

NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July-September, 2018

1960-2018 - 58th Year

www.nyhs.ca

From the President

We are pleased to announce that our general meetings will once again take place in the North York Central Library – details are below. I look forward to seeing you in September.

It is with great pleasure that we announce our new website – see page 6 for information. Our thanks to Sarah McCabe, Webmaster.

And at long last the repairs to the O'Connor Estate House are completed and we can access our records.

Starting July 12th Susan Goldenberg, Director and Membership Chair, will be contributing a monthly column on North York's heritage (people, places, events) to toronto.com (part of Metroland Media). If space is available, Metroland will simultaneously also print the column in *The North York Mirror*. Future columns will appear on the second Thursday of each month and will also be on our website www.nyhs.ca and promoted on our Twitter account. Hope you enjoy the read.

There will be an unveiling/installation event for two commemorative plaques at the end of the summer: Dempsey Store and the Golden Lion Hotel. Date and location will be posted on our website, emailed and phoned to members.

Enjoy the summer.

Glenn Bonnetta

Wednesday, September 19, 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

CALL ME PISHER – A MADCAP ROMP THROUGH CITY HALL

Howard Moscoe, author, retired City Councillor & TTC Chair

Wednesday, October 17, 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

GENERAL STORES OF CANADA: MERCHANTS AND MEMORIES

R. B. (Rae) Fleming, author

Wednesday, November 21, 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND LETTERS FROM CANADIANS AT VIMY

Michael Wilcox, Program Assistant, Historica Canada

Meeting Room 101 (main floor), North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street

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

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SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER MEETINGS - information

Wednesday, September 19th at 7.30 p.m.

CALL ME PISHER – A MADCAP ROMP THROUGH CITY HALL

Howard Moscoe, author, retired City Councillor and TTC Chair

"My grandfather was a horse thief, my grandmother a bootlegger, my father a bookmaker and my brother a scalper; so there was nothing left for me but politics."

Thus begins Howard Moscoe's hilarious, informative and undoubtedly (to some) a maddening account of his 32 years in public office. As you'll discover he used the tradecraft of all those questionable vocations to cajole, manipulate and beguile his council colleagues. While he advanced an agenda that often focused on derailing his political opponents, it was always driven by the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life in his ward and in the city as a whole.

You will also discover why the name Moscoe elicited widely varying, and sometimes extreme reactions.

Former Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman derided Moscoe as "the best excuse for birth control I know".

Adam Vaughan, M.P., Spadina-Fort York (previously a City Councillor), "Moscoe's had ability to drive those in power crazy. In fact, if he were on your side he could drive you crazy too. His style could inspire and confound you all at the same time."

Toronto Life, marking Moscoe's retirement from politics in 2010, expressed "hope that the next council can live up to the level of wit and absurdity".

And *Toronto Star* columnist Royson James offered this assessment, "Moscoe is no angel. He is a blustery, bombastic, hard-nosed advocate for the disabled, the downtrodden, and anyone else that comes up against the wall of bureaucracy that is often erected at city hall. His advocacy often brings him into conflict with the bureaucrats who really run the city. What the Councillor lacks in finesse he makes up in integrity.

Wednesday, October 17th at 7.30 p.m.

GENERAL STORES OF CANADA: MERCHANTS AND MEMORIES

R. B. (Rae) Fleming, author

Filled to the brim with groceries and clothing, these stores had so much more to offer. They were the centre of the community, where people told stories, shared news and advice- even borrowed money. In the book, Rae Fleming explores our relationship with the general store – once an institution at the heart of every Canadian town. The book explores the eclectic architecture of general stores and it ponders their history from the barter of butter and eggs to the occasional murder.

Wednesday, November 21st at 7.30 p.m.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND LETTERS FROM CANADIANS AT VIMY

Michael Wilcox, Program Assistant, Historica Canada

Focus is on letters written by Canadian soldiers from the front as well as photographs taken by professional war photographers. These primary sources are unique windows into the past and can inform and deepen our understanding of the battle and war more generally and our interpretation.

