



## NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER MARCH-MAY 2013

1960-2013 53<sup>rd</sup> Year

[www.nyhs.ca](http://www.nyhs.ca)

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### From the President

The 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>. The Board, Representatives and Committee listing is on the back page. I would like to thank all those new and returning members who have agreed to serve on the Board for this year. I also thank those who have not returned to the Board for their help in 2012.

In 2013, we need to make a special effort to get more people involved in heritage in North York. The monthly speakers' program at the library is a good way to introduce people to the work we do in the Society. I encourage everyone to invite their friends, neighbours and relatives to come to the monthly meetings. Beginning at the March 20<sup>th</sup> meeting there will be notices available for the next speaker. I encourage everyone to take at least one and give it to someone who might be interested in coming.

We also need volunteers, especially in the work of editing the oral history interviews, and data entry for the cataloguing project being done on the Scrapbooks.

If you were a member last year, and have not yet sent in your renewal, I urge you to do so – we need your support. Also, please consider adding a donation for ongoing support, or for a special project. For example, the John Bales House plaque fund has collected \$639. The Society has committed to raise \$1000 of the total \$5,500 cost for this project (partnering with Councilor James Pasternak, Ward 10 York Centre and Heritage Toronto).

Please check the website where information on current heritage events are posted, as well as links to other heritage organizations.

*Bill Aird*

Wednesday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 7.30 p.m. (Location: Auditorium)

### **HOW THE WAR OF 1812 DEFINED ONTARIO**

Janis Philip, author, landscape architect & urban planner

Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 7.30 p.m. (Location: Meeting Room #1)

### **POLLY OF BRIDGEWATER FARM, AN UNKNOWN IRISH STORY BOOK**

Catherine McKenty, author

Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 7.30 p.m. (Location: Meeting Room #1)

### **THE RESULT OF REBELLION: NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND** Dr. John Carter, author and historian

at the North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street,  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor, use elevator outside of library (west side of atrium)

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

### Continuation

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Information below has been provided by the March, April and May speakers:

***How the War of 1812 Defined Ontario***

(March 20<sup>th</sup>) Janis Philip, author, landscape architect and urban planner

When Governor Simcoe arrived in Niagara as the first Lieutenant General of Upper Canada, he had one thing in mind – war with the Americans. Every action he took over the next few years prepared the province from the location of roads, to settlements, ports, land grants, taxation, native agreements, and our parliamentary system. The presentation will show how the province came together in response to the threat of war, and how the War of 1812 defined our province.

***Polly of Bridgewater Farm: an unknown Irish story*** (April 17<sup>th</sup>)

Catharine Fleming McKenty, author, (granddaughter of four time mayor of Toronto, R. J. Fleming, younger brother of Aunt "Polly" Noble Verner, who ran the Cabbagetown Store, during the 1800s.

This semi-fictional account of Polly's early days follows her from her birth, just outside Dromore, Ireland, in 1837; her survival of the Big Wind of January 1839, the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s, and the May 1837 crossing of the Atlantic to the family's arrival near Quebec. Her journey takes her to Montreal and then Toronto, where she married a young tailor, John Verner, and they setup their businesses. Fiction based on actual historical events and people.

***The Result of Rebellion: North American Political Prisoners in Van Diemen's Land*** (May 15<sup>th</sup>) Dr. John C. Carter, author and historian.

It was all the result of rebellion! Between January and December of 1838, there were at least ten incidents of armed invasion from the United States to Canada. These incursions were all unsuccessful in attempts to overthrow the British rule in Upper Canada. Hundreds of men who were involved were arrested and charged with piratical invasion. Ultimately 92 English speaking "Patriots" were transported to the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land to serve sentences as political prisoners. Many of these men came from along the St. Lawrence River or from communities in northern New York State, Ohio and Michigan.

