

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

June 2007

Vol. XXIII No. 1

### GEORGIAN APARTMENTS DEMOLISHED IN DEAD OF NIGHT

Photo: City of Toronto Heritage Preservation Services (c.2003)



Toronto's last remaining row of pre-confederation Georgian-style terrace homes was unceremoniously demolished over the May long weekend by order of the City's Deputy Chief Building Official because,

after three and a half decades of neglect it had begun to collapse, causing a public safety hazard. The City was prompted to act when late on the afternoon of Saturday, May 19, a passerby witnessed bricks tumbling from the back wall. Police and fire crews soon had the area cordoned off as the building began to cave in upon itself. Unable to locate the new owners, city officials called in a wrecking crew at midnight and by morning the once proud Walnut Hall (102-108 Shuter Street) was nothing but a heap of century-and-half-old bricks.

Shock, dismay and much finger-pointing ensued, much of it played out on the editorial pages of *The Toronto Star*. And, while there is plenty of blame to go around, the story of how this tragedy came to pass is a long one featuring all the usual suspects (greed and apathy for built heritage playing leading roles), it begins in 1811 when Park Lot 6 was granted by the crown to Secretary William Jarvis.

*Continued on page 2*

### Let That Be a Warning

Very little remains of the Georgian city that Toronto was in the 1850s. The two buildings pictured here are located just east of Parliament Street on a piece of land slated for development by Little Trinity Church. While crumbling brickwork on their facades has recently been repaired and new flashings have appeared on the parapets, the future of these old shops is far from certain as, despite their age, they are merely "listed" on the City's Inventory of Heritage Properties and have no legal designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

*Continued on page 7*



## Apartments, *from page 1*

The Park Lots, as they were known, were 100-acre parcels of land that stretched from Lot Street (now Queen) north to Bloor, granted to government officials as a reward for removing from Newark to the new capital at York. The names of some of these estates remain to us – Moss Park, Grange Park – while others echo in the streets named for their owners such as Jarvis, Denison and McGill. As the city expanded northward in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of these lots were subdivided for development. In 1853 “Plan 62” was filed, dividing Park Lot 6 into fourteen, Lot 14 of which was purchased by John O’Donohoe – an auctioneer, land speculator and an alderman at the time. O’Donohoe then contracted John Aspenwell Tully, an Irish architect who had arrived in the city a decade earlier and who had apprenticed in the office of John G. Howard, to build a row of 3½-storey row houses which, on their completion in 1856, became known as O’Donohoe Row. Intended for the upper middle class in what was then a prestigious residential neighbourhood, the four homes were separated by parapeted fire walls containing chimneys. Built on the Georgian pattern each had three bays of windows and was surmounted by two pedimented dormers on both front and back. The block, until weeks ago, was one of only two remaining buildings that can be positively attributed to John Tully. The other is Hughes Terrace at 319-325 King Street West.



Photo (1934): City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub-Series 52, Item 1719

In the early 1980s, looking to enlarge their office at 225 Jarvis Street, the R.C.M.P. proposed the building's demolition with the possibility of incorporating its facade into a new tower that would house their Ontario Division H.Q. Such a public hue and cry arose at this proposal that the police abandoned the boarded up relic and located their headquarters in London, Ontario, which angered yet another sector of the Toronto populace. Walnut Hall endured a number of fires over the next decade and a half, and it was a constant battle to keep squatters from breaking into the building. Then Metro Councillor Jack Layton wrote in 1987 of how a homeless man perished in the doorway of “Toronto's first apartment house” in January of that year.

*Continued on page 8*

# THE YEAR TO DATE



## Toronto's 173<sup>rd</sup> Birthday

Each year for the past three, the Town of York Historical Society has celebrated the anniversary of the city's incorporation on March 6, 1834. This year's event, held at the storied St. Lawrence Hall, was a layered confection of historical ingredients. **Bruce Bell**, in a richly illustrated presentation, detailed the rise of Toronto from colonial outpost to Imperial city during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was followed by "Silent Films: Toronto in the Dawn of Cinema," a program of early footage curated by Candida Paltiel of the *Planet in Focus* film festival and masterfully narrated by **Mike Filey**. The finish was served up by former mayor **David Crombie**, who outlined some of the challenges of the past few decades and exhorted all to remember that a city that forgets its past has no means to its future.

