



## NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

**MARCH-MAY 2012**

**1960-2012: 52<sup>nd</sup> Year**

www.nyhs.ca

nyhs@bell.net

### *From the President*

The Annual General Meeting was held on February 15<sup>th</sup>. The 2012 Board and Committee are listed on page 8. My thanks to John Laraway, who has not returned to the board, for his service and for continuing as an Archives' volunteer. Also to those who have returned, and a welcome to Brian Simms, who has joined the board.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, the Society lost a long-serving member when Louis Badone passed away. Louis was a member for over 50 years and contributed in many ways. There is a memoriam on page 3. I'm sure there are many people who will remember him as a good friend.

The potential threat of closure of the Gibson House Museum and the Historic Zion-schoolhouse has been removed, and they are included in the 2012 budget. This does not mean that our community museums will not be subject to budget cuts in the future. I hope that our members and friends also support the continuing operation of these valued historic places.

The Canadian Air & Space Museum continues to be under threat of closure and there are plans to demolish Plant 1. As Downsview Park is a Federal Crown Corporation, Plant 1 lost its protected status when it was transferred to the Crown Corporation. We encourage you to sign the petition at <http://casmuseum.org/>

Please encourage your friends and relatives to join us for the next meeting of the NYHS.

*Bill Aird*

Wednesday, March 21 <sup>st</sup> , 7.30 p.m. <b>CANADA CYCLE &amp; MOTOR; The CCM Story</b> John McKentry, author Based on his recently released book, the history of CCM is traced from its formation in 1899 until its demise in 1983.	<b>LOCATION</b> North Central Library Meeting Room #1 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor 5120 Yonge Street at Park Home Avenue West side of atrium, use elevator outside library.
Wednesday, April 18 <sup>th</sup> , 7.30 p.m. <b>UNBUILT TORONTO 2: more of the city that might have been</b> Mark Osbaldeston, award winning author explores more never realised building projects in the Toronto area	TTC: North York Centre station.
Wednesday, May 16 <sup>th</sup> , 7.30 p.m. <b>OVER ANY DISTANCE IMAGINABLE: THE ROYAL MAIL FROM YORK;</b> Kate McAuley, Assistant Curator, Toronto First Post Office History of the post in Toronto from 1798-1851, including arrival of Colonial Post Office, alternatives to official Post, how the System worked, personalities, problems, and more.	Parking: Enter from Park Home Avenue, east of Novotel Hotel.
<b>WAR of 1812:</b> Bicentennial Talks: see page 3	

Meetings co-sponsored by the North York Historical Society  
and the North York Central Library, Canadiana Department

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**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**  
**by Bill Aird, President**  
**at the AGM, February 15, 2012**

I would like to give a couple of examples of why history is important to me. And I hope to you, too. I have always had a strong interest in science. Although I am not a scientist, I read popular journals.

For a long time, the dominant voices in science were sure that the earth was the centre of the universe. These people were not stupid! Some of them spent their lives building elaborate models of how the planets, sun, moon and stars moved around the earth.

When Galileo looked through a telescope, and reported that not everything orbited the Earth, he was forced, on the pain of death, to say that he was wrong. Bruno, a contemporary of Galileo, was burned at the stake because he refused to recant his views that the Earth was not the centre of the universe.

Today, the study of astronomy from a historical perspective, shows that we have gained knowledge, step by step, over the centuries. We now have a more accurate picture of how the universe works. Some scientists still talk about astronomy and physics as if we already know everything - all we have to do is discover one last link to know the 'theory of everything' - a 'grand unifying theory', and so on.

I do not believe them! From a historical perspective, we are at a certain point in our discovery of how the universe works. Some things will be proven false; new and wonderful things will be discovered. We should not lose sight of this historical perspective. Scientists who say they know everything make me think of the Greek myth about Icarus, who flew too close to the sun and his wax wings melted, and he came crashing to the ground.

