

# NEWSLETTER

## The Town of York Historical Society

April 2018

Vol. XXXIV No. 2

### UPPER CANADA'S FIRST PARLIAMENT RE-SURFACES

On February 6, Toronto's First Post Office staff joined a full house in the St. Lawrence Market's temporary tent to hear the latest plans for the location of Upper Canada's first parliament buildings. This was just the first of the public consultations, followed by a workshop and walking tour in March. "These events were all very well attended. We were pleased to see some younger people interested in the site," reports SoMei Quan, a Project Manager with the City of Toronto, who is leading the First Parliament Project. "The City is undertaking a Heritage Interpretation Strategy and Master Plan. It took several years to obtain funding for this work. The City has started this process of re-imagining a new future for the site."



Photo courtesy of Toronto Archives.

The First Parliament project began at the urging of heritage advocate Rollo Myers, former City Councillor Pam McConnell, and others. This small group managed to pull together the funding, expertise, and goodwill enough for a small archeological dig in 2000. Astoundingly, the excavation found results almost immediately.

*Continued on page 5*

*Learn more about the First Parliament Project on May 7th at the Town of York Historical Society AGM. Register or RSVP at [tyhsagm.eventbrite.ca](http://tyhsagm.eventbrite.ca) More details on page 4.*

### TORONTO'S CRUMBLING SCHOOLS



Toronto's schools are failing, structurally. The cost of the backlog of repairs has reached \$4.05 billion, and more than 100 – that's about one quarter – of Toronto's schools are considered critically compromised, with many more not far behind.

This was the situation described at a symposium organized by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario – Toronto Branch, and held at the City Adult Learning Centre on April 7. The school's auditorium displayed the sorry state of repair. Paint hung in great strips from the ceiling, the tile floors showed decades of grime, and teak wall panels that featured the crests of Canadian provinces were cracked and chipped.

*Continued on page 7*

## COMING UP

### At Toronto's First Post Office



#### **Himalayan Salt Watercolour Workshop: Tropical Ferns**

Thursday, April 26, 6:30-9:00 pm  
Hosted by artist Jennifer Fryer. Learn how to use watercolours with a "wet-on-wet" technique and how to use salts in your work. \$25  
[tropicalferns.eventbrite.ca](http://tropicalferns.eventbrite.ca)



#### **Jane's Walk: From Town to City in the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood**

Saturday, May 5, 12:00-1:30 pm  
Meet on the outdoor west balcony of St. Lawrence Market, above Market Street for a walking tour of 1830s York and early Toronto.  
*Free!*



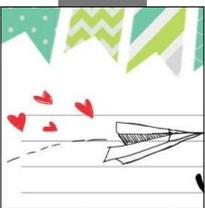
#### **Postcards: India Opening Reception**

Saturday, May 5, 2:00-4:00 pm  
*Read more information about Postcards: India on page 6.*  
*Free, please drop in!*



#### **Post-a-Letter Sundays**

May 6, and June 10, 1:00-4:00 pm  
A free, monthly drop-in for writers, correspondents, bullet journalers, and all those who would like dedicated writing time in good company.  
*Free, please drop in!*



#### **Paper Fair at the P.O.**

June 16  
Snag deals from local makers of Toronto's finest stationery, greeting cards, stickers, pins, art prints, postcards, and more!  
*Free admission!*

## TELL ME MORE!

The latest from Toronto's First Post Office and details on all these events can be found at [TownofYork.com](http://TownofYork.com)

## ELSEWHERE

### Events in Old Town Toronto and about Toronto History

#### **The World of Alias Grace: Architecture**

Gibson House Museum, 5172 Yonge Street  
April 28, 2:00-4:00 pm  
Explore the world of Margaret Atwood's novel *Alias Grace*. Join local history expert George Duncan for a discussion about the buildings and landscapes of Victorian Toronto. Using *Alias Grace* as a starting point we'll explore the architecture and development of Toronto and surrounding settlements, including Gibson House, an 1851 farmhouse. \$25  
[gibsonhousemuseum.streamintickets.com](http://gibsonhousemuseum.streamintickets.com)

