

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

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CITY OF TORONTO CELEBRATES 175 YEARS



John G. Howard, *King and York Streets, looking east along King, 1834*, City of Toronto, Toronto Culture, Museum and Heritage Services

And Whereas the name of York is common to so many towns and places, that it is desirable, for avoiding inconvenience and confusion, to designate the Capital of the Province by a name which will better distinguish it, and none appears more eligible than that by which the site of the present Town was known before the name of York was assigned to it...

An Act to extend the Limits of the Town of York; to erect the said Town into a City; and to Incorporate it under the name of the City of Toronto.

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Toronto Home to 34 National Historic Sites



When an article in the *Globe and Mail* earlier this year erroneously claimed Fort York as Toronto's only National Historic Site, readers were quick to respond. But ignorance surrounding urban sites, which are often in private hands, prompted a Parks Canada initiative launched during Doors Open Toronto last year. *National Historic Sites Urban Walks: Toronto* offers a series of walking tours linking designated buildings in some of central Toronto's historic neighbourhoods. Walk participants are asked to consider issues such as the redevelopment and re-use of various sites for commercial enterprises, and the consequence that many are not open to the public. A series of articles, beginning with this one, will highlight some of the national treasures that can be found in downtown Toronto.

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Toronto's 175th Birthday, *from page 1*

York was vulnerable to fires, which were frequent. The volunteer fire companies, comprised of young tradesmen, had only primitive equipment at their disposal. A recent fire on Yonge Street had claimed the life of a ten-year-old boy. Taverns burned most often and York had a licensed tavern for every 120 townsfolk. Public drunkenness was a constant nuisance. A cholera epidemic in 1832 had proven the town's infrastructure inadequate to such a crisis. The hospital had overflowed and "fever sheds" had to be hastily constructed. Many cholera victims were buried in a mass grave in a remote corner of St. James cemetery. It was hoped that the "Corporation," as it came to be known, would succeed where the Magistrates had failed.



The boundaries of the new city were Bathurst and Parliament Streets, the lake to the south and a line 400 yards north of Queen Street. Beyond the city itself were the "liberties," which extended from Dufferin to the Don River, and Bloor Street to the north. The city proper was divided into five wards, each of which was to be represented by two aldermen and two common councilmen. The aldermen were to elect one amongst them as mayor for a term of one year. From the pages of his *Colonial Advocate*, newspaper publisher William

Lyon Mackenzie – who had been an early advocate of incorporation – railed against the concentration of so much power in so few hands. The only mitigating factor he could envision was "the honest resolution and determination of the people themselves to choose careful moderate men to exercise power under the act..." (March 20, 1834). The first municipal election in Toronto was held on March 27, 1834. William Lyon Mackenzie became the city's first mayor.

The first Common Council had its work cut out. Restricted to a tax rate of four pence on the pound in the city, two pence on the pound in the "liberties," and with limited borrowing powers, its revenues were insufficient to the expectations placed upon it. When a second cholera outbreak arrived that summer, the provincial legislature downloaded the responsibility for this burden on Toronto and other towns. As a result, three of the city's first nine bylaws were related to matters of sanitation. One dealt with the proper disposal of garbage, one with plans for the construction of sewers and one established a board of health.

Overlaid on a map of contemporary Toronto, the original city (population 9,252) appears as small as a footnote. On the ground in 2009, however, surrounded by mountains of garbage, with City Council pleading chronic under funding, an influenza pandemic looming on fall's horizon, and many streets torn up and muddy, the 1830s do not feel so much like a foreign country.

Illustrations:

J.G. Chewett, Plan of the City of Toronto and Liberties, 1834, City of Toronto Archives, MT 401

Nathaniel Currier lithograph of a drawing by Thomas Young, Architect, *View in King Street Looking Eastward, City of Toronto, Upper Canada*, 1835



