

# NORTH TORONTO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

North Toronto Town Hall

VOL. 42 NO. 1

SPRING 2018



Perched on stilts for a better view of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth when they leave North Toronto station to head downtown, May 1939. *Toronto Star*, TRL

## Spring Programme

Join us at 7:10 for refreshments.



Wednesday, 25 April, 7:30 p.m.  
KING STREET WEST: FULL CIRCLE

Come and explore one of Toronto's oldest streets with architectural historian **Marta O'Brien**. King's fine residences, institutions and shops gave way to banks and industry by the early 1900s. A century later the circle is completed with condos and posh restaurants. Through archival and contemporary photographs we'll see how King Street West has reflected our city's changing roles.

Wednesday, 30 May, 7:30 p.m.  
THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY:  
LOOKING BACK AT 130 YEARS OF  
TORONTO HISTORY

The Ontario Historical Society (OHS) has been preserving, promoting and protecting Ontario's history since 1888, from the grassroots to the scholarly. On the Society's 130th anniversary, join OHS project manager and librarian **Sarah McCabe** for an illustrated presentation about the work of the Society past and present, with special reference to Toronto history. Learn about the OHS's role in defending Fort York and the rescue and restoration of magnificent John McKenzie House. Plus explore Toronto food history through the mystery of Lee Sew's handwritten Chinese cookbook, a treasure of the OHS reference library.

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HU 3-8447  
**CLASSIC VARIETY**  
2481 YONGE STREET (at Castlefield)  
IMPORTED CIGARETTES  
BRITISH - AMERICAN  
FRENCH  
SMOKERS' SUNDRIES - MAGAZINES  
POCKET BOOKS - GREETING CARDS

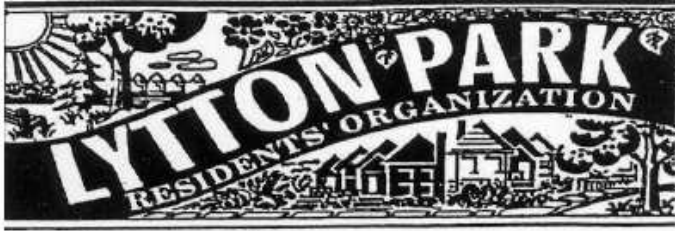
Spring Fashions  
at  
**Ostrander's**  
JEWELLERS  
2485 YONGE STREET (at Castlefield)  
485-0375  
• OPEN FRIDAYS TILL NINE •

### Annual General Meeting

of the North Toronto Historical Society was held on 28 February, 2018. Directors elected: Doug Campbell, Hilary Dawson, Brian Dunfield, Alex Grenzebach and Lynda Moon.

*(See back page for contact information.)*

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.



### Gates of Alexandra Renovation Project

The pillars and railings of the Gates of Alexandra Boulevard at Yonge Street have been an historical landmark of what is now known as Lytton Park since the earliest days of its development.

Sadly, the original gates were taken down and replaced in the 1990s using inferior materials and shoddy workmanship. The caps of the original pillars have been preserved, and regardless of the loss of the bricks and iron, they continue to be an important symbol of our heritage and to contribute to the unique character of our neighbourhood.

The replacement pillars are now crumbling, and have become both an eyesore and a safety concern. If the pillars become unsafe the city will take them down, and there will be no chance to replace them.



The city will not help financially. However, they are allowing the residents, through the Lytton Park Residents' Organization (LPRO), to repair and restore the pillars. It is estimated that it will cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000 to restore the pillars depending on the brick used, and assuming the foundations are sound.

### You can help refurbish this local landmark!

Please help by contributing now so the work can get started as soon as possible before it is too late and the pillars are gone forever.