#### **Enoch Turner Schoolhouse AGM: Distilling in Old Town Toronto**

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street  
April 30, 6:30 pm  
The legacy of the distilling industry in Old Toronto is instrumental to the fortunes of the city. Author Jordan St. John will explore the lives of the distilling men and women who made up a significant portion of the city's business and continue to do so today. \$10  
[enochturnerschoolhouse.ca](http://enochturnerschoolhouse.ca)

#### **Baking with Blossoms Workshop**

Mackenzie House Museum, 82 Bond Street  
Saturday, May 12, 9:30 am-12:30 pm  
Celebrate the blooming of May flowers. Explore the traditions of flower giving and preserving while making sweet treats with flowers such as lavender and dandelion on an 1860s wood stove. \$30  
[mackenziehouse.streamintickets.com](http://mackenziehouse.streamintickets.com)

#### **Doors Open Toronto**

At sites across the city, May 26-27  
One weekend every year Doors Open Toronto provides an opportunity to explore some of the most architecturally, historically, culturally and socially significant buildings across the city, many of which are not usually open to the public. The event also features walking tours, a speaker series, music series and other special programs. All activities are free. Full event details and a complete list of participating buildings will be released early in May.

# RECENTLY

## At Toronto's First Post Office and Around Town

### King Street: The Great Thoroughfare of Toronto

March 6, 1834 is the day that Toronto became a city, and the Town of York Historical Society celebrated the 184th anniversary of the day by taking a look at *King Street: The Great Thoroughfare of Toronto*. We were honoured to welcome architecture critic and urban affairs Columnist Christopher Hume, heritage advocate Rollo Myers, and City Transportation Services head Barbara Gray who spoke about King Street's rich history, the importance of Toronto's main streets, and the future of transportation on King.



We were also so happy to welcome a near sell-out crowd who filled St. Lawrence Hall's grand ballroom, and enthusiastically took part in the 1834 photo booth, Transit Bricks' Lego display, On the Bright Side's stamp art demonstration, and Mackenzie House's historic proof press, on which visitors produced their own souvenirs of the night.



Guests heartily partook of wonderful food from St. Lawrence Market vendor Scheffler's Delicatessen and prepared by Town of York Historical Society President Tom Arnold. Spirits were further raised with beverages from Henderson Brewing and Sparkplug Coffee. As usual, the famous Old Town Silent Auction garnered a lot of interest from the assembled, and many went home with something wonderful from Old Town businesses and other friends of the P.O. We thank our sponsors, donors, and guests so much for their support of the evening and of Toronto's First Post Office. Hope to see you all again next year for #TOs185th!



Our thanks also to the event sponsors Rockwerk Craft Stonemasonry, Semple Gooder Roofing, and the Sumach by Chartwell.

### Valentine's Paper Fair

Eager shoppers were able to shop some handmade goodies for them and their sweethearts when Toronto paper-goods makers gathered at the Post Office.



### Valentine's Bee

For those preferring the DIY approach, the Post Office was a-buzz during our Valentine's Bee with visitors busy creating sweet cards to make their honeys happy.

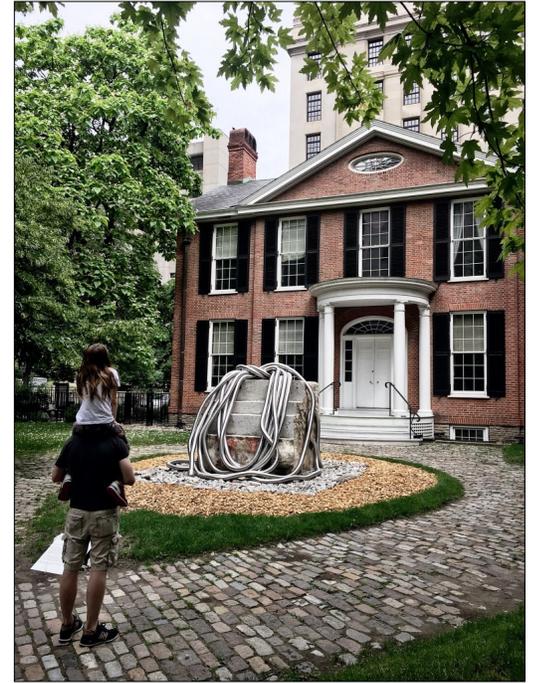
## WISH YOU WERE HERE?

