

Picnicking at the Arts and Letters Club Farm, York Mills, June 1918

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### **New NTHS mailing address!**

**283 Deloraine Avenue,  
Toronto, M5M 2B2**

Please use this address for all membership renewals and correspondence.

## Fall Programme



*Mark your calendars...*

**Wednesday, 28 September, 7:30 p.m.**

### **TORONTO'S MOVIE THEATRES OF YESTERYEAR**

Relive the memories of Toronto's old movie theatres during the golden age of the silver screen in a nostalgic trip into the past with **Doug Taylor**, author of *Toronto Theatres and the Golden Age of the Silver Screen* and *Toronto's Local Movie Theatres of Yesteryear*. Doug Taylor's presentation will be illustrated with archival photos of the theatres - exteriors, auditoriums, marquees and neon signs - and will be accompanied by personal anecdotes.

**Wednesday, 26 October, 7:30 p.m.**

### **SONGS OF YESTERYEAR: LIVE PERFORMANCE AND GRAMOPHONE RECORDINGS OF PARLOUR SONGS FROM THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES.**

Before radio and television appeared on the scene, family entertainment often took the form of amateur, heart-felt songs sung around the household piano. Raiding the giant sheet music collection from her family's historic North Toronto home, lyric soprano **Amy Dodington** loves to perform these simple treasures together with pianist **Doreen Uren Simmons**, who shares her passion for them. This evening Amy and Doreen will be joined by Amy's father, **Paul Dodington** (local historian and record collector) with one of his gramophones, to present songs and singers, some with specific ties to North Toronto.

**Wednesday, 30 November, 7:30 p.m.**

**Brian MacLean** will speak on the indigenous history of Toronto.

### **Fall Walk**

### **MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY**

**Saturday, 1 October, 2:00 p.m. (rain or shine)**

Meeting place: Cemetery entrance (Yonge St. east side north of St. Clair)

We will explore the western part of the cemetery with emphasis on the early history of North Toronto. (*Memorial of John Fisher, North Toronto's first mayor, pictured right.*)



The Society meets at the Northern District Library, 40 Orchard View Boulevard (one block north of Eglinton, just west of Yonge) at 7:30 pm on the last Wednesday of each month from September to November & January to May. Programmes are free and are open to the public. Our co-sponsor is the Northern District Branch of the Toronto Public Library.

## Davisville Public School

*Built Heritage News:* <http://tinyurl.com/hj7xjmv>  
Desperately overcrowded, and chronically under-maintained, Council has decided to tear down the old Davisville school and build anew, despite pleas from heritage advocates. This article by architect Catherine Nasmith (written before the final decision) looks less at the cultural and heritage merit of the Davisville building, but addresses the responsibility of government agencies to keep public buildings in a good state of repair, and the requirement under the Ontario Heritage Act to conserve historic resources.

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## Banning corporate donations the beginning of the end for the OMB?

*Post City Toronto:* <http://tinyurl.com/jzj5q2q>  
John Sewell has high hopes that a long overdue reform of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) is in the offing. The nub of his argument is that with new regulations limiting political campaign contributions, governments will no longer feel the need to pander to developers, and municipal councils will no longer be able to blame the OMB for their own poor planning decisions.

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## Derek Flack's Top 10 Toronto buildings from the 1960s

*blogTO:* <http://tinyurl.com/hzunac5>

- O'Keefe Centre (now the Sony Centre), architect Peter Dickinson, 1961.
- The Colonade, Gerald Robinson, 1964.
- Yorkdale Shopping Centre, John Graham, Jr.; Simpson's, John Andrews, 1964
- U of T Scarborough, John Andrews, 1964.
- Toronto City Hall, Viljo Revell
- Bloor-Danforth Subway Stations, John B. Parking and A.G. Keith
- TD Centre, Mies van der Rohe
- 20 Prince Arthur, Uno Prii, 1968
- Ontario Science Centre, Raymond Moriyama



## Yorkville

*Now Magazine:* <http://tinyurl.com/jb863h3>  
The redevelopment of the northeast corner of Avenue Road & Yorkville Avenue continues to be controversial. Originally planned at 40 stories, the proposed height has been reduced. But the developer plans to plunk his tower right on top of heritage buildings. The location is York Square, a 1968 victory for heritage conservationists when late Victorian houses were repurposed as a commercial district with an inner courtyard. Acknowledging the residential nature of the neighbourhood and its built heritage, height restrictions were brought in for development north of Bloor. The story continues.

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## Façadism: An Architectural Plague or Preservation?