Illustrated lecture will be about the actions which lead to this fascinating yet often overlooked chapter in the shared history of Canada, United States and Australia. Events associated with the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1838 including the St. Clair Raid, and investigate the consequences of these rebellious acts on the main participants. The lives of the exiled "Patriots" will be described, while incarcerated in the Van Diemen's Land penal system and detail their period of probation and time of freedom before their eventual return to Canada and the United States.

**WAR OF 1812 BICENTENNIAL LECTURES (Series)**

The North York Historical Society is partnering with Heritage Toronto and the North York Central Library for the lecture on Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> at 7.00 p.m. Concourse, NYCL. Free. Reserve your seat at Heritage Toronto.org/lectures or 416-338-1339.

***LOYAL THEY REMAINED? LOYALTY, IDENTITY, AND THE WAR OF 1812 IN UPPER CANADA***

Dr. Jane Errington, Queen's University; author and leading scholar of Upper Canada.

Other lectures in the series:

March 21: ***PERCEPTIONS OF 1812: IDENTITY, DIVERSITY, MEMORY***; Dr. Ross Fair, Ryerson University at Archives of Ontario, York University, 134 Ian Macdonald Boulevard.

April 3: ***CANDY, COWS AND COMMEMORATION: THE CASE OF LAURA SECORD***; Dr. Cecilia Morgan, OISE, Mimico Centennial Public Library Auditorium, 47 Station Road.

April 17: ***LESSONS FROM THE WAR OF 1812: A SIX NATIONS PERSPECTIVE***; Richard Hill, Six Nations Legacy Consortium at Grand River, Native Canadian Centre, 16 Spadina Road

April 24: ***GREAT GUNS, BROWN BESS, SUPPLY WAGONS, POOR OLD SOLDIERS AND JOLLY TARS: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WARFARE DURING THE WAR OF 1812***; John Grodzinski, Royal Military College of Canada, Todmorden Mills Theatre, 67 Pottery Road

## CRANG PLAZA early shopping centre

Crang Plaza, at Jane and Wilson, was developed in the early 1950s by Jethro Kirby Crang. The location was not picked at random; it was located on part of the Crang farmstead.\* The choice was typical of Crang's skill as a speculator. "As an example of the Crang shrewdness, the tale is told that before he subdivided his land and constructed the plaza, he raised sheep," Nathaniel Kellar, a public school vice-principal, wrote in his 1966 *Study Of Crang Plaza Development* for Queen's University. "The sheep were clipped for wool and eventually sold for mutton. Meanwhile the clipped grass was sold as sod. After the sod was stripped, the topsoil that was left was sold. Then he received money for subdividing his farm."

Before and during the 1940s, the area was rural. The northeast and northwest area was known as Beverly Hills. Jane Street and Wilson Avenue were rural oil surfaced roads. Sheppard Avenue, one mile north, was gravel surface even in 1960. The Crang farm was situated on Wilson Avenue, extending from Black Creek to about where Highway 400 is and north to the Oakdale Golf Course.

Prior to the plaza, there was a small general store, a Toronto-Dominion Bank bank, a drug store and post office where residents collected their mail. By the 1940s enough development had occurred to support a shopping plaza. The land was flat allowing easy building of subdivisions and a shopping plaza. Although Jane and Wilson were only oil surfaced roads, they were highly usable. Highway 400 was constructed by 1951, and a bypass (401) was planned.

The blocks bordered by Keele, Dufferin, Finch and Wilson were taken up by the Downsview RCAF base, petroleum storage and industry. These developments also would provide a customer base for the plaza.

Development on the plaza got underway in 1952. The Bank of Commerce experimented with a drive-in teller, one of the first of its kind. The Crang family closely controlled the renting of the shops and the subdividing of the land. The plaza sparked the development of new housing subdivisions, industry, gas stations and nearby a police station and firehall. The plaza was such a novelty that people drove down from Barrie to shop there.

The first new houses in the region were sold to people who were familiar to the Crangs. Indicative of the Crang influence are the street names in the subdivisions. "Jethro, June, Yvonne, Rosalie, Adele and Kirby were Crang children," Kellar wrote, "Mayall, Desmont, Dallner, Mattson and Snowden were family names of people connected with the Crang family. Haymarket Street was named after an English street. Minnie, residents say, was the Crang's cat."