NATIVE PEOPLES COLLECTIONS @ Toronto Public Library

An Overview of Indigenous Collections and Sample Searches for Materials

LOCATIONS

SPADINA ROAD BRANCH

Adult, teen & children's books, CDs, DVDs, magazines & newspapers.

Over 5,000 items on a wide range of topics pertinent to Indigenous peoples & communities.

NORTH YORK CENTRAL LIBRARY

Adult and non-fiction materials in print, CD and DVD formats.

Over 3,500 items

TORONTO REFERENCE LIBRARY, 4th Floor

Collections of Indigenous Language materials.

- (i) Dictionaries and texts.
- (ii) Learning materials containing audio cassettes/CDs.

Over 40 Indigenous language and language families are represented in these collections including Algonquian, Cree, Mohawk, Anishabemowin and Oneida.

Note: At the March 21st meeting, Andrew Lowe, North York History Librarian, North York Central Library, gave an overview of the Native Peoples Collections. Presentation and sample searches for materials will be posted on NYHS website www.nyhs.ca

MURDER IN RICHMOND HILL

In 1908, an article in the July 24 edition of the Newmarket *Era* provided a vivid description of events that later inspired Margaret Atwood to write the novel *Alias Grace*.

The author was William Harrison, a long-time Richmond Hill resident and member of the York Pioneer & Historical Society (YPHS). In addition to being a harness maker; prominent Methodist, a ban-the-bar advocate, an active municipal politician and former reeve, Harrison had developed a reputation as a local historian.

His articles were published in the Newmarket *Era*, the Richmond Hill *Liberal*, the Toronto Junction's *Leader and Recorder* and *Canadian Magazine*. In 1911, Harrison spoke to the YPHS about the settlement of refugees from the French revolution in York County and the murders at the Kinnear farm. Harrison's presentations were described as "excellent papers" by the Society's secretary J. Wrightman Millar. A synopsis of his work on the French refugees appeared in the 1912 Annual Report. In April 1911, William Harrison was nominated to become a York Pioneer.

The above is the introduction to David Raymont's, Past President, The York Pioneer & Historical Society (YPHS) article in the 2018 Volume 113, The Annual Publication of the YPHS (reprinted with permission).

Below is a link that will enable you to read local historian William Harrison's article of July 30, 1908.

<http://history.rhpl.richmondhill.on.ca/essay.asp?id=398>

PENNIES & PURSES

**An exhibit about money and spending
in mid-nineteenth century Willowdale**

The interpreters at the Gibson House Museum get asked a lot of interesting questions about the history of David Gibson, his family and Willowdale. The most asked questions are about money and what people spent it on. Conversations with our visitors have revealed that few other topics are as laden with misconceptions and romantic views as the topic of what life on a farm in rural Willowdale would have been like. With these conversations in mind, the Gibson House team put together our latest exhibition. Our goal was to delve into the fascinating history of commerce and how it shaped the lives of rural families in Willowdale. We also wanted to highlight our collection of handbags, to expand the story from not just money but how people carried, spent and earned it.

PENNIES & PURSES is divided into three sections:

Then and Now looks at the cost of everyday items. To research prices, we searched through the Gibson diaries, Douglas McCalla's *Consumers in the Bush* and the many diaries available through the *Rural Diary Archive*, maintained by the University of Guelph. Here we looked for a wide variety of goods and give the prices and the transaction dates, then we provided a comparison to what it would cost today. Here is where you can learn how much a cone of sugar really cost. The price might surprise you!



Handbags in History is perhaps the most distinctive element of our exhibition. We look at the evolution of handbags over a 200-year period. Starting with the year 1800, we provide examples, showcasing what they were made of, as well as the culture around them. We also go beyond just the bag and look at the contents of five bags and all the little essentials of everyday life they contained from 1800 to 2000.

