



WHO STANDS ON THE PLINTH?



Portraits of Henry Dundas, Peter Russell, Benjamin Vaughan, and the Dundas statue in Edinburgh, (Images: Wikimedia Commons)

It is a well-known adage that we progress by standing on the shoulders of giants, and continue their legacies. The world-wide protests that followed the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis have reminded us that we must choose carefully who we raise to giant status. As statues tumble around the world, we have the opportunity to think carefully about why these monuments were raised, and what, with their continued presence, are they telling the observer?

In Ontario, many of our places were named by the settler colonists as they drew lines on paper. Names were chosen by men trying to appease patrons or their own ego. Recently in Toronto, a petition (which has more than 14,000 signatures as of press time) has been circulating, demanding that Dundas Street be renamed. Dundas, as British Secretary of State, actively delayed the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. When they met in 1795, Dundas and Yonge Streets formed the first major intersection of provincial roads in Toronto. The street was originally named after the Town of Dundas, which in turn was named by John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, for his friend Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville.

In central Edinburgh, Scotland, a statue of the same Dundas stands atop a column, 41 metres above the ground. The statue was placed there in 1827. In 2020, Edinburgh City Council is adding new signage to the monument, to place the legacy of Dundas in context, and to re-dedicate the memorial "to the memory of the more than half a million Africans whose enslavement was a consequence of Henry Dundas's actions."

continued on page 3

LAUNCHING THE MUSEUM FROM HOME

Over the past few months, museums have had to rethink the ways in which they engage the public. It has presented multiple challenges but at Toronto's First Post Office, we strongly believe in taking every opportunity to share the story of our city and early postal service in Toronto.

We have developed a new way to interact with these stories with the Museum From Home, now at TownofYork.com.

You can now explore Toronto's First Post Office with a virtual tour. Or uncover the secrets of the Town of York with a digital exploration of the neighbourhood's past. Watch a pre-recorded presentation or explore virtual exhibits. There are activities for a younger audience, too: BINGO, crosswords, contests, word searches, and colouring pages. And it's all free! Have a look and let us know what you think. Explore the Museum From Home from TownofYork.com/Museum-From-Home/.



NEW FACE IN THE POST OFFICE



This summer, Toronto's First Post Office was granted funds from the Canadian Museum Association as part of the Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations program. With this support, we were able to hire Samantha Summers, who is a Master of Information and Master of Museum Studies student at the University of Toronto.

Samantha will be joining us this summer to help implement a new fundraising and donor management program, which will help us to continue to build productive relationships with our community and ensure the future of the museum and the Town of York Historical Society. She will also help us create a larger strategy for grant applications and developing stronger relationships with businesses and other community hubs in Toronto.

Though this is a work experience placement, Samantha comes with a wealth of knowledge in this field. She has a special interest in best practices in fundraising for nonprofits, with a particular focus on museums. Prior to her current program, she received her MA in medieval history from Queen's University and an HBA in Celtic Studies from the University of Toronto.

When not working, Samantha spends her time baking cakes and patronizing the opera, ballet, and theatre, even if that's as part of a "virtual" audience.

Welcome Samantha! We're so impressed with what you've achieved already and are excited to welcome you to the Toronto's First Post Office team.

DRAWING CONTEST WINNER!



This past spring, as part of our Museum From Home, we held a contest that challenged young artists to draw Toronto's First Post Office in their own style, and share why mail matters to them. We loved seeing and reading all the creative submissions.

Vanessa (age 11) sent us the colourful and energetic piece at left, and wrote: "I like to write letters to my friend pen pals around the world. I like checking the mail and receiving a letter or invitation."

We are excited to announce that Vanessa was voted the winner of the Mail Matters contest, and her winning artwork will be featured on a limited run of stamps. Of course, Vanessa will receive a sheet to use when she next writes her pen pals. And you can, too! Exclusively at Toronto's First Post Office, you can purchase a full sheet of 26 for \$50. The sheet also includes a souvenir enlargement, and proceeds will benefit the museum.

Stamps can be purchased via the shop at TownofYork.com, or at the postal counter at Toronto's First Post Office.



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!



Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic it has been inspiring to see how people have come together (while staying apart) to keep one another safe and to support key organizations in their communities. When we reached out to our donors in May, we knew that times were tough. But we were humbled by the outpouring of support. Our incredible donors have been so helpful over the past few months and we would like to thank you.

Through your donations, we have been able to produce at-home educational materials, events, and activities. Being able to engage with our community in this way has been heartening for us, and strengthened our resolve to provide online learning and engagement for our community. From the day it opened in 1833, Toronto's First Post Office was a place which connected communities through the exchange of letters. Today and with your support we are grateful to continue to be a hub for our community and to know that you support us and our mission.

WHO STANDS ON THE PLINTH? *continued from page 1*

Other Ontario place names are also being reconsidered, including the City of Vaughan. Benjamin Vaughan enslaved hundreds of people on plantations in the West Indies, and protested the abolition of slavery. In 2013, the City changed the name of the Civic Holiday weekend to Benjamin Vaughan Day. In 2020, they have been asked by the City's Heritage Committee to refrain from celebrating under that name, and the Mayor has suggested instead celebrating Emancipation Day, which is celebrated on August 1st in Ontario.

Russell Township, named for Peter Russell, has decided to keep the name, but change the namesake. Council decided earlier this month that "the ideals of Peter Russell do not reflect the current values of Russell Township residents", and is asking residents to suggest a new "Russell" who deserves the honour. An administrator in early York who enslaved more people than anyone else in the Town of York, Peter Russell openly expected to see himself on a plinth. He wrote that he believed the townspeople would erect him a statue for hiring Asa Danforth to open a road from York to Kingston. He was honoured with several Toronto streets named for him, including Russell Street, Russell Hill Road, and Peter Street.

This past March, the City voted to rename Russell Street, which runs through the University of Toronto, to instead honour Dr. Ursula Franklin, a German-Canadian scientist, feminist, teacher, and author. Until the change is finalized, Russell Street runs through one of Canada's most prestigious universities in Canada, that welcomes students of all backgrounds from around the world. What's in a street name? What does it matter who is raised above us? What does it mean to those students when they learn who we choose to honour?

On June 10, Mayor John Tory responded to the Dundas Street petition by requesting a working group be established to examine the issue of renaming streets. The working group is expected to return a report soon, with public consultations to follow.

TAKE YOUR PIC OF NATIONAL HISTORIC PLACES

The National Trust for Canada has expanded their annual Historic Places Day to an all-summer-long celebration of Canada's diverse historic places.

Until July 31, Historic Places Day is running a virtual selfie contest. Go to HistoricPlacesDay.ca/places/torontos-first-post-office/. Using your own selfie, put together a collage using their easy-to-use tool. Post it on social media, and don't forget to tag us @TOs1stPO. You could win \$1000!



Thank you, Michelle @missmichelleduong and Deborah @arconserve for allowing us to share your selfies!

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

Sign up online at townofyork.com/membership-box-rental

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/donations

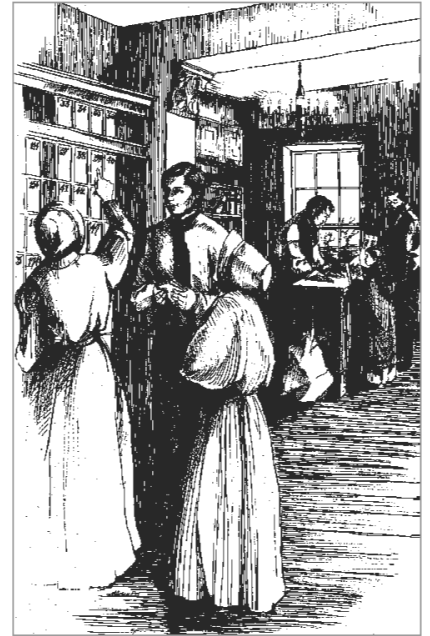
Get Your Mail at a Museum.

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

Only \$185 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 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 August 2-3 for Simcoe Day, September 6-7 for Labour Day, and October 11-12 for Thanksgiving.

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

Regular 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 Board of Directors: Kevin Both, Ruth Cameron, Anthony Colvin, Katherine Dennis, Shirley Farrar, John Jones, Corinna Prior, Martin Rainbow, and Alex Zisman.

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