The growth of the area led to the development of other plazas, including the massive Yorkdale Shopping Centre, which opened in 1964, with all its stores under one roof. Despite the competition, Crang Plaza continued to thrive. "The small-town atmosphere of the Crang Plaza where the shop-keepers expressed a genuine interest in their customers established a bond of loyalty between customer and shop-keeper," Kellar wrote. He also attributed its success to its liquor and brewer's stores. "As a liquor and brewer's outlet the plaza became the number one centre for miles around. Even today[1966] the nearest liquor outlet is over two miles away at Keele and Lawrence. Alcohol of any beverage is not for sale in Weston."

In 1990, the much larger Sheridan Mall, was built, partly on the site of the Crang Plaza.

*Susan Goldenberg, NYHS Director (edited)*

\*John Chew, saw mill, 1832, \*Concession 5W, Lot 11. now known as 1700 Wilson Avenue, page 198 Patricia W. Hart *Pioneering in North York*



Hogmanay at Gibson House Museum, 2012  
First Footers: Bill Aird & Geoff Geduld  
Gibson House Volunteers: Margit Nocent & Cheryl Michalson

## DONATIONS 2012

-4-

### Heritage Resource Centre

Bill Aird, Geoff & Edith Geduld, Marion Kinch, Peter MacDonald, Anne McIlroy, Lillian Methven, Marcia Paty, Penelope Potter, Edmund Ralph, Tony Ricci.

### John Bales House Plaque

Geoff & Edith Geduld, Andrew Gledhill, Marion Kinch, Marcia Paty, Penelope Potter, Edmund Ralph.

### Cummer Family Plaque

Geoff & Edith Geduld, Neil Hepburn, Betty Lambert (in memory of Betty Crossley), Mari Rutka & family, Gunild Spiess.

## DONATIONS 2013

(to March 3)

### General Operating Fund

Sheryl Adelkind, Betty Brannen, Jack & Margaret Cameron, Gordon Hawkins & family, O'Connor House.

### John Bales House Plaque

Sheryl Adelkind, Betty Brannen, Jack & Margaret Cameron, Gordon Hawkins and family.

### Cummer Family Plaque

John & Ann Blewett, J. K. (Kel) Crossley, Joyce M. Davies (in memory of Stan Davies), Elizabeth Krunys, Vasena Marsh, Jean Murphy, William Myhill, Pat Naughton, C. I. Silbet, Patricia Small, Carl Spiess, Gunild Spiess, Erina Stewart, Diana Urquart, Veronica Zufelt.

## CALENDAR

Tuesday, March 26 **LANSING and NEWTONBROOK PLAQUE UNVEILING** at two local North York Schools. Installation will take place later. Attendance by registration only. Email: [nyhs@bell.net](mailto:nyhs@bell.net) or 416-222-3485.

Saturday, June 22, 2013

**ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1888-2013:** 125<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and Honours and Awards Ceremony. More information to come. Registration required.

To September 14, 2013

### ***BUILDING A CITY: people, places and life in Toronto 1845-1899***

at the Market Gallery, south St. Lawrence Market, 95 Front Street East

Tues/Fri 10/4; Sat 9/4, closed Sun/Mon 416-392-7604

[www.toronto.ca/culture/the\\_market\\_gallery](http://www.toronto.ca/culture/the_market_gallery)

### **ELGIN & WINTER GARDEN THEATRE CENTRE'S 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

Mark your calendars October 7<sup>th</sup>. This milestone will be marked by special performances in the Elgin Theatre and a pre-performance reception. Ontario Heritage Trust pre-reservation call Isla at 416-325-5025

### **TORONTO'S COMMUNITY MUSEUMS:**

there's so much going on - check out this website:

<http://www.toronto.ca/museum-events>

## **THE WAR OF 1812**

### ***Bicentennial Commemoration of the Battle of York***

Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>

Join Toronto, Fort York and the Canadian Forces to honour those who fought.

