

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

June 2008

Vol. XXIV No. 1

### TOLLKEEPER'S COTTAGE TO OPEN AS A MUSEUM



The Tollkeeper's cottage in Davenport Square Park

On July 1st, Canada's oldest toll house will open to the public as a museum at the intersection of Davenport Road and Bathurst Street. A classroom-sized addition will serve as an interpretive centre. It is thanks to the efforts of countless volunteers under the stewardship of the Community History Project (CHP) that this rare old structure has been restored and replaced as close as possible to its original location.

The Tollkeeper's Cottage, as it has come to be known, dates from the 1830s as determined by its construction details. Moved and transformed several times over the intervening years the building was, by 1993, in use as an addition to a private residence on Howland Avenue that was slated for redevelopment. A concerned neighbour, knowing something of the cottage's heritage, alerted CHP to its existence and to the threat of its loss. Naturally, this information was received with some skepticism but confirmation from a previous owner and subsequent research revealed what the little house – hidden under layers of siding and asphalt roofing – could not: the report was true.

Purchased from the developer for \$1 by the CHP, the cottage was moved in June of 1996 to the yard of the Wychwood Streetcar Barns where the Toronto Transit Commission agreed to house it while rescue and research, along with heroic fundraising efforts, continued. The building gradually revealed its secrets and its uniqueness was well established by 2002 when, Toronto City Council having given its approval, the cottage was moved to its current location in Davenport Square Park.

*Continued on page 2*

### Town of York Home to the First Farmers' Cooperative in Canada

George Henry, in *The emigrant's guide; or, Canada as it is* (1832) wrote that, "A large body of the farmers Yonge Street and in the townships in the vicinity of York, have adopted the plan of storing their own wheat; they have formed themselves into an association, and have built a very large storage at York, on the margin of the lake, where they store it in the winter, while the roads are good, and transport it down in the Spring, – thus securing themselves the best prices." Organized in 1824 as an unincorporated joint stock company, the Farmers' Storehouse offered protection from both downturns in the market and indebtedness to local merchants. A recent article by Albert Schrauwers in the journal *Ontario History* looks at the role of the Farmers' Storehouse – and the religious group, the Children of Peace, that helped organize it – in fostering deliberative democracy in Upper Canada.

*Continued on page 8*

## Tollkeeper's Cottage, *from page 1*

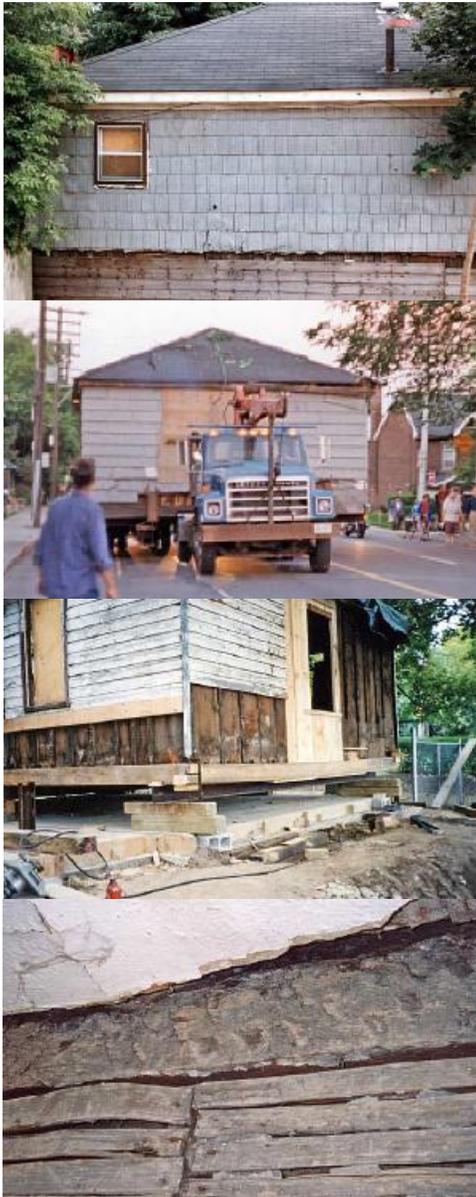
Although designated by the City as an historic site in September of 2003, the tarp-draped structure surrounded by renovation debris elicited numerous complaints from its neighbours over the next few years, many of them fielded by local Councillor Joe Mihevk. Meanwhile, assisted by the Toronto Historical Board (later Heritage Toronto), the CHP raised money and enlisted volunteers for what has been a painstakingly thorough restoration. The dedication with which this project was undertaken – CHP president Jane Becroft deserving special mention – is exemplary and a debt of gratitude is owed by all of us for the preservation of this treasure from Toronto's past.

