

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

March 2010

Vol. XXVI No. 1

FORMER PALACE STREET SCHOOL FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE



On the southeast corner of Front and Cherry Streets sits a mongrel of a red-brick building. Depending on which direction you approach it from, it might be a warehouse, a train station or an old hotel. Despite its cobbled-together appearance, when the westering

sun strikes its most mysterious façade it is strangely beautiful and evocative of one knows not what, exactly. This place, surrounded by almost nothing, is known to most of us by the name of its most recent incarnation, the Canary Restaurant. Operated by the Vlahos family since 1965, that venerable “greasy spoon” served its last meal three years ago, a victim of the closure of the Bayview extension.

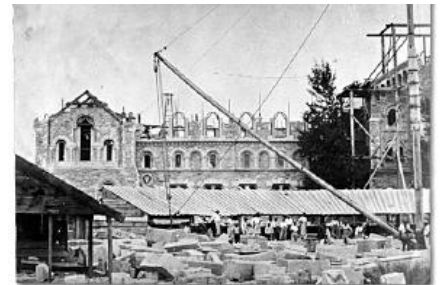
At the core of this hybrid structure on Cherry Street is a two-room schoolhouse that dates back 150 years. Although is hard now to imagine it so, this desolate area was a densely occupied residential neighbourhood in 1858. So much so that the Toronto Board of Education felt it required a larger school than the one Enoch Turner had built on Trinity Street a decade earlier. The Palace Street School, designed by Joseph Sheard, opened in 1859 and a second storey was added ten years later (William Irving, architect). Boys and girls were taught separately. It was a working-class area and the local employers were distilleries such as Gooderham and Worts, breweries – including Enoch Turner’s – brickyards and the railways.

Continued on page 2



University College Ahead of Its Time

Frederick William Cumberland spent a year in Europe studying college buildings in order to come up with his design for Toronto’s University College. The resultant building, constructed between 1856 and 1858, is one of the country’s earliest examples of Romanesque Revival Architecture. Elaborate carvings embellish both the interior and exterior walls, and its cavernous entryways are more reminiscent of Oxford than of anything that existed in Toronto at the time. Of course it was barely *in* Toronto: it was far to the north of most settlement in the 1850s, and presided over vast open swards of lawn.



Continued on page 8

Palace Street School, *from page 1*

Neighbourhoods evolve. In the late 19th century the students were moved to another school further north and the building was remodelled for use as a hotel. The first addition was built by David Roberts Jr., architect in 1890 and the hotel was briefly operated by Mr. Robert Irvine as the Irvine House. Irvine was succeeded by Mr. J. J. Darcy and a further addition and refurbishment was completed by Sproat and Rolph, architects. Mr. Darcy, as was



reported in the publication *Toronto: The Queen City of Canada*, conducted business “in a manner greatly redounding to his credit. The house contains upwards of 40 neatly furnished sleeping rooms, a well equipped dining room and office. The very best to be obtained in the market is served daily in the dining room, and in the well kept bar can always be found the choicest imported wines, liquors, ales, beer, porter, stout and cigars.”



It is in the street-corner section of the building that one can see vestiges of the grandeur that once attributed to the establishment known variously as the Darcy Hotel, the Eastern Star and the Cherry Street Hotel. As the neighbourhood became increasingly given over to industrial use in the early 20th century, the hotel eventually closed and the building sat vacant from 1910 to 1922. In 1923 the wing along Cherry Street was constructed for the offices of Canadian National Railways. Various manufacturing entities occupied it over the next few decades until the Canary opened in 1965 to serve the people who lived and worked in the area. In the 1980s, the surrounding industrial buildings were largely demolished in anticipation of an urban renewal plan that never materialized. The restaurant struggled, but survived, until the advance construction of the West Don Lands development closed off the area and even the film crews it had come to rely on as customers disappeared too.

