

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

October 2018

Vol. XXXIV No. 4

THE MYSTERY OF THE POST OFFICE THAT DIDN'T EXIST

by correspondent Garfield Portch, Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada

A Post Office at Toronto's Union Station was opened by the Prince of Wales and Prince George during the Royal Visit of August 1927. Other events on that tour included the opening of the Princes' Gate at the Exhibition Grounds and the dedication of the Peace Bridge across the Niagara River.

Recently, while rewriting my collection of Toronto postal history I discovered a postcard bearing a circular date stamp for July 6, 1881 at UNION RWY STATION / TORONTO CANADA. How could something be processed 46 years prior to the opening of an office? Was this a date error on the hand stamp? What is the story? I subsequently discovered two additional pieces, dated April 20, 1882 and March 28, 1884. These two items were cancelled using a duplex hammer with the marking: UNION RWY STA / TORONTO.

During the course of my research, I found that, although the first 'mail-by-rail' service from Toronto was in October 1856, the first Grand Trunk railway station was not opened until June 21, 1858 (known as the "New Station"). The Postmaster General's 1864 report to Parliament indicates that in 1863 a contract was let to Mr. J. Martin to transport the mail from the post office to the railway station using a two-horse vehicle on an 'as required' basis. This contract appears to be ongoing.



July 6, 1881, Toronto to Douglas, Ont.
Large circular date stamp.



March 28, 1884, Toronto to Whitby, Ont., featuring a small circular date stamp and 'cork' obliterator over the postage.

A report to Parliament (Sessional Paper 34) on April 27, 1869 presents the contract between the Post Office and the Grand Trunk Railway in which two paragraphs are important to this mystery. Paragraph 2 specifies a night train each way between Montreal and Toronto every day except Sunday, and Paragraph 7 requires "A convenient room to be provided at the Montreal and Toronto Stations for the accommodation of an officer of the Post Office to be stationed at each of these points".

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COMING UP

At Toronto's First Post Office



Hauntings and Mysteries of the Old Town of York

Friday, October 26, 7:00-9:00 pm, \$20

Discover the old town's haunted history and hear creepy stories guaranteed to get you into the Hallowe'en spirit. Warm yourself with hot cocoa and snack on treats by candlelight as you learn about Hallowe'en traditions in the town of York during the 1830s. Then, brave the darkness as we head into the city to explore ghostly haunts, and hear tales of dread and mystery from those who walked Toronto's streets before us.

October can be chilly so please make sure to dress for the weather! Pre-registration is required at oldtownhauntings.eventbrite.ca or call 416-865-1833



Watercolour Workshop: Constellations!

Thursday, November 8, 6:00-8:30 pm, \$30

In this workshop, artist Jennifer Fryer will teach you step by step to create a beautiful watercolour galaxy painting. In the process of making your painting, you will learn how to use concentrated watercolours, masking fluid, as well as how to highlight and finish off your masterpiece.

Pre-registration is required at watercolourstars.eventbrite.ca or call 416-865-1833



Post-a-Letter Sunday

Sunday, November 4, 1:00-4:00 pm

A free, monthly drop-in for writers, correspondents, bullet journalers, and all those who would like dedicated writing time in good company.

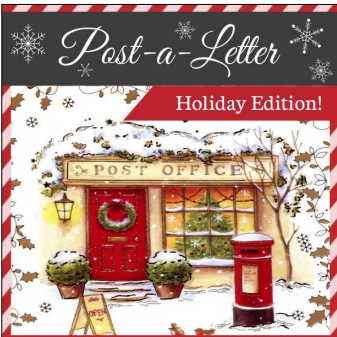
Free! Please drop in!

Soy Candle Making Workshop

Tuesday, November 20, 6:30-8:00 pm, \$30

In this soy candle making workshop lead by Naturally Sassy, learn the basics of soy candle making and become a candle master! After a brief introduction, you will get to mix, measure, and pour your own candles. Top it off by designing your very own labels to personalize your creations. All supplies to make two 4oz. candles are included, and a variety of fragrances will be available to choose from. All fragrances provided are phthalate-free.

