



CANADA RECONSIDERS ITS MONUMENTS

In May, Canada was reminded of its horrific residential schools when the graves of 215 children were found near Kamloops, British Columbia. All of the children, some as young as 3 years old, are believed to have been students at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The Kamloops school was one of more than 130 residential schools, operated until 1996. Subsequent announcements have since put the number of graves in the thousands. In Kamloops, of the remains that have so far been identified, the graves date from 1900 to 1971.

Here in Toronto, during a protest on June 7, the statue of Egerton Ryerson at Ryerson University was felled. Ryerson has long been a prominent historical figure in Toronto as the architect of the public education system, but he also supported a separate school system to force indigenous cultural assimilation.

After the head was reportedly rolled down the hill towards Lake Ontario, it later re-emerged on a pike at 1492 Land Back Lane in Caledonia. Land Back Lane was the site of a year-long occupation by Haudenosaunee demonstrators, who argued that a settler housing development project was taking place on land that had never been ceded to the Crown.



Ryerson at 1492 Land Back Lane. Image: REUTERS/Alamy.

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NEW PAVILLION HONOURS MICHAEL COMSTOCK



Michael Comstock in 2006

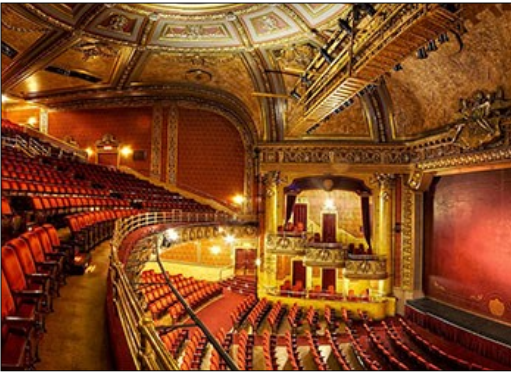
From special correspondent Kristine Morris of Friends of St James Park

Every community has its organizers, those who roll up their sleeves to get things done. They are the high notes in the musical composition of community life. In the St. Lawrence neighbourhood, Michael Comstock was one of those high notes. Last week, his many contributions to the community were commemorated with the naming of the new pavilion in St. James Park—the Michael Comstock Pavilion.

Shortly after Michael died from cancer in September 2012, his long-time friend, Barbara Bell, started a petition to name a local asset in his honour, which generated a swift response. Barbara worked with the late city councillor Pam McConnell on several possibilities, but when a new bandstand for St. James Park was proposed, they landed on an appropriate way to recognize Michael, one that evokes his love of music and his efforts to bring music onto the streets of the neighbourhood.

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MEMBERS' UPDATE – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Join us at 7:00pm on September 28th for our annual AGM, from our virtual location at the Elgin Winter Garden Theater.

The Town of York Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting on Thursday, September 28th online via Zoom. Following the business meeting, there will be a special talk by Ellen Flowers, Manager of Marketing and Communications at the Elgin Winter Garden Theater, who will give us a peek behind the curtain and speak about the theater and its history.

Owned and operated by the Ontario Heritage Trust, the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre Centre is a century-old theatre and National Historic Site. It is also the last operating vaudeville-era double-decker theatre in the world. This is a unique opportunity to get a virtual look behind the scenes of the theater and hear stories of a bygone era.

FREE for TYHS Members, \$10 for Non-Members.

Registration is required at [TFPOAGM2021.eventbrite.ca](https://tfpoagm2021.eventbrite.ca). More details can also be found at TownofYork.com. Memberships and membership renewals are available at bit.ly/renewTFPO.

NEW FACES AT TORONTO'S FIRST POST OFFICE

Since the last edition of the Town of York Historical Society Newsletter, we have welcomed two new staff members to the team.



Devin has recently joined us as a Postal Clerk. He was born and raised in Toronto, and now studies Business Logistics across the street at George Brown. You may also find him at Starbucks where he is a barista. Outside of work, Devin is quiet queer whose hair colour, clothing style, and dance moves are all influenced by his love of K-pop. He enjoys learning many choreography routines: owing to his years of dance training, cooking and tending his plants during his spare time.