*Now Magazine:* <http://tinyurl.com/juewnef>  
Richard Longley's thoughts on façadism: "the dirtiest word in the conservationist's dictionary." Is incorporating just a portion of a heritage building into modern construction preserving the streetscape, or the sign of an unimaginative architect?

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## IN MEMORIAM

### DONALD FREDERICK PATTISON

Donald Pattison died on May 12, 2016 in his 90th year. He was a longtime and valued member of the North Toronto Historical Society, and served on the executive in the early years. A lawyer by profession, Don made an important contribution by organizing the society's archives and by arranging for the registration of the North Toronto Historical Society as a charitable organization. Our condolences to Sally, his wife for 63 years, and other family members.

## Spring Lecture Series

APRIL: Terry Murray

### *Merle Foster and the Test of Time*

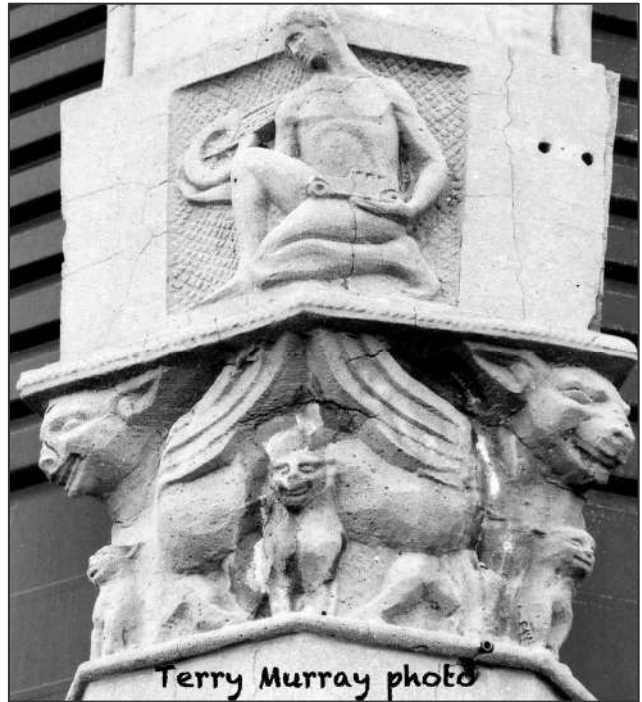
In April, we were introduced to Merle Foster, a Toronto sculptor who is relatively unknown today, but in the 1920s and '30s Toronto newspapers and national magazines called her "Toronto's girl sculptor." Author Terry Murray has spent the past decade uncovering the life of this forgotten artist who was actively producing work for five decades.

Terry first encountered the work of Foster when she was collecting material for her book *Faces on Places* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2016). Terry discovered that the carving on the Pierce-Arrow showroom (near Summerhill) had been created by a woman named Merle Foster. Intrigued by this female artist, Terry began her quest which will soon result in a published biography.

Merle Foster was born in Toronto in 1897, the daughter of Fred Foster (one of the fastest cyclists of the day). Originally named Muriel, she preferred to be called Merle. In the 1910s, she attended the Ontario College of Art (OCA). Even as a student, she managed to secure commissions. In 1917, she assisted artist Frances Loring in producing a patriotic sculpture, "The Spirit of Canada," for the gates of the CNE. The same year, Merle created a piece called "Motherhood" for the Ontario Bureau of Child Welfare. Made of plaster, it does not seem to have survived. Merle graduated from OCA in 1919.



Entrance to the Granite Club, St. Clair Ave., by Merle Foster. (Now at Guild Inn) Photo: Terry Murray



Merle produced a number of reliefs for the Pierce-Arrow automobile showroom, 1140 Yonge Street at Marlborough (currently Staples), in 1929-30.

Photo: Terry Murray

Merle collaborated with architects on several buildings. In 1923, she executed the many sculptures on the tower of Albert College in Belleville, designed by Toronto architect Alfred Chapman. She created sculptural features for the new Granite Club, which opened at its St. Clair location in 1926. (Since demolished, some of Merle's work survives in the grounds of the Guild Inn.) She designed medallions over the windows of the Art Gallery of Toronto, and, of course, the sculptures to adorn the new Yonge Street showroom of the high-end car company, Pierce-Arrow. She produced several fountains, including the fish fountain outside the Pall Mall Apartments at Yonge and Lawrence.

Many of Merle's creations were not designed to be permanent. She made display materials for Toronto's big retailers of the time, Eaton's and Simpson's. In 1927 she produced life size wax figures of the Fathers of Confederation for a Vancouver department store. In the 1930s, she worked as an assistant to sculptor Jacobine Jones, and together they created the massive figure of Johnny Canuck for the 1939 World's Fair. She had a long association with the CNE.

