

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

December 2006

Vol. XXII No. 3

Toronto's First Hospital Site of Archaeological Dig

In October, with permission from the site developer, Archaeological Services Inc. began work at the northwest corner of King and John Streets. They were looking for what remained, if anything, of the York hospital, once the largest building in town. The Loyal and Patriotic Society had put up £4,000 in 1819 towards the construction of a civic hospital. Governor Maitland provided an endowment of land and a tender went out. The contract was awarded to John Ewart, a recently arrived Scottish carpenter builder. Ewart would later go on to build the east wing of Osgoode Hall and Upper Canada College among other public buildings.

The hospital was completed in 1820. A two-storey Georgian brick building, it sat at an oblique angle in a six-acre square bounded by King, John, Adelaide and Peter Streets. Possibly for reasons of medical science it had been built facing true north. It had cost £3,501 and with insufficient funds left to either furnish or staff the facility it sat empty until 1824



Pencil sketch, artist unknown

when the second parliament buildings burned and it was appropriated for use by the legislature. Under the combined influences of public pressure and Governor Colbourne it began life as a hospital in June of 1829, coincident with a measles epidemic.

A low-lying town with notoriously bad sanitation, York was prone to epidemics. During the Cholera scourge in the summer of 1832, two "pest houses" were constructed to the rear of the hospital. Owing to the numbers however, it was decided to move the existing patients into these and give the hospital over to the plague victims.

Continued on page 4

Nineteenth-Century Building on Queen Street Destroyed by Fire



Very early on October 20, firefighters arrived at Ontario Paint and Wallpaper to discover a seven-alarm blaze. The family business had been founded by Max Ackerman in 1913 and had flourished ever since. Now owned by Sid Ackerman, Max's grandson, the store was due to celebrate a "grand reopening," following extensive renovations, the day the fire struck. Along with the 1873 building were lost hundreds of rolls of vintage wallpaper dating back to the twenties that had been stacked on the top floor. Until the Queen Street location can be rebuilt, please visit Ontario Paint and Wallpaper in its temporary home at Logan and Gerrard Streets – the former location of Woodland.

HERITAGE CANADA HONOURS FRIENDS



On October 13 at a ceremony in Ottawa, the Heritage Canada Foundation handed out the country's most prestigious awards for achievement and excellence in the field of built-heritage conservation.



In addition to our friends Catherine Nasmith (Journalism Prize) and Peggy Kurtin (Lieutenant Governor's Award), the honourees included Cityscape Holdings Inc. and Dundee Distillery District (GP)

Commercial Inc. (Corporate Prize for the Stone Distillery Building), The Town of Annapolis Royal (Prince of Wales Prize) and William Neville (Gabrielle Léger Award). George Smitherman was on hand to deliver a moving tribute to Ms. Kurtin; we doubt there was a dry eye left in the room. It was hard to be certain of this, however, because for some reason everything went rather blurry.

New Permanent Stamps



Canada Post has introduced three non-denominated stamps for its basic letter-mail rate that will retain their value forever. On January 15, when the rate increases to 52¢, there will be no need to purchase 1¢ stamps in order to "use up" your leftovers. In addition to the "permanent" stamps, Canada Post will honour 51¢ stamps on standard-sized letters under 30g until the end of 2007.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Open House



On December 13th, from eleven to three, you are invited to drop in out of the cold for a warm cup of mulled cider, in front of a real wood fire, in the reading room of Toronto's First Post Office. At the same time you can mail your season's greetings, or write and seal an old-fashioned letter to Santa Claus. There are also a number of beautiful books available in the gift shop should you have any historians on your list.

An Evening with Bruce Bell and Mike Filey



Mark this date on your 2007 calendar: **Tuesday, March 6th**. In what has become an annual event, the Town of York Historical Society will be celebrating Toronto's birthday with two of the city's most popular historians. These events are lively, humorous and always informative as these fellows try to top each other with tales from Toronto's past. Piano accompaniment by Randy Vancourt serves to enhance the evening, the proceeds of which benefit the Town of York Historical Society. Further information will be forthcoming in the New Year.

If you are not a member and you wish to receive an invitation, please call 416-865-1833.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Market Gallery



An exhibition titled *Building Blocks: Queen Street West 1847-1890* will be on display at the Market Gallery until February 25, 2007. Focusing on housing, commercial and institutional properties, it reflects a 40-year period in which Toronto was literally transformed. Historical images from the late 1800s and contemporary photographs by Patrick Cummins provide a perspective on what remains. This exhibition is presented in partnership with the Toronto Architectural Conservancy and features materials, such as the 1910 photograph above, from the City of Toronto Archives and from the Archives of Ontario.

Holiday Reception and Volunteer Awards

The Old Town Toronto Alliance will host a holiday reception on Friday, December 15 at 7:00 p.m. on the west mezzanine of St. Lawrence Market. The 6th Annual Volunteer Appreciation Awards will be presented, along with the Citizen of Old Town Toronto Award, and those for the drink and dessert competition winners. Entertainment will include Bruce Bell telling the story of Christmas at the Market and seasonal music will be provided by the Alicier Arts Chamber Trio. A cash bar and light snacks will be available. Bring a toy or cash donation for the Business Improvement Association's Market Toy Drive and please RSVP: info@oldtowntoronto1793.com.



