

# Historical Walking Tour of **North York Centre**

Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of  
North York Central Library, 1987-2012

Mary Ann Cross | Geoff Kettel | Barbara Myrvold



Toronto Public Library Board in partnership with  
North York Historical Society, North York Community Preservation Panel  
and Gibson House Museum



**TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY**

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Toronto Public Library is pleased to present this Walking Tour in partnership with the North York Historical Society, North York Community Preservation Panel and Gibson House Museum. The Tour celebrates the 25th anniversary of the North York Central Library and the growth and development of the local neighbourhood it serves.

Toronto Public Library has a vital role in creating, preserving and sharing the rich and diverse history of Toronto and its neighbourhoods. Our unique local history collections document the community's shared memory through the events, people, places, ideas and stories that continue to shape our City. The Library is not only committed to preserving Toronto's history and heritage but also to collecting resources relating to contemporary life and culture in our City. Torontonians can access and use our rich collections by visiting local library branches or online through our website.

The Canadiana Department of the North York Central Library documents the evolution of North York through the stages of aboriginal settlements, rural communities, suburban township and multicultural borough and city to its current place as a growing and vital part of the City of Toronto. Materials include books, newspapers, photographs, scrapbooks, clipping files, family histories and municipal and genealogical records with expert staff available to support researchers from young students to professionals. The information provided in this Walking Tour is drawn from these collections, which continue to be built through purchased materials, donations from local residents and partnerships with community agencies.

To bring local history to life and to stimulate interest, excitement and pride in the history of Toronto and its neighbourhoods, Toronto Public Library partners with local communities to present exhibits, programs, publications, wikis, blogs and community events such as this Tour.

I hope you will enjoy the Walking Tour of North York Centre and invite you to further explore and enjoy Toronto's evolving neighbourhoods through our local history resources.



Jane Pyper  
City Librarian



## Key to Abbreviations in Credits

CTA	City of Toronto Archives
NYCL	North York Central Library. Canadiana Department
NYCL NYPLA	North York Central Library. Canadiana Department. North York Public Library Archives
NYHS	North York Historical Society
TRL	Toronto Reference Library. Special Collections Department

## Major Information Sources

North York Central Library. Canadiana Department

North York History Collection

North York Historical Society Archives

North York Public Library Archives

Ontario. Toronto Land Registry Office

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## Acknowledgments

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## Cover Illustrations

Front: North York Central Library interior, 1987  
Moriyama & Teshima Architects

Back: North York City Centre, south façade, 1987  
Moriyama & Teshima Architects

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**TOUR START: North York Central Library foyer,  
5120 Yonge Street**

**STOP 1: 5110 Yonge Street,  
lower level of North York Central Library**

**North York Memorial Community Hall  
Moriyama & Teshima, 1987. Mural by Artessa Studio, 1987**



Giles Orr

War memorial mural, 2012

This is the second North York Memorial Community Hall. It opened in May 1987 (at the same time as the new North York Central Library) and replaced an earlier community centre that stood on the west side of Yonge Street, south of Park Home Avenue, from 1949 until it was demolished in 1985 for the present civic square (Stop 9.2).

The current facility includes two banquet rooms, a smaller meeting room, and a large catering kitchen. It is three times larger than the original one-storey building, whose foundation stone, laid in October 1949, contained the names of 1,555 people who enlisted from North York in the Second World War, as well as 46 who made the supreme sacrifice.

In keeping with that tradition, the entrance lobby of the replacement hall features a giant, seven-by-three-metre (22-by-ten-foot) ceramic mural honouring North York's war dead. Recorded are the names of 88 North York men and one woman who gave their lives in the wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45. Comprised of approximately 10,000 handmade and hand-coloured ceramic tiles, the mural depicts four archways



First North York Memorial Community Hall, 1956

overlooking a coastal landscape, and flanked by a Canadian flag and a Union Jack. At the centre is a battlefield grave marker, with Canada's coat of arms at the top and a downturned Enfield rifle topped with an army helmet at the base.

Nicholas Graven and Susana Moore were commissioned by North York Council in 1985 to create the work to mark the 40th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War. (Their research for the memorial uncovered more names than were recorded on the original lists.) The husband and wife's Artessa Studio also designed the municipal crest mosaic in the Douglas Snow Aquatic Centre (opened in 1985 and replacing a swimming pool that opened in 1958 beside the old community hall) and the *North York Heritage Murals* in the North York Centre subway station (1988).