*Merle Foster continues on page 4*

*Merle Foster continued from page 3*

Merle turned her hand to all manner of three-dimensional objects, including props and costumes for Toronto's Santa Claus Parade, and the Toronto Skating Club Carnival (precursor to the Ice Capades). She made stage props for the famous magician Harry Blackstone. Her 1930 papier mâché camels for a Toronto Shriners' Convention ended their brief lives floating in the lake!

In the 1920s, Merle's studio was on Walton Street in the Ward. She paid local children to model for her, and held Christmas parties for them. The first was a very small affair, and she gave the children gifts taken from her own childhood toy box. By 1931, the artist's party was a major event in the poor neighbourhood, attended by 70 young guests. Supported by businesses and citizens, Merle received donations of food and gifts from across the city. The fun-loving artist was genuinely concerned about the welfare of children.



Another memorable Merle Foster Christmas party in the Ward. *Chatelaine*, December 1928.

Merle lived with her sister Pory (Florence), and together they adopted Barbara. (The baby was actually Pory's illegitimate daughter.) With an extra mouth to feed, Merle turned more to display work in the 1930s and '40s. She also designed memorials for the Mississauga Pet Cemetery, earning \$40 per headstone. In 1940, Mrs. L.G. Buckner commissioned a statue of St. Christopher which still stands on her former property.

Terry Murray conceded that Merle Foster may not have been Canada's greatest sculptor, and few of her works survive. But, to her credit, Merle proved that a woman could make a living from her art.



Merle Foster, c. 1960.

**READ TERRY MURRAY**

*Faces on Places: a Grotesque Tour of Toronto.* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2006.)

*Come to Dust: The Long Life, Short Art and Shorter Afterlife of Merle Foster.*

Check [terrymurray.org](http://terrymurray.org) for publication info.



**MAY: John Lorinc & Tatum Taylor**  
*The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood*

Two of the editors of a recent book about Toronto's St. John's Ward, John Lorinc and Tatum Taylor, described its evolution from the 1830s working class suburb of Macaulaytown to the despised slum known as "The Ward." Ultimately, a large portion of the Ward was demolished in a spirit of "urban renewal" to build Toronto's City Hall in the 1960s.

The Ward extended from Yonge Street to University Avenue, and from College to Queen Street. It was carved out of the generous land grant awarded in the 1790s to Dr. James Macaulay of the Queens' Rangers, as well as those of John Beverley Robinson, and William Dummer Powell. The property was subdivided into small lots suitable for

*The Ward continues on page 5*

*The Ward* continued from page 4

working class families, and was first known as “Macaulay Town.”



**The Ward, 1910**

CTA

Newcomers to the city were drawn to the area by its cheap accommodation. As immigration mushroomed, smaller houses were constructed at the rear of lots, and this soon became the most densely populated part of Toronto.

Journalist John Lorinc described the successive waves of immigrants who made the Ward their home. Freedom-seekers from the United States arrived in the 1840s, increasing through the 1850s until by 1861, more than half of Toronto’s black population resided in the Ward.

Later in the century, economic and political upheaval in Europe propelled people to North America, and the Ward became home to large numbers of Italians from the Naples area. Russian Jews fled pogroms in Russia, arriving in the 1890s.



**Jewish restaurant and chicken warehouse, Agnes St., c.1910**

CTA

Tatum Taylor (ERA Architects) has a particular interest in the way the Ward was seen by contemporaries. Earlier observers viewed the various religions, customs and activities on the streets as picturesque. As living conditions deteriorated in the face of poverty, residents were seen as “aliens,” and a potential threat to the British colonial way of life. When Chinese immigrants arrived in the twentieth century, hostility and racism became more evident. The unfamiliar values of residents of the Ward were equated with degeneracy, the densely packed housing was deemed a slum, and poverty was viewed as synonymous with “booze, brothels and gambling.”



**Chinese children, 18 June, 1926**

CTA

By the 1920s, the *Globe* characterised inhabitants of the Ward as “human derelicts” living in hovels unfit for livestock, and the whole area reeked of “moral leprosy.” In 1927, when a ten-year-old Polish girl was murdered on Elizabeth Street by a mentally ill Chinese immigrant, news coverage was framed in terms of racial stereotypes, and condemnation of the “maniac Chinaman” who had perpetrated the heinous crime.

Although a wave of “displaced persons” arrived from Europe after World War 2, news coverage was less fearful, although attitudes and vocabulary continued to be racist. As demolition of part of Chinatown was contemplated in the late 1950s, a sudden wave of nostalgia flowed into reporting about the Ward, including recollections of its vital and cosmopolitan qualities back in the 1920s.