Now, I said I would give a couple of examples of the importance of history. Science is one example, the other is the importance of the historical perspective in every aspect of our lives. We learn from experience in our jobs, schools, architecture and health care, etc. It is important to maintain a historical perspective in all of these. Not only is there always something new to learn, but the lessons already learned are forgotten only at our own peril. We hear a great deal these days about governments, at all levels, reducing

spending, cutting back, contracting out, closing libraries and museums, selling off city housing properties, etc. From a historical perspective, we know that we get what we pay for. With inflation, population growth and aging infrastructure, we cannot have lower budgets, without cutting services, and lowering the standards in many areas.

As an organization, the North York Historical Society is concerned about threatened closures of the Gibson House Museum and the Historic Zion Schoolhouse, as well as cutbacks at Black Creek Pioneer Village, and the closure of the Plant 1 location at Downsview, where the Air and Space Museum is housed. Just to give you some perspective on how cutbacks affect one of these facilities, as part of our Oral History Project, we did an interview recently with Dennis Pollock, retired Head Gardener at BCPV. When he started at the village, he had six people working for him, 2 all year round and 4 over the summer. At retirement, 24 years later, he had only one assistant. In addition to looking after all the vegetable and flower gardens, he was responsible for the farm property north of Steeles Avenue and expected to make time to talk with visitors. The beauty and integrity of the village cannot be maintained with such huge cutbacks in staffing.

We need to focus attention on the benefits of treasures like the Gibson House Museum, Historic Zion Schoolhouse, etc. These are all part of our rich culture and need our support. They also need our creativity - we need to find ways of making these places more important to our culture, because when people go to visit them and their children go there on school trips, then public support grows, and it is not so easy for someone to say "Let's close them down".

The North York Historical Society can make a difference. We need your support and your creativity to do so, because first and foremost the Society is based on volunteers. One of the activities you can all do is to simply to talk about our programs and the museum with your friends and family. Word-of-mouth is one of the most powerful ways of expanding recognition of the Society and the things we value. So please, encourage your friends and family to come out to Society functions, and to go to visit the historic properties. Also, if anyone belongs to a retirees association, or another group that might have an interest in our work, let us know.

## **WAR of 1812: Bicentennial Talks**

presented by Heritage Toronto, Toronto Public Library, Royal Ontario Museum, in partnership with local historical societies, including the North York Historical Society (May 23<sup>rd</sup>).

Tuesday, May 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Ontario Museum's Theatre: **1812: The Big Picture**, Dr. Carl Benn, author of *The War of 1812*. Ticketed. More information to follow.

Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 7.00 p.m. Mimico Branch (416-394-5330) Toronto Public Library: **Etobicoke and 1812**; Denise Harris, President, Etobicoke Historical Society

Wednesday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 7.00 p.m. North York Central Library Concourse, 5120 Yonge Street: **York Township and 1812**, Janice Nickerson, genealogist and author of *York's Sacrifice, Militia Casualties of the War of 1812*.

Wednesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 7.00 p.m. Bendale Branch (416-396-8910), Toronto Public Library: **Scarborough and 1812** Richard Schofield, Archivist, Scarborough Archives  
Free admission to all lectures.

## **RETURN ENGAGEMENT**

at the Historic Zion Schoolhouse:  
**SECRET LIFE OF A SCHOOLMISTRESS** returns after sold out run in 2011.  
Thursday, March 29-31 at 7.30 p.m.  
Sunday April 1 at 2.00 p.m.

Schoolmistress Hattie Dickenson reflects on a lifetime in the classroom. Share her triumphs and failures, and the secrets she has kept hidden, as she says goodbye to teaching.

