

NEWSLETTER

The Town of York Historical Society

July 2011

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TORONTO'S INDUSTRIAL PAST UNCOVERED



Archaeologists at work on the site of Context Development's new project at the foot of Bathurst Street

Rampant development has once again brought Toronto face to face with its own history. This time, condo developers working just southeast of Fort York have unearthed the foundations of an engine house built by the Grand Trunk Railway in

1855-56. Within its cruciform footprint, the remains of brick kilns tell of how locomotive parts were once hand forged of wrought iron. Outside, the wooden bases of outhouses still reek. Discarded bottles and bits of crockery remind us of the men who worked and ate their lunches here, perhaps watching the transfer of cargo between schooners and train cars on nearby Queen's Wharf.

The railway transformed Toronto from a warehousing centre into an industrial powerhouse in the middle of the 19th century. This engine house appears on a number of old maps and plans, including an 1876 bird's-eye view of the city (see detail on page 4). Built to service and repair locomotives, it included a turntable, a smithy and a pump house. As Grand Trunk competed for travel to the American Midwest, the building also briefly housed a passenger terminal, at this the starting point of its westbound track. For months after it was built, a horse-drawn "shuttle" transported travellers to and from its eastbound terminus, near the Don Valley.

Continued on page 4

1853 Schooner Found on Lake Bottom



Photo: shipwreckworld.com

A team out of Rochester, New York, has discovered the wreck of a Canadian schooner sitting upright, masts intact, on the frigid bottom of Lake Ontario. Built in 1853 at Portsmouth, Ontario, the Queen of the Lakes was already an old girl when she set sail out of Rochester on November 28, 1906, with 480 tons of coal destined for Queen's University in Kingston. Encountering a fierce nor'easter, the ship's weakened hull began taking on more water than the bilge pumps could handle. The crew of six scrambled into the yawl hung off the stern, and were only fifty feet distant when the Queen went down just ten miles from the lake's southern shore. Battling ten-foot waves they eventually managed to row, cold and exhausted, to safety. Less fortunate were the ship's owners, Richardson and Sons of Kingston, who held no insurance on either the vessel or its cargo, then valued at \$5,000 and \$1,700 respectively.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT 28th Annual General Meeting

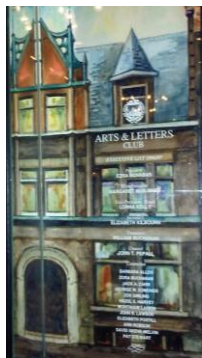


The 28th Annual General Meeting of the Town of York Historical Society was held on May 11 in the Great Hall of the historic Arts and Letters Club. Our hostess – and the recipient of the fourth annual Sheldon Godfrey award – was Margaret McBurney, author of *The Great Adventure: 100 Years at the Arts and Letters Club*. Following the business meeting, and some refreshment, members were led



by Ms. McBurney on a guided tour of the wonderful old Elm-Street building that has been home to the ALC for over a century. It began at the top in the art studio, redolent with oil paint and containing not one but two upright grand pianos, and continued down through the boardroom, library and archives.

Art was everywhere. Not just in the form of sculpture and painting, but also in the drawn portraits of every club president (including Ms. McBurney herself, 1998-2000), the banners by J.E.H. MacDonald that hang in the Hall, and in ubiquitous hand-lettered and illustrated ephemera such as event programs, executive lists and humorous poems.



It was an enriching experience, and one that offered a glimpse into the private social lives of some of our most colourful and creative historical figures.

Photos by Craig Akerfeldt.

Doors Open Toronto



As usual it was all-hands-on-deck at Toronto's First Post Office during Doors Open Toronto, held the weekend of May 28-29. Among the hundreds who visited, one of the earliest was University of Toronto PhD candidate Michael Wilcox. Mr. Wilcox's thesis concerns the Christian Brothers who operated the De La Salle Institute on these premises, and those immediately to the west, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He wondered why the 1871 school building was not adorned with an historical plaque, as are both the post office and the former Bank of Upper Canada on the corner. He had not been gone half an hour when Andrew Stanton showed up and proceeded to install a Heritage Toronto plaque honouring the former Catholic boys school!