There is a long history of the community hall and the library being in the same building. In 1945, local residents voted to pay up to \$70,000 for a memorial community hall. In 1949, the Trustees of the Toronto General Burial Grounds granted six acres (2.4 hectares) for the project on the Yonge Street frontage of their York Cemetery lands (Stop 7). The building committee for the new hall included library advocates Gladys Allison and Rev. A.W. Jones of Willowdale United Church, where a library had operated since 1945. It recommended that the new facility include a library, as well as two auditoriums, committee and craft rooms and a kitchen.

North York Public Library's first branch opened in a room on the ground floor of the community hall on September 30, 1950. The fledgling library was managed by the North York Public Library Association Board, established that year with Gladys Allison as the first chair. With North York's rapid expansion in the 1950s, the library quickly outgrew its small quarters in the community hall and, between June 1954 and May 1957, its operations gradually moved to alternative quarters. (Details are provided at Stop 3.3).

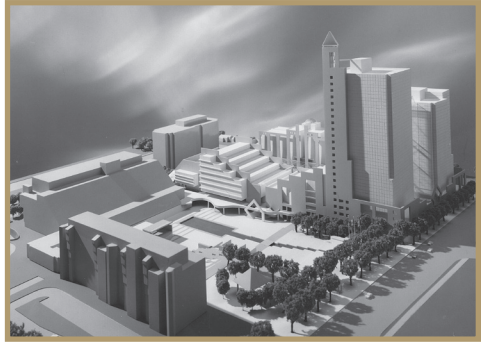
## **NOTABLE SITES on route between Stop 1 and Stop 2**

### **1-2.1 North York City Centre**

**Yonge Street, southwest corner of Park Home Avenue.**

**Moriyama & Teshima Architects, 1987**

The North York City Centre incorporates a library, a community hall, a 250-room hotel, a two-level shopping galleria and two office towers, and is connected to North York Centre subway station, Mel Lastman Square (Stop 12) and several adjacent buildings. The \$250 million complex was built between 1985 and 1987 as part of North York's billion dollar downtown development, and was designed in response to a proposal call held by the City of North York in 1981. Most of the site belonged to the North York Public Library Board. Rampart Enterprises (later known as Avro Group) won the right to redevelop the property; in exchange it replaced the existing library (Stop 3.3) and community hall with the new North York Central Library (Stop 10) and the new North York Memorial Community Hall (Stop 1), which were built at no cost to taxpayers.



**Model of North York City Centre, 1982**  
**Moriyama & Teshima Architects**

### **1-2.2 North York Centre Subway Station. 1987**

North York Centre opened in 1987 as a single station addition to the Yonge-University-Spadina line, and was a key element in the redevelopment of North York's downtown. This section of Yonge Street has a long history of transportation services, starting in 1828 with the first stage coach line between York (Toronto) and Holland Landing and including electric streetcar service provided by a succession of companies from 1896 to 1948.

### **1-2.3 Empress Walk**

**5095 Yonge Street, southeast corner of Empress Avenue.**

**Page + Steele, 1997–2000**

This large condominium and retail complex was built by Menkes Development; phase 1 was completed in 1997 and phase 2 by 2000. The lower portion has a three-storey retail mall with subway access, and features the longest unsupported escalator in North America providing access to the movie theatres from the ground floor. Above are two 34-storey residential towers with a total of 745 units.

**STOP 2: Princess Park, rear of Empress Walk,  
5095 Yonge Street, southeast corner of Empress Avenue**

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**2.1 Reconstructed main and back entrances from first North  
York Municipal Building**

**Stood at 5145 Yonge Street, southeast corner of Empress Avenue, 1923–1989.  
Murray Brown, 1923. Addition to east facade, 1947. Demolished, 1989.  
Partially reconstructed, about 2000**



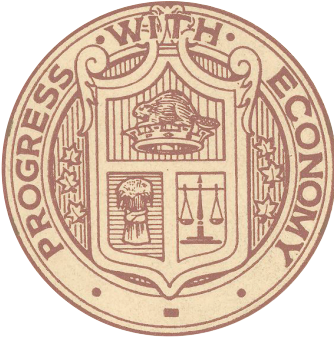
NYHS 00076

First North York Municipal Building, 1923.

Reconstructed here are the main and back entrances to North York's first municipal office, which from 1923 to 1989 was located on the site of the present condominium and retail complex. On the outside are the cornerstone and the restored frontispiece from the Yonge Street entrance to the main building that opened on December 19, 1923. Notable architectural features are the wrought-iron balconette (originally painted green) and the Indiana limestone door surround, cornice and township shield. Preserved on the inside are the cornerstone and the stylized round-arched entrance from an extension to the municipal building, which opened on July 18, 1947, North York's 25th anniversary.