Pre-registration is required at soycandle.eventbrite.ca or call 416-865-1833



Christmas Open House

Sunday, December 9, noon-4:00 pm

Paper crafts and festive treats, all in a quaint historic setting. Take advantage of our stationery and supplies to catch up on your holiday correspondence and mail your letters to Santa!

Free! Please drop in!

TELL ME MORE!

The latest from Toronto's First Post Office and details on our events, talks, and workshops can be found at TownofYork.com. Or, sign up at TownofYork.com for a monthly e-newsletter delivered to your inbox, with details on our community programs.

WHAT'S HOT IN THE SHOP: CARD SALE!



There are already many made-in-Toronto Hanukkah and Christmas cards on the shop shelves at Toronto's First Post Office, and more are on their way!

To help you keep up your holiday correspondence, from now until the end of the year, buy four cards, postcards, gift tags, or boxed cards in the Toronto's First Post Office Shop, and get one free! Be prepared for all of the coming year's occasions! Stock up now and keep a few on hand.

Members of the Town of York Historical Society: your discount applies on top of these savings. You receive an additional 10% off everything in the shop, including cards.

Small print: the free card will be of equal or lesser value than any one of the other four cards. Sale ends December 31st.

HOLIDAY MAIL-BY DATES

The holidays are a busy time for everyone, including the Post Office! Be sure to get your cards and packages out before the dates below to ensure that they arrive in time.



Hanukkah begins on Sunday, December 2nd this year. To arrive for the Friday previous, cards sent to addresses within Toronto should be mailed before November 28. Get them posted by November 26 if they are travelling across the country.

Canada Post has released these suggested mailing dates for Christmas cards:
Within Toronto, mail cards by December 20.

Within Ontario, mail cards by December 19.

Within Canada, mail cards by December 18.

For the United States, mail your holiday cards by December 10.

For the rest of the world, post your cards by December 3rd, though cards to Africa should be mailed by November 19.

For more information, visit canadapost.ca/mailingedates, or pick up your free reference sheet at Toronto's First Post Office.

Toronto's First Post Office will be open as usual on December 24th, but closed December 25 and 26.

FROM THE COLLECTION: THE POSTMASTER DESK

by TFPO Curator, Zoé Delguste-Cincotta

Currently displayed in the reading room of Toronto's First Post Office, this impressive cherrywood Postmaster's desk dates from the 1830s. This piece is in excellent condition. Aside from some simple bumps and scratches, you would never think this is a day over 50, let alone 185 years old. Chalk it up to quality craftsmanship.



Postmaster Desk, 987.30.130

Speaking of which: The top of the desk is a fall front that reveals a writing surface— a wonderful example of Georgian ingenuity that you don't get at Ikea. This surface serves double duty, both as a main working surface when released, and when closed, as a cover to seal up shelves and slots.

What would have been stored in these compartments? Anything from papers and letters, to seals, wax, quills and ink. The base of the desk is comprised of three large drawers, with two round knobs and would have been used to store stacks of pressed letters along with some larger items used regularly by postal clerks.



With the shipping volume of modern post offices, postmaster's desks unfortunately don't serve the purpose they used to, but, back in the day, this was the heartbeat of the office.

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!



From history lovers to postal enthusiast, from high school students to retired teachers- volunteers are integral to so much of the work that we do at Toronto's First Post Office.

Our wonderful team of enthusiastic and skilled volunteers help us maintain many key aspects of our museum functions. Some represent us with their professional and friendly manner out in the community at events throughout the city, like the Gatsby Garden Party or Frost Fest at Fort York. Others prefer to work behind the scenes by helping us catalogue and care for our artifact collection, or transcribe hand-written archival letters. Recently, our research library underwent a comprehensive inventory with the help of two dedicated volunteers. Have you taken part in Post-a-Letter Sunday recently? Volunteers organize and host that event entirely!