The new book, *The Ward*, tells some of the stories of Toronto’s most multicultural neighbourhood.

*The Ward* continues on page 6

**MORE ABOUT THE WARD**

*The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood.* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2015.) Edited by John Lorinc, Michael McClelland, Ellen Scheinberg & Tatum Taylor.



**Toronto Courthouse Excavation**

A new Toronto Courthouse is to be built downtown, between Centre Ave. and Chestnut St., north of Armoury St., north of Osgoode Hall. As with all major construction in Toronto, an archaeological assessment was required. This area is in the heart of the Ward, and Infrastructure Ontario funded its archaeological investigation.

With John Lorinc, last fall your editor had the privilege of joining other historians in a tour led by consulting archaeologist Holly Martelle (Timmins Martelle Heritage Consultants Inc.). In many ways this was a dream site for archaeologists: a parking lot had sealed it for many decades, and there had never been deep excavation or construction in the area to disturb the remains of over a hundred and fifty years of urban occupation.



**Oval shape is the remains of a water cistern behind a Centre Ave. house.** Photo: Hilary J. Dawson

The archaeology produced remarkable information about this under-documented part of our city. The footings and outlines of cottages, row houses and workshops can be linked with the actual families who lived there by consulting city directories and other records.

One occupant of a Centre Avenue house was black abolitionist Francis G. Simpson, born in the United

States and living in Toronto by the 1850s. A community leader, he arranged a delegation of "Colored People" to greet the Prince of Wales during the Royal Visit to Toronto in 1860. Simpson was a shoemaker, which explains the well-preserved collection of shoes unearthed on the site of his home.



**Corner stone of the BME, unearthed in its cellar.** Photo: Infrastructure Ontario

On the Chestnut St. side of the site were the remains of the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) Church. More than a spiritual centre for Toronto's black community, the church was a hub for anti-slavery activism and social justice organisation. The earliest frame church was replaced by a stone building, whose foundations and basement were found. In the 1950s, the BME congregation moved to another church on Shaw St., and this building continued to be used by a Chinese United Church. It was demolished in the 1980s.

The whole area was pock-marked with privy pits, giving a hint of living conditions in this area of the Ward. Finds like tiny toy tea sets and tobacco pipes give a glimpse of the daily life of real people.

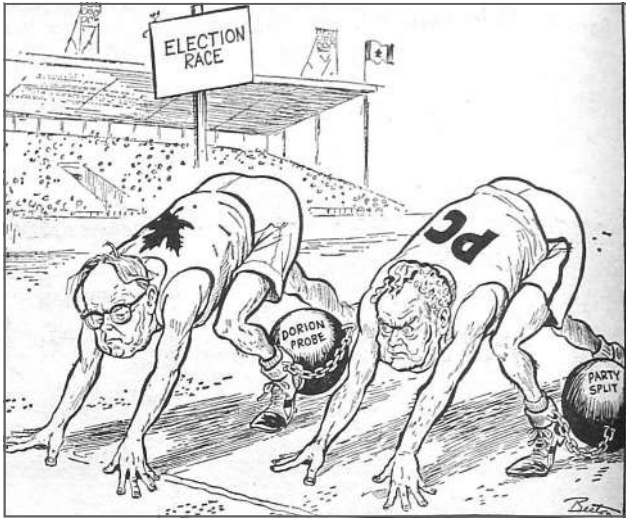
This site holds an abundance of stories reflecting the multicultural character of the Ward, and the roots of today's multicultural city. Tatum Taylor (ERA Architects) is working on an interpretation plan to ensure these stories are not lost, and can be accessed by anyone visiting the neighbourhood. In the meantime, some of the area's history will be displayed on the hoarding surrounding the construction site for the new courthouse.

**1921 City Directory  
Chestnut St., west side**

84 Cleveland Pneumatic Tool Co
86-90 Eaton T Co, warehse
92-94 British M E Church
98 Wise Julia
98 Commar Michl
100 Chong Kee
102 Chinese

## 50 Years Ago

Items from the North Toronto Herald, 1966, contributed by Alex. Grenzebach. The Herald is available at Northern District Library.



At a kick-off for Mitchel Sharp's Eglinton Liberal federal election campaign, party organizers reported "that the jubilant Liberals had downed some 2800 oysters, served up by a crew of 17 oyster openers, over 2,000 sandwiches, assorted bon-bons and 10 gallons of apple cider." It must have worked, because in the November 8 election, Sharp defeated Conservative candidate Dalton Camp and Lester Pearson's Liberals increased their seats, although it was still a Liberal minority government.

