

NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 2013

Founded 1960

www.nyhs.ca

From the President

Two more 200 Years Yonge replacement plaques were unveiled on March 26th - the LANSING plaque at Churchill Public School and NEWTONBROOK at R. J. Lang Elementary and Middle School. At both schools, Gary Miedema, Chief Historian, Heritage Toronto, gave an illustrated presentation. At R. J. Lang, Doug Wardle, a long time NYHS member, who grew up close by, shared some of his memories with the students. Since then he has been invited back twice to talk to two Grade 3 classes. See pages 2 to 4.

Congratulations to sculptor, Adrienne Alison, who has been awarded the commission for a monument to the War of 1812, to be unveiled on Parliament Hill next summer. The Society's two sponsored bronze sculptures: C. W. Jefferys, Canada's foremost historical artist, and Robert Gourlay, social reformer, are the work of this artist. See page 7.

Long time NYHS member, and our Sunshine Committee representative, Lillian Methven, had an accident recently and is now recuperating. She usually sends out greetings on our behalf, but this time we send her get well soon wishes and a speedy recovery.

Also congratulations to Sheryl Adelkind for a 15 year Volunteer Service Award. We thank her for the ongoing participation in the Archives Committee Monday Group.

Please continue to invite your friends, neighbours and relatives to come to the monthly meetings. There will be notices available at each meeting for the next speaker in our series. I encourage everyone to take at least one and to give it to someone who might be interested in coming.

Bill Aird

Wednesday September 18th, 2013 at 7.30 p.m.

HOW THE RAILROAD SHAPED TORONTO

Derek Boles, Historian and Author

Wednesday October 16th at 7.30 p.m.

HANGMAN'S GRAVEYARD: on the discovery of a graveyard beneath the Don Jail Property. (documentary)

Alexis Dunlop, Anthropologist & John Dunlop, Archeologist

Wednesday November 20th at 7.30 p.m.

FROM HANDS NOW STRIVING TO BE FREE: a talk on the prisons of the 1837 Rebellion and the boxes they made while in prison.

Darryl Withrow, Author and Volunteer Woodwright at the Pickering Museum

at the North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street,
Meeting Room #1 (west side of atrium) use the
elevator outside the library.

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

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LANSING & NEWTONBROOK PLAQUES

200 Years Yonge (1796-1996) *Connecting Communities* was the theme to celebrate legendary Yonge Street. On the City of North York's Yonge Street Bicentennial Planning Committee, Frank Whilsmith (the then Past President), the late Betty Crossley and Gunild Spiess (NYHS members) were citizen representatives. City of North York's Council representatives were Councillors Joanne Flint and John Fillion. The four Yonge Street blue commemorative signs (York Mills, Lansing, Willowdale and Newtonbrook) were installed that year.

The Willowdale replacement plaque was unveiled at McKee Public School in November, 2011 and installed in the Pioneer Cemetery, Yonge & Church the following year.

Unveiling of Lansing and Newtonbrook replacement plaques took place on Tuesday, March 26, 2013. Lansing at Churchill Public School and Newtonbrook at R. J. Lang Elementary & Middle School. Installation locations to be confirmed – we will provide the information in the next newsletter.

The above three are in Ward 23 (Councillor John Fillion). The York Mills plaque is in Ward 25 (Councillor Jaye Robinson) – we will update members on the status of a possible replacement plaque in our next newsletter.

Please turn to pages 3 and 4 for the texts, captions and artwork of these plaques.

THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

announces a series of webinars

www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/en/Webinars-180

Webinar #1: ***BUILDING STORIES***

Share Your Community's Heritage with the World: Built Heritage and Historical Tours, Kayla Jonas Galvin
Friday, September 6, 11am to noon.

Webinar #2: ***HISTORICAL EDUCATORS***

Professional Development for Teachers Using Ontario's New History and Social Studies Curriculum, Jill Collyer
Tuesday, September 24, 4.00 to 5.15 p.m.

Cost: free. Space limited.

