

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

September 2009

Vol. XXV No. 2

### MUSEUM CELEBRATES UNIQUE HISTORY OF POSTAL STATION K



Postal Station K sits on the west side of Yonge Street, just north of Eglinton Avenue at Montgomery Street. On the same site once stood Montgomery's Tavern where William Lyon Mackenzie and his followers plotted their ill-fated assault on Toronto in December of 1837. The Art Deco post office constructed almost a century later has its own renegade patron. It is the only building in Canada (and one of very few anywhere) to

bear the Royal cypher of Edward VIII, who chose marriage to Wallis Simpson, an American divorcée, over the British Crown.

In the basement of Station K is a private museum that pays tribute to both of these histories and also that of the site which connects them. A labour of love on the part of supervisor Peter Hooker, the museum's collection also comprises artifacts pertaining to the Canadian postal system from Edward's abdication to the present. The many crowns and coats of arms represented on these objects remind one of a time, as our friend Mike Piette likes to say, "when we worked for the *Queen*, and *not* Business Depot."

Mr. Hooker's museum is not currently open to the public on a regular basis owing to the steepness of the basement stairs. He is lobbying for space above ground, and would like to incorporate a coffee shop or lunch room to accommodate groups who continue to ask to come. We wish him luck. His enthusiasm alone was worth the visit undertaken by the staff of Toronto's First Post Office Museum on August 31.

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### National Historic Site Built by Society Born in 1834



The decision to form a St. George's Society was made by "a group of loyal citizens" dining together at the British Coffee House on the evening of St. George's Day, April 23, 1834. In 1891 the society built St. George's Hall, a large red sandstone and brick building designed by architects Edward and Webster, at 14 Elm Street. As part of an ongoing series on Toronto's National Historic Sites, this article looks at what we now know as the Arts and Letters Club, designated in 2007.

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# Postal Station K, *cont'd*



Above, top to bottom: A sketch based on a contemporary British engraving shows Montgomery's Tavern burning in the background. Prospect House, where the York Township Council and the York Masonic Lodge held their meetings until 1874 and 1871 respectively, was destroyed by fire in 1881. Oulcott's Hotel lent the village of Eglinton an air of grandeur that Davisville lacked (images courtesy of Toronto Public Library). Its veranda removed, it made a fine post office of which these letter carriers were no doubt proud (City of Toronto Archives, Wm. James Family Fonds).

At right: Prince Edward at the National Exhibition in 1927 (City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 8140).

John Montgomery built his first tavern on this site in 1830. It was burned by government troops for its treasonous associations following the 1837 rebellion. Montgomery rebuilt in 1843 a hotel which he eventually sold to one Charles McBride of Willowdale, who reopened it in 1858 as the Prospect House. This too succumbed to fire in 1881. John Oulcott then purchased the property and built a three-storey brick hotel which opened in 1883. At that time there were two villages in the area, Davisville and Eglinton, each with its own post office. Neither offered home delivery as did the City of Toronto to the south. Rather, in the manner of Toronto's First post offices, they published notices in the local newspapers regarding letters awaiting pick up.

On November 22, 1889, the unincorporated villages of Davisville and Eglinton (a population of 750 was required) formally united to become the village of North Toronto, becoming the *town* of North Toronto on April 7 of 1890. North Toronto established a post office in that name in 1893 and meanwhile the village of Bedford Park to the north acquired one in 1890. In 1912, lured by the promise of streetcar connectivity, all three communities chose annexation to the City of Toronto. Soon afterward, Oulcott's Hotel was purchased and refurbished to serve as the North Toronto post office and home delivery was introduced to the area. The former hotel was demolished during the depression and the current building opened in 1936, the year of Edward VIII's brief and uncrowned reign. In its basement, the same one that houses Mr. Hooker's marvellous museum, can yet be seen some wainscoting remaining from the old hotel that witnessed so many changes in our now vast city.



Edward left his mark on Toronto in other ways. A month after his first visit in August of 1919, the newly completed bridge over the Don was named the Prince Edward Viaduct in his honour. On a second visit, in August of 1927, the Prince of Wales – accompanied by his brother Albert, Duke of York (and future King George VI) – cut the ribbon on a new eastern entrance to the CNE grounds: Princes' Gate. The one-cent stamp at left was never issued. The nautical one, reproduced in Mr. Hooker's museum, is a fanciful creation.