Davenport Road is one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, roads in the area, dating back to the end of the ice ages when it was a footpath used by aboriginal people en route from present-day Montreal to Niagara. It was later used by French fur traders in the 17th century and by early European settlers in the late 18th, appearing on a map drawn by Elizabeth Simcoe in 1796. Major improvements to the road began in 1833 when the government of Upper Canada began contracting privately owned companies to build, maintain and control specific section of thoroughfare. These companies were then allowed to recoup their investments through the collection of tolls. By 1840, the 13-kilometre stretch of Davenport between the Humber and Don Rivers had five tollgates. Tollgate No. 3 was at Bathurst Street.

Tolls in 1851 were sixpence for every vehicle drawn by a team, thruppence for a single horse and cart. As unpopular then as they are today, their collection was challenging and occasionally dangerous. Travellers would often try to avoid paying by going off the road or creeping past in the dead of night. Tollkeepers, who were poorly paid and lived with their families in tiny cottages such as this one, bore the brunt of resentment that should have been directed at the owners of the road. The system was abolished in 1895.

Above, from top to bottom: The cottage as it was discovered with its toll-collection window opening still in place; the cottage on the move to its temporary home at the Wychwood TTC barns; stripped of its modern siding the vertical plank construction was revealed (the only other known extant building of this type is the Joseph Schneider house in Kitchener); peeling the interior walls revealed hand-split lathing, as well as a hand-hewn beam that had once been part of another structure. The re-use of building materials was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century owing in part to the tremendous amount of labour involved in their manufacture.

At right: This picture, a detail from a painting by Arthur Cox dating from 1875, shows the cottage at the southeast corner of Davenport and Bathurst. A later sketch by Marmaduke Matthews shows it moved to the west side, having lost the front porch and rear addition seen here.



## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



### Afternoon Tea at the P.O.

This past winter a number of high teas, organized by Muddy York Tours, were served after closing time in the Reading Room of Toronto's First Post Office. As a fire flickered in the hearth, participants tucked into dainty sandwiches, homemade scones with butter and jam, and an assortment of cakes, pastries and tarts. Knowing perhaps that a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, Richard Fiennes-Clinton would then regale the gathering with tales of old York and early Toronto.

The talks evolved with the season, December's focusing on 19th-century Christmas traditions and January's on Scottish new-year celebrations and the profound impact the Scots have had on our national landscape. February offered tales of crime, punishment and mystery from the city's past, up to and including a famous Toronto mystery that captured the world's attention in 1919 – the disappearance of famed theatre tycoon, Ambrose Small. March teas took on a decidedly Irish flavour, detailing the history of Irish immigration and settlement in early Toronto. By then, private groups had begun to book teas of their own, hungry to learn of the city's history in general and to sink their teeth into Fiennes-Clinton's tender scones.

On hiatus over the summer while the weather is more conducive to walking tours, this program will resume in the fall. Anyone interested in booking ahead should contact Muddy York Tours at 416-487-9017 or [richard@muddyorktours.com](mailto:richard@muddyorktours.com).

## Puzzles, Pinpricks and Knots of Love

Up until the introduction of mass-produced paper versions in the second half of the 19th century, valentines were elaborately hand-crafted objects whose messages were often deliberately difficult to unravel. Valentine puzzle purses, such as the one pictured below, had to be unfolded and refolded



several different ways in order to decipher the verses they contained. Other valentines bore their words in bands that looped and swirled in serpentine patterns or knots which, like a ring, had no beginning or end. Intricate lacy designs, today achieved by die- or laser-cutting, were created using knife work and pin-pricking. Lovers might compose their own poetry or use verses taken from source pamphlets especially published for this purpose, many of which were surprisingly bawdy in flavour.

On the weekend of February 9-10, Miriam Smith offered a lecture and workshop on the evolution of the paper valentine at which participants learned how to create three styles of valentines popular in the early 19th century. Smith, who delivers education programs at Toronto's First Post Office when not busy working at Black Creek Pioneer Village, brings both rigorous research and a contagious enthusiasm to bear on her subject matter. This event is destined to become an annual affair; be sure to watch out for it next year.