Registration: email to sohn@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca

The webinars are the first in a new series of online training sessions held by the Ontario Historical Society. Complimentary registration is being made available to OHS members and friends. Please spread the word to colleagues and friends.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD

Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration
Congratulations to Sheryl Adelkind
for 15 years of volunteer service.

HERITAGE TORONTO TOURS

continue to October 6th

www.heritagetoronto.org

LANSING PLAQUE



LANSING



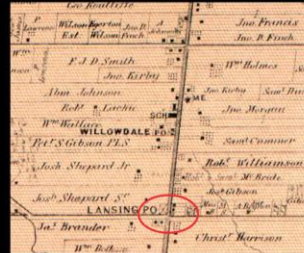
The Dempsey Brothers' Store, built in 1860 by Joseph Shepard II, was a landmark on this corner until it was moved in 1996 further north to 250 Beecroft Road.
North York Historical Society.



View looking south from Yonge Street at Sheppard Avenue. The Golden Lion Inn later served as the first offices for the Township of North York in 1922. The carved lion above its door was saved during the 1933 demolition and later moved to the North York Central Library.
North York Historical Society.

European farmers settled in this area first in the 1790s. The Golden Lion Inn was built in 1824 at the southwest corner of today's Sheppard Avenue and Yonge Street, which became the centre of a small community. In 1860, a large, brick general store was built on the northwest corner. Six years later, the "Lansing" post office opened in the store. During the late 19th century, other shops opened north and south on Yonge Street.

Following the extension of the electric street railway in 1896, the surrounding farm fields gave way to residential streets. Lansing rapidly expanded in the 1950s with the widening of Yonge Street and the opening of nearby Highway 401. In 1974, the Sheppard station opened as part of the Yonge subway extension, and the neighbourhood developed into a high-rise, densely populated community.



This 1878 map shows Lansing as a small community with a post office (PO), and other buildings clustered around the intersection of Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue. Farm orchards are shown as rectangular clusters of small dots.
Illustrated Historical Atlas of York County, 1878. Toronto Public Library.

HERITAGE TORONTO 2012

TEXT

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CAPTIONS

Top left picture: The Dempsey Brothers' Store, built in 1860 by Joseph Shepard II, was a landmark on this corner until it was moved in 1996 further north to 250 Beecroft Road.
North York Historical Society.

Bottom left picture: View looking south from Yonge Street at Sheppard Avenue. The Golden Lion Inn later served as the first offices for the Township of North York in 1922. The carved lion above its door was saved during the 1933 demolition and later moved to the North York Central Library.
North York Historical Society.

Right side picture: The 1878 map shows Lansing as a small community with a post office (PO) and other buildings clustered around the intersection of Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue. Farm orchards are shown as rectangular clusters of small dots.
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NEWTONBROOK PLAQUE



NEWTONBROOK



This 1878 map shows Newtonbrook (circled) as a small community. Its post office (PO) and other buildings are centred near the intersection of Yonge Street and today's Cummer and Drewry Avenues. An earlier road, now Cummer Avenue, crossed Yonge Street by 1819, and provided access to a sawmill on the East Don River.
Illustrated Historical Atlas of York County, 1878. Toronto Public Library.

The intersection of Yonge Street and Drewry Avenue was once the centre of a rural community known as "Newtonbrook". The community took its name from the Newton Brook Wesleyan Methodist Church, founded in 1857. A post office opened inside a general store on this corner in 1863. Along with a small cluster of local shops, a school, and the church, Newtonbrook became an important nucleus for local residents and families farming nearby. Mills on the Don River, and Humberstone's Pottery located north of here on Yonge Street, further contributed to the growth of the area.



Yonge Street, 1920, looking north from Cummer and Drewry Avenues, showing the Newtonbrook general store and post office on the west side of the street.
North York Historical Society.



Newton Brook Wesleyan Methodist Church Parsonage, 1914. It was in this parsonage that Canada's 14th Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, was born in 1897.
Newtonbrook United Church.