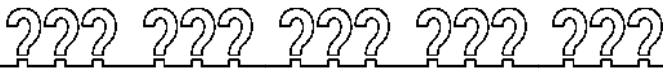
**By Cheque:** Payable to Lytton Park Residents' Organization Inc. and note "Alexandra Gates" on the Memo line and mail the cheque along with your name, address, phone number and email address to: Lytton Park Residents' Organization Inc., P.O. Box # 45031, 2482 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M4P 3E3

*Any unused contributions will be returned, or if you wish can be donated to the LPRO in support of other heritage causes.*

**For more details:** visit Alexandra Gates at the LPRO website, or send us an email at: alexandra.gates.2017@gmail.com.

**Note:** if you can also help to canvas that would be most appreciated.

### New Feature!



#### Who's Who in Mount Pleasant Cemetery? by Doug Campbell

*From time to time we will have 3 or 4 names of people interred in the cemetery who have one or two things in common, for instance a position or a business.*

What business were these 3 men engaged in?

**Samuel Nordheimer  
Octavius Newcombe  
Richard S. Williams**

*The answer is on page 6.*

### Cut Flowers for the Sick Room

THERE is a feeling abroad that physicians are sometimes apt to pay less attention than they should to the æsthetic side of their profession. Can there be any question as to the added comfort to the patient, during the weary days of convalescence, of the fragrance of Nature's most beautiful products in the form of Roses, Carnations, and other cut flowers?

May I ask Physicians to note that I make a specialty of cut flowers of almost any kind.

Particular attention is called to my three-year-old Rose Plants, ready for planting, and which I will deliver at \$1.50 per dozen. They are Hybrid Teas, and will bloom all summer long.

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*Hospital World, September 1916*

## Spring Lecture Series

JANUARY: Derek Boles

*Don Station:*

### *The Little Station with the Big History*

Derek Boles, Chief Historian of the Toronto Railway Museum, entertained a full house with the history of the Don Station, from its opening in 1896 to its reincarnation as a feature of the Toronto Railway Museum at Roundhouse Park in 2008.

Before 1892, CPR trains bound for Toronto from the east had to travel to the West Toronto Junction, then reverse the five miles into Union Station. In 1892, CPR built a branch line down the Don Valley. In 1896 the Don Station opened, just south of Queen Street. It was very convenient for residents of the new suburb who no longer had to travel to Union Station. The station was also very convenient to streetcar lines.

The rail line crossed Queen Street at grade. The station attendant was responsible for blocking the traffic and closing the gates for the train to cross. For many years there were debates about the cost of separating the two rights of way. In 1910 a high level bridge was built on Queen Street, with a long staircase down to the station, which had been moved eighty feet south. The cost was shared by the city and the railway companies, and the bridge officially opened in October, 1911.



Queen St. E., Church St. looking east from King St. to bridge over Don R., showing Don Station at right, 1907  
TRL

Somewhere in all that mud, the train tracks cross the street car tracks.

Tourism increased after the First World War. New passenger cars needed more powerful engines, which in turn needed more substantial bridges. The one over the Don was replaced in 1928.

Both CN and CPR passenger trains used the Don Station, which in the 1920s saw more than twenty trains a day. During the Depression it declined in importance. In the 1930s a brush fire scorched the siding, and it was covered with metal. By the mid 1950s, Don Station no longer served passengers. In 1965 it was made redundant when centralised tracking was introduced, and it was officially closed on 5 December, 1967.

In 1969 the station was moved to Todmorden Mills Heritage Site where at first it housed a railway exhibit, but then became a storage facility. Finally in 2008 it was moved to the Toronto Railway Museum.



In 2008 Don Station was removed to Roundhouse Park where it underwent extensive renovations. It is the only Toronto station remaining from the nineteenth century.

#### MORE ABOUT TORONTO RAIL HISTORY

Derek Boles, *Toronto's Railway Heritage*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009

#### Toronto Railway Museum

255 Bremner Blvd, Unit 15, Toronto, ON M5V 3M9

#### Toronto Railway Historical Society

<http://www.trha.ca/donstation2.html>

#### Railway Heritage Footprints in the West

Donlands. A 6-part series

<https://tinyurl.com/y75pntnf>

**FEBRUARY: Guylaine Pétrin**  
***York County Archaeology and the  
Underground Railway***

Guylaine Pétrin loves a mystery. In 1995 an archaeological dig near Elgin Mills Road and Yonge Street uncovered remnants of a log cabin, and excavated artefacts showed that the site had been occupied between the 1840s and the 1870s. Oral history suggested an Underground Railroad connection, but there was nothing in the history books about freedom-seekers settling in the area. Was there any truth to the local story? Guylaine determined to find out.