As this event can now be confidently described as an annual one, it is safe to mark it on your calendar and look forward to something special in 2008.



Post Office Director/Curator Janet Walters with TYHS board members Cynthia Malik and Jennifer McIlroy



## Professional Development

March 21-23 saw Director/Curator Janet Walters and Assistant Curator Kate McAuley of Toronto's First Post Office in Fergus, Ontario, for an Ontario Museum Association workshop. The setting was the Wellington County Museum and Archives overlooking the Grand River. Built of locally quarried limestone in 1877 as the House of Industry and Refuge, this landmark structure provided shelter for the "deserving poor," the aged and the homeless for almost a century and, a National Historic Site, is the oldest surviving example of a state-supported poorhouse in the country. The workshop, "Display and Design for Community Museum Exhibits," benefitted greatly from the expertise of the building's current occupants, as did TFPO staff who attended in anticipation of mounting a significant exhibition in the fall of 2008.

## Taking It to City Hall

Organized by the Toronto Historical Association, eighteen local heritage organizations showcased their programs and services in the Rotunda at City Hall



during an all-day affair on April 20. Toronto's First Post Office was ably represented by Kate McAuley and Education Assistant Miriam Smith. And, while we neglected to document this occasion, others were not so negligent. Pictured here are Glenn Bonnetta (North York Historical Society) and friend in a photograph taken by Alex Grenzebach of the North York Community Preservation Panel.

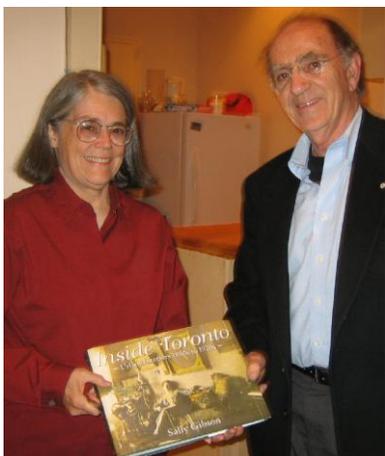


## Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Town of York Historical Society is a peripatetic affair for two good reasons. Firstly, the Society's own premises at Toronto's First Post Office are too small to accommodate the number of people wishing to attend and, secondly, because there are so many interesting and hospitable venues in the "old town" to explore.

This year found us at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse where we bid a sad farewell to Joan Miles who had served as President of the Board of Directors for two years. Joan will continue to be active in her own community with the West Toronto Junction Historical Society and to pursue her environmentalist interests with the Green Tourism Association among her many other concerns. Meanwhile, the Society will move forward under the capable leadership of Jennifer McIlroy who will oversee a new strategic planning process in the coming months.

Following the business meeting at the schoolhouse, heritage consultant Sally Gibson gave an illustrated presentation based on her recent book,

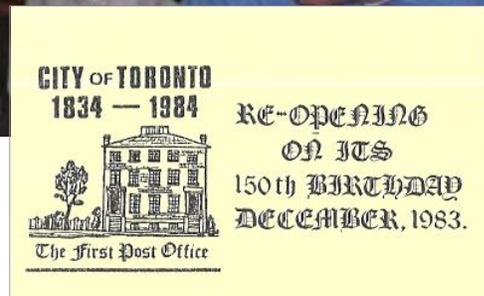


Sally Gibson shows off a copy of her book to board Vice-President Sheldon Godfrey

based on her recent book, *Inside Toronto: Urban Interiors 1880s-1920s*, featuring rarely seen photographs of the spaces in which Torontonians once lived, worked, shopped and performed other rituals of daily life. (Cormorant Books, 326 pages, \$59.95)

## A Visit from the Postcard Club

On the evening of June 14<sup>th</sup> Toronto's First Post Office hosted a regular meeting of the Toronto Postcard Club, now celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The members of that renowned organization not only honoured the post office by creating a special postcard to mark the occasion but some came bearing gifts, including a copy of a card issued by our own fledgling post office museum in 1984 to recognize the city's sesquicentennial.



