

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

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### RARE, STOLEN STAMP TURNS UP AFTER 60 YEARS



The "Inverted Jenny" was the result of a printing error. Only a single sheet of 100 stamps was ever released to the public.

In April of this year, a young man from Belfast showed up at a New York auction house with one of

the most famous stamps in the world. The experts at Spink USA were at first incredulous. After all, only 100 of these misprinted stamps had ever made it onto the market and the whereabouts of all but two were largely known. This "Inverted Jenny," however, turned out not only to be genuine, but to be one of two still missing from a block of four that had been stolen from an exhibit in 1955. Naturally, the FBI were called in, and the identity of the gentleman from Northern Ireland – who claimed to have inherited the stamp from his grandfather – was not made public during the ensuing investigation.

The stamp in question, with the exorbitant face value of twenty-four cents, was issued in May of 1918. The occasion was the inauguration of regular air mail service between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York City. Six brand-new Curtiss JN-4HT aircraft (nicknamed Jenny) had been modified for this purpose. The co-pilot seats were removed to accommodate mailbags, and the fuel capacity had been increased. The first flight took off from Washington at 11:47 a.m. on May 15.

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### You Can Shop at Toronto's First Post Office from Afar



### by Direct Ship!



We at Toronto's First Post Office understand that for many of our members, much as they would prefer to shop here, it simply isn't convenient, especially for out-of-towners. Well, now there is a solution. Through Canada Post's "Direct Ship" program, merchandise can be ordered – in person or by phone – through TFPO, and delivered directly to your door, anywhere in Ontario, within a few days. Shipping on orders over \$25 is free! The best part is that our post office is credited with the sale, which helps us meet our very important CPC targets and even generates a little income!

## Rare Stamp, *cont'd*

The stamp was designed to be printed in two colours – a blue Jenny in a red frame. This process was error prone, as each sheet had to be placed in the press twice. Compounding this was the haste in which the stamp had been prepared. Engraving only began on May 4th, and initial deliveries went to post offices on May 13th. As there had been errors with a previous two-colour stamp in 1901, collectors such as William T. Robey were on the lookout. Early on May 14, Robey entered a Washington post office and asked to see the new stamps. He was shown a full sheet of 100 stamps that had somehow escaped inspection: Jenny was upside down! Robey has since said that his "heart stood still." When questioned later, the postal clerk claimed ignorance. As he had never *seen* an airplane, how was he to know?



Larry Lyons, executive director of the Philatelic Foundation in Manhattan, helped to authenticate the stamp that surfaced at a New York auction house in April. Photo: Joshua Bright for *The New York Times*



Mrs. Green's locket in 2002. Photo: Siegal Auction Galleries  
Mrs. Green also accidentally used one of the stamps to mail a letter. It was recovered, and remains the only cancelled example of an Inverted Jenny in existence.

Having purchased the sheet of stamps for \$24, Robey sold them within a week to Philadelphia dealer Eugene Klein for \$15,000. Klein, after numbering the stamps lightly in pencil on the back, almost immediately sold the lot to Colonel H.R. Green for \$20,000. Green then proceeded, through Klein, to sell the stamps off at steadily increasing prices, although he did have one placed in a gold locket for his wife (left), back to back with a "regular" Jenny.

In 1936, collector Ethel Stewart McCoy (who favoured airmail stamps and those with palm trees depicted on them) purchased a block of four (nos. 65, 66, 75 and 76) for \$16,000. In September of 1955, she loaned them to a stamp show in Norfolk, Virginia, from whence they disappeared, stolen without a trace. She bequeathed the missing stamps to the American Philatelic Research Library in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, but only one (no. 75) was recovered prior to her death in 1980. Another (no. 65) turned up a year later. In 2014 a reward of \$50,000 each was offered by the Mystic Stamp Company for the remaining two stamps – to anyone who might return them to their rightful owner.



Keelin O'Neill at the World Stamp Show in May. (Note his tie.) AP photo.

That was the reward claimed by young Keelin O'Neill in a special presentation at this year's World Stamp Show in New York City, with a restored Curtiss JN-4HT as backdrop. The timing of the stamp's discovery couldn't have been more fortuitous: the World Stamp Show is held only once every ten years, and the reward for the stamp's return was set to expire. Mr. O'Neill, who had hitherto known little about his inheritance, seemed happy with the outcome.