The 1852 Census for Vaughan Township identified three black families – Sisco, Armstrong and Jackson – living together in a frame house in this area. All nineteen household members had been born in the United States: they ranged in age from thirty-seven years old down to a one year old, born in 1851. The head of the household was Isaac Sisco, and the Agricultural Census showed that they were located on Concession 1 Lot 54, a property of 210 acres. Recently arrived, they had not had time to plant and harvest crops.

This farm was a large piece of prime real estate, right on Yonge Street, and it was surprising that three recently arrived black families lived there. Guylaine searched land records and found a reason why that property might have been vacant and available for a low rent: it was originally owned by Thomas Kinnear, the man whose 1843 murder was the basis of Margaret Atwood's award-winning novel *Alias Grace*. Seven years after the gruesome murder there may still have been local superstition about living at the site of the crime.

Guylaine tracked all these families back to the Binghamton, NY, area. They had all been born free, but when the US Fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1850, their liberty was at risk. That law, which mandated the recapture of escaped slaves even in northern states, spawned a lucrative kidnapping business, selling free blacks into slavery. So these farming families moved *en masse* to the Elgin Mills area, far from the American border, where there was good land, and extra work available in the various mills.

Widow Sarah Armstrong moved to Canada with her children, Mary, Sarah; James, Richard, William, John Henry and baby Charles. With few jobs available to women, she supported them by taking in laundry. When her older sons enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War she moved the family back to Binghamton. Guylaine has found the military pension files for Richard, William and John Henry Armstrong.

The Sisco family settled into farming. Isaac purchased a threshing machine, which he rented out to other farmers in the area, operated by his son George. This was a dangerous piece of machinery, and George had several serious accidents. In 1869, and again in 1875, George's hands became entangled in the works, resulting in operations and amputations. His medical treatment was recorded by Dr. James Langstaff of Richmond Hill. Undeterred, George continued operating the thresher, but it cost him his life in 1877, when he was just 27 years old.

The 1861 Census shows another black family farming nearby. In the 1870s, John Robert and Emaline Thomas and their five children took advantage of free land grants and moved up to the Bracebridge area.

So the oral tradition was correct: there had been several black families who had left the United States to live safely in York County north of Toronto. Yet, although they had been members of the community for decades, a century later, this vague memory was all that remained!



**Susannah Maxwell**

The only 19<sup>th</sup> century black resident of Richmond Hill to appear in history books is Susannah Maxwell. Born in Pennsylvania about 1805, she came to Canada in the 1850s, and moved to Richmond Hill about 1870. Susannah worked as a laundress. She died in 1923, reputedly at the age of 117.

MARCH: Fiona Smith

## Marjorie Pickthall (1883-1922): Canada's Darling Poet

Marjorie Pickthall was the rising star of Canadian poetry in her time, yet she is almost unknown today. Fiona Smith was researching her own family's connection with Canadian poet Helena Coleman when she first encountered Marjorie Pickthall. Helena and Marjorie's lively correspondence is in the collection of the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria University (U of T). The girls became friends when they were young, and their letters showed their development as writers. Fiona decided to do further research..



Born in England in 1883, Marjorie Pickthall moved to Toronto with her family in 1890. She attended Anglican private schools, and Bishop Strachan

School has a creative writing award named in her honour. Marjorie wrote from an early age, and illustrated her own stories. By the time she was 16, she had become a regular contributor to the *Globe*. (Left: illustration for her poem "The Silly Water-Sprite" *Globe*, 8 Oct, 1904.) She soon found that her stories earned more than her poems, sometimes as much as



\$150. In 1905 she hired an agent to represent her interests. Many of her poems and stories were printed in *Acta Victoriana*, Vic's literary journal.