North York Township was incorporated as an independent municipality on July 18, 1922, and the first reeve was R.F. Hicks, a prominent dairy farmer. Council meetings initially were held in various buildings on Yonge Street, but after the last location was destroyed by fire on February 20, 1923, the fledgling municipality decided to construct its own building. An 86-by-125 foot (26-by-38 metre) site was purchased





Seal of North York Township, 1923

on Yonge Street at the southeast corner of Empress Avenue. Toronto architect Murray Brown was commissioned to design both the municipal building and the seal for North York Township. Not surprisingly, Brown's \$35,000 Colonial Revival-style building was designed to be fireproof, with the walls of hollow tile faced with a rug brick and the floors of flat tile arch construction.

The seal was described in North York Bylaw 103, passed on December 23, 1923, as "A Shield showing a sheaf of grain and scales, surmounted by a beaver on crown, and border of maple leaves on right and left hand sides, the whole surrounded

with the words, "Progress With Economy."

The main floor had offices for the Township clerk and treasurer. The council chamber, a small assembly hall and a small members' room were on the upper floor. The basement or ground floor contained the Building, Health and Waterworks departments, together with Hydro-Electric Commission offices and space for the boiler and fuel rooms. The \$40,000 addition (\$5,000 more than the original building) provided offices for the clerk, the treasurer and the treasury, the Township engineer and the Engineering Department, and the reeve.

Even with the 1947 addition, though, the building quickly became hopelessly inadequate with North York's unprecedented growth following the Second World War. Some municipal departments relocated to alternative quarters, but on March 1, 1956, the first section of a new municipal building opened at 5000 Yonge Street, north of Burnett Avenue, on a site later partly used for the North York Performing Arts Centre (Stop 8.2).

The old building subsequently was used for a variety of civic functions until the site was cleared for redevelopment in 1989. Menkes Development dismantled the old building and stored some sections for reconstruction as the east entrance of Empress Walk. Unfortunately, the glass surround greatly reduces the view of the original frontispiece.

## **2.2 Reconstructed hose tower from North York Fire Station No. 1 Stood at 5125 Yonge Street, south of Empress Avenue, 1942–1989. Murray Brown, 1942. Bay addition, about 1952. Demolished, 1989. Partially reconstructed, about 2000**

This reconstructed tower, originally used to dry fire hoses, was part of North York's first fire hall, which opened on January 1, 1942 in the cluster of municipal buildings that stood on Yonge Street in the vicinity of Empress Avenue. The tower features a gabled roof with cornice-returns, pilasters framing a half-circle louvered vent, time clocks, red brick quoins and frieze-like bands of smooth-cut Indiana limestone. The stone medallion shows firefighting equipment — a helmet, hoses and axes — and



North York Fire Station No. 1, 1945

in form to many 19th-century fire stations. The new hall was equipped with two pumper trucks, and for the first time, there were five full-time, paid fire fighters.

A volunteer fire brigade was organized in North York by 1923. W. J. (John) Nelson was the first chief; an important qualification was his ownership of a garage on Yonge Street at Elmhurst Avenue where the brigade's only fire truck, a Model T Ford, could be kept. His son, Ivan M. Nelson, took over in 1935, and carried on as the chief of the North York Fire Department until his death in 1975. Fire Station No. 1 subsequently was renamed in his honour.

With North York's huge growth after the Second World War, the firefighting force expanded and, in about 1952, the original fire hall was enlarged with an additional bay on its north side. When the fire hall was demolished for redevelopment in 1989, a new, larger Ivan M. Nelson Fire Station opened at 12 Canterbury Place in August 1989. With municipal amalgamation in 1998, it became known as Fire Station 114. Attached to the three-bay fire station is a separate two-bay portion on the south side for EMS Station 22.

The old hose tower was carefully dismantled in 1989; a decade later, Menkes Development partially reconstructed it in the property east of Empress Walk that the developer donated for a public park.

is inscribed with the motto, *Semper Paratus* ("Always Ready").

North York Fire Station No. 1 was designed by Murray Brown, the same architect who planned the township's first municipal building two decades earlier. The fire hall was fashioned in the Colonial Revival style incorporating clean lines, contemporary materials and an overall massing influenced by Modern design. With its two prominent garage bays, compact size and tall hose-drying tower, it was similar

## **STOP 3: Gibson Park**

### **Yonge Street, northwest corner of Park Home Avenue**

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This park was once part of the farmland that David Gibson purchased in 1829 (Stop 4). In this section he planted an apple orchard in 1832. One tree, a Tolman Sweet, survives, and a second stood here until the summer of 2006, when it was blown down in a storm. The apples are featured in an art installation that is now in storage and will be reinstalled when the two 42-storey towers of Gibson Square are completed. Details about the art work are included on Stop 6.