A Visit From Alice



There are few things the staff at Toronto's First Post Office enjoys more than a visit from mail artist extraordinaire, Alice So from San Francisco, CA. Having dropped by on June 25, she is seen here with the dozen or so letters she had penned to various friends in her broad postal community. Alice has recently been having postal adventures in France, Italy, the Czech Republic and India. She has created a series of marvellous little chapbooks on her impressions of the Indian mail.

Interpretive Centre to Occupy



Former Porsche Showroom

At a standing-room-only event on June 23, the Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism and Culture, unveiled plans to reuse the former Porsche dealership on the first parliament site as an interpretive centre to open in February of 2012. “Next year’s bicentennial is an ideal time to draw attention to the importance of Ontario’s first parliament buildings, which were destroyed in battle during the war of 1812,” said Dr. Thomas H.B. Symons, Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT). “We are delighted that the new commemorative centre will showcase this history, exploring the evolution of our democracy and significance of the war, both of which have played major roles in shaping the province and the country we know today.”

Many in attendance would have been more delighted to hear that a proposed land swap with PNF Holdings had finally cleared the site of private owners, but this was not the case. Instead, the existing building will be adapted in order to provide some interpretation in time for the War of 1812 bicentennial. The vast front showroom will accommodate exhibits and provide space for educational activities and special events. The remainder of the building will be leased, to assist the Heritage Trust with operating costs.

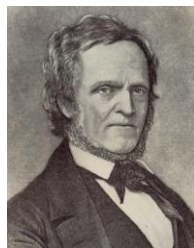


Top: Artist’s rendering of the interpretive centre signage, courtesy OHT
Above left: Joe Gill of Friends of Fort York attended in period costume
Below: Members of the Old Town Toronto Network bask in the spring sunshine outside the car dealership following their April 14 meeting



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Rebel Remembered: The Legacy of William Lyon Mackenzie



Writer and historian Chris Raible will give the first annual Toronto History Lecture in memory of the late Paul McGrath. McGrath was Chair of the Toronto Branch of the OGS and the staff genealogist for the television series *Ancestors in the Attic*.

When: Thursday, August 4, 7:30 p.m.

Where: City of Toronto Archives, 255 Spadina Road

Cost: Free, but reservations required

Registration: 416-392-0558 or tinyurl.com/6hshhsx



Tweed! The Musical

Tweed! is a story of small-town Ontario and the lives and loves that were lost and found there. This beautifully

staged, all-Canadian production comes with a talented cast, original live music, thrilling choreography and breathtaking production numbers. It is a story that will touch your heart.

When: Thursdays to Sundays, August 18-28, 8 p.m.

Saturday matinées August 20 and 27, 2 p.m.

Where: Todmorden Mills Heritage Site, 67 Pottery Road

Cost: Admission is free

Information: 416-504-7529 or tweedthemusical.com

Scotiabank Buskerfest

Now in its 12th year, this festival has evolved into one of the largest of its kind in north America. There is something for everyone: silent comedy and slapstick, daredevils and magicians, highly skilled circus acts and a wide variety of clowns, contortionists, acrobats, aerialists, puppets, fire and some things there are no words to describe. Food vendors from the market and local restaurants are on hand, as well as a wide variety of artisans exhibiting and selling their work.