Join our email list and receive details on our upcoming events delivered to your inbox every month. Subscribe at [TownofYork.com](http://TownofYork.com).



# TOWN OF YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

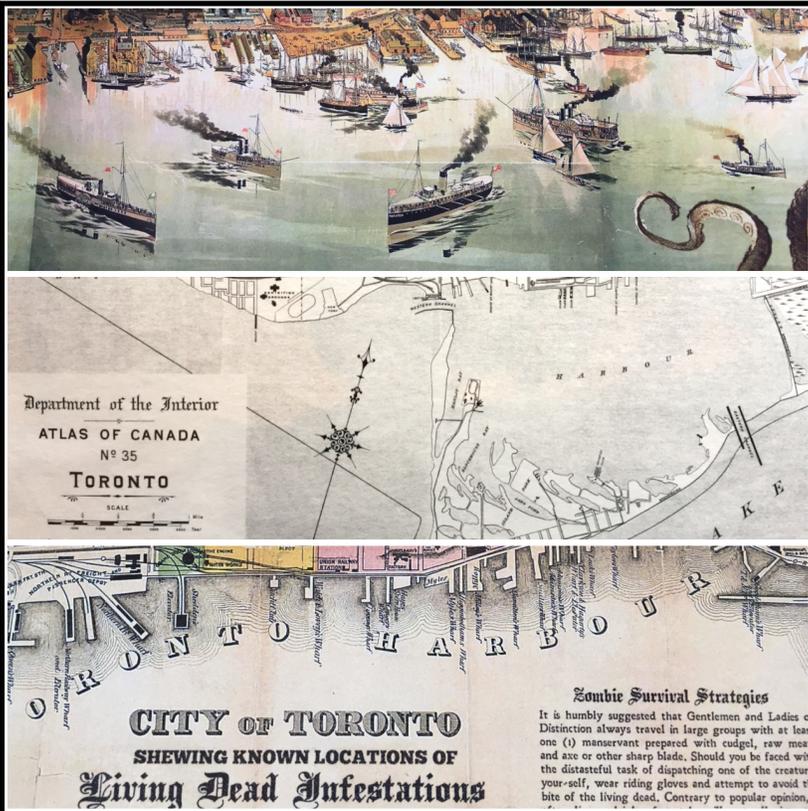
The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting on Monday, May 7, at Campbell House Museum at Queen and University. Following the business meeting, our special guest Dima Cook of EVOQ Architecture will speak about the First Parliament Site and North St. Lawrence Market projects.



Members of the Town of York Historical Society: FREE, non-members: \$10  
Campbell House Museum, 160 Queen St. West  
May 7, 2018, 7:00-8:30 pm

All are welcome but space is limited, so please claim your seat with a registration or RSVP at [tyhsagm.eventbrite.ca](http://tyhsagm.eventbrite.ca)

## WHAT'S HOT IN THE SHOP?



Maps! Our visitors can't get enough of these beautiful maps of historic and "historic" Toronto from our friends Storm and Shadow at Mythical Matters, and Alternate Histories. Perfect for home or office, but look closely... some are not all what they seem.

Lose yourself in these views of the Queen City. Discover the skyline of the 1854 shoreline. What lost buildings would your favourite routes have taken you past in 1910? Was your neighbourhood a red zone in the Living Dead Infestation of 1847?

If your home or office needs art, consider these and other early views of Toronto city life and early Canada, all now available in the shop and ready for gifting or framing.

As always, your purchases helps support Toronto artists, local makers and Toronto's First Post office.

# FIRST PARLIAMENT, *from page 1*

“I can honestly say we were shocked out of our skulls,” archeologist Ron Williamson told the Toronto Star. The dig found floorboards from the original building, a portion of a wall, and other objects dating from the 1780s to the 1820s. The floorboards were charred from the American sacking of York in 1813, but still in place after nearly 200 years. The archeologists believe there is more waiting to be found.