This new relationship is the result of a visit to TFPO by John Sayers, editor of the club's newsletter (*Card Talk*) on April 11, and it is to bear more fruit. The post office has been invited to host a table at the TPC's 27<sup>th</sup> annual show – Canada's largest postcard show – in February of next year. For more information go to [www.torontopostcardclub.com](http://www.torontopostcardclub.com).



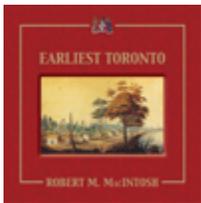
Education Assistant Stephanie Thomas addressing TPC members and demonstrating the form that correspondence took in the 1830s

## New Face on the Board

Melville Olsberg has a long-standing interest in history in general, and that of Toronto in particular. He served for a number of years on the board of Citizens for the Old Town and has given walking tours of the neighbourhood which he knows well, his current address being adorned by not one but two historical plaques. A retired Justice of the Peace, Mr. Olsberg is a Fellow of the Canadian Institute of Certified Administrative Managers and was, for two decades, the Executive Director of Holy Blossom Temple. He joined the Board of Directors of the Town of York Historical Society in May of this year.



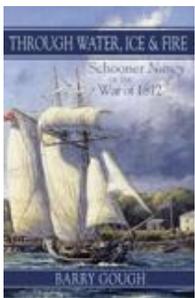
## New Books in the Gift Shop



### Earliest Toronto

By Robert M. MacIntosh

General Store (2006), 107 pages, \$19.95  
Including dramatic conflicts in the aboriginal communities and two centuries of French exploration, this book tells the city's story up to the War of 1812.

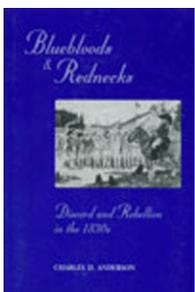


### Through Water, Ice and Fire – Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812

By Barry Gough

Dundurn Press (2006), 213 pages, \$24.99  
This legendary vessel of Great Lakes and Canadian history lived a thousand lives in a noted career that began in Detroit and ended in a fiery explosion in the Nottawasaga

River in the last year of the War of 1812.



### Bluebloods and Rednecks – Discord and Rebellion in the 1830s

By Charles D. Anderson

Dundurn Press (1996), 192 pages, \$19.95  
A thoroughly researched and well-crafted chronicle of a perilous time in history, this book serves as a reminder that Canadians have not always been the peaceful and

rational people we like to believe we are.

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

### St. James' Cathedral: a Living Part of Toronto's History



The history of early Toronto has been inextricably linked to that of St. James' since the first wooden church building was completed in 1807. This exhibition explores many of the connections between the two and comprises artifacts

dating back to the war of 1812, including the colours of the Third York Militia, embroidered by the ladies of York and then buried to save them from capture by the Americans. Displayed here for the first time are objects that were discovered during a recent archaeological study of the city's first general hospital site.

The exhibit is open 1–4 pm every Sunday and Tuesdays to Thursdays until July 5. Group tours are welcome by appointment; please contact Nancy Mallett at 416-364-7865, ext. 233.



## Victorian Garden Opens

On Saturday, July 7, the restored 19<sup>th</sup> century garden in St. James' Park will be officially opened. At 1 pm in the Parish House of the cathedral, Wendy Shearer, the landscape architect for the project, will give an illustrated presentation on period gardens. At 2 p.m. in the garden itself,



addresses will be given by Councillor Pam McConnell and Dean Stoute, followed by a tour and refreshments. This event is sponsored by the

City of Toronto and all are welcome.

