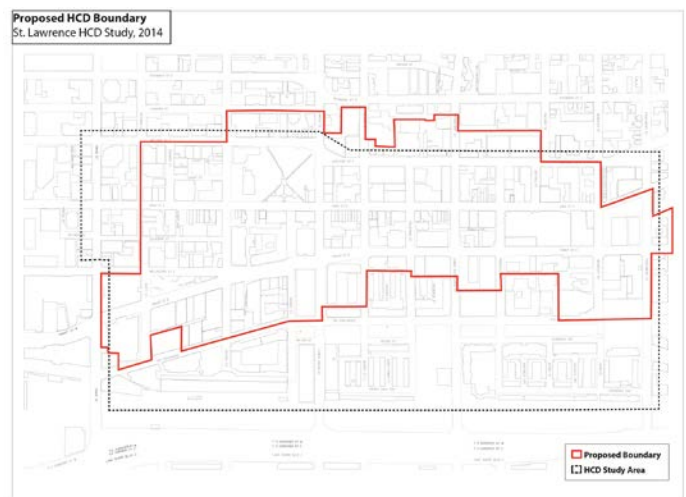
As one of the most difficult periods of the 20th century, the Great Depression left very few Canadians untouched. Using more than eighty interviews with women who lived and

worked in Toronto in the 1930s, *Breadwinning Daughters* examines the consequences of these years for women in their homes and workplaces, and in the city's courtrooms and dance halls.

ST. LAWRENCE HCD STUDY PRESENTATION



On April 10, the City of Toronto held its second community consultation on the St. Lawrence Heritage Conservation District Study. In addition to Heritage Preservation Services, the HCD study team included Fournier Gersovitz Moss Drolet & Associés (heritage conservation architects), Archaeological Services Inc., Bousfields Inc. (planners), the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association and other volunteers from Ryerson University and George Brown College. The public meeting was held in the beautiful new St. James Cathedral Centre. One might suppose that a 91-page PowerPoint presentation put together by committee would be less than scintillating, but this was far from the case. Solid research, punctuated by vintage photography, was organized into a compelling case for the HCD's proposed boundaries, delineated below. We were pleased to note that the original perimeter of the study area has been stretched slightly northward to include Toronto's First Post Office and its immediate neighbours. For the curious, the entire presentation can be seen online.



Meet Some of Our Neighbours and Customers



Leaves of Trees

Leaves of Trees is where Roohi Qureshi dreams up new skin-care recipes based on all-natural products and makes them up in small batches to share with you. Her products are modern apothecary with a pinch of exotic flavour, many of them based on unrefined argan oil sourced from a women's cooperative on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Women collect the argan tree nuts from the local area and then grind them by hand to extract the cosmetic oil without the use of solvents or other harmful chemicals. A highly labour-intensive process (it takes one woman 20 hours to produce a litre of oil), this enterprise helps to provide employment for the local women. Argan oil is an excellent moisturizer, which is absorbed quickly leaving your skin and hair soft, not greasy. All of the products from Leaves of Trees are made by hand.

Roohi's lotions are packed with unrefined Moroccan argan oil in combination with unrefined shea or cocoa butters to moisturize the driest of skin leaving it silky but not greasy. One of her most popular products is a lotion-style deodorant unlike any other on the market - natural, effective, gentle on the skin, and it keeps

you smelling great. The lip balms are the best we have ever tried; they keep your lips moist and healthy for hours. All Leaves of Trees soaps are made by hand using a cold-process technique. All are palm-oil free with only essential oils used for scent. These soaps can be customized to create unique one-of-a-kind gifts perfect for weddings, showers and clients.
177 Queen S. East, Tuesday to Saturday 10-6.

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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday, May 12, 7:00 pm

The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting this year in the new administration facilities at Little Trinity Anglican Church. Following the business meeting, Stewart Boden and Samantha Cutrara from the Archives of Ontario will present: *Dear Sadie: Love, Lives and Remembrance from Ontario's First World War.*

Free for TYHS members (\$10 for non-members), 403 King Street East (east of Parliament Street). Space is limited; RSVP to Toronto's First Post Office, 416-865-1833 or tfpo@total.net.