The current project stands on the shoulders of these discoveries. A group of organizations, led by the City of Toronto, is developing a Heritage Interpretation Strategy, which will in turn be used to create a Master Plan for the site, now back in public hands. The site is bounded by Front, Parliament, and Berkeley Streets, with Parliament Square Park to the south. Currently, the site is home to parking lots, a car wash, and a car dealership.



Ron Williamson and Rollo Myers in 2017 at the site of the 2000 archeological dig.  
Photo courtesy of Graeme Steel/CBC

In 1793, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe moved the colonial capital to the newly monickered Town of York, and designated the area, then just east of his original 10 blocks, for the first purpose-built Parliament buildings, built in 1797. These were twin brick buildings, connected by a walkway. There were plans to add more to these modest beginnings, but in 1813, an attack on York by American forces included setting fire to the buildings. A replacement Parliament burned in an accidental fire in 1824. The third Parliament was built to the west, and the old site lapsed into disuse.



The 2000 dig in progress.  
Photo courtesy of ASI.

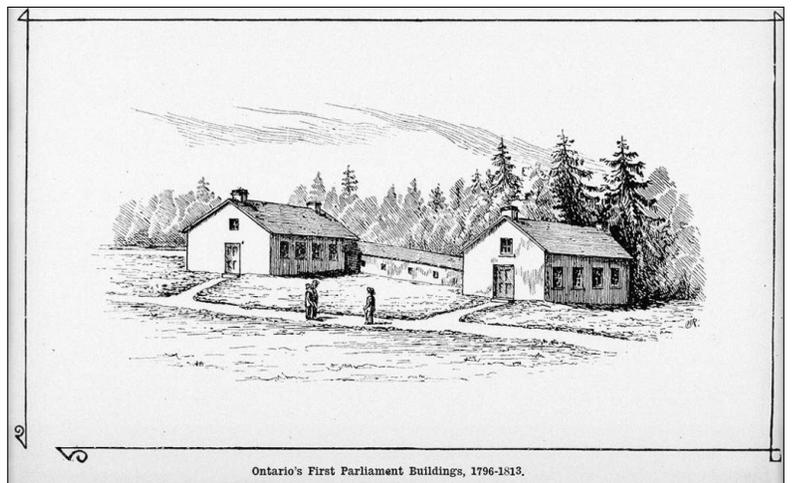
But those who have been participating in the public consultations have not been restricting themselves to Simcoe’s Parliament. They have also been considering the 12,000 years of Indigenous use of the land, the Home District Gaol, which stood on the site from 1840, and the use of the block by Consumer’s Gas, beginning in 1887.

The First Parliament group is consulting with the public and other stakeholders to learn more about the site and its potential uses. One confirmed use will be a branch of the Toronto Public Library, which will replace the St. Lawrence branch. How else will we interpret this corner of Toronto, this cornerstone of democracy in Canada? Only time will tell, but the community will have a say, too.

*Special thanks to SoMei Quan.*

*Please see [firstparliament.ca](http://firstparliament.ca) for more information on the project and its next steps..*

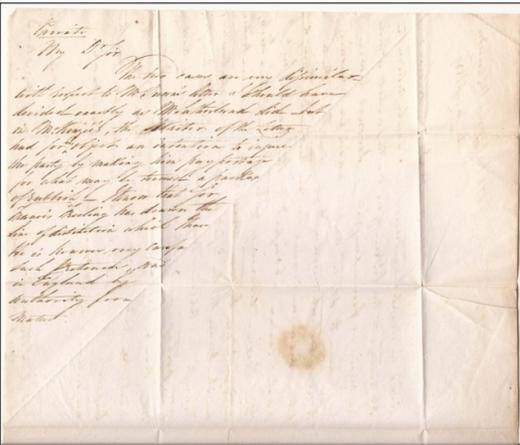
*We will also be hearing about the First Parliament Project at the Town of York Historical Society’s Annual General Meeting on May 7, 2018. See page 4 for more information.*



Ontario's First Parliament Buildings, 1796-1813.