### **3.1 Yonge Street**

Yonge Street, the six-lane arterial road that is the main street of North York Centre, is one of the oldest roads in the province and at one time was listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest street in the world at 1,896 kilometres (1,178 miles).

The road was initiated in 1793 by John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada (now Ontario), who wanted a military, commercial and settlement route to connect the upper and lower Great Lakes. Named after Sir George Yonge, Secretary of War in the British Cabinet and Simcoe's friend, Yonge Street began to be surveyed by Augustus Jones on February 26, 1794, starting at Holland Landing and going south to the provincial capital at York (Toronto).

In May 1794, Jones' colleague, Alexander Aitkin, began surveying settlers' lots on both sides of the thoroughfare, working north from Eglinton Avenue. By the end of that month, Queen's Rangers had cleared a path of 20 feet (six metres) as far north as Lot 17, Concession 1, roughly to present-day Park Home and Empress avenues. Soldiers and settlers completed the primitive road to Holland Landing by mid-February 1796.



TPL Chimside 2001-2-698

Yonge Street, west side, near today's Ellerslie Avenue, showing William Stevenson's store (location of Willowdale Post Office) and Willowdale School, 1897

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### 3.2 First North York Hydro Building

5151 Yonge Street, northeast corner of Empress Avenue.

Craig and Madill, 1929; second storey addition, 1948



NYHS 00296

First North York Hydro Building, 1929

This was the first stand-alone office of North York Hydro, and is the only survivor of an enclave of early 20th-century municipal buildings that existed on Yonge Street near Empress Avenue. It was designed in the Edwardian Classical style, similar to the first North York Municipal Building (Stop 2.1). Both were constructed of red brick with limestone trim; the decorative keystones on the Hydro building were a modest attempt to provide some architectural flourishes on an otherwise utilitarian structure.

Donald Ross, a township resident, was the principal architect on the \$20,000 project; the associated architects were Craig & Madill. The Toronto architectural firm designed several other buildings in North York including Earl Haig High School (1929–30); a renovation of Willowdale United Church (1932); and Lansing United Church (1949–50).

In the early years, local residents were supplied with electrical power by the privately-owned radial railway. On December 7, 1923, the North York Hydro-Electric Commission was formed, and the public utility acquired the street railway's transmission lines.

At first, the Hydro offices were housed in the basement of the municipal building, but in November 1929 they moved into their own building. The *Toronto Star* noted on November 16, 1929, "The new premises of the commission lie just north of the town hall, and the group of township buildings form an impressive centre for the progressive community." The new Hydro offices were built in front of the Commission's equipment warehouse that had been constructed on a 40-foot (12-metre) lot at the northeast corner of Yonge and Empress for \$3,650 in 1925. Hydro staff used a team of horses and a wagon acquired in July of that year; the first truck was purchased in 1928.

A second floor was added to the office building in 1948, but the Hydro-Electric



Commission soon outgrew the space and in December 1956, it returned as the sole occupant of the municipal building. (North York Waterworks Department moved into the old Hydro building.) In 1965, the \$1,139,000 North York Hydro Building opened at 5800 Yonge Street. The original building at 5151 Yonge Street was listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties on May 26, 2009.

### **3.3. Library Service at Yonge Street southwest corner of Park Home Avenue, 1954–1985**



J.V. Salmon/TFL Salmon 51-40648

Harold Holmes Gibson House, showing the second library portable, 21 December 1957

For three decades, the land bordering this intersection was used for library services. The site had once been the home of Harold Holmes Gibson (1870–1946), an engineer and a grandson of David Gibson (Stop 4). In 1897, the year following his marriage, Harold was given one acre (.4 ha) fronting Yonge Street at the southeast corner of the family farm (Lot 18, Concession 1 West) by his parents, Peter Silas Gibson and Eliza Holmes. Here, he built a large, red brick dwelling, probably of his own design. In 1902, he and his growing family moved away, but the property remained within the Gibson family for many years. Eventually the Township of North York acquired it, and by the early 1950s its Engineering Department was installed in the old Harold Holmes Gibson House.

The North York Public Library Association, formed in 1950, then was located a short distance south in the North York Memorial Community Hall (Stop 1). On November 24, 1953, the Association Board asked North York Council “for the land adjacent to the Engineering offices for placing a portable classroom for library

use, parking space and a driveway with access for the bookmobile". The request was granted, and by June 1954, the children's library had moved into the portable (donated by the North York Board of Education from Drewry Avenue Public School). The township's first bookmobile, acquired earlier that year from Smith Bros. of North York for \$12,670 (plus taxes), opened for business on July 27, 1954. It parked here when it was not out on its route of 13 weekly stops around the township. Extra books were stored in the children's portable, and then in a second portable acquired in 1955.