## Toronto's 174<sup>th</sup> Birthday

If the above photograph is blurred it is because the Downtown Alternative School Singers, who opened the program at St. Lawrence Hall on March 6, simply would *not* stand still. Their enthusiasm was matched by that of Bruce Bell who told of the many talented singers and musicians whose performances had preceded them in that room.



A brief intermission allowed everyone to take advantage of the sumptuous spread prepared by TYHS board member Patricia Braithwaite before members of the St. James' Cathedral choir, who also perform with the Canadian Opera Company, quite simply tore the lid off the great hall.

If the intermittent blizzards deterred you from attending this year's event, don't fail to join us next year at this magnificent venue when the city of Toronto celebrates its 175<sup>th</sup> birthday and the Town of York Historical Society shows it how.



## Celebrating Mother

From Ancient Greece to Upper Canada, motherhood has been honoured for centuries. A lecture and workshop hosted by Miriam Smith on May 3rd at Toronto's First Post Office invited participants to learn more about this ancient tradition and also to create an old-fashioned letter to mother bearing emblems associated with her in the early 19th century, including those of local wildflowers. A traditional simnal cake, as pictured at right, was served.



## Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Town of York Historical Society, always a peripatetic affair, was held this year at the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre Centre. The Society takes pride in the number of interesting and hospitable venues in the "old town" it has been able to allow its members to explore. The business meeting was followed by a tour of the premises that seemed to leave a smile on the face of everyone who participated.

There was nothing but good news to report at this year's AGM. President Jennifer McIlroy gave a rallying speech in which she urged the membership to be resolute in their adherence to the goals and ideals of the organization, especially in light of the ongoing development and increasing density of the "old town" neighbourhood. She stressed that we should continue to be educators and story-tellers, sharing our knowledge of the city's origins with all newcomers, and that our updated strategic plan must embrace these new challenges. She then introduced the first annual Sheldon Godfrey award for outstanding service and contribution which Janet Walters, at right, looks suitably stunned upon accepting from Sheldon and his wife Judy.



## New Face on the Weekends

**Meredith Hogan** joined the staff of Toronto's First Post Office in April of this year. A seasoned professional with years of business experience, Hogan had recently resumed her education in pursuit of a Public Relations Certificate at Humber College when the position of weekend postal clerk became available. We are delighted to have her on board and equally pleased that she finds the job "fun." Having rented a box at 260 Adelaide for over a decade, Hogan is also a valued stakeholder in Toronto's First Post Office and one who upholds all of the traditions to which that institution adheres.



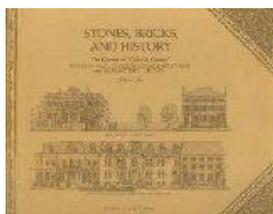
## New in the Gift Shop



### Note Cards from the Archives of Ontario

\$1.50 each or 10 for \$7.50  
The Archives of Ontario's collection includes nearly 2 million photographs of the people, places and events that make up our

shared heritage. Now, for the first time, some of these unique and important images are available as high-quality note cards. Send a piece of Ontario's history!



### Stones, Bricks and History: The Corner of Duke and George 1798 – 1984

By Sheldon and Judy Godfrey  
Lester and Orpen Dennys (1984),  
75 pages, \$19.95

This book chronicles the restoration of the block of historic buildings which includes the 1827 Bank of Upper Canada as well as Toronto's First Post Office (1833) and the De La Salle building (1871). It is also a history of Toronto as seen through the windows on the corner of Duke (now Adelaide) and George Streets which was at the centre of events in the early 19th century. First published on the occasion of the city's sesquicentennial and the province's bicentennial this book is once again available at the post office.

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

### Taking it to the People



The new Starbucks at Front and Frederick Streets had not been open long before Bruce Bell made sure that both staff and patrons were aware of where they stood – or sat. He is seen above installing a picture of the house that originally surveyed that corner. At that time, in the early 19th century, the view would have been of the lake, just across the street. The frame building depicted in Bruce's gift was the first home of William Warren Baldwin and his family and is known for being the birthplace, in 1804, of the "gentleman reformer," Robert Baldwin. Later, the printing office of William Lyon Mackenzie's controversial newspaper, *The Colonial Advocate*, occupied the premises and it was the site of the infamous "types riot" of 1826.