A six-mile 12-lane section of highway 401 was opened from Highway 400 to Hogg's Hollow. This was the first section opened in a programme to widen 401 from Highway 27 to Highway 48.


The unfinished (or "ghost") apartment building that had been standing for six years near the top of the Bayview Extension was the subject of an article stating that "This farce has gone on long enough, and should be settled once and for all..." The apartment had been built without proper zoning and lacked water and sewer services.

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 "Shoes from Cradle to College"

The report of an all-party Senate committee suggested that pensioners should get \$1,260 (couples \$2,220) yearly. The plan "would increase the present \$75 now payable at 69 years of age, and at 65 in 1970, by \$30 single, and \$35 for couples."

The *Herald* reported that "the desire for developers' dollars clashed with homeowners' hopes" at an Eglinton Planning District meeting. The newly-formed South Eglinton Ratepayers' Association opposed high-rise development; however, other residents said that "they couldn't afford to repair their aging homes and wanted to sell."

Canada Savings Bonds would return an average annual yield of 5.03% if held to maturity in 12 years.



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A \$56 million extension of the Yonge St. subway from Eglinton to Sheppard was approved by the Metropolitan Transportation Committee. The favoured route was west of Yonge and east of Duplex / Jeddburgh. Cut and cover construction was recommended.

## Heritage Calendar

## Stay-cation?

### University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies *Historic Streets of Toronto*

Have you ever wondered about the stories behind some of Toronto's oldest streets? Join architectural historian **Marta O'Brien** for this non-credit (no assignments or tests) course. Using archival and recent images, we'll examine the history of a selection of streets – primarily through the changes in built form. Some of the streets go back to the earliest days of the Town of York and have connections to its famous families, individuals and events (Jarvis Street and Spadina are two examples). One class is a walking tour.

University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies,  
near St. George subway station  
[www.learn.toronto.ca](http://www.learn.toronto.ca); put 3108 in search box top right  
**DATE:** Sept. 6 - Oct. 25, 2016,  
Tuesdays 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

### Walks

#### ROMwalks

416-586-8000

[rom.on.ca/en/whats-on/romwalks](http://rom.on.ca/en/whats-on/romwalks)

#### Heritage Toronto

This year, all tours require pre-registration.

416-338-1338

[heritagetoronto.org/programs/tours/](http://heritagetoronto.org/programs/tours/)

#### Lost Rivers

[lostrivers.ca/WalkSchd.htm](http://lostrivers.ca/WalkSchd.htm)

#### Citywalks Tours & Talks

with Marta O'Brien

<http://www.citywalks.ca/index.html>

We welcome contributions from members: heritage events and achievements, brief articles and photographs of local history interest.

**Submissions for the next Newsletter by 5 Sept. to [dawsonbh@rogers.com](mailto:dawsonbh@rogers.com) or call 416-481-6622.**



### Toronto Public Library Museum + Arts Pass

<http://tinyurl.com/zmmo4qv>

The Sun Life Financial **Museum + Arts Pass (MAP)** lets you and your family (2 adults & up to 5 children) explore the best of Toronto's arts and cultural treasures for **free**.

With your valid adult Toronto Public Library card, you can take out a pass for your family at any Toronto Public Library branch. Quantities are limited and rules and conditions apply.

Participating sites include Aga Khan Museum, AGO, Bata Shoe Museum, City of Toronto Historic Sites, ROM, Textile Museum, Science Centre, Toronto Zoo and many more.

### CityPASS

<http://tinyurl.com/zruqph4>

**Buy** a multi-attraction pass for admission to CN Tower; Casa Loma; Royal Ontario Museum; Ripley's Aquarium of Canada; Toronto Zoo OR Ontario Science Centre.

### Receive the *NTHS UPDATER* by email!

Would you like us to remind you of upcoming meetings and heritage events with an electronic newsletter?

Email me at [alexg@alumni.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:alexg@alumni.uwaterloo.ca) and I will add you to the distribution list. *We will not give out your email address.*

**Alex. Grenzebach**

## McMichael 50

CANADIAN ART COLLECTION D'ART CANADIEN

<http://50years.mcmichael.com>

### Happy Birthday, McMichael!

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg is celebrating 50 years of sharing Canadian art.



## North Toronto Historical Society

An affiliate of the Ontario Historical Society, and a non-profit charitable organization.

**NOTE NEW ADDRESS % 283 Deloraine Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5N 2B2**

[www.northtorontohistoricalsociety.org](http://www.northtorontohistoricalsociety.org)

*Annual Memberships:* Seniors & Students \$5, Adults \$7, Families \$10

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