By that time, North York Public Library Board had started to plan for a central library on the land where the old Harold Holmes Gibson House stood. Established as a municipally-supported board by North York Township Bylaw 9612 passed on January 3, 1955, the public library was allotted the corner property by North York Council in January 1956. It also received permission that year to purchase a small parcel to the south (Lot 17, Concession 1 West) from York Cemetery trustees (Stop 7.2). Associated architects James Murray and Henry Fliess were appointed to design the new library in April 1956, and by year's end their preliminary sketch plans had been approved. (Murray was a significant force in Canada's postwar architectural scene; Fliess' work includes many of the original homes in Don Mills.) However, it was not until August 12, 1957 that North York Township Council passed Bylaw 12412 formally selling the 1.573 acres (.64 ha) site to the Library Board for \$52,000. It was comprised of the Yonge Street frontage of 133 feet (40 metres) on Lot 18, Concession 1 West and 35 feet (ten metres) on Lot 17, Concession 1 West with 489 feet (149 metres) on Park Home Avenue and 350 feet (110 metres) on the southern boundary.

In 1957, the adult and children's departments relocated to three rented stores at 5188, 5190 and 5192 Yonge Street, a block north of Park Home Avenue, opening there on May 9. The Library's administration and technical services staff had moved out of the North York Memorial Community Hall in April 1956, going first to the old Harold Holmes Gibson House, then to the portable formerly used for the children's library and finally to rented quarters at 5562 Yonge Street.

NYCL NYPLA 0015



Portable for the children's library, about 1954

NYCL NYPLA 0014



North York's first bookmobile parked behind the old Gibson house, about 1954



Gladys Allison Building, North York Public Library, about 1959

Construction of North York's first stand-alone library started in spring 1958. The old Harold Holmes Gibson House was demolished; the portables were sold and on October 15, the cornerstone was laid for the new building. The \$700,000 library opened to the public on July 8, 1959, and officially on October 19. With 41,000 square feet (3,800 square metres), it included adult and children's libraries, an auditorium/art gallery, two meeting rooms, and, on the second floor, offices for administration and technical services. The innovative design featured an exterior frieze by Toronto artist Harold Town.

The building was named in honour of community activist Gladys Allison (1901–1979), the driving force behind the establishment of a public library system in North York. She began to campaign for a library service in 1938; helped set up a library in the basement of her church in 1945; and served on the Library Board both as a member and chairperson from 1950 until 1966. The Gladys Allison Building closed on October 5, 1985 for redevelopment of the site, and was replaced by the North York Central Library that opened on May 13, 1987 (Stop 10). The reading room in the Canadiana Department is named for Gladys Allison. Stored here are the cornerstone contents from the Gladys Allison Building, including an embossed brass door knob from the Harold Holmes Gibson House.



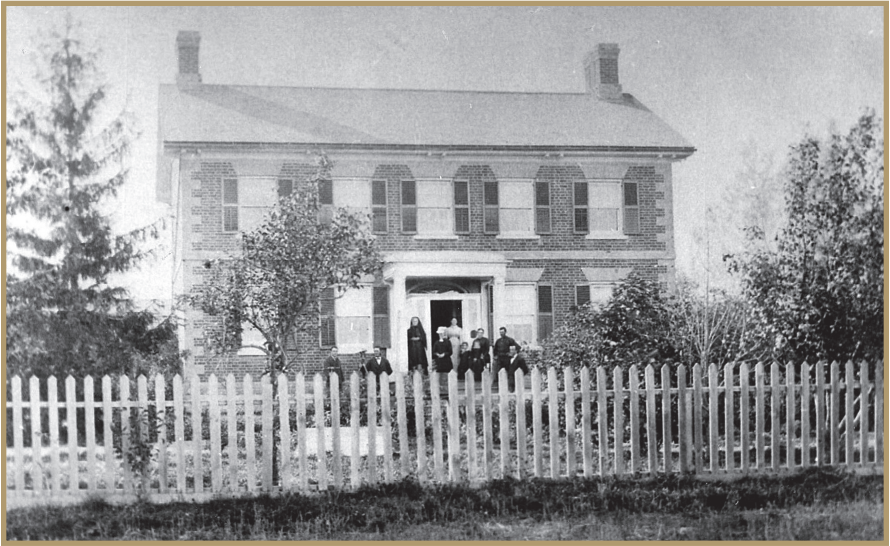
Gladys Allison (1901–1979), 1958

## STOP 4: 5172 Yonge Street

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### David Gibson House. 1851