Meanwhile, in the office, we are joined by Sydney, this year's Young Canada Works student, who is revitalizing the museum's education programming.

Sydney is an emerging museum professional and an avid volunteer across museological institutions including the Gardiner Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum. Previously, she obtained an

Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto, where she studied classical art and archaeology. Recently, she completed a Master of Museum Studies, also from the University of Toronto, where she specialized in public program development and delivery. Sydney's professional practice focuses on using research and evaluation information to improve museum teaching and learning. Sydney aspires to create inclusive programming that challenges, enriches and educates, while retaining a character and environment that is welcoming, friendly and reflective of the communities museums serve.



FAREWELL: Meanwhile, Postal Clerk Raine has moved on to a new position, and we wish them the very best! You can find some of Raine's creative endeavors at www.etsy.com/ca/shop/asundayraineMarket

COMING UP – AUTUMN AUTHOR’S SERIES

Join us this Fall for our Author Series featuring four acclaimed Canadian historical fiction and non-fiction authors. With the help of illustrated presentations and readings, these authors will provide insight into the primary and secondary source research they conducted and their efforts at ensuring historical accuracy in their works.

Tickets: *Per event:* TYHS Members \$15, Non-Members \$20. *For the entire series:* TYHS Members \$50, Non-Members \$70. More information can be found at TownofYork.com/upcoming-events/ or at the individual event listings.



MARK BOURRIE, *Bush Runner: The Adventures of Pierre-Esprit Radisson*

Thursday, September 23, 2021, 7pm-8:30pm, markbourrie.eventbrite.ca

This is the extraordinary true story of the 17th-century Pierre-Esprit Radisson, a man more trading partner than colonizer, a peddler of goods and not worldview. Using Radisson’s journals, which are the best first-hand accounts of 17th century Canada, Bourrie will provide insight into the sources used to bring Radisson's story to life.



ANN BIRCH, *Settlement*

Thursday, October 21, 2021, 7pm-8:30pm, annbirch.eventbrite.ca

Ann Birch chooses to write about real historical people who lived in York (early Toronto) in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Ann will share about delving into primary sources like letters and diaries, and the necessity of secondary sources. Ann will talk about her constant effort to be authentic in her writing of historical fiction about York.



ROBIN BLACKBURN MCBRIDE, *The Shining Fragments*

Thursday, November 18, 2021, 7pm-8:30pm, robinblackburn.eventbrite.ca

Spanning the years 1882 - 1904, the story follows Joseph Conlon from his early childhood in Ulster to his experiences of youth and adulthood as an Irish immigrant in Toronto. Left behind as a small boy at Union Station, Joseph grows up in a city bleak with bigotry. Joseph is haunted by the spirit of his unborn sister, Annie, and the powerful and often conflicting influences of the women in his life.



KATIE DAUBS, *The Missing Millionaire*

Thursday, December 2, 2021, 7pm-8:30pm, katiedaubs.eventbrite.ca

In December 1919, Ambrose Small, the mercurial owner of the Grand Opera House in Toronto, closed a deal to sell his network of Ontario theatres, deposited a million-dollar cheque in his bank account, and was never seen again. Katie Daubs tells the story of the Small mystery, weaving together a gripping narrative with the social and cultural history of a city undergoing immense change.

THE MEANING OF MONUMENTS, *from page 1*

Skyler Williams, a Six Nations of the Grand River member, speaking to the CBC, said that he didn’t know how it got there, but that the demonstrators would keep it unless someone else “is wanting to take it on tour.”

The head now links two protests that are part of a broader re-consideration of the commemoration of historical names and figures of those who took part in historical racism in Canada. As Williams told the CBC, such statues, place names, and policies are "iconic symbols about the genocide of our people."

See also *Renaming Dundas Street*, in *Heritage News in Brief*, page 5.



MAIL MATTERS DRAWING CONTEST: WINNER!

This past spring, as part of our Museum From Home, we held a contest that challenged young artists to show us in a drawing how mail can help brighten someone's day, and share why mail matters to them. We loved seeing and reading all the creative submissions.