Then, in November of 2009, came the announcement that Toronto was to host the Pan Am Games in 2015. This means that the West Don Lands will move very quickly to develop the area for the accommodation of athletes in the short term, and to provide housing for Torontonians in the long term. None of the building's current tenants – mostly artists, many of whom are employed in the film industry – has a lease longer than two years. They are concerned about the building's future, despite the assurances of Cindy Wilkey, Chair of the West Don Lands Committee, that it will be “very vigilant about the preservation of this building.” The fact that the façade is visible in promotional drawings for the Pan Am athletes' village is of little consolation. As a pre-emptive move, having received permission from the owners (Ontario



Above is a view of the interior of the Canary restaurant in 2005 as seen in the film *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* about the life of rapper 50 Cent.

Realty Corporation), a group of the tenants has begun to gut and refurbish the corner section of the building for use as a film location and event space. It is their hope that this rehabilitation, which involved opening up windows and doorways long boarded over, will shed light on the former glory of the place and increase its chances of being saved in its entirety.

On the Waterfront



Toronto was once a city defined by its geographic location on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Contemporary Torontonians are fond of lamenting the disconnect between their city and its waterfront, and one of the most often cited culprits is the Gardiner Expressway. A new artwork installed on the under-belly of a thirty-metre section of the maligned highway, south of Fort York, not only makes that space appealing, but draws a connection to the city's early beginnings.

Watertable, commissioned by the City of Toronto and created by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak marks the original shoreline of Lake Ontario. The artists used undulating strings of blue LED lights and sound recordings made on the far side of Toronto's islands to mimic the lapping of waves. They hope it will prompt viewers to reflect on a time when "Everyone who came to this area...arrived by water." Their artists' statement further suggests that *Watertable* "will raise the dead shoreline to haunt



the living, forcing the wall of glass-skinned condo towers to forever check their back."

Another recent nod to the City's original shoreline is a spectacular new park on Fort York Boulevard designed by Canadian author and visual artist

Douglas Coupland. The park, Canoe Landing, is named for its most prominent feature: a giant ten-metre-long red canoe visible from the Gardiner. The canoe is large enough and high enough for those standing in it to see over the Expressway to Lake Ontario. The park itself is the centerpiece for a 20-hectare development of condo towers built on former railway land. The canoe sits on a hill made from earth excavated for parking garages.

As Lisa Rochon noted a year ago, "Doug Coupland is all over Toronto." The Vancouver artist's 2008 *Monument to the War of 1812* is not far away, on the corner of Fleet Street and Lakeshore Boulevard. Located at the foot of the "Malibu" condo tower and directly south of Fort York, this work features two greatly oversized toy soldiers. One is British and golden and upright. The other, American, and silver in colour, has apparently been knocked over. More specifically, the standing figure wears the uniform of the 1813 Newfoundland Regiment, and the one lying on his back, that of the 16th U.S. Infantry Regiment. The two regiments would have met in April of 1813 during the Battle of York.



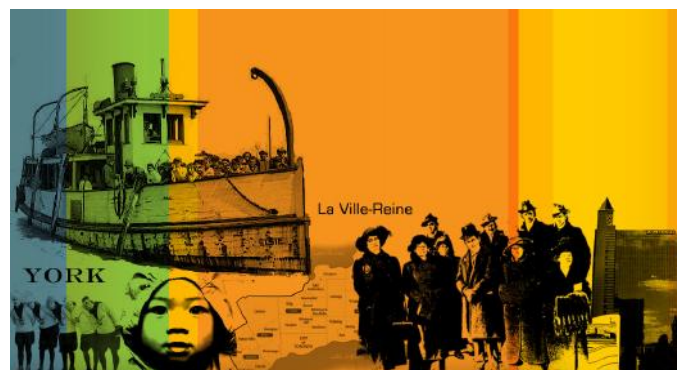
While slightly cheeky, the toy soldiers are not meant to make light of military tradition. Their simple iconic forms, like that of the red canoe, are intended for what will be, in the main, a drive-by audience. All three of these works are clever, concise and accessible and they get people talking about the history of Toronto. And that can't be a bad thing, can it?