(Contemporary photos above are by Michael Hudson)

# Walking Tours

**Wednesday, July 25**  
**Historic Toronto**  
ROMwalk; meet at 260  
Adelaide Street East.



Discover some of the important institutions around which life revolved in York and early Toronto, including Toronto's First Post Office, the Bank of Upper Canada, St. Lawrence Market, St. James Cathedral, St. Lawrence Hall and Courthouse Square.



**Saturday, July 28**  
**Theatres in Old Toronto**

Heritage Toronto Walk; meet at the southeast corner of Bay and Adelaide Streets

Visit sites where theatres once stood and learn about the buildings – old and new – that now house some of Toronto's world-renowned performing arts groups.



**Sunday, August 12**  
**In the Footsteps of Black Victorians**

Heritage Toronto Walk; meet at 82 Bond Street

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Toronto was the centre of anti-slavery organizations and black cultural and political activities in Canada West. Hear more stories about the men and women of the community as we visit some of the sites known to them.

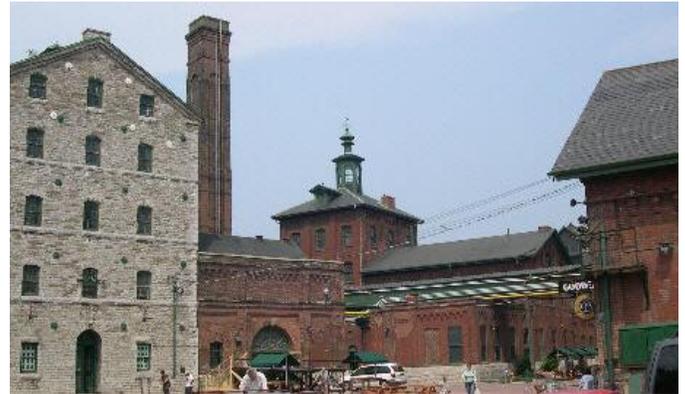
**Sunday, August 19**  
**Colourful Corktown**

Heritage Toronto Walk; meet at 106 Trinity Street



One of Toronto's oldest areas, Corktown retains a rich stock of domestic and industrial built heritage. Learn about the city's first parliament buildings, and hear the saga of Thornton and Lucy Blackburn, fugitive slaves who became community leaders.

**Sunday, August 26**  
**Whiskey, Wharf and Windmill**  
ROMwalk Plus\*; meet at 260 Adelaide Street East



Highlights of this tour include Little Trinity Church, Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, the Consumers' Gas Building, the Distillery Historic District and more. The walk will end with light pub grub at an historic brewery.  
\* \$30; pre-registration is required. Call 416-586-5799.



## Dickens of the Mounted

Beyond Chutleigh Productions and alliesallover theatre co-op present Eric Nicol's mostly true story of Frank Dickens, son of the famous author, who was given a choice: go to jail, or go to Canada. Now if he can overcome his reputation for ineptitude, laziness and heavy drinking he might just earn a place in the history books. From Sam Steele to Sitting Bull, from whisky smugglers to Louis Riel – if the West doesn't kill him the mosquitoes will. Directed by Brad Lepp and starring Kristian Bruun, *Dickens* is playing a limited run at the Factory Studio Theatre (125 Bathurst Street), from July 4–15, before it continues its Fringe Festivals tour across the country. For box office and/or information call 416-966-1062.

# Help protect Toronto's history

## Background

The City of Toronto needs volunteers to participate on the Toronto Preservation Board and four Community Preservation Panels. With your participation, the board and panels help City Council make informed decisions about the conservation of the city's heritage buildings. It's an opportunity to meet new people who value Toronto's history and have input into heritage issues that will affect Toronto now, and for decades to come. With support from City of Toronto staff, members provide advice on a range of issues, including heritage issues in their communities.

## Board and panel makeup

The board consists of 14 members, including three Councillors, and meets a minimum 10 times each year. The Preservation Panels consist of up to 15 members, in each of the four districts, and also meet a minimum of 10 times each year.

## Length of term

Appointment to the board and panels is for a three year term. The current terms are from 2007 until 2010.