Roniyah (age 7) sent us the colourful and energetic piece, and wrote that mail matters to her: "because when I get mail from my Grandmother it makes me feel happy. I love to send mail to my friends." We are excited to announce that Roniyah was voted the winner of the Mail Matters contest, and her winning artwork will be featured on a limited run of Picture Postage stamps. Of course, Roniyah 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, artist's statement, 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.

TORONTO LETTER WRITING SOCIAL

The Toronto Letter Writers Society meets the second Sunday of every month. All are welcome! This is a free, monthly drop-in for letter-writers, journallers, and all those who would like dedicated writing time in good company. The Society usually meets at the Post Office, and will again someday soon, but in the meantime we have gone virtual! Join friendly fellow correspondents on Zoom on these upcoming dates: September 12, October 3, November 14.

Email torontoletterwriters@gmail.com for Zoom information.



SUMMER SAVINGS



This summer, members and newsletter readers can save on stationery, gifts, greeting cards, and more! Use the code **TFPOSUMMER** at TownofYork.com, or mention it at the counter to save 15% off your gift shop purchases. And because we love a long summer, this offer is good until the last drop of Labour Day weekend, September 6.

We're proud to stock made-in-Canada and made-in-Toronto products, and to support local artists and artisans. Browse the shop at TownofYork.com. All purchases are sent out or ready for pick-up within 1 business day. This is a great opportunity for an annual birthday card stock-up, or even get a jump on your end-of-year greetings!

As always, shopping at Toronto's First Post Office supports the museum's mandate, as well as the individual makers. Thank you for your support!

HERITAGE NEWS IN BRIEF

OCULUS ACTIVATED: A free, temporary exhibit and art installation has opened at The Oculus in South Humber Park, and will remain until September. The exhibit is part of The Oculus Revitalization project, which aims to transform the pavilion into a vibrant community space, and shares details on the pavilion's history, the revitalization project, space-age architectures, and more. More programming will follow this fall, including walking tours, the unveiling of a heritage plaque, and a number of artist-led events and initiatives. The Oculus Revitalization project is led by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario and the Toronto-based architecture firm Giaimo.



CENTURY POST OFFICE FOR SALE: The Post Office at 1117 Queen St. West, built in 1902 by Samuel George Curry, and continuously operational until 2020, is located in the proposed West Queen West Heritage Conservation District. It has been listed under the City of Toronto's Heritage Register as "Postal Station C" since June 1973, but not designated, and is particularly vulnerable to demolition. However, MP Julie Dzerowicz, as a direct response to Postal Station C, is calling for a halt to the sale, and also for the federal government to stop the sale of all Canada Post lands in order to ensure that the process assesses the best interests of the local community and reviews sites for the possibility of affordable housing. Toronto City Councillor Ana Bailão moved to ask Canada Post to work with the City to keep the building in public ownership for the purpose of establishing a cultural and arts hub. As of press time, Colliers has removed the sale listing from its website.



ANOTHER STEP CLOSER TO RENAMING DUNDAS STREET: In July, after a year's study, City Council voted to remove the name Dundas from the street, the square at Yonge Street, and the subway station. In June 2020, a petition was signed by nearly 14,000 people who called for the renaming, noting that Henry Dundas played a significant role in delaying the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The petition also led to a Recognition Review, a wider look at how the City commemorates public figures and events in place names, and especially at how systematic racism may be embedded in place names within Toronto.



ONTARIO PLACE: Sources speaking to the Globe and Mail have leaked details about the companies that have bid to revitalize Ontario Place. The companies have apparently been given the nod by the Province, behind closed doors and without input from Toronto residents or City Council. According to the Globe and Mail, the companies that will make the site "a world-class year-round destination" are ÉcoRécro Group, an outdoor recreation equipment company, Therme Group, an Austria-based "wellbeing resort" developer, and Live Nation, which already operates the on-site music venues. The grassroots group Ontario Place for All has called for Ontario Place to be kept open to the public as parkland.