Adrianna Prosser, creator of the sold-out *Rebellious Women* at Gibson House, and Maggie Newell, who plays the role of a 1910 schoolmistress for education programs at the Schoolhouse.  
Tickets \$22 (includes HST). 416-395-7432

## **DONATIONS (2011)**

### **Heritage Resource Centre**

Nancy Baines, Jack & Margaret Cameron, Jean Hill, Gwendolyn Kane, Ruth Kingma, Audrey & Barry Long, Margit Nocent Eleanor Pyke, Tony Ricci, Bob & Penny Richardson, Brian Simms

### **Plaquing Program**

Nancy Baines, Jack & Margaret Cameron, Jean Hill, Gwendolyn Kane, Ruth Kingma, Audrey & Barry Long, Eleanor Pyke, Bob & Penny Richardson.

### **Cummer Plaque**

Gunild Spiess

## **DONATIONS (2012)**

### **Heritage Resource Centre**

Andrew Glenhill  
Marion Kinch

### **Plaquing Program**

Marion Kinch  
Andrew Gledhill

### **Cummer Plaque**

Neil Hepburn  
Gunild Spiess, Mari  
Rutka and family

## **IN MEMORIAM**



**Louis Badone 1924-2012**

Peacefully in his 88<sup>th</sup> year. A member since the North York Historical Society was formed. Past director, president and representative on the North York Heritage Committee.  
Louis & Donalda Badone lived in the Elihu Pease House on Avondale for nearly 50 years. They campaigned successfully (with the City of North York and subsequently the City of Toronto) to preserve the house. It has been moved and is now on Harrison Boulevard.  
Our condolences to Donalda and the family. He will be missed.

**Bill Aird, President's Introductory Remarks,**  
continued from Page 2

The Society can also use help in all areas of its activities and programs. If you would like to help with the archives, Oral History Project, monthly general meetings, newsletter, website or the schools program, just talk to me or one of the other executive members, and tell us what you would like to do. If you have experience with library resources, databases, bookkeeping, editing, teaching, event organising, just about anything else, or if you would just like to help out, let us know. We have fun and sometimes we even manage to accomplish a thing or two.

One of the things we have discovered in the Oral History Project is people come to North York from many different places. Some were born here, have lived their lives in the area, others come from England, Finland, Poland, Italy, a farm in Saskatchewan, New York City, Kansas - even Hamilton and downtown Toronto.

I was born in North York, in a house on Stewart Crescent, behind the mausoleum, southwest of Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue. My family moved when I was about 2½ and I did not come back to the city for almost 40 years. Now I have lived here for nearly 25 years.

I have learned that our culture is dependent on people who volunteer their time to make things happen. Many of our sports programs, museums, clubs, charities and societies would not exist if it were not for the people who give their time, energy and creativity to provide us with a rich culture. The North York Historical Society is one of the beneficiaries of these civic minded people. Geoff has already asked you to recognize the contributions of some of those who give their time, energy and skills to the society.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Society, to recognize that Geoff Geduld has made many contributions as President. Twice, he stepped forward and has done an excellent job of carrying out his duties. His knowledge and skills are a hard act to follow. I hope to continue to get his input.

I would be remiss if I did also thank Edith Geduld, a past president and more recently in an unofficial position as coordinator of the committees.

*Edited by Edith Geduld*

**HERITAGE RESOURCE CENTRE  
NYHS offices at the Miller Tavern**

"As I have previously informed you, the Society now pays occupancy costs ... that's real estate taxes and utilities for our space. It remains rent free. Last year it cost us \$6,000 and I am sure you will understand that such an annual expense is unsustainable, As a result the Archives Committee has been meeting to discuss possible alternatives."

*Geoff Geduld, Past President  
at the AGM, February 15, 2012*

**ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
2012 A Year of History Conference**

Celebration honouring the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Waterloo Historical Society, the inaugural season of the Waterloo Region Museum and the OHS's Annual Honours and Awards Ceremony. Friday & Saturday, June 8 & 9.

[www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca)  
[ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca](mailto:ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca) 416-226-9011

**DOWNSVIEW BRANCH  
TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY**

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations took place on Tuesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>. The NYHS invited Dennis Pollock, retired Head Gardener, Black Creek Pioneer Village and resident of Downsview, to share his memories. Bill Aird, President, presented the branch with a copy of *Pioneering in North York; a history of the borough*, by Patricia W. Hart.