**Sunrise Ceremony** 6/7.30 a.m. Palais Royal, 1601 Lakeshore Blvd. W.

Four first nations, descendants of the battle warriors, led by The Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

**Walking in their Footsteps** 10a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Starting point Palaise Royale. 5 km public walk retraces battle route to Fort York, guided by historical interpreters. Pre-register at [fortyork@toronto.ca](mailto:fortyork@toronto.ca) or call 416-392-6907 Ext.223.

**Military Parade and Colour Presentation** Colour 10a.m. Legislative Assembly, Queen's Park.

**Military Parade** 11.30 a.m. To 1 p.m. Begins at Queen's Park Legislative Assembly and ends at Fort York.

**Commemorative Ceremonies** 1.30/4p.m. Fort York National Historic Site

**Service of Remembrance** 1.30/2.30 p.m.  
**Memorial Plaques Dedication** 3/4pm

**Toronto.ca/1812**

**Show them you remember-**

## Recollections of Longtime Yonge Street Dweller

In June 1979, the *Toronto Star* interviewed Oscar Smith about the ninety-one years he had lived in the same farmhouse, on Yonge Street in North York, including a quarter-century adjacent to the Northtown Shopping Centre, built on land once owned by the Smith family. The U-shaped plaza was bordered by Yonge Street, Kenneth Avenue and Church Avenue.

Smith was eighty-two when he married for the first time, Olive, a neighbour of many years. "I remember as a child watching horsedrawn stage coaches going by the front gate of my dad's farm, at 5421 Yonge Street, providing public transit from Toronto to Richmond Hill," Smith told *Star* reporter, Harold Hilliard, in a two-part interview published June 12 and 15, 1979.

"Then, I watched them lay the original rails for the Metropolitan Railway, which took over public transit from the stage coaches, operating an electric radial car service, from Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe south to Toronto's city limits below St. Clair Avenue. That was before 1895, when I was about five or seven years old," Smith said, "At that time Yonge was just a rough road. Township workers used to crack stones at our gate and use them to fill the ruts."

During harvest time, Smith recalled, his father would be up at 4 a.m. to make the trip to Toronto to sell grain or hay. Farmers went

from seed store to seed store selling grain. Hay was usually sold at the St. Lawrence market. "If dad had trouble selling his crops, we stayed at the Clyde Hotel at King and Jarvis Streets. Boy, what an event that was! Bedding down the horse in the hotel stable, then a dinner in the hotel dining room. What luxury!"

Smith didn't know the exact age of the family farmhouse but said it predated 1837, the year of the Upper Canada rebellion. Rebel leader, William Lyon Mackenzie, kept his printing press in the house, at the time the rebels went down Yonge Street, to meet defeat by government troops at Montgomery's Tavern near Eglinton Avenue.

Government troops searched the home for the press but did not find it. The rebels had hidden it in one of the three wells on the farm. Smith tried himself to find the press with no luck and the wells were all gone by 1979. The government troops set the house on fire but it was put out quickly and the damage was not great.

After World War I, Smith got his first car, a Model T Ford. "If anything went wrong we could always fix it with a hammer and a chisel."

Smith also told the *Star* that Willowdale farmers, including himself, gave gifts of grain to relief trains to western Canada during the 1930's Great Depression.

*Susan Goldenberg, NYHS Director (edited)*



A North York Childhood,  
circa 1902, 2012  
exhibition at Campus Alliance  
Française of North York

Two of the partners were the  
Gibson House Museum and the  
North York Historical Society

Clockwise: (1) Glenn Bonnetta,  
Anne McIlroy, Bill Aird, Geoff  
Geduld (NYHS) (2) Edith Geduld  
(NYHS) Marie Boal (GHM)  
(3) Christophe Plaintiveau (AF)

**NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**2013 Board of Directors, Representatives & Committees**

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and a non-profit organization sponsored in part by  
the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Sport

**NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**Membership 2013 - 52<sup>nd</sup> Year**

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