Marjorie spent her summers on the Toronto Islands, enjoying being close to nature. Some summers she was invited to the Coleman cottage in the Thousand Islands. It all fuelled her writing. She disliked the 19<sup>th</sup> century stereotype of sentimental women poets writing sweetly romantic verse. She viewed her own work as marrying "pain and presence," and drew her inspiration from nature, art and religion.

Marjorie was heartbroken when her mother died, and was unable to write for some time. Helena helped her get a job as an assistant librarian at Vic, which was moving into the brand new Birge-

Carnegie Library. There, she worked on a bibliography of poetry.

She returned to writing, and was published in *The University Magazine* (Montreal), the foremost literary magazine of the day, edited by Andrew McPhail. It was notable for paying contributors.

In 1912, Marjorie developed health problems. She left her job and went to England. When war broke out, she trained as an automechanic, rented Chalke Cottage, and invited Helena to stay with her. Her writing went well, and several pieces were published in England.

By 1920, she was homesick and returned to live with her father in Toronto. Soon she travelled to BC, where she published a *The Wood Carver's Wife*, a play in verse which was performed at Hart House in November 1921.

For most of her life, Marjorie had been plagued by chronic back pain. In 1922 in Vancouver, she underwent successful surgery but died of a blood clot a few days later. She was 38. Her funeral was in Toronto, and she is buried in St. James Cemetery beside her mother.

Obituaries lamented a literary life cut off in its prime. In 1927 McClelland & Stewart produced a complete collection of Marjorie Pickthall's poems. A few of her poems were set to music during her life. Decades later Marjorie's words live again as contemporary Canadian composers like the late Jean Coulthard, and Matthew Emery set them to music.

### Thank You Paul!

A wonderful treat for the audience was hearing a recording from 1920 of Pickthall's poem "Duna" sung by Reinald Werrenrath. It was played on a 1920 "portable" player designed to be taken to lumber camps. Thanks to member Paul Dodington for sharing these gems from his collection.



??? ??? ??? ??? ???

### Who's Who in Mount Pleasant Cemetery?

What business were these 3 men engaged in; Samuel Nordheimer, Octavius Newcombe & Richard S. Williams?

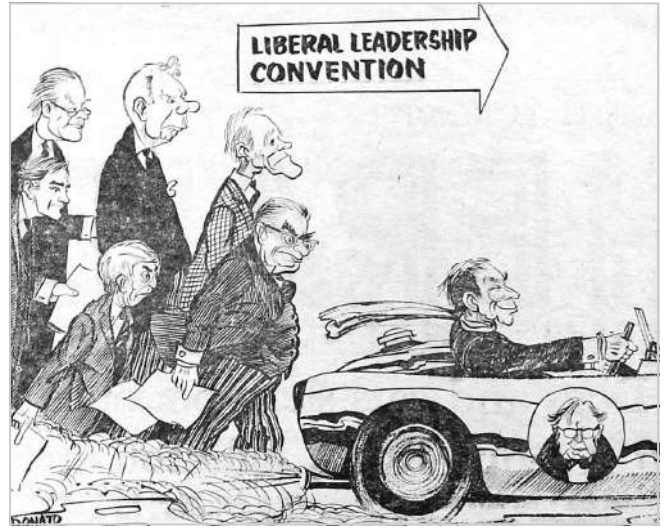


**Answer:**

All 3 made pianos. Richard William's company also made other instruments. As you can see by his monument he also made violins.

### 50 Years Ago

Items from the North Toronto Herald, 1968, contributed by Alex. Grenzebach. The Herald is available at Northern District Library.



Pierre Elliott Trudeau succeeded Lester B. Pearson as leader of the federal Liberal Party, thus becoming the 15th Prime Minister of Canada.

The Canada Pension Plan introduced Survivors' Benefits.



The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "touched off a racial holocaust throughout the United States with many major cities turned into battlegrounds."

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50 Years Ago continues on page 7

In what is now unacceptable language, it was reported that two classes at Glenview Senior Public School “have invited a group of young Indians from Manitoulin Island for a visit and a tour of our city.”

1967 was a record year for construction in Metropolitan Toronto with \$634,692,809 in building permits – a 15% increase over 1966.