Fort York's New Visitor Centre Coming by 2012



In anticipation of the bicentennial of the War of 1812, Fort York is undergoing a revitalization of the entire 43-acre National Historic Site in which it is located. The architectural jewel in the crown of this development will be a new visitors' centre. The winning design, chosen in December of last year, is by Vancouver's Patkau Architects Inc. in conjunction with Toronto-based Kearns Mancini. It recreates, in weathered steel, the escarpment that rose from the 19th-century shoreline of Lake Ontario and defined the fort's original geography. The approach under the Gardiner Expressway, there at its highest elevation, will become a public park. A carpet of sea grass, in conjunction with the art installation *Watertable* (see page 3) will allude to the lake that once lapped at the base of the bluff.

Located outside of the walled fort, the new visitor centre will, in addition to its interpretive function, provide space for administrative and support services such as washrooms, a gift shop and a restaurant. This will free up those sections of the fort now devoted to these uses, and allow visitor access to its historic buildings in their entirety for the first time since it became a museum in 1934.

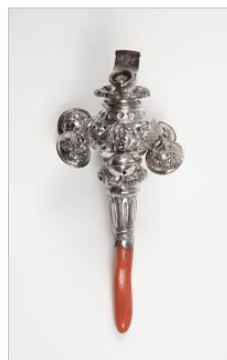


Toronto Museum Project

Launched at historic Fort York on March 6, the Toronto Museum Project Online is an interactive website that began with 100 Torontonians each engaging with an artifact in order to tell a story. Collectively, and joined by those who choose to further contribute in the same way, these are intended to broaden the dialogue about what could and should be included in a Toronto Museum.

The original participants were given access to the City of Toronto's various heritage collections. Some chose, rather, to address an artifact from among their personal possessions. Each, however, uses the object in question as the genesis for a story that underlines why Toronto has become such a fascinating, diverse and liveable place.

Evelyn G. (no last names are given), for example, chose a silver baby rattle given as a Christening gift to one of Timothy Eaton's children in 1884. This prompted her to muse about baby gifts over the years and in various cultural contexts. Before coming to Toronto in the 1960s from Sierra Leone, Evelyn – originally from the Barbados – had lived in London, England, where she trained as a nurse and mid-wife. Now a mother and grandmother, she fully understands how Christening gifts can become valuable keepsakes from one generation to the next.



TMP Online was made possible with the support of the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canadian Culture Online Strategy. Go to www.torontomuseumproject.ca.

New Face on the Weekends

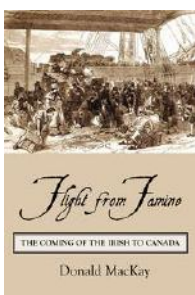


Kevin Both joined the staff of Toronto's First Post Office this month. Kevin is a recent graduate of the Urban Studies program at York University where, among other pursuits, he examined the process of neighbourhood building in the West Don Lands and the redevelopment of the Don Valley Brickworks. He

has been a Doors Open Toronto volunteer and, over the past three years, has conducted walking tours of Toronto's downtown core under the aegis of Bruce Bell Tours. Kevin also has considerable retail experience, and that makes him a perfect fit for the hybrid environment of the post-office museum.

Kevin will be replacing Meredith Hogan who, having recently completed her Public Relations Certificate at Humber College, has now secured full-time employment in that field.

New in the Gift Shop



Flight from Famine: The Coming of the Irish to Canada

By Donald McKay

Dundurn Press (2009), 368 pages, \$29.99

This is the story of the migration that brought a million Irish to Canada in the first half of the 19th century. Many arrived penniless, hoping to "make good" in the new world.

Others died at sea or got no farther than a grave on Grosse Île. Nevertheless, by the time of Confederation the Irish were a well established presence in the country.



Toronto's 175th Birthday Poster

Old Town Toronto (Promotional) Alliance (2009) \$20.00

We still have on hand a few of these magnificent posters that reproduce the map created in 1934 by Ethel Georgens Adelaide Foster

in celebration of the city's centennial. It charmingly depicts the city as Ms. Foster imagined it would have looked in 1834 and, while not entirely accurate, it is remarkably researched and detailed.

Serendipity Brings Historic Images to Light

In January we received a phone call from Graham Garrett. He introduced himself as a photography historian researching, with Robert Lansdale, the life and work of Eli John Palmer (1820-1894). Palmer had been a prominent photographer in Toronto during the latter half of the 19th century. Despite this, examples of his work have been hard to find.