At the Town of York Historical Society, we are committed to providing meaningful volunteer opportunities, by dedicating resources and staff to nurture the time, unique talents, and passion that our volunteers contribute to the museum. The diverse ages, cultural backgrounds, and skills of our volunteers help us meet and engage with the evolving needs of the Old Town neighbourhood and the communities of Toronto. To all our amazing volunteers: THANK YOU. We couldn't do it without you.

TWO MORE NEW FACES ON THE BOARD

This autumn, the Board of Directors of the Town of York Historical Society was excited to welcome two new members. They, along with the rest of the board, have been busy planning for the next steps of the Society, and how it will continue to research, interpret, and share the history of our community.



Corinna Prior

Corinna is an urban planner with an extensive background and interest in the heritage sector and the impact that it can have in fostering a deeper sense of community. In her capacity as a planner, she has worked on property designations and easements, heritage conservation districts, and broader heritage

policies. She has also worked first-hand for many years in historic museum settings, including Black Creek Pioneer Village, Upper Canada Village, and Pinhey's Point museum. Corinna has lived in Toronto for the past decade and can usually be found exploring the City's past, avidly gardening, and chasing after her slightly wild, one-year old daughter.



Katie Dennis

Katie is a familiar face around the post office. Some might remember her as the weekend postmistress from 2014-2017 with a short break in between to go back to school. She is currently an Underwriting Assistant at an insurance company in North York but has an extensive background in museums and cultural institutions. Apart

from working at the post office, Katie has also held posts at Fort York, Black Creek Pioneer Village, the Ontario Heritage Trust and more. "I just keep coming back and can't stay away!", says Katie of the TFPO community.

PREPARING A GIFT OF A LIFETIME

Though we all hope to be around for a good long while, when we inevitably pass away, preparing a will is a great comfort for those left behind. It takes much less time than expected, and that it is easy to include instructions for "planned giving".

There are a few advantages to leaving instructions for a legacy gift. It lets your loved ones know which charities are important to you, which may guide their own decisions for gifting or volunteering, especially if they want to do something in your name.

It may allow you to give a larger gift than you were able to in life. Did you know that money you leave to a charity like the Town of York Historical Society and Toronto's First Post Office offsets taxes? You won't be diminishing the amount left to your family or other beneficiaries.

You can also choose to leave either a dollar amount or a percentage of your estate. No matter the size of the gift, your donation can help charities launch a special project or sustain programming.

Whether you are creating your own will through an online service, or with the help of a lawyer, keep legacy giving in mind. It only takes a moment to include a few extra sentences that will be so meaningful to your community.

More information on donations and giving can be found at CanadaHelps.org, where you can also quickly and securely donate to the Town of York Historical Society and Toronto's First Post Office. This link—bit.ly/TOs1stPO—will take you directly to our donation page. Tax receipts are delivered promptly, with thanks.



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Develop a deeper relationship with your community and discover Toronto's history! If you have enthusiasm and a few hours each week or month, consider becoming a volunteer at Toronto's First Post Office.

Our volunteer program is a tailored experience. We meet with applicants to discuss how your experience, interests, and skills will best fit with the museum's needs.

We are currently recruiting volunteers in the following areas:

Social Media Content Development

Special Events

Digital Transcription

Please email info@tos1stpo.com with any questions or to set up a volunteer interview. We can't wait for you to join our team!

ELSEWHERE

In Toronto's Old Town and about Toronto History



Enoch Turner Schoolhouse Founders' Dinner

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street

Friday, December 7, 6:15pm, \$120 per person

A Canadian Christmas dinner, featuring Sean O'Shea as Master of Ceremonies, with lutenist Benjamin Stein, and soprano Emily Klassen performing seasonal music for singing, listening, and dancing.