Young Filmmaker Focuses on Built Heritage



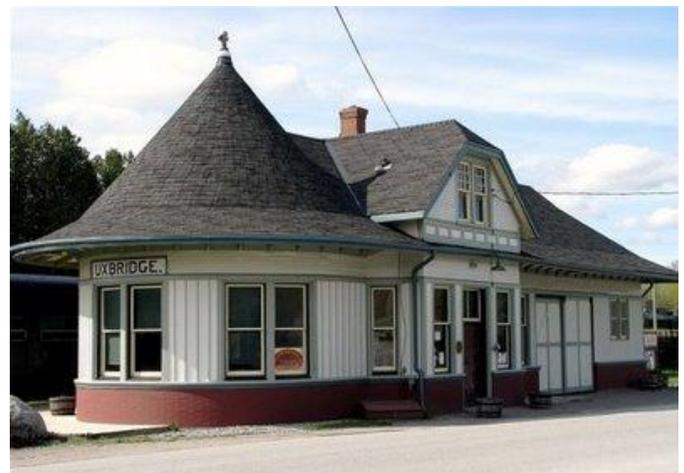
Mark Magro, in the brief time since leaving the Toronto Film School, has made three documentaries about the precarious state of Ontario's built heritage, especially in rural areas. *Cedar Mains Farm: A Forgotten Landscape* (2007) tells the story of an abandoned parcel of land in Caledon township that until recently comprised a rich architectural landscape. First settled by a pioneer family whose story is told in the overgrown cemetery, it was, from 1949 to 1981, the rural playground of Dr. Sidney Martin Blair. Blair had made his money as an engineer in the oil industry. At Cedar Mains he bred sheep and cattle and hosted equestrian events. The property eventually came into the hands of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, whose mandate is to protect the natural environment, particularly watersheds, and not to save old farm buildings. In the three years since Magro's first encounter with the place in 2006, all of the unique agricultural structures have collapsed and been removed, leaving only a stone chimney and a dilapidated church dating from an earlier time.



Nonquon Island, known by Port Perry residents as Seven Mile Island, also enjoyed a heyday as a retreat for the wealthy. Tobacco merchant

and later publishing magnate Alex Ross Wilson purchased a former hunting and fishing lodge on the island in 1919. He turned the property into an estate showplace with elaborate gardens, statuary, swimming and reflecting pools, a tea house and a boathouse with a dance floor on the upper level. Scottish stonemasons who had recently completed the construction of Casa Loma were hired to erect large stone pillars in the shape of cigars at the

entrance to the property. After Wilson's death in 1941 his widow Mary sold the property to Harry and Freda Ely from Forest Hill. The Ely family bred Palomino ponies on the island and ran a private children's camp there during the summer months. Since the 1980s, however, the property has changed hands a number of times and been the site of many short-lived ventures. The ornate statues and intricate fencework were damaged by vandals in the 1990s. The estate has recently been purchased by the local Mississaugas, who had been denied access to this prime fishing locale for over a century. Mark Magro's film, *Nonquon Island* (2008), does not speculate on the future fate of the island's built heritage.



A real happy ending, however, is reached in *The Story of Uxbridge Station* (2008). The Toronto Nipissing Railway was built in the late 1960s by William Gooderham to carry grain to his distillery as well as lumber for export and cordwood for resale. It was the first public narrow-gauge line in North America, and was taken over by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1883. The current Uxbridge station on this line was built in 1904 and is one of the few "witch's hat" stations in Ontario. Its waiting rooms, freight room and ticket office are now beautifully restored. Owned and maintained by the Township of Uxbridge, a team of volunteers operate a museum at the station as well as a train to Stouffville as a tourist attraction during the summer.

These three films, produced independently by Mark Magro's production company, Wanted Media, are now available in the gift shop at Toronto's First Post Office for \$15⁰⁰ each. The latter two recently screened at the ReelHeART film festival.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT Toronto Postcard Club Show



Toronto's First Post Office was invited to host a table at the Toronto Postcard Club's annual show and sale on Sunday, February 8 in the gymnasium at Humber College. Above, Kári Sackney and Kate McAuley are entertained by a fellow presenter.

THA Heritage Showcase



Once again, during Heritage Week, a showcase in the lobby of City Hall was organized by Peggy Kurtin for members of the Toronto Historical Association. TYHS was there. Being a registered charity, it

was one of only a few groups privileged to sell merchandise at the event.

Doors Open Toronto

This year marked the tenth anniversary of Doors Open Toronto. More than 250,000 visitors, young and old, discovered and explored 175 Toronto buildings May 23rd and 24th, shattering last year's attendance record. Toronto's First Post Office welcomed almost eight hundred, and went through six pounds of sealing wax.



Photo: Mike Crisolago



An Evening of Stories, Song and Dance

The Town of York Historical Society has been celebrating Toronto's birthday with a gala event on March 6th for the past five years. The fact that 2009 marks a special anniversary – Toronto's 175th – was just another excuse to pull out all the stops. In addition to valuable and entertaining history lessons provided by Bruce Bell and Richard Fiennes-Clinton, this year's audience was in for some very special treats.

To see the costumed Fort York Regency Dancers performing in the magnificent ballroom of St. Lawrence Hall – where we were assembled – was to be transported to the world of a Jane Austen novel. In the evening's second act, soprano Aleksandra Balaburska, accompanied by pianist Irene Wong-Montgomery, channelled Jenny Lind in a performance of songs popular in the 19th century. Balaburska's versions of several Scottish ballads, with an admirable accent, were particularly affecting.