DOUBLE THE PLEASURE, DOUBLE THE FUN

Until June 1, Tuesday – Friday 9:30 – 4:30, Saturday 12:00 – 4:30

This exhibition, curated by Chelsea Jeffery and Rachel Wong for the Scotiabank Contact Festival, features never-before-seen 3D stereographic photographs from the Photographic Historical Society of Canada's collections. Visitors are invited to experience stereographs from the 1850s to the 1950s, with a focus on images of Toronto, using both historic and contemporary stereo viewers.

Campbell House Museum, 160 Queen Street West.



ELIZABETH REX, by Timothy Finlay

May 22 – June 2

On the eve of her former lover's execution, Queen Elizabeth I descends to the stable lodgings of Shakespeare's players. Her arrival provokes the rapier-sharp wit and keen insight of Ned, Shakespeare's genius performer of women's roles, and sparks the imagination of the Bard of Avon. In the course of the long night, the actor, the playwright and the Queen come to startling revelations about the roles they have played and the lives they have lived.

Papermill Theatre, Todmorden Mills Heritage Site, 67 Pottery Road. Visit www.eastsideplayers.ca or call 416-425-0917 for tickets and information.

INTERFAITH WORLD PRIDE FAIR

Saturday, June 21, 3:00 – 10:00 pm

Hosted by the United Church of Canada – along with Shir Libeynu, Ismaili Queers, Kulanu, Sunset Service, the Toronto Unity Mosque and others – this Fair will feature performances by local artists and speeches by leaders of faith-based communities working together to promote inclusion. A dynamic interfaith Youth Service, with singing, drumming, and youth choirs will follow the Fair and be held inside the church from 6-9 pm. Havdallah, a Jewish candle-lighting service marking the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week, will conclude the event.

McGill Square, in front of the Metropolitan United Church, 56 Queen Street East



GATSBY GARDEN PARTY

Sunday, June 22, 12:00 – 5:00 pm

Spadina Museum's celebrated summer garden party is back! Come in 1920s costume and nab the prize in the costume contest. Enjoy live period music from the Maple Leaf Champion Jug Band. Watch the Sugar Shakers shake a leg, and maybe learn a bit of Charleston yourself. Bring your ukulele and join the ukulele jam! Refreshments will be available for purchase.

Spadina Museum Historic House & Gardens, 285 Spadina Road.

\$5 for adults, free for children under 12. For more information contact spadina@toronto.ca, or 416-392-6910.





The Post House Rises

For the benefit of those members who don't live in the vicinity – and this would include our readership in Victoria, British Columbia and McLean, Virginia – we thought we would provide an update on recent developments at Toronto's First Post Office. If only the benign "yarnbombing" pictured at left was all we had endured over the winter! As it was, on the second Saturday before Christmas our front steps were unceremoniously removed, and what you see at bottom left has been our public face ever since. Access to the post office, and to our neighbours in the other side of the building, has been via a central stairway of two-by-fours connecting to a series of plywood ramps. Throughout a prolonged and miserable winter we nevertheless lived in hope. Our landlord, Allied

Properties REIT, has undertaken a restoration of the front of the entire block. They have consulted with both City of Toronto Heritage Preservation Services and the Ontario Heritage Trust. We were privileged to display drawings for the completed project, provided by Taylor Hazell Architects, at St. Lawrence Hall during our March 6 event (page 4). If all goes according to plan – and the work is being done by Clifford Restoration, reputedly the best in the biz – we are going to be gorgeous again soon. Meanwhile, the Post House condominium to the rear (below right) has reached its full height and sandwich boards around the neighbourhood proclaim that the new owners' keys are "in the mail."



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 (President), Kevin Both, Luisa Giacometti, Sheldon Godfrey, Sanford Hersh, Susan Grav, Judith McEvel, Councillor Pam McConnell and Nancy Wigston.

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

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Monday to Friday: 9:00 – 5:30
Saturdays: 10:00 – 4:00
Sundays: 12:00 – 4:00
Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

**The Post Office will be closed May 18-19 for Victoria Day
and July 1 for Canada 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.