

**NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**  
**March – May 2018**  
**1960-2018 - 58<sup>th</sup> Year**  
**www.nyhs.ca**

***From the President***

Our 58<sup>th</sup> year has begun. On page 6 the Board and Committee contact information is listed. Only change is welcoming Marla Weingarten to the board; she joined us last September and was appointed Secretary (an Officer of the Board), and was nominated at the recent AGM. The Society always needs more help on the committees – do please contact any of us for information.

Updates on both the O'Connor Estate House and the North York Central Library are not firm as of mid-March. Repairs on the former are incomplete and construction continues at the latter! Our April meeting is at the Gibson House Museum and May will be at the Edithvale Community Centre.

*Glenn Bonnetta*

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Wednesday, April 18, 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

***EDWARD MARION CHADWICK (1840-1921), LAWYER, GENEALOGIST AND HERALDIST***

Ian Kyer, historian, author, lawyer  
at the Gibson House Museum, 5172 Yonge Street (entrance off Park Home Avenue, west of Yonge Street)

Wednesday, May 16, 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

***AN AURORA ABC WITH NORTH YORK FOOTNOTES***

Jacqueline Stuart, author, Curator of Aurora Museum (1981-2006)  
at the Edithvale Community Centre, 131 Finch Avenue West, in the Banquet Room

Saturday, June 2, 2018 from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

***GIBSON HOUSE MUSEUM'S GARDEN PARTY***

5172 Yonge Street (entrance off Park Home Avenue, west of Yonge Street)  
Themed event includes tours of the heritage garden, garden presentations, community displays, children's garden crafts, strawberry shortcake (\$), demonstrations in the historic house and more. Admission is free.

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## **DONATIONS 2017 (June-December)**

**General Operating Fund:** Bill Aird, Hugh Barnett, Margaret Chadwick, Geoff & Edith Geduld, Mary Fay, John Gambles, Linda Gargaro

**Plaquing Fund:** Margaret Chadwick, Mary Ann Cross, John Gambles

**Miriam Jackson Memorial Fund:** Eileen Lewis, Geoff & Edith Geduld  
Initial intention was to purchase an artifact for the Gibson House Museum, in memory of Miriam Jackson, a long-time board representative and Gibson House Volunteer. Instead we will donate the funds when the plans for an installation in the lower gallery are complete.

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## **FUTURE CITY OF TORONTO MUSEUM**

In an "Opinion" article on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Alex Bozicovic, wrote in the *Globe & Mail* that "Old City Hall towers over Toronto. The grand sandstone pile stands at the top of the Bay Street canyon, its carvings and gables testifying to Victorian Toronto's ambition and craftsman-ship." This was a few days before a report was to be presented by city staff to the City Council's Executive Meeting, recommending that the building be repurposed to house – among other things – a new Museum of Toronto.

In the March issue of *The Aldernews* (Etobicoke Historical Society), Joel Winter, President, in his *Reflections'* column writes "...that the time may have finally come: City Council is ready to vote on a proposal to develop part of the old city hall into a Toronto Museum. The beautiful old city hall would be a great location for it." He goes on to say that he's written a letter of support to councillors urging them to vote in favour of a proposal to develop part of Old City Hall into a Toronto Museum.

The North York Historical Society's Board of Directors, at their March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting, voted in favour of a similar action.

In 1965, following the battle to save the building, the City of Toronto's government moved into the structure which has served simply as courts since then. As fairly new immigrants to Canada, long-time NYHS member, Gunild Spiess, and her late husband, were among a group of citizens protesting the demolition of the then not necessary old building. She is still pleading for the ongoing future of the building.

Long before amalgamation in the '60s, plans for the Eaton Centre included a number of skyscrapers around a large plaza leaving only the cenotaph. After a public outcry these plans were abandoned and the Eaton Centre was constructed leaving the landmark civic building untouched. Interesting note: the Church of the Redeemer (a little north) was also slated for demolition.

## IN MEMORIAM



**Juanita Sternberg**

1944-2018

Long- time member.

Served on the board for many years:  
Treasurer, President also Gibson House  
Volunteer.

Our condolences to her family and friends.



**Margaret Cameron**

1927-2018

Long-time member.

Condolences to family and friends.



**Peter Buckley**

1936-2018

Long-time member.

Served as Director and Treasurer.  
Condolences to his family and friends.

**No Picture available**

**Joan Lloyd**

1931-2018

Long- time member.

Condolences to family and friends.

## THE HOME OF MAZO DE LA ROCHE 3950 Bayview Avenue

For more than two years, between 1976 and 1978, the fate of the onetime home in North York of Mazo de la Roche, author of the bestselling *Jalna* books about nineteenth-century Ontario, was fought over by preservationists versus developers.

The struggle was as melodramatic in its way as the soap opera plot of her *Jalna* books. At issue was whether the 17-room fieldstone and stucco house would be razed to make way for a housing development. The outcome could be viewed as a victory for both sides as some of the nine acres was used for the new houses and at the same time the house, which de la Roche called "Windrush Hill," was saved.