Over the course of the 20th century, Newtonbrook was absorbed into the urban expansion of North York and the City of Toronto. Today, the former general store on the northwest corner of Drewry Avenue and Yonge Street, rebuilt after a 1907 fire, is the most prominent survivor of the earlier community.

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CORNELIA DE GRASSI AND THE UPPER CANADA REBELLION

A Tale of Old North York

A thirteen-year-old girl, in acts of derring-do, helped the government side win in the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.

Cornelia de Grassi, was the daughter of Phillipe de Grassi (shown in picture), descendant of a noble Italian family, who settled in what is now the Don Mills-Lawrence Avenue East area, on a 200-acre grant in 1831. He was a supporter of the government side in Upper Canada and wrote in his diary, "After a fire (in 1833), I managed amidst great trials and difficulties to struggle on until that unfortunate rebellion broke out in 1837 when Mr. W. L. Mackenzie thought to take upon himself more regal functions and declared that my property with that of many other loyal men should be parceled out among his followers."



On the evening of December 4, 1837, when the rebellion broke out, de Grassi went to Toronto with his daughters, Charlotte, age 15 and Cornelia, age 13, to offer his services to the government and governor, Sir Francis Bond Head. He volunteered to discover the strength of the rebel party. Head accepted the offer and de Grassi, instead of doing the spying himself, asked Cornelia to do it, perhaps figuring that the rebels would not be suspicious of a child.

De Grassi wrote about her daring expedition in his diary, "Cornelia, a capital rider, rode out under the pretense of wishing to know the price of a sleigh, went to the wheelwright's shop close to Montgomery's tavern, and being suspected was taken prisoner by some of the rebels who ordered her to dismount."

Despite the danger, Cornelia was unflustered. Luckily for her the rebels' attention was soon distracted when Mackenzie announced that the western mail had been captured by the rebels. In the confusion and rejoicing, Cornelia had the presence of mind to gallop away as several muskets were fired at her. She barely escaped alive. One musket ball went through her saddle and another grazed her clothing.

Arriving back in Toronto, she passed on crucial information as to the number and condition of the rebels. She reported that the number of rebels had been greatly exaggerated. This information was invaluable for the government forces in dealing with Mackenzie and his supporters. "Thus the Loyalists were encouraged, measures were taken to meet Mackenzie's attack and so my poor child was the means of saving Toronto where he had many partisans," her father wrote in his diary. Based on her information about the relatively small number of rebels, Sir Francis Bond Head, who had previously been so sure of defeat that he had put his family on board an England-bound steamer, revised his thinking and decided to hold out.

The heroic Cornelia's adventures did not stop here. After following the government "loyal" troops up Yonge Street, she was on her way home when she discovered rebel Peter Matthews setting fire to the Don Bridge. Again she returned to the city and gave the alarm.

He was captured soon afterwards and was later hanged for treason.

Charlotte de Grassi had her share of excitement, too. Returning from Toronto, she was fired upon and wounded by a large party of rebels.

Written and researched by Susan Goldenberg, NYHS Director (edited)

NOTE: De Grassi Street, off Queen Street East, near Broadview Avenue, and the popular TV series, are both named after this family.