General Stores tackles the essential hub of commerce in communities like Willowdale. Our exhibit case has been made up to look like a store window and shows a sampling of the diverse goods sold in stores at the time. In this section we wanted to tackle some of the misconceptions about people's relationships with general stores and discuss the savvy commercial habits that helped families succeed. We also wanted to highlight the many ways people actually bought goods, as cash was by no means the only or most common medium of exchange. Finally, we show what kind of money was actually in people's purses, which was not always straight forward.

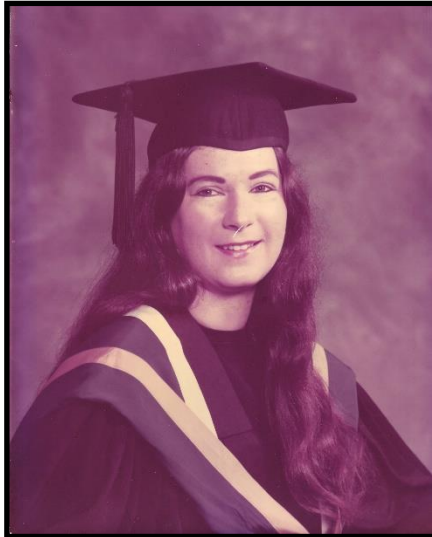


The exhibit continues until August 31st. Summer is a great time to come to the museum. The exhibit is in our Discovery Gallery and is free to visit. However, why not consider a guided tour of the historic house. Not only will you get to ask the guides your own questions, and maybe inspire our next exhibit, but the information on prices continues into the house itself, with examples from David Gibson's journals and letters of purchases he made on display next to similar items in the house.

Handbags are still changing, and we want to keep documenting those changes. To do this we are also asking the public to help us continue our explorations of bags and what people carry inside them. If you are willing to share, please tweet us a picture of your bag and its contents @GibsonMuseumTO using the hashtag #WhatsinmybagTO and it will be added to the multimedia screen in the exhibition, offering another comparison between what people carried in the past and the present!

*Sam Sharp, Historical Interpreter, Gibson House Museum & Colborne Lodge
(edited)*

IN MEMORIAM



Lavina Elsie Lanty

Thursday, May 3, 2018

Long time member of
the North York
Historical Society.

Our condolences to her
family and friends.

DONATIONS 2018 (January-June)

General Operating Fund: Sheryl Adelkind, Betty Brannen, Margaret Cameron, Lillian Methven, Elizabeth Minaker, Penelope Potter

Plaquing Fund: Sheryl Adelkind, Glenn Bonnetta, Betty Brannen, Carole Carruthers, Gordon Hawkins, Lillian Methven, Elizabeth Minaker, Gunild Spiess

Miriam Jackson Memorial Fund: Alexandra Kim, Geoff & Edith Geduld*, Lavina Lanty, Lillian Methven, Eleanor Pyke*

*In memory of Margaret Cameron

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW WEBSITE

<https://nyhs.ca>

We have updated our website (the URL is still the same). Please visit regularly to check out our upcoming meetings and events calendar, recent news items, and North York local history articles.

More to follow in the coming months.

What else would you like to see? Please let us know what you think at info@nyhs.ca.

NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S CONSTITUTION & BY LAWS 2006

The Society's Board of Directors' are currently reviewing the Constitution and By Laws. Draft will be posted on the website and circulated to members at the end of the summer. Details will also be included in the November-January Newsletter.

TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT

Drunkenness was such a serious social problem during the 19th century that a wave of temperance swept Upper Canada and the rest of North America to deal with the matter.

In Upper Canada there were 147 distilleries and 96 breweries serving a population of fewer than 500,000 in 1842, according to an unattributed study of the issue that is in the North York Historical Society archives. The first Upper Canada temperance society was formed in 1828 and the temperance movement grew so very quickly that just four years later, in 1832, there were about 100 societies with a total membership of 10,000.

"Excessive drinking was prevalent among the pioneers," the study says. "It served as an escape from the rigours of clearing the land and making a home in the wilderness and the men enjoyed a well earned drink after a building or logging bee".