# FROM THE COLLECTION: A LETTER FROM THE POSTMASTER

by TFPO Curator, Zoé Delguste-Cincotta



Letter and Cover, 2006.1.166

This letter, dating from 1829, was written by Postmaster James Scott Howard at “York PO” to "Thomas A. Stayner Esq. D.P.M.Y. Quebec". In this letter, Howard is reporting to Stayner, his superior and Postmaster General of Upper, and Lower Canada, about a disagreement on a refund paid to William Lyon Mackenzie. Mackenzie would go on to become the mayor of Toronto, but at this time he was a member of the House of Assembly for York Country.

The letter begins “Sir, Your letter of the 5 I have received and in compliance therewith I shall return the 3/9 postage [to] Mackenzie on the packet which he received from Kingston [...]”

A common practice at the time, this letter is comprised of a single sheet of cotton rag manuscript that has been written on both sides with brown ink, then folded into an envelope and sealed with wax. This was done to save on the price of paper and postage. The black ink double ringed cancellation on the cover notes “York U.C. 14 MAY 1829”.



## NEW EXHIBIT: POSTCARDS INDIA

by guest artist Linda Ward Selbie

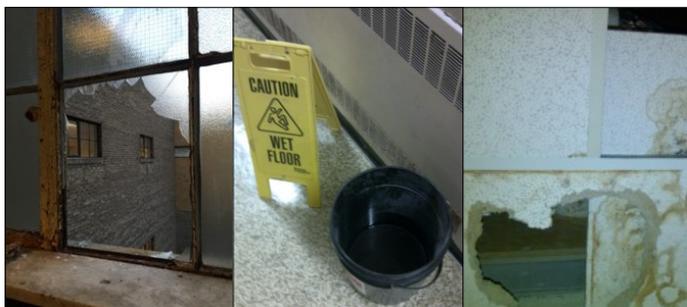
The idea for the exhibition began by imagining a contextual pairing of some of my documentary photographs with commemorative postage stamps. The picture selection was chosen to depict some historical tribal Indian culture as contrast to modernization. As everywhere, rural communities are the slowest to see change. All nations with an active postal mail system continue to depict cultural events of significance, almost as a form of folk art in something as small as a postage stamp. Happily today it is still possible to find unique commemorative stamps that complement and reinforce the subject image. Indian postage includes everyday topics such as family planning, sports activities, animals (of course) work, and technology, all depicted on gorgeous eye catching stamp designs.



Memories of India, the post offices, beautiful stamps, lovely people all came together for the Postcards India exhibit at Toronto’s First Post Office Museum. India is a world leader in IT technologies with a young and talented population. Most have no interest to learn about paper communication as it is something they are neither interested in nor have need for. Still, it would be nice if more people could experience the delight of receiving a beautiful postcard from a friend or loved one, it does bring a lot of joy that just can’t be replicated by an emoji.

*Postcards India* is at Toronto’s First Post Office as part of the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. April 27<sup>th</sup> - May 31<sup>st</sup> 2018.

## CRUMBLING SCHOOLS *from page 1*



Photos of Toronto schools courtesy of Fix Our Schools.

On the stage, representatives from the Toronto District School Board joined advocates for education, built heritage, and conservation to call for greater provincial funding for repairs and maintenance of school buildings in Toronto. Krista Wylie of the grassroots organization Fix Our Schools initially believed that the state of disrepair at her child's school was a problem with the Principal, but soon realized that sending children to crumbling, cold buildings was a province-wide issue.

Steve Shaw, Executive Officer of Facility Services, Sustainability and Planning at the TDSB, explained how the funding formula has been shorting schools for more than 20 years. Though the Ministry of Education announced extra funding in 2016, it is not enough to even begin addressing the backlog. \$80 million is required just to repair leaking roofs in Toronto schools.

From the 1880s, the Toronto Board of Education employed its own architects, who built school buildings with consideration for the neighbourhood, and for how students would use and move through the space. These are well-built, beautiful buildings. At the symposium, the Liberal and NDP candidates for the local riding (the PC Party candidate was not able to attend) responded to questions from heritage conservationists about the future of Toronto's historic and valuable school architecture.

We hope this conversation and these questions will continue through the coming provincial election. Our children should be safe and comfortable while they learn.