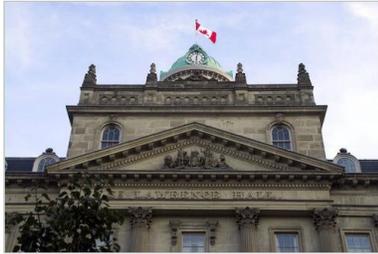
### It's Our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

This year, The Town of York Historical Society celebrates a quarter century of history. For those of you who don't know, the organization was born of interest generated by the restoration, in the early 1980s, of an historically significant group of buildings including York's fourth post office. Many experts – architects, historians and curators – had volunteered assistance over the course of the project and from this core group the Town of York Historical Society was incorporated in 1983. The group's first order of business was to reopen the old post office, now a National Historic Site, 150 years after it first opened in December of 1833. To mark this latest milestone, the museum will mount an exhibition at the Market Gallery in the fall to showcase its unique and valuable collection of artifacts related to letter writing and the Royal Mail in Upper Canada.

# Old Town Walking Tours

## Historic Toronto Sunday, July 6, 2 pm and Wednesday, August 20, 6 pm

ROMwalk; meet at 260  
Adelaide Street East.



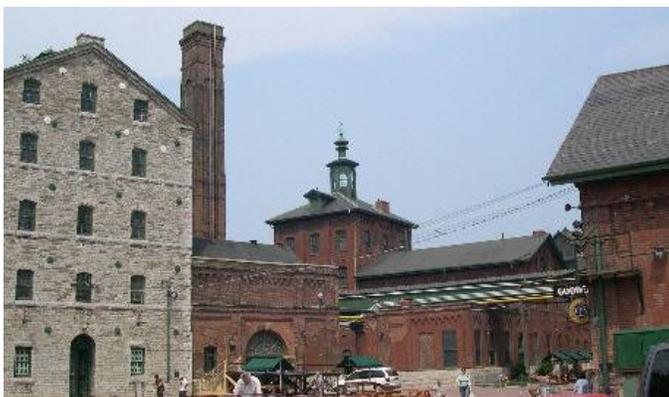
Discover some of the important institutions around which life revolved in York and early Toronto, including Toronto's First Post Office, the Bank of Upper Canada, St. Lawrence Market, St. James' Cathedral, St. Lawrence Hall and Courthouse Square.

## In the Footsteps of Black Victorians Sunday, July 27, 1 pm

Organized by Mackenzie House; meet at the St. Lawrence Market.



Mackenzie House invites you to walk through parts of old Toronto where African-Canadians, many of them escaped slaves, carved a community in the 19th century. Toronto was the centre of anti-slavery organizations and black cultural and political activities in Canada West. William Peyton Hubbard, known as "Old Cicero," was the city's first alderman of African descent.

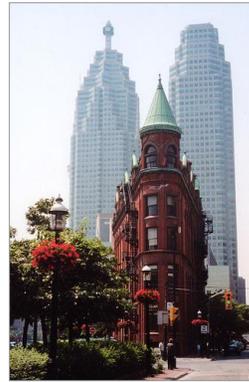


## By Appointment Whiskey, Wharf and Windmill

Group ROMwalk\*; meet at King and Trinity Streets.

Highlights of this tour include Little Trinity Church, Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, the Consumers' Gas Building, the Distillery Historic District and more.

\*For private groups of ten or more, \$10 per person.



## Along the Front Sunday, July 13, 2 pm and Wednesday, August 13, 6 pm

ROMwalk; meet at Front and  
Jarvis Streets.

Stroll along one of the city's oldest streets. Highlights will include St. Lawrence Market, former warehouses, the much-photographed Gooderham (or Flatiron) building, Berczy Park, BCE Place, the Dominion Public Building, Royal Bank Plaza, the Royal York Hotel and Union Station.

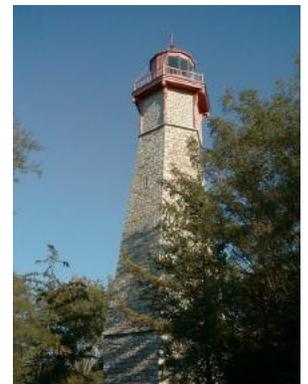
## Harbour Tour on the Trillium



Photo: Ted Wickson

Join popular historian Mike Filey on Saturday, July 5, for a one-hour tour of the Toronto Harbour aboard the legendary Trillium as part of a special day to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Gibraltar Point lighthouse. The restored 1910 paddle steamer will depart from the city's mainland Toronto Island ferry docks at noon and arrive at Hanlan's Point by 1:00 p.m. in time for passengers to make their way to the lighthouse site for a plaque presentation ceremony with refreshments to follow.