Social evenings were arranged with ice cream, bananas and lemons as refreshment. From time to time there were oyster suppers. The programs at these socials included mouth organ solos, readings, songs, recitations, debates and speeches. A wide variety of subjects was covered, such as: the federation of Upper and Lower Canada; whether farmers should keep or sell their stock and crops; a debate on marriage vs. bachelordom with marriage regarded as superior.

With regard to the last item - the pro-marriage advocates maintained that "married people are longer lived than single people". Also, they were tidier, and the wife would have a fire and a meal ready for the man of the house whereas a single man, tired after a long day, would have to take care of himself. The marriage advocates declared that "Trying to make a home happy without a wife is like trying to make something out of nothing, a thing impossible for any human being to do."

TIMELESS SUPERSTITIONS

Many of today's most popular superstitions were already in use amongst Pennsylvania Germans who came to North York in the 1790s in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

According to an article on *German-Canadian Folklore* by J. J. Wintemberg, published in 1901 by the Ontario Historical Society, it was considered bad luck to open an umbrella in the house, or spill salt and seven years' bad luck to break a mirror. Conversely, the settlers anticipated good luck if they found a four-leaf clover or a horseshoe.

According to Wintemberg, settlers' predictions of the weather were based on signs. Those people today who find weather forecasts sometimes to be inaccurate despite the most modern technology might want to turn to the way weather was forecast several centuries ago by early settlers. It rained if a toad was killed or if a cock crowed after sundown. If it rained on Whitsunday, it rained for seven Sundays in succession. If a large number of crows were seen flying about in the winter, the weather would soon be milder.

If squirrels gathered large quantities of nuts in the fall, a long winter would be expected. Cats, they believed, had nine lives and when a cat washed its face, it was a sign visitors were expected.

The settlers had an unusual way of treating ailments in children. For example, a child with asthma was instructed to stand against a tree and a hole was made above his head. When the child grew past this hole, the belief was that he would lose the asthma. A child with mumps was cured by rubbing his jaw on the pig trough.

Susan Goldenberg, Director, North York Historical Society (edited)

AT THE GIBSON HOUSE MUSEUM

5172 Yonge Street (entrance off Park Home Avenue, west of Yonge Street)
Limited free parking on site: nearby street and underground parking nearby.
Toronto.ca/gibsonhouse@toronto.ca 416-395-7432

Summer Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This Victorian farmhouse was home to the Gibson family,
Scottish immigrants who helped establish North York.

PENNIES & PURSES: now until August 31st. An exhibit about money and spending in mid-19th century Willowdale (see article and pictures on page 4 & 5). FREE. Regular admission applies for tours of the Gibson House Museum.

THE FAIRER VOTE: September 22, 2018-February 10, 2019

This exhibit is a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Canadian women being entitled to vote in the federal elections. It showcases objects from the Toronto History Museums' collection that illustrates the lives of women in 1918 and highlights key people in the Canadian Women's Suffrage movement and the milestones on the way to winning "Votes for Women". FREE. Regular admission applies for tours of the Gibson House Museum.

FALL FESTIVAL: Saturday, September 22nd, 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

Tour the heritage garden, watch historic demonstrations and try hand-on activities. Vendors will showcase produce and products, while local groups provide information about Willowdale community organizations. FREE.

Museum Thursday Nights (Family Night!) Every Thursday, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Throughout July and August, Thursday Nights are Family Nights, featuring kid-friendly crafts, games and activities for the whole family between 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Pay What You Can.

Tea and Tour Sundays 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.

There's a seat for you at the harvest table in the historic kitchen on Sunday afternoons throughout the year. Relax and have a chat over tea and homemade cookies. Enjoy a tour of the lovely, 1850s farmhouse. Regular admission applies.

Gibson House Museum at the *Cultura Festival* in Mel Lastman Square

Fridays: July 6, 13, 20 and 27, 6 to 8 p.m.

Cultura features unique performers and artists, international street food vendors, creative and interactive art installations and evening film screenings under the stars in Mel Lastman Square. Gibson House Museum provides hands-on children's crafts. Visit the Gibson House Museum booth from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. For more information visit www.culturafestival.ca