When: August 25 – 28

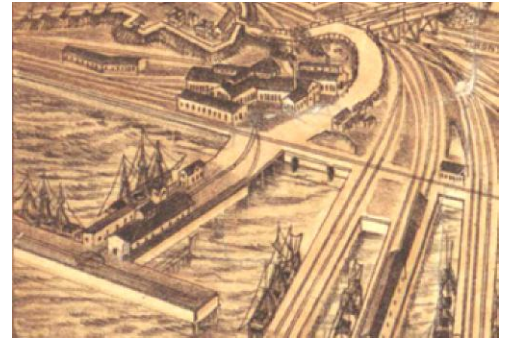
Where: St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood

Cost: By donation to Epilepsy Toronto

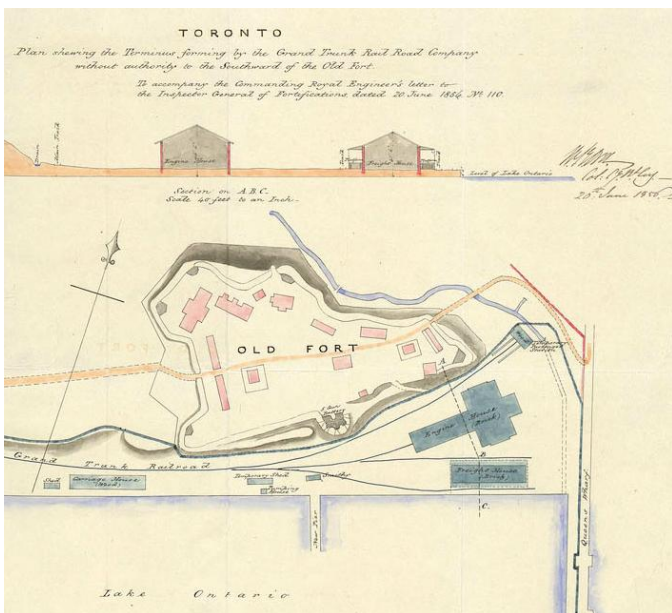
Information: info@torontobuskerfest.com

Industrial Past, from page 1

The site of the engine house was once occupied by a blockhouse built in the 1790s. As Toronto reinvented itself, the brick and masonry railway building was subsequently buried in a push to move the shoreline further south. It has now come to light in the haste to profit from housing development. In 2005, the City of Toronto mandated the screening of sites expected to contain archaeological resources. In 2006 we related the discovery, courtesy of time allotted by Malibu Investments Ltd., of portions of Queen's Wharf dating from 1833. Later that year, pre-construction for the TIFF Bell Lightbox complex brought us the story of the 1819 hospital that witnessed so many sick and dying "famine Irish" pass through it and its adjacent fever sheds in the summer of 1847. The current excavation has, in addition to the engine house, uncovered parts of a channelling system, constructed much like Queen's Wharf out of massive timber cribs, designed to divert the flow of Garrison Creek away from the railway building. What we know about all these sites we owe to the archaeologists and historians tasked with their hasty documentation and interpretation before the bulldozers resume their work.



The development in this case is the "Library District," a joint venture between Context Development Inc. and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. It will comprise a 29-storey condo tower, social housing, a library and the aptly named "Mouth of the Creek Park." Some parts of the crumbling engine-house foundation, it is hoped, will be reconstructed in the park to commemorate the industrial patrimony of Toronto's waterfront. "Crumbs!" a fellow built-heritage enthusiast was heard to mutter at a recent event. "They give us crumbs."



Detail of map dated June 20, 1856 showing new Grand Trunk Railway facilities including a cruciform brick engine house at Queen's Wharf, LAC

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

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Monday to Friday: 9-4

Weekends: 10-4

Closed on holiday Mondays and the Sundays preceding them.

The Post Office will be closed July 31 and August 1 for the long weekend, and September 4 and 5 for Labour 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 Tourism and Culture; our members, donors and customers; and Canada Post.

The Town of York Historical Society

Individual Membership	\$25
Family Membership	\$40
Lifetime Membership	\$250

Directors: Patricia Braithwaite, Sheldon Godfrey, Meredith Hogan, Ewa Jarmicka, Judith McEvel, Jennifer McIlroy, Councillor Pam McConnell, Melville Olsberg and Elaine Tipping.