The Island Lighthouse is the oldest landmark in Toronto. In 1808 the following appeared in the *Upper Canada Gazette*: "It is a pleasure to inform the public that the dangers to vessels navigating Lake Ontario will in a great measure be avoided by the erection of a lighthouse."



# CANADA DAY EVENTS WITH HISTORICAL FLAVOUR



## **St. James' Park, Church and King Street East, 11:50am to 5pm**

Join the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood in a parade, birthday cake, activities for children, student award presentations, barbeque and much more! Entertainment includes jazz and folk music, a Kung Fu demonstration and East Indian dance. Free, and free food for children under 12. 416-368-2794 [slna@bellnet.ca](mailto:slna@bellnet.ca)



## **The Tollkeeper's Cottage, Davenport and Bathurst, 2 pm**

You are invited to attend the official opening of the The Tollkeeper's Cottage as a museum and the unveiling of a plaque as well as a new sign for the park – renamed The Tollkeeper's Park in recognition of the site's historical significance. Free. 416-515-7546 [info@tollkeeperscottage.ca](mailto:info@tollkeeperscottage.ca)



## **Fort York, 100 Garrison Road, 10am to 5pm**

See the Fort York Summer Guard, perform musket drills (kids can too) and fife and drum music. There will be guided tours of the fort available all day, cooking and dance demonstrations and lots of fun for the whole family. Regular admission rates apply. 416-392-6907 [fortyork@toronto.ca](mailto:fortyork@toronto.ca)



## **Gibson House Museum, 5172 Yonge Street, 12 to 5pm**

Take a journey to the rural community of Willow Dale, circa 1851. Experience a taste of the past with homemade ice cream, children's activities, old fashioned games on the lawn and samples of cooking from the historic kitchen. Admission is free! 416-395-7432 [gibsonhouse@toronto.ca](mailto:gibsonhouse@toronto.ca)



## **Montgomery's Inn, 4709 Dundas Street West, 1 to 4:30pm**

Montgomery's Inn invites you to join the Tea Room volunteers for the Annual Strawberry Delight, with strawberry shortcake, made the old fashioned way, a pot of tea or rhubarb drink. Take goodies home from the bake table. \$6 for tea. 416-394-8113 [montinn@toronto.ca](mailto:montinn@toronto.ca)



## **Todmorden Mills, 67 Pottery Road, 12 to 4pm**

Todmorden Mills heritage Museum suggests you pack a picnic lunch and enjoy a day in the Don Valley. Visit the 19th-century homes, sample treats prepared in their kitchens, and enjoy activities for children. Regular admission applies. 416-396-2819 [todmorden@toronto.ca](mailto:todmorden@toronto.ca)

# Farmers' Storehouse, *from page 1*

Not only was the Farmers' Storehouse a source of earnings for its shareholders but it served them as both bank and company store. Members of the company (shares cost £2 10s with a limit of 20 per partner) could take goods and cash from the store to the value of their stock. In this way they were able to circumvent not only the York merchants but the Bank of Upper Canada as well.

Shareholders annually elected a board of directors who in turn hired a storekeeper to conduct the general business of the company, taking the farmers' wheat, transporting it to Montreal and purchasing merchandise for the company store. The first board of directors, elected in June of 1824, was also charged with petitioning the Governor for a waterfront lot on which to build. They received a piece of land immediately south of the town market and where the St. Lawrence Market building stands today. Although this had been declared public beachfront in 1818 the storehouse received an exemption as being for a public purpose.

The members of the original board of directors were all from among the earliest immigrant families to York's hinterland and all were to some extent involved in reform politics. In fact, the company soon became one of the crucibles in which the reform movement developed and a springboard for aspiring politicians of that stripe. The organizers of the Farmers' store would go on to play important roles in the construction of Shepard's Hall – later dubbed “radical hall” – and one would go on to be a principle organizer of the 1837 rebellion.



No known image of the Farmers' Storehouse exists. This detail of an 1828 view of the shoreline shows a building on the water's edge in its location but the many windows indicate that it is likely a fanciful creation of the artist.

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

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

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Toronto, ON M5A 1N1**

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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, August 3-4 and August 31-September 1 for the summer holidays.**

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.