Each winter for the past 45 years people across this country have heard Foster Hewitt's familiar voice say, “Hello Canada and hockey fans in the United States.” At the conclusion of this season Foster Hewitt will say no more—he's retiring. He hasn't missed a Saturday night broadcast in 36 years.



Upper left is a mini dress with flounced pantaloons; upper right is the influence of the thirties in an orange jersey; lower left is a white organza shirtwaist with pleated ruffles with navy satin bow; lower right is drifts of snowy chiffon held by a satin ribbon of this one-sleeved toga; and above is a sleeveless suit with waistcoat and skirt of black linen teamed with a long-sleeved white crepe blouse and hot pink crepe belt.

In the June federal election, Liberal Mitchell Sharp won Eglinton riding again and the almost-unknown Liberal Bob Kaplan upset Conservative Dalton Camp in the “new and opulent” riding of Don Valley. Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield faced his “first real test as a leader of a federal party after serving as premier of Nova Scotia.”

Construction of the \$79 million subway extension from Eglinton to Sheppard was scheduled to begin in August at Yonge and Lytton. There was discussion about extending it to Finch where there was ample parking available under the power lines.

Metro police guarded “the TTC Eglinton subway station and all TTC lines and bus stations after a ‘mad bomber’ exploded 10 sticks of dynamite Wednesday night in the Eglinton station and a Gray Coach waiting room.”

# Heritage Calendar

## Doors Open



**Saturday and Sunday, May 26-27, 2018  
from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybhbntl7>

For 2018 Doors Open Toronto will shine the spotlight on the city's film and television industry. 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. This event also features walking tours, a speaker series, music series and other special programs. All activities are free, but some require advance registration.



<http://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca>

**Market Gallery**, 2nd floor South St. Lawrence Market, 95 Front Street East

**Notes in the Night: The History of Toronto Jazz Clubs since 1946.** Sponsored by: JazzFM

Guest curated by Ralph Coram, this exhibition focuses on Toronto's many jazz venues using photographs, menus, advertising, memorabilia, record sleeves, posters, correspondence and interviews.

**DATE:** 3 March to 23 June, 2018

**INFO:** 416-392-7604

<http://www.toronto.ca/marketgallery>

### 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**

## Walks



### Jane's Walk

<https://janeswalk.org>

Walk, jog or bike: Toronto walks May 4,5,6 2018  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9vk4wg7>

Jane's Walk is an annual festival of free, citizen-led walking conversations inspired by Jane Jacobs. Jane's Walks encourage people to share stories about their neighbourhoods, discover unseen aspects of their communities, and use walking as a way to connect with their neighbours.

Away? Walks take place in hundreds of cities around the world. Join the next global Jane's Walk Festival in Buenos Aires or Jerusalem on May 4th, 5th, and 6th, 2018!

### Heritage Toronto

<http://heritagetoronto.org/programs/tours/>  
416-338-0684

### ROM

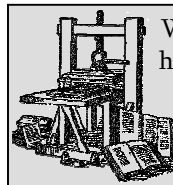
<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/whats-on/romwalks>  
416-586-8000

### Ontario Jewish Archives

<https://tinyurl.com/y8sx9zdn>  
416-635-5391

### Toronto Botanical Garden

Offers garden tours for about \$10  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9u5k6ls>  
416-397-4145



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

**Submissions for the next Newsletter by June 20 to [dawsonbh@rogers.com](mailto:dawsonbh@rogers.com) or call 416-481-6622.**

## 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 M5M 2B2

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

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

### 2017 Executive (\*Directors)

*President & Programmes:* \*Lynda Moon

*Membership Co-ordinator:* \*Brian Dunfield, 416-484-9304

*Secretary:* Flo Morson

*Treasurer:* Bill Dawson

*Publicity:*

*Members-at-large:* Janet Dunfield, \*Alex Grenzebach, Ken Pon, Liz Warrenner, John Warrenner

*Past President:* John Hutchinson

*Newsletter Editor:* \*Hilary Dawson

*Plaques:* Doug Campbell

*Research:* Hilary Dawson