## A Lifetime – Day by Day: Five Women and their Diaries



From the school-age scribbling of Martha (Marty) Hastie to the middle-aged musings of Phoebe Gregg about her daughter Bessie's children, these diaries provide intimate glimpses into the lives of women in Ontario during the latter half of the 19th century. All members of the middle and upper classes – Beatrice Edgar (above, centre) was the daughter of Sir James Edgar, a Member of Parliament – these five women had the time and education to record the details of their day-to-day experiences. **This exhibition**, organized and circulated by the Archives of Ontario, **will be on display at Toronto's First Post Office until September 30.**

## History Road Show



Beginning in late October, the Town of York Historical Society will be offering a travelling slide show on the history of old-town Toronto to the neighbourhood's present-day condominium and co-op residents. This is an opportunity to learn how Toronto began – right where you live. For more information about this program, please contact Toronto's First Post Office at 416-865-1833 or [tfpo@total.net](mailto:tfpo@total.net). If you build it, we will come!

## This Fall at Fort York

### Dance and Danceability

Fri. September 25, 7:30 to 10 p.m.



Learn how to dance Jane Austen style. Everyone is welcome to try some English Country Dancing at Fort York. Experience is not necessary; nor is a partner required.

Can you walk to the beat of a lively tune?  
*\$15 per person. Pre-registration is required.*  
*Telephone 416-392-6907 ext. 100.*

### Ghosts of the Garrison

Fri. and Sat. October 16, 17, 23, 24, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.



Tour the grounds of Fort York at night, and hear stories from some ghostly visitors. Great fun for the family...but not too spooky for the younger crowd. Suggested for 5 years of age and up.  
*Tickets \$10 per adult, senior or youth, \$5 per child.*

## Write Your Memoirs – Everybody Can!



### Fall Workshop Series at Montgomery's Inn

Join memoirists at work, from beginning writer to polished professional. Work toward the completion of your autobiography with Gayle Dzis, a memoir instructor for nineteen years.

#### ***Beginners, write your life history.***

Ten Saturdays: September 25th to December 2nd  
9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

#### ***Return and complete your story.***

Ten Saturdays: September 25th to December 2nd  
1:00 to 3:45 p.m.

Fee: \$150 plus GST

For more information call Gayle Dzis 905-270-2159.  
To register call 416-394-8113.

# St. George's Hall, *from page 1*

The first constitution of the St. George's Society stated its objectives "to unite Englishmen and their descendants...for mutual and friendly intercourse and for affording to such Englishmen and Welshmen as may stand in need of it, advice and counsel, and pecuniary assistance." In an era predating government social assistance, such societies and lodges helped to care for the widows and orphans of members, to pay for funeral expenses, and to support the injured and unemployed among them. Interestingly, By-Law VIII in 1855 stressed that, "The introduction of political or religious subjects, or their discussion, shall never be allowed at any meeting of the society."



The Arts and Letters Club has occupied St. George's Hall since 1920, renting the building from the St. George's Society until purchasing it in 1986. Although the name "St. George's Hall" remains carved in stone above the entrance to this day, the Club hired local architects Sproatt and Rolph to remodel the interior when they first moved in. The hall was redecorated in Tudor style, with a baronial fireplace, timbered ceiling and a choir loft. A stage was later added.

After 1986 the Arts and Letters Club carried out extensive renovations while preserving the hall's heritage character. In addition to general repairs, the washrooms were extensively remodelled and an elevator was installed to improve accessibility. Today a volunteer House Committee manages the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the building.

The Arts and Letters Club was formalized in 1908 out of a loose association of men interested in conversation and the arts – the latter including literature, architecture, music, painting, sculpture, photography and "stage."

The Group of Seven were among its most prominent early members, J.E.H. MacDonald being the most active and the designer of the crest. Despite the Club's more creative (and often humorous) take on the traditional British men's club, it was not until 1985 that women were allowed to become members. In 2008 the Club's 100th anniversary was celebrated with the publication of an excellent history, *The Great Adventure: 100 Years at the Arts & Letters Club*, written by Margaret McBurney – a member since 1987.

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

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Charitable Reg. No. 108101627RT0001  
Newsletter Editor: Janet Walters  
ISSN 1481-8922

### Hours of operation:

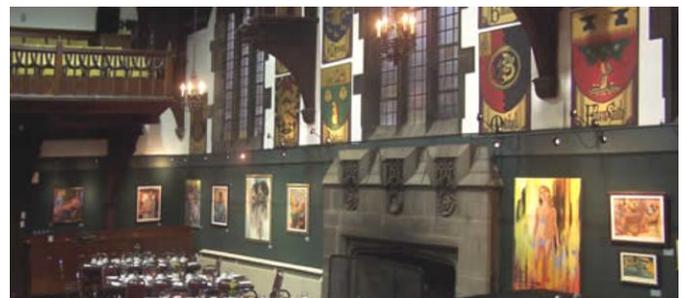
Monday to Friday: 9-4

Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

**The Post Office will be closed October 11–12 for Thanksgiving and November 11 for Remembrance Day.**

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.



## 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 McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy (President), Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg and Elaine Tipping.