Crèches at St. James



The seventh annual exhibition of crèches from around the world can be viewed daily at the Archives and Museum of the Cathedral Church of St. James until December 22, and

again December 28-30, 1-4 p.m. This year's exhibit will include over 130 examples from over 40 countries, including some dating back to the medieval period. In the one from Hamburg in the cathedral's "twin" diocese of Grahamstown, South Africa, the figures of Mary and Joseph are dressed in Xhosa costume. Above, one of its creators, Nombuyiselo Malumbezo admires her work.

Mystery at the Schoolhouse

In the continuation of a series begun last year, Enoch Turner Schoolhouse presents three mystery writers whose books are set in historical Toronto speaking about the city they have come to know through their research.

February 6

Mel Bradshaw, author of *Death in the Age of Steam*

February 13

Rosemary Aubert, author of the Ellis Portal mysteries

February 20

Maureen Jennings, author of the William Murdoch series

February 27

A screening of the third film in the Murdoch mystery series: *Under the Dragon's Tail*

Each Tuesday-night program begins at 7:30 p.m. (with refreshments at 7:00). Tickets are \$8 for the lectures, or the series of three for \$20. Admission to the film is \$10. All admissions are reduced for ETS members. For information call 416-863-0010.



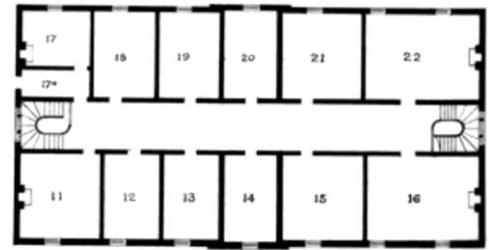
Toronto's First Hospital, *from page 1*



Drawn from memory by N. Bethune

In 1847, the year of the potato famine, 38,000 Irish immigrants passed through Toronto (population 21,000) between May and October. Many of these were ill with Typhus and a number of "fever sheds" were hastily erected to accommodate them.

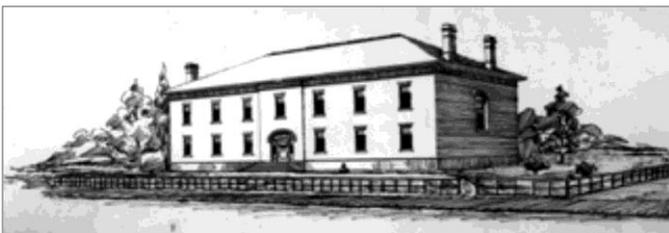
There was a good deal of griping on the hospital board about the disproportionate load of these patients the city was required to bear, but the 1,124 deaths on record include many medical professionals, as well as the Catholic Bishop Michael Power, who gave their lives administering to the sick.



Upper Floor Plan of Old Hospital

It must be noted that hospitals at the time were for the destitute only – those with means received medical treatment at home. Patients paid a shilling per day if they could afford it and nothing if they could not. Such institutions were also used as educational facilities, with the student doctors' fees serving as income. Access to poor patients for this purpose had been clamoured for, by practitioners wishing to emulate the practice in leading centres such as London and Edinburgh, as one of the reasons for a hospital. By the 1850s it had become such a battleground for competing schools that several patients died as a result. This crisis resulted in new guidelines for responsibility to patients and an eventual shift away from apprenticeship in medical education towards a more academic approach..

Deemed inadequate by 1854, the hospital was closed and a new one on Gerrard Street opened in 1856. The building at King and John served as government offices from 1856 to 1859 but was demolished in 1862. Its former front yard will soon be home to the new Toronto International Film Festival Centre. Because of the old building's unique orientation, one corner would have intruded into the TIFF site as is evident in the allocation of demolition debris discovered. We are grateful for the fact that the story of this little-known building, which features so prominently in early descriptions of the town, has been brought to light by this excavation.



Pencil sketch attributed to Owen Staples, as is the floor plan above right. All images courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

The Town of York Historical Society

Individual Membership	\$15
Family Membership	\$25
Lifetime Membership	\$150

Directors: Bruce Bell, Patricia Braithwaite, Richard Fiennes-Clinton, Gerald Doyle, Sheldon Godfrey, Cynthia Malik, Judith McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy, Councillor Pam McConnell. Joan Miles (President)

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

**260 Adelaide Street East
Toronto, ON M5A 1N1**

Telephone: 416-865-1833
Facsimile: 416-865-9414
e-mail: tfpo@total.net
Charitable Reg. No. 108101627RT0001
Newsletter Editor: Janet Walters
ISSN 1481-8922

Hours of operation:

Monday to Friday: 9-4

Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed December 24-28 and December 31 to January 1 for the holiday season.

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 Culture; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.