Wanting to help, Janet Walters at Toronto's First Post Office offered to circulate an e-mail to fellow members of the Ontario Museum Association. From there, word spread to the Archives Association of Ontario, eventually reaching Marilyn Armstrong-Reynolds, an archivist in Kingsville. By coincidence, she had just become reacquainted with some local history collections while moving them to new premises at the library. Intrigued, she revisited a 150-year-old Woodbridge-Boyle family album that had recently been donated to the Kingsville-Gosfield Heritage Society, being of no apparent genealogical interest to the Woodbridge family. There she discovered 52 images by Palmer – "a veritable gold mine," according to Bob Lansdale. The Boyles, it turns out, are descendants of Palmer's through the marriage of a daughter. Janet Ferguson, a Boyle and a member of the Heritage Society, was able to provide our historians with information about her ancestors as well as an additional photo album containing five more Palmer portraits. It is hoped that a portrait of Eli himself will be discovered among them.



Left to right: Robert Lonsdale, Graham Garrett, Marilyn Armstrong-Reynolds and Janet Ferguson
Photo: Jeff Ingratta

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT Rare Canadian Stamp Sells for Record-Setting Amount

The 12-penny black of 1851 is often mistakenly identified as Canada's rarest stamp. While that is not the case, "one of the finest original gum examples" (according to the catalogue) recently sold at an auction in New York City for \$260,000 US – more than double the pre-sale estimate. While the winning bidder chose to remain anonymous, the owner of the collection from which the stamp came is billionaire investor William Gross. Proceeds from the sale will go towards the creation, at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, of a 12,000-square-foot gallery to exhibit the cream of Gross's collection.



Puzzles, Pinpricks and Knots of Love

The paper valentines typical of the early nineteenth century were not child's play, either to create or in

terms of their occasionally ribald content. Puzzle purses, with their intricate origami-like folds, are just one of three types of valentine created by participants in a workshop at Toronto's First Post Office on February 13th.

This annual program, designed and presented by Miriam Smith, grows in popularity every year. This last one was actually oversubscribed, with one young couple



having come all the way from Ottawa to attend.

An Evening With William Lyon Mackenzie

Paulette Touby chats with fellow newspaper publisher William Lyon Mackenzie over a sumptuous spread at St. Lawrence Hall on March 6. "Mack" had just delivered a witty diatribe on the trials he endured as Toronto's somewhat reluctant first mayor.



The first half of the evening's program was devoted to looking back over the city's 175th anniversary year. Those lucky enough to be in attendance were each given a copy of the poster (see page 5) after learning something of its history from Michael Comstock. Following the intermission, the focus turned to the



next milestone anniversary to be celebrated: the 2012 bicentennial of the War of 1812-14. Members of the Fort York Guard were on duty, and plans for the Fort's new interpretive centre, due to be completed in time for the festivities, were on display. As the last act, the Halton Hills

band Random Roads demonstrated their genuine love of Canadian history and the characters that shaped our past as they applied their spine-tingling harmonies to songs such as *Tecumseh's Lament*, *Laura Secord*, *Come All Ye Bold Canadians* and *Bishop John Strachan*.



Photos: Brad Smith

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: Mark Your Calendars

THE ST. LAWRENCE WARD: A Pictorial View of Toronto's Oldest Neighbourhood Extended Until April 17



The Market Gallery presents an exhibition focusing on the history of Toronto's oldest neighbourhood. Maps, photographs and art serve to illustrate the architecture, economic development and political life of this area. Showcased in this exhibit are early views such as *Fish Market, Toronto* (1840-42) by William Bartlett, Goad's insurance atlases from the

late 1800s, and photographs of King Street East in the 1870s when it was Toronto's main shopping street.
The Market Gallery, 95 Front Street East, 2nd Floor. Open Tuesday to Friday 10-4, Saturday 9-4.