Gibson House Museum



David Gibson House, about 1873, showing his widow, Eliza Gibson, son Peter Silas Gibson and family

This fine dwelling was built in 1851 (with later additions), and was the second home of David Gibson (1804–1864) and his family. The two-and-a-half storey building was constructed on a fieldstone base with red bricks made on the property. It displays several features of Georgian Revival and Neoclassical styles: a central doorway with an elliptical fanlight transom, rectangular sidelights, and a two-panel door (all original); and evenly placed, symmetrical windows in a five-bay façade. The exterior displays other distinctive decorative components, notably buff brick used for bands around the building, voussoirs over the windows and doors, and corner quoins. The porch has been restored, based on 19th-century photographs.

David Gibson was born in Glamis Parish, Forfarshire, Scotland. He apprenticed as a land surveyor, immigrated to Upper Canada in 1825, and soon secured government work, as well as private employment. In 1828, he married his cousin, Eliza Milne (1809–1887), the daughter of a prosperous local miller. The following year, Gibson purchased the south half of Lot 18, Concession 1 West where he established a farm; his 105 acres (42 hectares) stretched from Yonge Street to Bathurst Street, from the south side of present-day Park Home Avenue to the south side of today's Ellerslie Avenue.

Gibson was a supporter of William Lyon Mackenzie, and twice was elected (in 1834 and 1836) as a Reform member representing the first riding of York in





David Gibson (1804–1864)



Elizabeth Milne Gibson (1809–1887)

the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada. After taking part in the unsuccessful Rebellion of 1837, his 1829 wood frame house was burned by order of the Lieutenant Governor. His wife and children were sheltered in his neighbour Jacob Cummer's house, and he fled to the United States.

He secured employment as a surveyor, and soon brought his family to Lockport, New York. He did very well, choosing not to return under the general pardon of 1843. After he lost his job in 1848, however, he and his family returned to their York Township farm, which had been managed by relatives during their absence. He resumed his dual occupations of surveyor and farmer, and once again became an active member of his rural community. In the 1850s, he petitioned the government for a post office, which opened in 1855, and suggested the name, "Willow Dale" because of the abundance of willow trees in the area. David Gibson died suddenly in Quebec City at age 59 on January 25, 1864. Eliza remained in their home until her death at age 77 on February 22, 1887.

David and Eliza had nine children. Eventually their son, Peter Silas Gibson (1837–1916), took over the house, living there with his wife, Eliza Holmes (1844–1943), and ten children until his death on August 6, 1916. The following year, most of the Gibson farm was sold to the Park Home Site Company and eventually was subdivided.

The North York Historical Society was founded in 1960 to advocate for Gibson House, which was purchased by the Township of North York in 1965. Restored to the 1850s period, it opened as a museum in 1971. It is now owned by the City of Toronto and operated by the Culture Division. Gibson House was designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* on December 15, 1980 as being of architectural and historical value or interest (City of North York Bylaw 27975).

## STOP 5: 250 Beecroft Road

### 5.1 Joseph Shepard II Store and Residence (later Dempsey Brothers Store)

Stood at 4804 Yonge Street, northwest corner of Sheppard Avenue,  
1860–February 1996; moved to current location, 1996



TRL Chirside

Dempsey Brothers Store, 1921

For 136 years, this two-and-a-half storey building was a prominent Yonge Street landmark. Built in 1860 as a general store and family residence for Joseph Shepard II (1815–1899), the building was located at the northwest corner of Sheppard Avenue until February 1996 when it was moved to its present location. (The family surname usually was spelled with a single p, but the street name has a double p.)

The building is constructed primarily of red brick, with buff brick used in the elaborate pattern under the eaves, on the gable ends, and the corner quoins. The sash, six-over-six windows on the second floor are original, but the three large windows on the ground floor were reconfigured in 1996 to reflect an earlier storefront appearance. The separate entrance to the original residence also was rebuilt; as was the verandah, a late 19th-century addition consisting of chamfered posts and elaborate fretwork at each consecutive bay, 12 in all.

The building originally stood on the site of the log house that Joseph Shepard I (1767–1837) built in 1798 at the southeast corner of a 210-acre (84-hectare) property

that he formally acquired in 1802. Lot 16, Concession 1 West extended from the west side of Yonge Street to today's Bathurst Street, from present-day Sheppard Avenue to just north of today's Burnett Avenue.