The building is included in *North York's Modernist Architecture Revisited*, presented by E.R.A. Architects 2010, in the Libraries' section, page 45. Architect: Paul Meschino. *Photograph: Bill Aird*



## **The Christmas Concert at the Historic Zion Schoolhouse**

by Mary Wyatt

The Christmas Concert, circa 1936, consisted of skits and drills, which were like the *RCMP Ride* without the horses, recitations, a piano selection, a sing-song, and a call for talent from the floor. I remember our hired man, George Patterson, and his rendition, with appropriate swagger, of *The Wig Wig Waggle o' the Kilt* which received enthusiastic applause.

Everyone was busily involved; making copies of the parts for the plays, copying the Carols and seasonal songs in our scribblers, making stage props and backdrops for the plays. Somehow in this flurry of preparations, rehearsing our lines, practicing the drill routine and carol practice, we did our Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, not to mention Social Studies, Natural Science, Composition, Art and Health.

Bobby Rogers, our best artist, decorated the blackboards with carolers standing under a lamp post, their mouths open showing their tonsils, while fat, fluffy snowflakes floated softly down through the chalky lamplight to the already snow covered ground.

We all made decorations in our spare time! On the table, which was attached to the wall and could be folded down flat against it, were all the colours of poster paint. My personal favourites were shimmering gold and silver. There was imitation snow, made from mica, scraps of felt and ribbon, tin-foil from cigarette packages, paste, red, white and green crepe and construction paper, pipe cleaners, old cardboard, paper cups, pine cones and more. No materials were safe from our frenzied efforts to cover every inch of our school with Christmas finery. The paper cups were transformed into bells for the Christmas tree. We painted the cones, rolled them in the imitation snow, attached golden cord, in preparation to hang them on the tree, which we knew would materialize just before the event. Crepe paper streamers were cut and crimped to festoon the windows.

Around December 1<sup>st</sup>, a group of trustees, including my Father, arrived to carry out major construction. They went out to the woodshed bringing in lots of long boards and

trestles to erect a platform. This was our stage and it was set up across the back of the room in front of the boys' and girls' cloakrooms. Great Grandma's old carpet was spread on top and a draw-curtain was installed across the front. From then on, it was possible to step up on to the stage and walk across it to reach our desks. Did ever a thespian have a grander entrance? It was fun to see our classroom from this elevation. I could even see the top of the teacher's head! Meanwhile, some of the Mothers were busily making dresses out of crepe paper and also cheesecloth, for *The Drill*. With tinsel glittering in their hair, the girls looked so beautiful by lamplight on the big night. Hollywood's Shirley Temple, with all her curls, paled in comparison.

As soon as the stage was in place, a friend of the teacher arrived to play the piano for our dress rehearsal. A few days before the concert, Mr. Herdman had arrived with the most beautiful big spruce and it nearly reached the ceiling. It was set up to the left side of the girls' entrance, almost touching the edge of the stage and neatly concealing most of the piano and the accompanist. We took long strips of cotton batting, from a big roll, wrapped in blue paper, and gently laid it along the branches to represent snow. One by one the beautiful cones were tied in place. The paper cup bells and other ornaments were carefully hung in any empty spaces. Lastly came the icicles. Someone had made a yellow five-pointed star from construction paper for the top of the tree. It was much admired by us all. I tried to make one for our tree at home with limited success.

The smell of pine cones, spruce tree, paint and glue, combined with woolly mittens, scarves and boots, drying on the hot air register above the furnace permeated the room as the excitement grew in anticipation of the big night. Santa Claus would be coming at the end of the performance to give out the presents, which had mysteriously appeared under the tree and also net bags of candy, nuts, and oranges. I can still hear those sleigh bells outside in the yard heralding Santa's arrival.



## The Christmas Concert, by Mary Wyatt

continued from Page 5

I also remember running downstairs to the basement after the show and catching Santa changing into his street clothes! I felt like Dick Tracy – I had solved a great mystery.