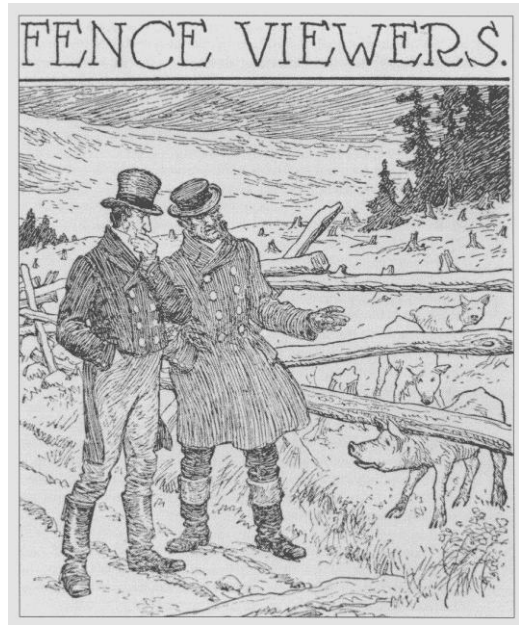
EARLY PIONEER LIFE

A Tale of Old North York

In 1793, one year after founding the community of York, Governor John Graves Simcoe advertised free lots of 210 acres west of Yonge Street and 190 acres east. To qualify for a grant of land, a man had to prove he was a “professing” Christian capable of manual labor and a law-abiding citizen. Before obtaining the final deed, the settler had to complete stipulated duties over a two-year period. These included clearing the land for cultivation, building a frame or log house, at least 16 x 20 feet, with a shingle roof and fencing ten acres of land. All timber across the lot, a quarter of a mile, had to be cut with thirty-three feet cleared smooth and left for half the public road.

In 1806, it was agreed by the majority of inhabitants that hogs and cattle should be allowed to run at large. Any stock trespassing on fenced land could be impounded. (The illustration shown is by C W Jefferys found in the Richmond Hill Library electronic collection). The fences had to be five feet high, with not more than four inches between the rails for the first three feet.

Life was not easy for the pioneers. They chopped wood in winter, burned off the land in the spring and planted potatoes, turnips, pumpkins and corn between stumps. Wheat, the chief marketable product, was sown in the fall. A cow was essential for milk and a few chickens for eggs and poultry; partridges, pigeons, salmon and deer were added to the diet as obtained. With the introduction of sheep, spinning wheels and looms for their wool were set up, and tattered garments replaced by homespun gray cloth.



Prowling wild animals were a constant menace. Bears destroyed the wheat by gathering it in their paws and eating off the heads, wolves killed sheep and hogs and foxes preyed upon the chickens, lambs and small pigs.

It was necessary to wind one's way through the stumps and roots on foot or horseback. Wagon travel was slow because of the many mud holes and bridges were washed out by floods.

Researched and written by Susan Goldenberg, NYHS Director (edited)

GIBSON HOUSE MUSEUM & HISTORIC ZION SCHOOLHOUSE

Appointment of Curator (Acting)

The NYHS would like to welcome the new acting Curator of the Gibson House Museum & Historic Zion Schoolhouse. Dorie Billich has almost 25 years of experience in the museum/heritage field: Education Program Coordinator at Black Creek Pioneer Village; Heritage Resource Officer at the City of Markham, Curator at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum; and most recently as the Manager of Culture for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. She is a past director of the Ontario Historical Society and a past chair of their Museums Committee.

ADRIENNE ALISON, Sculptor

The Society sponsored two of her realist bronzes: *C. W. Jeffreys*, Canada's foremost historical artist, is located in the park at Mill Street, east of the Miller Tavern, and *Robert Gourlay*, a social reformer, is in St. James Park, King Street East, between Church & Jarvis. Others in Toronto are *Bishop Strachan* at Trinity College at the University of Toronto and *James Beaty*, proprietor of *The Leader*, a Toronto 19th century newspaper, and a former mayor of the city, in the court yard at King and Jarvis.

Adrienne Alison has been awarded the commission for a monument to the War of 1812.

According to the National Capital Commission, the monument will sit near the East Mall on Parliament Hill and will be unveiled September 2014. It will be 3 metres tall and 4 metres long, and include 6 individual male figures in various states of action. The sculptor would like to see the inclusion of at least one woman, and this is still in discussion!