*Mazo de la Roche*

De la Roche only lived in the 1922 house for six years, between 1939 and 1945. However, she was the one who expanded it from a house into a mansion with the addition of two wings. The east wing she added was an impressive, oak-panelled reproduction of an Elizabethan room. This room, where she did much of her writing, had two fireplaces. The west wing was for garages and servants. In the warm weather de la Roche would sit by a stream that wandered through the property and write.



Born in 1879, de la Roche's original name was Mazo Roche. When she became a writer, she decided to call herself Mazo de la Roche, and said she was descended from an aristocratic French family with connections to Ireland. In reality she was born in Newmarket, Ontario.

### *Windrush Hill*

It was not until she was forty-eight that de la Roche, then living in Toronto, became successful. That was the year she won the \$10,000 *Atlantic Monthly* prize for the novel of the year. The novel was *Jalna*. De la Roche moved to England with her cousin, Caroline Clement, where they adopted a girl, Esmée, and a boy, René. Clement was de la Roche's closest friend throughout her life and had been adopted by the Roches at age seven, when she was orphaned. In 1939, with the outbreak of World War II, the family returned to Toronto, moving into the Bayview and Steeles house.

The children swam in the stream in the summer and skated on the frozen water in the winter. Esmée told the *Willowdale Post's* community news editor, Doreen Whincup, in a June 7, 1972 article that "There were always dogs around to play with and the grounds were like a forest with all kinds of places to hide and dream." The oil tank was buried in the ground, but not deeply enough, with the result that in very cold weather the oil would solidify and the furnace wouldn't run. When they were snowed in, the children would put on snowshoes to get out.

The problems of getting staff and of transporting the children to schools in the city eventually became too much to handle so in 1945 the family relocated to Forest Hill. De la Roche was at work on her seventeenth *Jalna* novel when she died in 1961 at the age of 82.



In 1976, the year the uproar began over “Windrush Hill”, more than ten million people around the world had bought her books. She was Canada’s biggest bestselling author after Stephen Leacock.

The 1976-78 turmoil had been preceded by another threat. Metro Toronto had tried to expropriate the land about a decade earlier to straighten Bayview Avenue. The 1976-78 squabble had its origin in the winter of 1976 when JFM Developments bought the nine acre property, including the house, for \$1.6 million with plans for 26 to 30 new homes. On April 7, 1976, the North York Planning Board approved demolition of the house. That touched off a storm of protest amongst heritage lovers and so on April 17<sup>th</sup>, the North York City Council postponed the demolition for six weeks, giving time for a buyer for the house to come forward. The next day a fire broke out on the roof, caused by sparks flying up the chimney from the burning of papers in a fireplace, but the house escaped injury.

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, the last day of the deadline set by city council, Don Mills developer Harry Winton offered to buy the house for \$250,000 plus an adjoining lot for \$70,000. His total acreage was 1.3 acres, leaving space on the remaining nearly 8 acres for 25 homes. Winton said he would make part of the house a museum honouring de la Roche and would live in the other part. Heritage lovers breathed a sigh of relief.

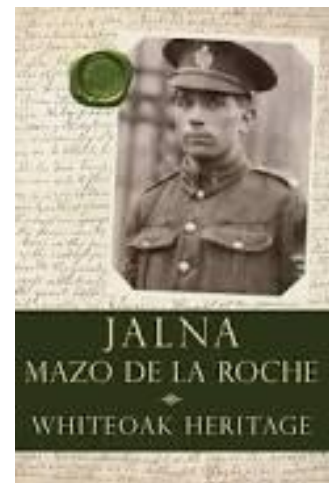
*The Jalna series has sold more than eleven million copies in 193 English and 92 foreign editions. In 1935, the film Jalna, based on the novel, was released by RKO Radio Pictures. In 1972, a CBC television series was produced based on the series.*

One year later, on May 17, 1977, Winton’s enthusiasm had waned. He announced he planned to sell the house. He blamed the new owner of the development, New Style Developments, for destroying the ambience by tearing down the trees bordering Winton’s property and he blamed city council for allowing it. Mayor Mel Lastman was unsympathetic, saying council could do nothing since the trees were on private property. He said Winton was looking for an “excuse” to abandon the project.

Two weeks later New Style said it would replace the trees, but Winton remained determined to sell the house. On August 12<sup>th</sup>, he placed a for-sale advertisement in the newspapers, asking for \$600,000, nearly double what he had paid, and saying the property was “the former home of Mazo de la Roche.”

Failing to attract a buyer, Winton got a demolition permit the first week of October 1977. North York’s building commissioner and borough solicitor, spurred by heritage lovers, swung immediately into action, cancelling the permit. They said Winton had previously agreed not to pull down the house for twenty years.

In March 1978, Winton sold the house for \$515,000 to the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario for use as a place of worship. The Society took possession of the house on April 10, 1978 and still occupies it. It is listed on the City’s Inventory of Heritage Buildings.



*Researched and written: Susan Goldenberg, Director, NYHS (edited)  
Photograph of Windrush Hill: Bill Chambers*