The favourite part of the program for many, however, was the intermission, during which were



Photos: Kári Sackney

served "175 Years of Cakes." The Culinary Historians of Ontario and George Brown College students of Applied Food History had prepared eight historical cakes. The earliest was a Rich Plum Cake from an 1840 Toronto cookbook. Another was the cake featured in Margaret Atwood's 1969 Toronto-based novel, *The Edible Woman*.

26th Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Town of York Historical Society was held this year at Campbell House Museum where our members were warmly welcomed by Curator Liz Driver and her staff. The first order of business was the presentation of the second annual Sheldon Godfrey award. This year's recipient, Peggy Kurtin, is seen here with Mr. Godfrey, as Judge Campbell looks on with approval from his frame on the wall.



Following the business meeting, the assembled were led on a tour of the historic home which ended in the basement kitchen where Patricia Braithwaite had laid out a sumptuous spread. When everyone was sufficiently refreshed, they reassembled in the ballroom in order to view the documentary, *C.W. Jefferys, Picturing Canada*. Jefferys (1869-1951) was an artist who made Canadian history come to life. The film was introduced by its producer, John Bessai of Cinefocus Canada, who entertained questions after the screening. Mr. Bessai is pictured at right with TYHS board President Jennifer McIlroy.



Photos: Brad Smith

New Face for the Summer



Laura Fournier is spending the summer at Toronto's First Post Office in the capacity of Program Coordinator. An Honours graduate from the University of Toronto, she has spent two previous summers working in museums, first at the Smiths Falls Railway Museum and subsequently at the Rideau Canal Museum.

Among other projects she is working on is the promotion of an historical road show which the Town of York Historical Society is offering to local condominium dwellers. She is currently conducting research to ascertain what buildings originally stood on the sites now occupied by these new residences.

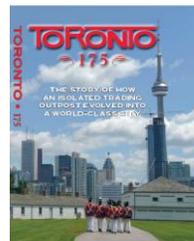
Laura's employment at TFPO is made possible by a matching grant from Young Canada Works, sponsored by Heritage Canada and administered by the Canadian Museums Association.

New in the Gift Shop



**Historical Post Cards from
*Canadian Culture Thing***
\$1.50 each

Toronto's First Post Office has finally managed to procure a fabulous assortment of historic postcards of the city. The oldest image depicts the "coffin block" circa 1890, just prior to its replacement by the Gooderham or "flatiron" building. Seen here is Miss Toronto, 1926, in the first annual beauty contest held at Sunnyside Beach.



**TORONTO 175, The Story of How
an Isolated Trading Outpost
Evolved into a World Class City**
Produced by Ann Martin

World Life Video Productions (2009) \$19.95
This film is a fast-paced look at the evolution of the little town of

York that became the modern metropolis of Toronto. The city's history comes to life with the assistance of archaeologists, archivists, historians, authors and curators.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Toronto's Tumultuous Year



As Toronto's first mayor, William Lyon Mackenzie faced a series of challenges: accusations of bias from a divided and sometimes hostile council, a catastrophic accident at City Hall, the deadly return of cholera to Toronto and, perhaps his biggest challenge of all, building a city bureaucracy

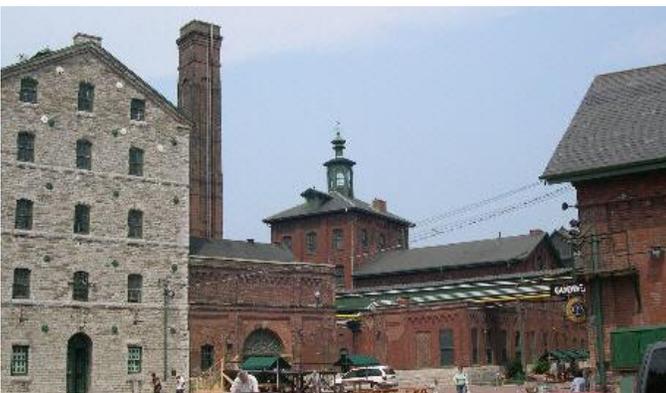
from scratch. *Toronto's Tumultuous Year: William Lyon Mackenzie as Mayor* explores an eventful year in the life of the city as shown through the trials and tribulations of the man who is still its most controversial Mayor. This exhibition is on display at Mackenzie House, 82 Bond Street, until January of 2010.

New Self-guided Walk

Beating the Bounds

Pick up a map at Toronto's First Post Office or at Heritage Toronto in St. Lawrence Hall, 157 King St. East.

Dirt streets and wooden sidewalks, the smell of wood smoke and stables, schooners and steamboats in the harbour – this was what one would have encountered here in 1834. While it is a challenge to fully understand life back then, by walking the 1834 boundaries you can get a sense of the scope of the old city – with your feet! This route covers approximately 9.5 km and will take about four hours. It begins in Market Lane Park, just west of St. Lawrence Hall, and finishes at Parliament Square Park in the Distillery District.