The Shepards were ardent Reformers, and during the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837, Joseph II, his three older brothers, Thomas (1805–1899), Jacob (1806–1854) and Michael (1809–1873), and their mother were active participants on the rebel side. Joseph II and Jacob were imprisoned on December 11, 1837 and remained in the Toronto jail until they were pardoned on May 12, 1838.

Joseph II returned to work at the family mills and farms. Eventually, he was appointed as a justice of the peace, served on York Township Council in 1862, and in 1866, his store became the site of the first Lansing Post Office. The name was suggested by one of Shepard's daughters, and soon it also was used for the surrounding community. Son Joseph Shepard III served as the Lansing postmaster from 1869 to 1876.

Long counters ran the full length of the store, with groceries on one side and dry goods on the other; hardware and farm implements were stocked in the back. The living quarters included a parlour, a dining room and a kitchen on the main floor and six bedrooms upstairs for Joseph, wife Elizabeth and their six children. The store also served as a waiting room for travelers on the horse-drawn stage coaches that ran daily from Yorkville to Richmond Hill and as a milk depot for local farmers. Later, streetcars on Yonge Street's electric radial railways stopped here for passengers and milk.

In 1888, the Shepards leased the building to 27-year-old Benjamin R. Brown (1861–1939) who bought the business and the site (24/100 acres/.1 hectares) in 1904. He was the postmaster at Lansing from 1888 to 1921. The next store owners were George and William (Bill) Dempsey, who took over the business in 1921 and purchased the site in 1923. They converted the top floor into two family apartments and added roof dormers. In addition to running the well-known Dempsey Brothers Hardware Store, George operated the Lansing Post Office (1921–1949). In 1948, Bill became the sole owner of the *Enterprise* (later the *Mirror*), the North York newspaper the brothers had purchased in 1926. The store stayed within the family until 1989 when the property was sold to developers, who later donated the building to the City of North York.

After being relocated to Dempsey Park in 1996, the restored building opened as the City of North York Archives in September 1997, but after municipal amalgamation in 1998, the records were transferred to the main City of Toronto Archives on Spadina Road, and it became an archives exhibit space. After considerable debate about its future use, the building was leased in 2000 for a learning centre for children with autism. The land and buildings at 250 Beecroft Road were designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* on December 17, 1998 (City of Toronto Bylaw 812-1998).

## 5.2 Dempsey Park

Mary Ann Cross



Dempsey Park, 2012

“This is a welcoming park, with the soft rolling hillocks beckoning people to walk on the grass,” assesses geographer John Warkentin. The park land was assembled in stages by various means over the course of the 1990s.

The first phase of Dempsey Park opened in autumn 1997 to provide a suitable setting for the former Dempsey Brothers Store (Stop 5.1), which was moved to this site in 1996. It includes a date stone of 1860 on a pillar at the entrance, and a ceremonial lawn, a town square plaza and a gazebo, recalling the old store’s role as a community meeting place.

When the park was expanded west of the gazebo in 1999, the local community was part of a collaborative design process. *Where Past & Present Meet...* by landscape architects from the MBTW Group commemorates the time when the land was part of the Gibson family farm. *Timetrack* by artists Millie Chen and Warren Quigley traces the passage of time, highlighting aspects of the area’s history from the prehistoric era, through First Nations culture, to European agricultural settlement, and the time of Shepard’s store.

In the pathway leading from the Precambrian boulders at the park’s west entrance, embedded bronze casts of ginkgo leaves and worm fossils represent ancient flora and fauna. Tracks of past and present indigenous animals are indicated by cast bronze footprints of northern leopard frogs, white-tailed deer and raccoons.

The time when First Nations peoples lived in the area is represented by bronze casts of corn, beans and squash, the “Three Sisters” that the Iroquois considered as “sustainers of life” to be planted, eaten and celebrated together. The corn stalks support the pole beans, and the squash vines trap moisture and shade the roots of the corn and bean plants.



For many years, the site of the present park was owned and operated as part of the Gibson family farm (Stop 4). Reflecting those times, there are embedded bronze casts of several farm implements in one of the pathways: a gross plot edging knife, a scythe, a hitching post showing ropes with the halter knots used to tie up the horses, a two-man saw, and a wagon wheel. On the nearby wall, there is a work glove and a cultivator.

The kitchen garden, near the west entrance of the park, represents the type of garden that was situated close to the farmhouse for growing vegetables, herbs and flowers. Cuttings from two Tolman Sweet apple trees and a Snow apple tree that were still standing in the 1980s, on the site of David Gibson's original orchard in Gibson Park were grafted on to the rootstock of the young apple trees in the orchard section of the park so they will produce the same kinds of apples. A single Tolman Sweet apple tree survives in the Yonge Street section of Gibson Park (Stop 3).