Discounted Histories: Retail History and Trade Networks in Toronto

Toronto Media Arts Centre, 32 Lisgar Street

November 1-30, Wednesday-Friday, 11am-7pm, Saturday 11am-6pm, Sunday 12-5pm

Presented by Myseum of Toronto in collaboration with the City of Toronto Archives, this exhibit explores Toronto's relationship with retail: a wampum bead; a sewing machine; a beaver pelt; or a mail order catalogue. More talks and events can be found at myseumoftoronto.com/exhibition/discountedhistories/



100 Years Ago: Kensington Market & The Great War

Lillian H. Smith Branch, Toronto Public Library, 139 College Street

Tuesday, November 6, 6-8pm

Historian Bruce Beaton will be joined by culinary historian Briget Wranich, whose recent book, *Recipes for Victory*, co-authored with Elizabeth Baird, gives an inside look at feeding the troops, and dealing with food restrictions at home. Come prepared to sample cake! Copies of the book will be for sale.



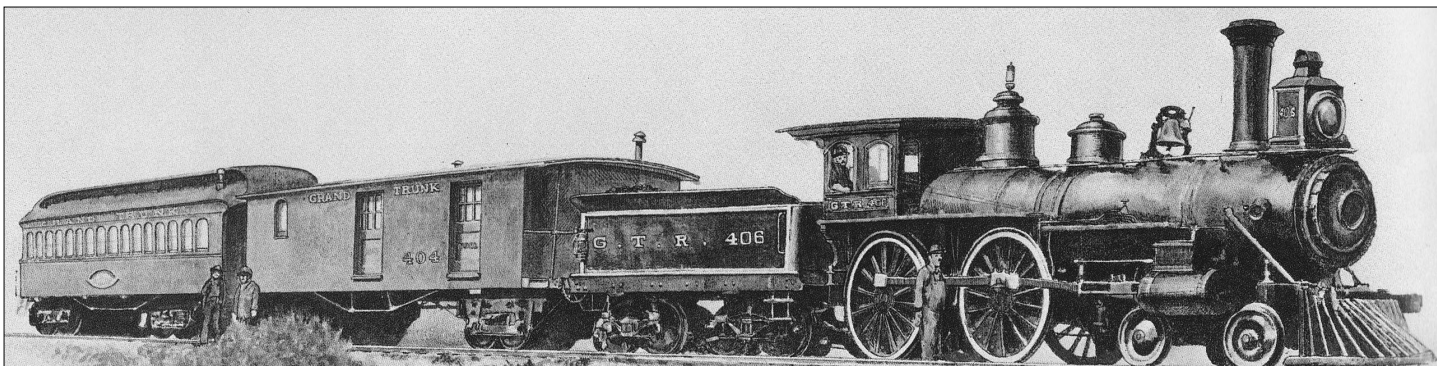
Toronto History Trivia Night

The Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen Street West

Saturday, November 20, 7-10pm, PWYC, \$5 suggested

Join Heritage Toronto at the historic Gladstone Hotel and put your local knowledge to the test. We'll have 3 rounds of Toronto History Trivia alongside some awesome prizes. Questions will vary in difficulty: whether you're a seasoned history buff or just looking to learn a bit more about the city, there'll be something for everyone. Come with a group of 4-6 or come prepared to make 4-6 new friends.





Grand Trunk Railway Mail Train. Credit: *150 Years of Postal Service*

THE POST OFFICE THAT DIDN'T EXIST *from page 1*

A new railway station named Union Station was opened by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1873, a year that also saw the opening of Toronto's 8th post office located on Adelaide St., at the head of Toronto St.

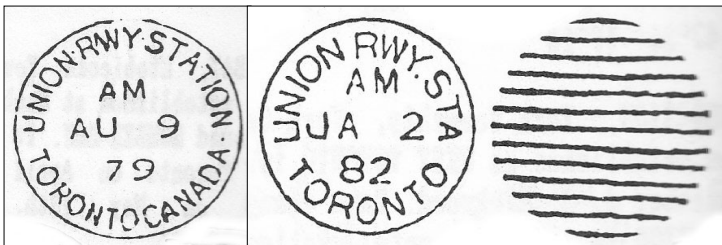
A column in the January 14th, 1883 edition of the *Globe & Mail*, entitled "Inconvenient Mails" discussed a request from the Board of Trade to Postmaster Thomas Patteson that a mailbox be installed at Union Station to accommodate businesses for which the mail bag to Montreal closing at 5:30 pm was too early. In addition to delaying the closing of the bag by 15 minutes, it was also agreed to establish a 'receiving room' at Union Station, where late mail could be deposited up to the train departure time.