Old Town Walking Tours



Theatres in Old Toronto

Sunday, July 26, 1:30 p.m.
Heritage Toronto walk; meet at 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.



Cabbagetown People

Saturday, Aug. 8, 1:30 p.m.

Heritage Toronto walk; meet at Parliament and Winchester.

Since its beginnings in the 1830s as an immigrant reception neighbourhood, Cabbagetown has been home to an amazing group of personalities. Hear the stories of some of those who have been active in

the arts and sciences, politics, business, architecture and various social movements.

Imagining Toronto's Past

Saturday, Sept. 12, 1:30 p.m.
Heritage Toronto walk; meet in St. James Park.

Visit some of the 1856 sites from Michael Redhill's novel *Consolation*, then explore our current attitudes towards preservation of the past and what lies beneath our city.



Fort York and the Garrison Commons

Sunday, Sept. 13, 1:30 p.m.
Heritage Toronto walk; meet outside of the canteen, which is also the gift shop.

Explore the evolution of Fort York's Garrison Common, land outside the fort which was originally set aside for military purposes. Through the years this site has witnessed some of Toronto's most dramatic events and changes.

SIMCOE DAY - HOLIDAYS WITH HISTORY

The first Monday in August is a civic holiday in much of Canada but it goes by different names in various parts of the country. In Toronto, where it originated, the holiday has been known as Simcoe day since 1968.

Fort York, 100 Garrison Road, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

An annual Toronto tradition, Simcoe Day at Fort York connects you with the place it all began, the birthplace of Toronto. See period demonstrations of cooking, artillery and musketry. Kids can join a drill session! On hand will be members of the 41st Regiment of Foot from Fort George National Historic Park in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Governor John Graves Simcoe and Mrs. Simcoe will inspect the troops at 1:00 and address the citizens of Toronto followed by a musket and artillery salute. Regular admission. 416-392-6907



Gibson House Museum, 5172 Yonge Street, 12 to 5 p.m.

Take a journey to the rural community of Willow Dale where costumed guides will welcome you to the home of David and Eliza Gibson and their family. Experience a taste of the past with homemade ice cream, children's activities, old fashioned games on the lawn and samples of 19th-century cookery from the historic kitchen. Admission is free! 416-395-7432.

Leave a Legacy

If preserving and promoting our heritage is important to you, the **Town of York Historical Society** would like to help you leave a legacy to support your personal passion.

Through planned giving, you can increase your income, reduce the taxes you pay, and leave a legacy for future generations.

There are many different gift-planning vehicles available, and planned gifts should be designed around your personal circumstances. To learn more about how you can **support the Town of York Historical Society** through planned charitable giving, please contact me to arrange a private consultation.



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National Historic Sites, *from page 1*

Designed by Frederic Cumberland and built between 1851 and 1853, 10 Toronto Street is an outstanding example of Greek Revival architecture. It served as Toronto's only post office for twenty years, and was then used by the federal government to house a branch of the Department of Inland Revenue until 1937, when it was taken over by the Bank of Canada. In 1959 a group of local financiers, including E. P. Taylor, purchased the building for \$500,000 to serve as the executive headquarters for the Argus Corporation. This saved it from demolition.

In 1978 Conrad Black purchased controlling shares in Argus from the widow of a former owner, after which he lost no time in becoming key executive. It was from this headquarters (of Argus, Hollinger and Ravelston) that he subsequently masterminded the acquisition of nearly 400 newspapers worldwide. In 2006, Black was accused of wire fraud, racketeering and money laundering. Surveillance video cameras captured him removing boxes of documents from the building to a chauffeur-driven Cadillac waiting in the alley. Thus was the charge of obstruction of justice added to the other counts.

Today the building serves as the corporate headquarters for Morgan Meaghan & Associates, a major Canadian investment firm, who purchased it in 2006 for \$14 million. It and "Toronto's First" are the only two post offices remaining from nineteenth-century Toronto. Its magnificent Beaux Arts successor, located at the head of Toronto Street on Adelaide (then Duke Street), was demolished in 1960. The building at 10 Toronto Street was designated a National Historic Site in 1958.



The Old Toronto Post Office/Old Bank of Canada Building as it appears today, hemmed in by much taller buildings. A third storey, which is hidden behind the portico, was added during E. P. Taylor's ownership.

The Town of York Historical Society

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

Directors: Bruce Bell, Patricia Braithwaite, Richard Fiennes-Clinton, Sheldon Godfrey, Cynthia Malik, Judith McErvell, Jennifer McIlroy (President), Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg and Elaine Tipping.

Toronto's First Post Office

is administered by the

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Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed August 2-3 and September 6-7 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.