O'Neill might not have known, but the Inverted Jenny is one of the most coveted stamps in the world. On May 31, an instance of it (no. 58, in better condition than the newly returned no. 76) sold for over \$1 million U.S. The

stamp is so well known it is often referenced in popular culture. In the 1985 film *Brewster's Millions*, Montgomery Brewster (Richard Pryor) pays \$1,250,000 for an Inverted Jenny and uses it to mail a postcard. In a 1993 episode of *The Simpsons*, Homer finds an entire sheet of the stamps at a flea market and (doh!) rejects them. There is, however, still one out there to find. You might want to look for no. 66 in that old cigar box you got from Uncle Jack years ago...



# Geoffrey James Named Toronto's First Photo Laureate



Photo: Martin Lipman, courtesy the Canada Council for the Arts

In February, the City of Toronto appointed Geoffrey James its first ever “photo laureate.” For a three-year term his loosely defined role will be “to celebrate the craft of photography, the leaders in the field of photography in this city, and the contributions of photographers and photography in telling Toronto’s story.” The position comes with a \$10,000 annual honorarium. One of the other perks, according to James, is that he can now “photograph strangers with complete impunity.”

The Welsh-born, Oxford-educated, award-winning photographer is self-taught in the medium in which he has worked for over thirty years. James’ production has largely focused on manmade landscapes, ranging from the parks created by Frederick Law Olmstead to the asbestos mines of Quebec.



Geoffrey James’ 2015 US-rate stamp, image courtesy of Canada Post.

He has also explored urban spaces in Paris, Lethbridge (Alberta), Toronto and Havana. In a book published in 2014 – *Inside Kingston Penitentiary 1835-2012* – James documents the final days of that notorious institution. It was a project he describes as “the darkest thing I’ve ever done,” but he

has never shied away from the dark, taking his well-travelled Leica to places such as the no-man’s-land along the US-Mexican border. The image chosen by Canada Post for the US-rate stamp in its photography issue for 2015 depicts a scarecrow-like figure on a barren road. It turns out to be a portrait by James of the painter Alex Colville, taken in 1970.



Geoffrey James, *Aboriginal Ground*, 2013, archival ink-jet print

James describes Toronto as “a wonderful subject...a city in a constant state of transformation, an exhilarating social experiment.” By contrast, he says of Venice: “There’s nothing to be done with it.”

## Familiar Faces at Toronto's First Post Office



After leaving us at the end of last summer to further her education at Western University in London, Ontario, Katherine (Katie) Dennis is back in the fold, at least for now! She will be working weekends and filling in on other shifts as required. Those of you who pick up your mail on Saturday or Sunday will no doubt be pleased to see a familiar face and know that your needs will be understood and met. On the other hand, everyone will be equally relieved to hear that Zoé Delguste-Cincotta has not left the organization. Zoé will be taking over the position left vacant in January by Jess Roycroft (now a front-end developer in the online world). Having recently completed the Master of Museum Studies program at the University of Toronto, Zoé will also be training in some of the administrative aspects of the museum.



## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



### March 6th Event

The Town of York Historical Society celebrated Toronto's birthday this year with a presentation of Leah Simone-Bowen's thought-provoking recent play, *The Flood*. In it, five inmates of a women's prison present a microcosm of the social and racial prejudices



prevalent in late 19th-century Toronto. All the talk of food (or lack of it) in the play seemed to make everyone very hungry by intermission!

TYHS would very much like to thank presenting sponsors Semple Gooder Roofing, Rockwerk Craft Stonemasonry, and Taylor Hazell Architects, for

making this event possible. Thanks also to *The Bulletin*, Sweetgrass Brewing, the Ontario Hostelry Institute, and Scheffler's Deli for their donations-in-kind. Last but not least, thanks to everyone who donated goods and services to our successful silent auction – we couldn't have done it without you!



Left: Prio to the program, and during intermission, graphologist Edda Manley offered a five-minute handwriting analysis to any willing guests Here, Karen Makimoto has taken her up on the offer. Right: Playwright Leah-Simone Bowen with Post Office Director Janet Walters.

## Jane's Walk on May 7th

This year, Assistant Curator Kat Akerfeldt led people on a Jane's Walk through the "old town" on behalf of Toronto's First Post Office and the Market Gallery. Jane's Walks are held all over Toronto in early May to celebrate – on her birthday – the life and work of urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs, whose writings advocated a walkable, community-based approach to city building.



### And later that evening...

The Searcher Group, who concern themselves with the paranormal and life after death, recently conducted an investigation at Toronto's First Post Office. While they are not the first such group to express an interest in the old post office, they are the first to come up with any reason to return. The Director of the Searcher Group, Richard Palmisano, has been conducting research in this field since 1979.



Peter Roe and Paul Palmisano listen for otherworldly voices at TFPO.