The Postmaster General's Annual Reports to Parliament between 1856 and 1885 do not indicate any payroll expense for staffing at the railway stations at either Toronto or Montreal. No expense was too small for this report. Even a small payroll entry of \$3.87 is shown in 1876 for a Temporary Letter Carrier.

It is my belief that the room at Union Station specified by the 1869 contract was always in place as an informal agreement with the Toronto Post Office. I also believe that the Toronto Post Office simply designated Union Station as the workplace for a clerk who would guarantee the security of the mail, as these bags would have included registered mail, and envelopes containing cash.

I suspect that, prior to 1879, the clerk at the station accepted letters as a favour, letters that that he would then send back to the post office for processing. Some of those letters may have been processed and returned in the closed bag. Then, late in 1879, I think that Postmaster Patteson provided a handstamp to the platform clerk, so mail destined for the train did not need to go back to Adelaide St. for processing.

I therefore conclude that, even though two specific handstamps were created and used, Union Station was not a post office, but an important extension of the Toronto Post Office. I would be delighted to hear from anyone having information to continue this research.



Proof dates for two hammers for August 9, 1879 and January 2, 1882. Credit: *Ghost & Post Offices of Ontario*



April 20, 1882. Toronto to Peterboro, Ont., featuring a Berri duplex hand stamp.

GET INVOLVED

Become a Member.

Show your support for history in Old Town Toronto, get 10% off in the shop, and receive the Newsletter right in your mailbox.

Individual Memberships: \$30 Family Memberships: \$50

Mail-in membership forms can be found at townofyork.com/membership.html

Donate.

All donations and memberships come with a tax receipt!

Cheques may be sent to Toronto's First Post Office, 260 Adelaide St. East, Toronto, Ontario, M5A 1N1. Many other ways to donate, including by credit card or PayPal, can be found at townofyork.com/support.html.

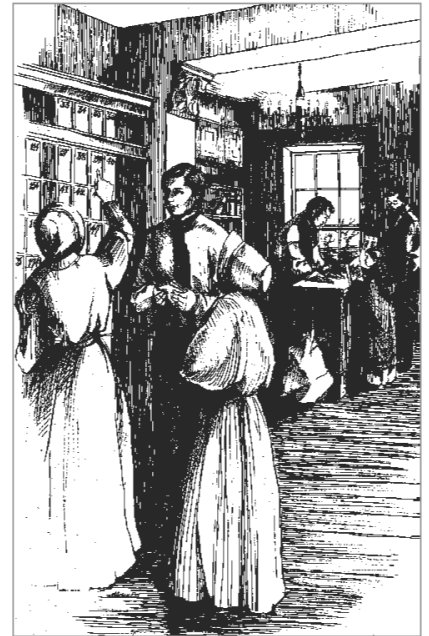
Get Your Mail at a Museum.

A limited number of P.O. boxes have become available!

Only \$173.85 per year, tax and membership included. Enjoy value and security, outstanding and responsive customer service, and courier deliveries. All within a National Historic Site. And yes, we're open on weekends!

Be Social.

We post regularly on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @TOs1stPO. Join us!



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

260 Adelaide Street East
Toronto, ON M5A 1N1

The Post Office will be closed November 11 for Remembrance Day, December 25 and 26 for Christmas, January 1 for New Year's Day, and February 17 and 18 for Family Day.

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

The Town of York Historical Society Board of Directors: Valerie Bayers, Kevin Both, Anthony Colvin, Katherine Dennis, Shirley Farrar, Michael Kaspro, Geoffrey Milos, Corinna Prior, and Martin Rainbow.

The Town of York Historical Society is a legally incorporated non-profit organization and registered charity.

Toronto's First Post Office is a museum, National Historic Site and Canada Post outlet.

Gratefully acknowledged is the support of the City of Toronto; the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sport, our members, donors and customers, and Canada Post Corporation.

Town of York
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



TORONTO'S FIRST
Post Office