TORONTO'S ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY: WILLIAM THOMAS AND JOHN LYLE

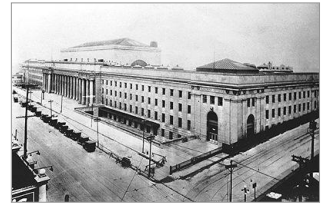


Tuesday, May 4, 7:00 pm

Between 1843 and 1860, British-trained architect **William Thomas** designed and built over one hundred buildings in Canada, many of which are still standing today and house religious, governmental, educational, commercial and cultural activities. Author Glenn McArthur uses drawings, prints and photographs to illustrate Thomas's work in Toronto – including St. Lawrence Hall and St. Michael's Cathedral – as well as in Quebec City, Hamilton, Halifax, London, Guelph, Chatham, and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Tuesday, May 11, 7:00 pm

John M. Lyle was one of Canada's pre-eminent 20th-century architects. Moving from New York to Toronto in 1905, just after the city's devastating fire, he lived through the Great Depression, two world wars and the rise of modernism. His designs for Union Station and the Royal Alexandra Theatre expressed a personalized and original approach to form and detail. In this illustrated talk, author Glenn McArthur describes how Lyle paved the way for a uniquely Canadian architectural style.



Sunday, May 16, 1:00 pm

Join architectural historian Marta O'Brien for a downtown walking tour of buildings by Thomas and Lyle.

\$15 individual lecture or tour (\$12 for members), and \$40 for the series (\$33 for members)

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street near King East and Parliament

For information and reservations, contact Linda McLean at 416-863-0010 or linda.mclean@heritagetrust.on.ca



APRON-MANIA

Saturday, May 8, 2:00 pm

Do you have a passion for pinafores? Join the Culinary Historians and the Costume Society of Ontario to learn about their history and variety, from utilitarian kitchen coverings to glamorous 1950s hostess aprons. Bring your favourite apron, old or new.

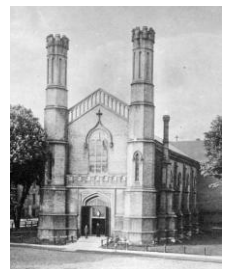
\$10 members; \$12 non-members. Campbell House Museum, 160 Queen St. W. Space is limited; pre-registration recommended. Contact Campbell House Museum 416-597-0227 or campbellhouse@bellnet.ca

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday, May 17, 7:00 pm

The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting this year at the Church of the Holy Trinity. The church was built in 1847, and its first Rector was Henry Scadding. Now it is surrounded by the Eaton Centre, saved – by a dedicated congregation with support from the wider community – from demolition at the time of the mall's construction.

10 Trinity Square. RSVP to Toronto's First Post Office, 416-865-1833.



University College, *from page 1*

A fire on St. Valentine's Day in 1890 destroyed the east wing and the east end of the south façade, but the restoration work by Mr. David Brash Dick was completed by 1892. The main building of University College – designated a National Historic Site in 1968 – has been augmented over the years by others, including three residences. And an addition (the Laidlaw addition) was built in the 1960s. The first permanent building at the University of Toronto, UC remained the only building on campus until 1889 when the Biological Building was constructed, also by D.B. Dick. Despite the encroachment of other colleges and the urban development that has grown up around it, University College – with its lawn in front and playing field behind – still holds pride of place on UT's St. George campus.



But University College is of historical significance for more reasons than its architecture. The founding college of the University of Toronto, it was established by provincial legislation in 1853, with 50 male students, as Upper Canada's first non-sectarian institution of higher learning. Its Literary and Athletic Society, established in 1854, was the first democratically elected student government in Canada. Last but not least, it is the setting of one of Toronto's most famous ghost stories – a chilling tale involving a jilted lover, his thwarted attempt at revenge, murder, and skeletal remains found under a staircase following the 1890 fire.

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Front Page: Construction of University College, Toronto, 1857
Lantern slide, Photographer unknown
William H. Hammond Fonds, Archives of Ontario, I0021812
Top Right: University College, University of Toronto, 1917
City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 306
Above: University College during the Second World War
University of Toronto Archives

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

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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 April 2–5 for Easter, and
May 23–24 for the Victoria Day long weekend.**

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