## Eligibility requirements

For both the board and the panels you must be 18 years of age or older and a resident of the city of Toronto. The board provides advice to City Council on issues relating to the Ontario Heritage Act, so expertise is needed in the areas of architecture, archaeology, planning, landscape architecture, etc. For the Community Panels, skills in heritage research, architecture, planning and engineering are especially useful.

## Information session

Tuesday, June 12 at Toronto City Hall; 100 Queen Street West; Committee Room 4; at 7 p.m.

## Deadline for applications

Applications will be accepted until Friday, June 29, 2007 and are available online at [www.toronto.ca/heritage-preservation](http://www.toronto.ca/heritage-preservation)

## More information

Call Paul Maka at 416-338-1077, or by email at [pmaka@toronto.ca](mailto:pmaka@toronto.ca)

Visit the Heritage Preservation web site at [www.toronto.ca/heritage-preservation](http://www.toronto.ca/heritage-preservation)



Employees of the City of Toronto or any of its agencies, boards or commissions are not eligible to apply. People currently serving on other City agencies, boards, commissions or special-purpose bodies whose appointments are continuing, a judge of any court and members of the Legislative Assembly, the Senate or House of Commons of Canada are also not eligible. To reflect the diverse nature of Toronto's population, people with disabilities, native people, and racial and ethnic minorities are especially encouraged to apply.

---

## Warning, *from page 1*

Evidence from various mid-nineteenth-century business directories indicates that the westernmost structure is the older of the two. The address appears as (Leslie) Scott's Hotel in 1853 and 1856. It was then occupied for a number of years by the millwright Benjamin Small until 1864 when it became a grocery store operated by Thomas Kingsmill. Its neighbour to the east first appears in 1864 as the establishment of H.J. Hartwell, Chemist and Druggist. It would have been a lively strip in its day, shared by the tavern of Francis Bail and, on the corner, William Wright's "Welcome Home" inn. The latter, as the Derby Tavern, survived until 1988. Let us hope that Toronto's oldest remaining church, as it seeks to expand the services of its ministry to include a gymnasium and other facilities, will opt to preserve these humble little shops that have been neighbours to Little Trinity and its rectory for a century and a half.

## Apartments, from page 2



The future seemed to brighten for Walnut Hall when, in 1997, it was designated as a heritage building, thus preventing its demolition. Purchased along with some residential lots on George Street by a pair of small-time Toronto developers, it was to be restored as part of a condominium complex that included ten semi-detached houses on the rear lots. A July article in *The Toronto Star* reported that the restoration was slated to begin that fall. It never happened, and some who had bought new town homes on George Street based on that prospect were disappointed.

In 2002 when one of the owners – Joe Jonatan – obtained sole proprietorship of the old building he presented a new plan to the city. In exchange for keeping and renovating Walnut Hall, Jonatan was granted approval for a seven-storey tower behind it, as well as \$20,000 in heritage monies. The latter was never accepted, nor was the agreement with the city ever signed despite the protests of the Garden City Residents Association.

Just this past winter, following Jonatan's death in February, the building was purchased for \$1.8 million by a Montreal-based partnership with a number of heritage conversions in its portfolio. The 2002 agreement was revisited and inspectors had been conducting an assessment of the site. It was too late. Too late also for a proposed bylaw put before council by Councillor Kyle Rae last year that would have compelled owners of heritage properties to maintain them. Architect Catherine Nasmith, editor of the *Built Heritage News*, maintains that the City had the power all along to expropriate, or to enforce maintenance standards under the building code. In the end, however, the sum total of what was done was nothing, which is what remains today of John O'Donohoe's initial investment in the urban fabric of Toronto. Shame on all of us.

### POST BOXES FOR RENT

The postal boxes at 260 Adelaide Street East are historical reconstructions of the originals built by James Scott Howard in 1833 and once held by such notables as Mayor William Lyon Mackenzie. At the time of this printing, four of these boxes were available for rent. Anyone interested should contact the post office at 416-865-1833.

### 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 McErvel, Jennifer McIlroy (President), Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg.

## 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](mailto: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 July 1-2, August 5-6 and September 2-3 for the summer long weekends.**

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.