## Annual General Meeting



On May 16, at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts in the Distillery Historic District, the Town of York Historical Society celebrated its 33rd AGM. A brisk business meeting was followed by a wonderfully



detailed and illustrated talk by Richard Fiennes-Clinton (left). Research for his recent book, *Muddy York: A History of Toronto Until 1834*, has left Richard armed with enough "mud" on the town's early denizens to fuel a dozen or more such lectures.

The 9th annual Sheldon Godfrey Award was presented that evening to Judith McErvel, a long-standing member of the Board of Directors. The award is presented to individuals who have excelled in their commitment to promoting, restoring or retaining key aspects of Toronto's heritage. The award was accepted on Judith's behalf by her nephew Peter Grav (below).



## New Face on the Board



An Engineer by profession, **Geoffrey Milos** has been working for the past 15 years as an IT Manager in the field of electronic medical records, specializing in risk management. Some of the highlights of his resumé we noted were his "proven track record of doing more with less," his communication skills, his legal training and

experience and his business acumen.

A resident of Old Town Toronto, Geoffrey lives mere blocks from the post office, where he can usually be seen every week day when he comes to pick up his mail. He is enthusiastic about seeking new sources of revenue for the organization and offering his expertise in whatever ways it can be useful.

## Q&A Letterbox Celebrates First Anniversary

Q&A Letterbox is a collaborative venture by Queenie Best of *queenie's cards* and avid letter-writer and stationery blogger Andrea Raymond. The two met through their mutual love of paper and decided to share



their favourite designers and Canadian producers through a curated subscription series. Monthly subscribers receive a selection of cards and other stationery goodies in the mail. On May 27, the enterprise celebrated its first anniversary at Toronto's First Post Office with everything one could wish for at a birthday party – balloons, chocolate, prizes – right down to the loot bags!

Andrea Raymond and Queenie Best outside Toronto's First Post Office on May 27th.

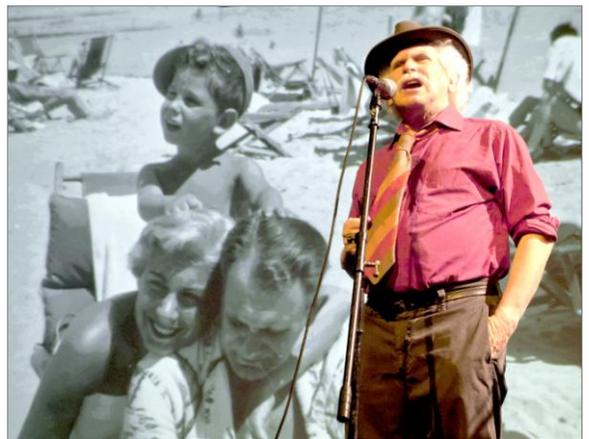


Last year's Paper Fair was such a big hit we thought we'd offer this special one-of-a-kind pop-up market once again. Over 150 customers took advantage of the opportunity to shop local, shop small-business, shop handmade, and support a museum, all at once! This year's vendors included The Chemist Tree, Gotamago, The Imagination Spot, Jonesy Charismatic Stationery, Paper Plus Cloth, queenie's cards, Q&A Letterbox, Sprouts Press, Storm and Shadow, and Swell Made Co.

In addition, we were pleased to welcome the attendance of a few *very* special guests. Edda Manley of The Campaign for Cursive, a cursive expert and handwriting analyst, was on hand to explain what those curlicues on your letter "t" say about your personality. Local historian, walking tour leader, and author Richard Fiennes-Clinton was selling and signing copies of his recent book, *Muddy York: A History of Toronto to 1834*. Last but not least, Alex Sawa and Cori Carl from Mackenzie House Museum brought along their portable proof press to provide demonstrations and a hands-on printing experience for visitors.

## Bob Bossin's *Davy the Punk*

On Saturday June 18, just in time for Fathers' Day, the Town of York Historical Society presented one son's musical tribute to his elusive father. The event was held at the Performing Arts Lodge in front of a near-capacity crowd, which Bob Bossin had eating out of his hand (and singing along!) from the start.



Singer-songwriter Bob Bossin flanked by TYHS Board President Tom Arnold and Janet Walters.

The father that Bob Bossin knew while growing up in 1950s Toronto was a quiet, conservative and softspoken booking agent. The father he later discovered was 'Davy the Punk,' a pivotal figure in Canada's gambling under-world of the 1930s and 1940s.

Bossin Jr. tells Bossin Sr.'s amazing story with such reverence, compassion and humour that we come to love a man who, by all objective means, was fairly unlovable. Toronto's First Post Office would like to thank PAL for hosting us, and Scheffler's Deli and Sweetgrass Brewing Co. for their generous sponsorships.