One of our Santa's was portrayed by Gordon Sinclair. Dad lent him a coonskin coat for the big night. I remember Santa always got kisses from the pretty young girls. I guess he'd be sued for harassment today!

Prior to 1936, the evening took place by lamp light. The coal oil lamps hung along the wall in brackets, with shiny reflectors behind each one. I remember sitting on the stage with some fellow performers at one concert, when people arrived late due to a terrible snow storm. Their car was stuck and so they came come by horse drawn sleigh, all bundled up in buffalo robes and carrying a lantern, for light and heat. As this little group traipsed across the stage to take their places in the audience, someone brushed my bare arm with the still lit lantern. I suffered a slight burn but didn't cry; after all the show had to go on.



Mary Wyatt: OHP interview by Linda Gargaro  
Photo by Geoff Geduld

I donned my kimono and took Uncle Wes's black thorn stick as my camel prod, to portray of one of the three Wisemen in the familiar Christmas tableau. I wondered if it would be comfortable to ride a camel dressed in a bathrobe, but guessed they did strange things in strange lands. I had my myrrh, frankinsense and gold at the ready. The other actors were in place, the Star of the East swung from the ceiling - look out Bethlehem, here we come! (One nagging thought always bothered me – as my name is Mary, how come I never got to portray The Mary?)

How I would love, once more, to see the lamplight sparkle on the tinsel and reflect on the faces of the audience. More than any player could hope for - the applause still rings in my ears. What a challenge it was to get all the cars out of the drifts in the dark school yard and safely back home. How comforting to toast our toes on the oven door, after the chilly drive home. And so to bed, secure in the knowledge that our concert had been a grand success, and oh, so much better than Oriole's last week!  
*Edited & condensed by Edith Geduld*

## ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST'S PARLIAMENT INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

265 Parliament Street is now open.  
[www.heritagetrust.on.ca](http://www.heritagetrust.on.ca)

### **Built 1797 – burnt 1813 and back 2012!**

The centre, located at 265 Parliament Street, sits on the original site of Ontario's parliament buildings, on the block bordered by Front St. E on the north, Berkeley St. on the west, and Parliament St. on the east. Ontario Heritage Trust acquired this important property in 2005, retained the original building, a car dealership, and recently adapted it to accommodate the interpretive centre. The exhibit: **Foundations & Fire: Early Parliament and the War of 1812 Experience at York** interprets the history of Ontario's first purpose-built parliament buildings and commemorates the War of 1812 bicentennial.

The Americans attacked the then small town of York on April 27, 1813 and during the ensuing occupation, burned the parliament buildings, Government House, the barracks (now Fort York) and military storehouses.

## CITY OF TORONTO MUSEUMS

Plan your children's/grandchildren's birthday parties at:

Colborne Lodge 416-392-916, Fort York National Historic Site 416-392-6907, Gibson House Museum 416-395-7432, Mackenzie House 416-392-6915, Montgomery's Inn 416-393-8113, Scarborough Museum 416-338-8807, Spadina House 416-392-6910, Todmorden Mills Heritage Site 416-396-2819  
[www.toronto.ca/museum/birthdays](http://www.toronto.ca/museum/birthdays)

A workshop  
presented by  
Toronto Branch of the Ontario Genealogical  
Society  
and the Canadiana Department  
of the North York Central Library

**FINDING YOUR GREAT WAR ANCESTORS**

Spend a full day with some of Canada and the world's top Great War experts. Discover new resources, practical strategies to crack research conundrums, shocking truths about the "war to end war".

Saturday, March 31, North York Memorial Hall, Concourse Level, 5110 Yonge Street, (North York Subway Station).

Check [www.torontofamilyhistory.org](http://www.torontofamilyhistory.org) or call 416-733-2608 (voice mail) to see if space is still available.

Also **FAMILY HISTORY COURSES** Spring 2012 - March 27. April 3, 10, 17: 6.30-8.30 p.m. Contact information as above.