## MEET THE RESEARCH LIBRARY

Did you know that the Town of York Historical Society houses a wonderful research library? With more than two thousand volumes, this focused collection is an excellent resource, rich in information about the communities and people of Upper Canada, the Town of York and early Toronto, postal history, writing equipment, and museology. The library also contains a number of rare books and some historical and philatelic periodicals. Vertical files of research on postal history and the early history of York/Toronto and its denizens are also located on site. The collection is constantly being enriched through acquisitions and donations.

Since last fall, staff and fantastic volunteers have been working on various library-related projects including book repair, maintenance, inventory, and a complete update to our catalogue in order to reflect new acquisitions. With the proceeds of the book sale held last September, the TYHS were able to purchase library supplies and two new shelves.

Interested in what the TYHS Library has to offer? Search titles anywhere, online via [LibraryThing.com/profile/TFPO](http://LibraryThing.com/profile/TFPO), or contact us at [info@tos1stpo.com](mailto:info@tos1stpo.com).

# GET INVOLVED

## Become a Member.

Show your support for history in Old Town Toronto, get 10% off in the shop, and receive the Newsletter right in your mailbox.

**Individual Memberships: \$30      Family Memberships: \$50**

Mail-in membership forms can be found at [townofyork.com/membership.html](http://townofyork.com/membership.html)

## Donate.

All donations and memberships come with a tax receipt!

Cheques may be sent to Toronto's First Post Office, 260 Adelaide St. East, Toronto, Ontario, M5A 1N1. Many other ways to donate, including by credit card or PayPal, can be found at [townofyork.com/support.html](http://townofyork.com/support.html).

## Get Your Mail at a Museum.

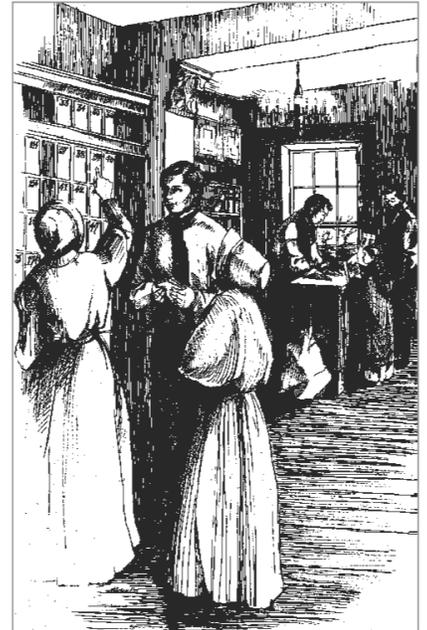
*A limited number of P.O. boxes have become available!*

Only \$173.85 per year, tax and membership included. Enjoy value and security, outstanding and responsive customer service, and courier deliveries.

All within a National Historic Site. And yes, we're open on weekends!

## Be Social.

We post regularly on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @TOs1stPO. Join us!



## Toronto's First Post Office

is administered by the

## Town of York Historical Society

260 Adelaide Street East  
Toronto, ON M5A 1N1

The Post Office will be closed May 20 and 21 for Victoria Day,  
and July 1 and 2 for Canada Day.

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Charitable Reg. No. 10810 1627 RT 0001  
Newsletter Editor: Kat Akerfeldt  
ISSN 1481-8922

Hours of operation:  
Monday to Friday: 9:00 – 5:30  
Saturdays: 10:00 – 4:00  
Sundays: 12:00 – 4:00  
Closed on holiday Mondays and Sundays preceding.

The Town of York Historical Society Directors: Tom Arnold, Kevin Both, Adriana Ermter, Shirley Farrar, Michael Kaspro, Suzanne Kavanagh, Geoffrey Milos, Martin Rainbow and Nancy Wigston.

The Town of York Historical Society is a legally incorporated non-profit organization and registered charity.  
Toronto's First Post Office is a museum, National Historic Site and Canada Post outlet.

Gratefully acknowledged is the support of the City of Toronto; the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sport, our members, donors and customers, and Canada Post Corporation.

**Town of York**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



**TORONTO'S FIRST**  
**Post Office**