**PAL**Toronto



**Sweetgrass**  
BREWING CO

# THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

## **ORDINARY WEATHER: An Exhibition of Contemporary Photography by Nathan Cyprys Until September 22, 2016**



There is a sense of wonder in our surroundings that seems to only truly manifest itself when we become tourists in an unfamiliar landscape. In *Ordinary Weather*, emerging photographer Nathan Cyprus questions the lack of wonder we experience in our everyday surroundings. Setting out to explore Toronto by bicycle, he discovers that the awareness which he sought is, in actuality, ever available.

**Mackenzie House Museum, 82 Bond Street, free with regular admission.**

## **YORKVILLE MUSIC SCENE: A Walking Tour with Nicholas Jennings Thursday, June 23, 6:30 – 8:00 pm**

Amid the luxury condos and shops that have come to shape contemporary Yorkville, remnants of the neighbourhood's rich musical history lie embedded in the streetscape. Discover the birthplace of Canadian song. Visit the sites of famous clubs and coffeehouses like the Riverboat and the Penny Farthing, and learn how stars such as Joni Mitchell and Neil Young got their start.

**Heritage Toronto, \$20, visit [heritagetoronto.org](http://heritagetoronto.org) for more information.**



## **GATSBY GARDEN PARTY**

**Saturday and Sunday, June 25 and 26, 12:00 – 5:00 pm**



The Gatsby Garden Party is back! This year it's celebrating with two full days of 1920s fun. Step back in time and enjoy live music from Combo Royale and the Maple Leaf Champions Jug Band. Learn how to dance 1920s style with Hogtown Swing. Try a game of croquet. Come in period garb; there are great prizes for the best costumes! Explore a real 1920s mansion – Toronto's Downton Abbey. Delicious refreshments will be available for purchase. Doesn't that just sound like the perfect summer day, old sport?

**Spadina House Museum, 285 Spadina Road, \$10 or \$15 with a house tour.**

## **WHEN THE BEATLES ROCKED TORONTO**

**June 18 to November 12, 2016**

It was 50 years ago this summer that the Beatles played Toronto for the last time. Inspired by that anniversary, this exhibit looks back at our city during the early sixties, an era when postwar immigration and the baby boom reshaped the city's physical form, ethnic make-up and social outlook. International designers brought new architecture, hip areas emerged downtown, and youth culture blossomed – the Beatles arrived in a city that was suddenly cosmopolitan.

**Market Gallery, 95 Front Street East. \$10, \$5 for seniors and youth.**



## **HOGTOWN: An Interactive Theatre Experience**

**July 15 to August 28**



Take a journey through time to December 31, 1926 at the hottest Speakeasy in Toronto. It's the night before Election Day and everyone has a different agenda. There are mobsters looking to cause trouble, politicians hoping to sway the vote and a forbidden romance that's about to erupt. You never know what you'll discover in the rooms of the club. This immersive theatre experience takes audiences on an adventure they'll never forget.

**Campbell House Museum, \$45, get tickets at [hogtown.brownpapertickets.com](http://hogtown.brownpapertickets.com), or call 416-597-0227.**

## IN MEMORIAM



Judith McErvel served on the board of the Town of York Historical Society for twenty years. She was still, in fact, a member of the board when she passed away unexpectedly in April. Prior to her tenure at TYHS, she contributed eight years of very active service as a member of the Toronto Historical

Board, the precursor to Heritage Toronto. For the majority of her professional life – from 1961 to 1998 – Judith was the Archivist for the T. Eaton Company, and later became a driving force in the effort to save the seventh floor of Eaton's College Street store, what we now know as The Carlu. At every stage of her remarkable and rich life she cultivated friendships. She is sorely missed by many, many people.



ChangeIt,<sup>®</sup> in partnership with the Bank of Montreal, lets you automatically round up your debit, credit, or mobile wallet purchases and donate the difference to a cause you care about. It's a painless way to give, and your small change can make a big difference! You can track your donations online, control your rounding preferences and even set monthly maximums. You also receive a tax receipt for every penny you donate. It's a small change in your life that could make a huge difference Toronto's First Post Office! To those of our members who are already giving to TFPO through this program, we send a great big vote of thanks!



### SNAIL-MAIL SUMMER AT



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### Town of York Historical Society *Care to join us?*

Individual Memberships	\$30
Family Memberships	\$50

Directors: Tom Arnold (President), Kevin Both, Shirley Farrar, Luisa Giacometti, Suzanne Kavanagh, Councillor Pam McConnell, Geoffrey Milos 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 close July 1 for Canada Day, and July 31 and August 1 for Simcoe 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.