**NORTH TORONTO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

On Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 7.30 p.m.

**AFRICAN CANADIANS in the WAR OF**

**1812** An illustrated talk presented by Wayne Kelly, Manager, Public Education and Community Development, Ontario Heritage Trust.

at the Northern District Library, 40 Orchard View Boulevard (one block north of Eglinton, just west of Yonge). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

**13<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF**

**DOORS OPEN TORONTO, May 26 & 27**

Volunteer opportunities:

Tour Guides

Information Ambassadors

Orientation Dates: March 29<sup>th</sup>, April 21 at City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, corner of Queen, at Bay, Committee Room #2 (2<sup>nd</sup> floor). For more information call 416-392-9315 or email [spevol@toronto.ca](mailto:spevol@toronto.ca)

**City of Toronto  
MUSEUM NEWS**

[www.toronto.ca/museum/location](http://www.toronto.ca/museum/location)

for up to date information.

Or our website for the link [www.nyhs.ca](http://www.nyhs.ca)

**Remembered**

Almost 200 years after Toronto was captured and burned by invading American forces, this exhibit commemorates the fallen British, First Nations, Canadian and American combatants. Until September 8<sup>th</sup>, Tues-Fri 10/4; Sat. 9/4. The Market Gallery, s. St. Lawrence Market, 95 Front Street E. 416-392-7604

[marketgallery@toronto.ca](mailto:marketgallery@toronto.ca)

**MILITARY HERITAGE WALKS** (Free)

led by Ian Wheal, Historian & Certified Hike Ontario leader

Walks begin at 2.00 p.m. Approx. 2½ hours. Call 416-593-2656

Sat. April 7: **Garrison Creek, First Nations Route to Credit River and Beyond.**

Meet at Queen St. W and Gore Vale (Trinity Bellwoods Park).

Sat. April 21: **Military Horsewomen of Garrison Common: Anne Gwynne & Susannah Robinson.**

Meet at Gladstone Ave & Queen St. W.

Sat. April 28: **Military Post Road to Humber River.**

Meet at Queen St. W & Ossington Ave

**NORTH YORK MODERNIST  
ARCHITECTURE 2011 FORUM**

**Suburbia – Heritage of Everyday**

A dialogue on post war modern architecture as part of the city's heritage. A video of this event is available on Heritage Toronto's website –

<http://heritagetoronto.org/news/story/2011/10/12/2011-north-york-modernist-architecture-forum>

For more event information

the **ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY** now has a member-editable online events calendar at [www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca)

Bookmark the site and check for heritage events in your area.

**Finding the Fallen: The Battle of York**

# NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[www.nyhs.ca](http://www.nyhs.ca)  
[nyhs@bell.net](mailto:nyhs@bell.net)

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Auditor VACANT

## Representatives

NY Community Preservation Panel	Linda Gargaro, Edith Geduld, Ruth Kingma
Toronto Historical Association	Bill Aird

## Committees (Chair)

Archives (Heritage Resource Centre)	Glenn Bonnetta
Membership	VACANT
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Newsletter/Flyer Editor	Edith Geduld
North York Minute	Linda Gargaro
Oral History	Linda Gargaro
Phone	Ann McIlroy
Plaquing	Glenn Bonnetta
Social Convenor	Jean Hill
Sunshine	Lillian Methven
Webmaster	Bill Aird

North York Historical Society is an affiliate of  
The Ontario Historical Society  
and a non-profit organization sponsored  
in part by the Ministry of Culture

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## NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership 2012  
52<sup>nd</sup> Year

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ May we email newsletters to you \_\_\_\_\_

Family \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Senior \$10.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Student \$5.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: Heritage Resource Centre \_\_\_\_\_ Plaquing Program \_\_\_\_\_ Cummer Plaque \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque payable to the North York Historical Society  
5845 Yonge Street, POB 45045, Willowdale, ON M2M 4K3