MICHAEL COMSTOCK HONoured *continued from page 1*

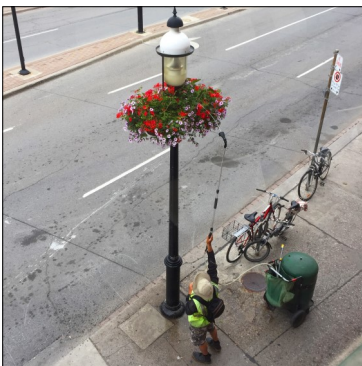
Michael was born in Detroit in 1945 and attended Michigan State University. He moved to Canada in 1969, settling at first in Kingston. When he relocated to Toronto, he became part of a cohort of civic-minded community members who were passionate about the power of the citizen to make democracy work. They were motivated by the wave of reform-minded city councillors and the emergence of people like Jane Jacobs, who were rethinking the modern city, wholly embracing her mantra that new ideas need old buildings.

Michael would later become the president of TABIA, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, the umbrella organization of all the BIAs in the city. But as a founding member and chair of the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA, he initiated many of the neighbourhood programs that we enjoy today. George Milbrandt, current chair of the board of directors for the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA, described Michael's internal drive to make a difference as key to establishing one of the largest and best run BIAs in the city, stating "He had the energy and the vision to get so many things off the ground."



Michael worked tirelessly to bring events and people to the area. He had the vision to see a future neighbourhood that celebrated its historical antecedents and unique landmarks. Together with Alan Seymour, he formed the Old Town Toronto Promotional Alliance (OTTA), and Seymour is credited for coming up with the moniker Old Town Toronto. The Alliance allowed them to engage beyond the early boundaries of the BIA and they worked in concert with another community group, Citizens for the Old Town, to draw tourists, residents, and businesses to the area.

In 1998, Michael and his group of community "conspirators" formed an ad hoc alliance called SEDERI: the South East Downtown Economic Redevelopment Initiative. Michael and Alan were both steering committee members, as was Edward Nixon, who remarked, "If there was an initiative to improve, celebrate, or market the neighbourhoods of Old Town Toronto, he either instigated it or was a leading part of it." SEDERI's foundational revitalization strategy for the area, the 2002 Old Town Toronto Action Plan, had an enormous impact on the neighbourhood's future. Its goals were to make the area recognizable as the Old Town, advocate for heritage development and public realm improvements, and attract business and tourism.



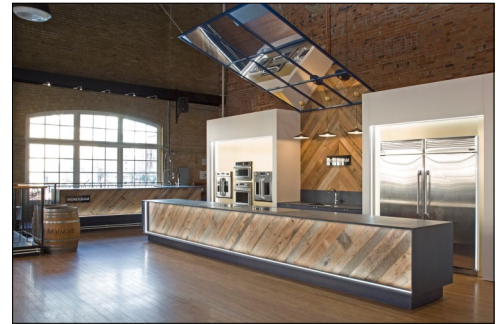
One initiative they started, which was later used across the city, was the installation of street signs that identified the district. They installed markers near important heritage buildings that read "Old Town 1793." The heritage lamps and the seasonal greenery that ornament our local streets and parks were Michael's idea. He designed and built the prototype of the basket frame that hangs from the lampposts. He was part of the initial drive to light the Old Town's heritage buildings. St. Lawrence Hall was the first to be fitted in 2009, the Market in 2019 and St. James Cathedral, completed just this past year. Those who work tirelessly to make positive change in their community know that the timeframes can be long. Dig back to the beginning of any current project and there you will find the seeds planted by Michael and his cohorts.

Local historian Bruce Bell credits Michael for getting him into the tour guide business. In 2002, when Bruce was writing local history articles for the area's community newspaper, *The Bulletin*, Michael approached him with the idea of doing walking tours for tourists to promote the history of the area, the Market, and its vendors. As he tells it, "Michael was always really involved in history, food, and people. Before him, none of this existed—no tourism, no buses full of visitors, nothing. He really changed the neighbourhood."