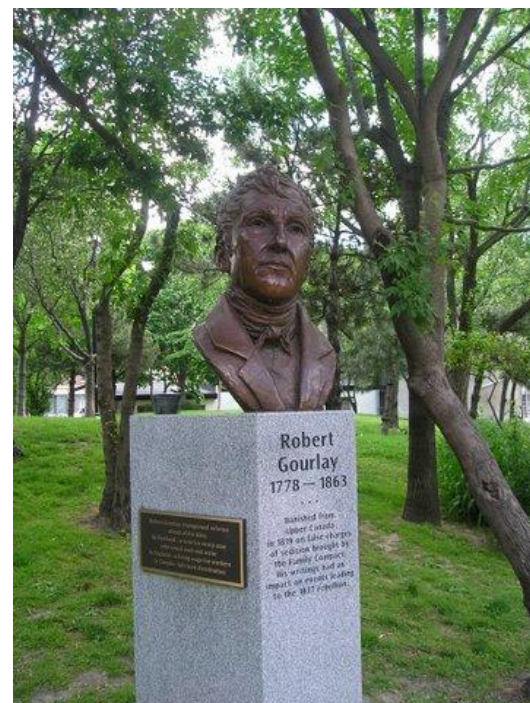
Her work is built around an assemblage of figures with space in between including a Métis militia man, a native warrior, a member of the British infantry, a farmer, and a Quebec infantry man.

Her process will have her crafting half-metre tall sculptures of each figure, which then grow to their full height of two metres before being cast in bronze and assembled in unified action on their plinth, which will include a raw chunk of Canadian Shield.

Based on an article from The Toronto Star, by Murray Whyte, June 27, 2013.



Adrienne Alison at the unveiling of C.W. Jeffreys' sculpture with Penny Potter, Donald & Louis Badone, Barbara Kane, Edith & Geoff Geduld, 2000.



Robert Gourlay, 1778-1863
Social Reformer, St. James Park, 2004

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS at the Gibson House Museum

5172 Yonge Street, just north of Mel Lastman Square, accessible from a laneway off Yonge Street.

Note: The Gibson House will be closed from September 1st to 16th.

Community Quilt Group Gathering: starting September 19th, Thursday evenings, 6 to 8 p.m. Explore historic and contemporary quilting techniques. No previous experience necessary. Free. Call 416-395-7432.

Pay What You Wish Thursday Evenings, from September 19th, 6.00-8.00 p.m. Drop in and have a look through the house. Try some hands-on-games, activities or crafts.

Social Knit, Crochet and Corking Saturday Gatherings: from September 21st, 2.00-4.00 p.m. Inviting all levels of ESL learners to join us – even if you have never picked up a knitting needle or crochet hook before. Free.

Tea and Tour Sundays: starting on September 22nd from noon to 4.30 p.m. Guided tours through the museum, includes tea and treats in the historic kitchen. Regular admission applies.

EVENTS

August 24/25: Mississaugas of the New Credit's **27th Annual POW WOW and traditional Gathering Homecoming** in Hagersville. www.newcreditpowwow.com or call Faith Rivers 519-445-2283.

September 7: **Ontario Model Soldiers Society** is hosting show at Old Fort York, 10am to 3.30pm. www.fortyork.ca or www.omss.ca or call Norman White 416-285-5600 or email omss@bell.net

September 7, 14, 21: **Annual Book Fair** at the Tollkeeper's Cottage Museum from 11am to 4pm. Corner of Bathurst Street and Davenport Road. www.tollkeeperscottage.ca

September 13, 20, 27: 2-hour **Ghost Walks** through Exhibition Place, starting at 7 pm. Hosted by the Swansea Historical Society. Call 416-263-3618 for details.

September 26: The Friends of Fort York's annual fund raiser, the **Georgian Mess Dinner**. Funds go to support the Fort York Guard and the *Fife and Drums*. www.fortyork.ca or email info@fortyork.ca

September 26: **A Sprited Affair; celebrating beer, whiskey & wine**, at 7.00 p.m. Ticket includes 6 drink samples, delicious food, actors, great music, silent auction. Tickets \$75.00. www.BlackCreek.ca/SpritedAffair

CNE: **The Scadding Cabin** is open throughout the CNE. When you visit the fair, visit the cabin and say hello to the volunteers who are promoting the York Pioneers & Historical Society and explaining the artifacts in the Society's collection.

The 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, Tourism and Sport