The Alliance organized events to celebrate the area's heritage legacy and to attract visitors. One such event,

the 2008 Festival of Old Town was a commemoration of the War of 1812 and included heritage concerts at St. Lawrence Hall, a picnic in Sackville Park, Market walking tours and a corn roast dinner at the Enoch Turner School House. Michael described the event as helping “people understand that there is an Old Town area, where Toronto began, where pioneers lived and died and built the city. We have a history we should celebrate and learn from.” The year prior, the Alliance produced a two-day historical event that included tributes to historical black leaders like Marcus Garvey and Thornton Blackburn.

Most people, when asked to remember Michael, mention the Market Kitchen. His wife, Sharon, says that the Kitchen at the St Lawrence Market was one of his proudest achievements. Inspired by a trip to New Orleans where he saw how a chef can connect people to a city’s history through food, he spearheaded the concept and installation of a demonstration kitchen in the neglected space on the Market’s mezzanine level. It was Michael’s usual force of will that made it happen. He built the first kitchen and showed the powerful combination of food and tourism, a trend that was just emerging at that time. On Saturdays, the kitchen was used to showcase vendors and their food, with Bruce Bell providing the historical connection.



The Market Kitchen. Image courtesy of the Market Kitchen SLM Facebook.

Michael was an enthusiastic guitar player, and he brought his love of music to his community, first with the Global Roots music festival on Market Street in 1998, which morphed into Buskerfest, a festival featuring circus artistry, music, and magic. Then came Woofstock. Both events became so popular that they were relocated to Woodbine Park. He also started the popular noon-hour jazz concert series in Berczy Park to serenade lunching office workers and residents alike.

If Michael was not helping out on the ground, he was at his computer, trying to effect change through a popular opinion column he wrote for *The Bulletin*. He covered topics affecting the community at the local level such as homelessness, condo development, and the installation of public art and he often bemoaned the state of tourism in the city compared to what it could be. Frank Touby, editor of *The Bulletin*, wrote in remembrance of Michael, “he was a practical guy, full of practical ideas...If there was a job to be done that required perseverance, strong common sense and a volunteer spirit, Mike was quite often the volunteer.”

Today, the spirit of Michael’s promotional work with OTTA continues under the umbrella of the Old Town Toronto BIA. Many projects currently underway—the North Market, revitalizing the underpasses, development of the West Don Lands neighbourhood, and the work to designate the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood as a Heritage Conservation District—are, according to the current BIA director Al Smith, a natural progression of the work Michael did. Today the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood is one of Toronto’s biggest tourism draws, a testament to Michael’s success and the hard work of others who have built upon those early plans and taken them in new directions.

To remember Michael is to remember through music. After a pandemic-enforced hiatus, the Music in the Park program will soon return to perform on the new pavilion, which now bears his name. Bands will set up, perform sound checks, and ready their instruments. People will draw together in the plaza in anticipation of a good show. The members of the band will make eye contact, their countdown just audible, and then, in that moment, in the first surge of the opening hit, Michael will be remembered.

This article has been edited for space. The full text can be found on the Friends of St. James Park website, at friendsofstjamesparkto.com.



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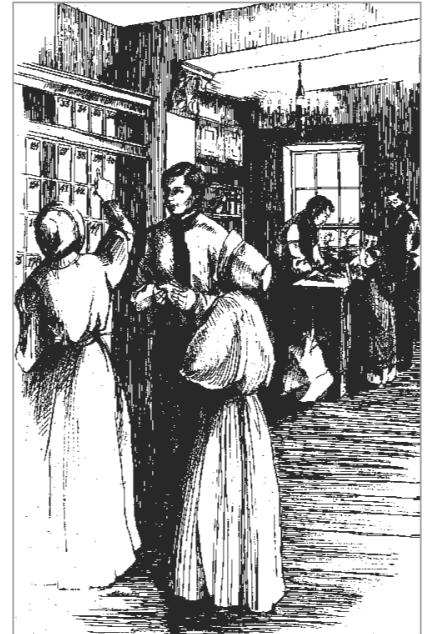
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Town of York
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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