## **STOP 6: Gibson Park** **Park Home Avenue, northeast corner of Beecroft Road**

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### ***100 links – 1 chain.* Stephen Cruise, 1998**



*The Marker* by Stephen Cruise, Beecroft Road, west entrance to Gibson Park

The dual occupations of David Gibson as a surveyor and a farmer are commemorated in the art installation, *100 links – 1 chain*, by Stephen Cruise, commissioned by the City of North York Parks and Recreation Department when Gibson Park was established in 1997.

*The Marker*, located at the west entrance of the park at Beecroft Road, includes a larger-than-life stake, ten chain links and five tags or tellers, representing a surveyor's marker, and the 66 foot long measuring chain of 100 stainless steel links connected together, with bronze tellers marking every 10 links from either end, to the 50 link teller at the middle. The apple on top of the stake represents the Gibson apple orchard. At the base, are 12 granite boulders, symbolic of stones that farmers cleared from the land before planting crops. One is inscribed with the location of Gibson Farm — "Concession 1W, Lot 18, County of York, Canada West", another with the name Euclid, the Greek mathematician often referred to as the "Father of Geometry" and the "Patron Saint of Surveyors", and a third with the latitude and longitude of the stake, as well as its modern surveying co-ordinates in the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) geographic coordinate system. The life-sized colt, "Logo", recalls a foal pictured in a 1905 Gibson family photograph. "Useful" and "Rainbow", named on one side of the foal, are the names of Gibson family horses that were agricultural fair prize winners.



Stephen Cruise

*The Gateway* by Stephen Cruise, Yonge Street, east entrance to Gibson Park

*The Gateway* is located at the east entrance to Gibson Park near Yonge Street. Currently in storage while the adjacent buildings are under construction, it features two brick piers that represent a pair of wooden piers that once marked the driveway to the Gibson farm. The north pier is topped with an apple, representing the apples in the Gibson orchard — forty barrels in 1851,

according to the agricultural census. In 1848, David Gibson wrote an inventory of his animals. The figure of a small draught horse standing on a gambrel-roof barn on top of the south pier represents "one horse, John, and one mare, Kate". The names "Devon", "Blacky", "Page", "Beauty", "Spot", "Cherry" and "Grey" and the images of seven cows, on pavers between the piers, represent cows named in the same 1848 inventory.

*The Gateway* and *The Marker* are linked by a pathway with a series of pavers showing images of tellers denoting 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 links. These pavers are also in storage, and will be reinstalled when the Gibson Square construction is completed.

## STOP 7: 160 Beecroft Road in York Cemetery

### 7.1 Michael Shepard House. 1859



L. Gardner/NH/55

Michael Shepard House, May 1961

This two-storey dwelling, with a rear kitchen wing of one-and-a-half storeys, was constructed in 1859 for Michael Shepard (1809–1873). It was built around the same time as the store/dwelling of his younger brother, Joseph Shepard II (Stop 5.1), and the house of their family friend and neighbour David Gibson (Stop 4). All three are of similar construction — red and buff brick on a fieldstone base — and incorporate key features of the Late Georgian and Neoclassical styles. Note here the central doorway (the paired Tuscan columns supporting a generous entablature are a later addition); symmetrically-placed, multi-pane, six-over-six sash windows with thin glazing bars; paired double-stack chimney flues at the gable ends; and quarter-round openings within the attic storey of the gable ends. The buff brick highlights several important structural elements.

The house stands on a section of a 210-acre (84-hectare) property that Michael's father, Joseph Shepard I (1767–1737), received as a crown grant in 1805. Lot 17, Concession 1 West extended from Yonge Street to today's Bathurst Street, from north of the present-day Burnett Avenue to south of today's Park Home Avenue. Joseph I was born in New Hampshire, and came to Canada in 1774. Eventually he became a prosperous farmer and miller, owning several farms, as well as saw and grist mills in York Township. (His clapboard house, built in 1835, stands today at 90 Burndale

Avenue; the federal government building at 4900 Yonge Street is named the Joseph Shepard Building.)

Michael purchased the north half (105 acres/42 hectares) of Lot 17, Concession 1 West, from his parents for £500 on March 24, 1837, a few months before his father's death on May 3. In his will, Joseph I bequeathed the south half (105 acres) of the lot to his wife, Maria Catherine Fisher (1782–1852), with instructions that Michael was to receive it after her death; he also willed 12 acres (4.8 hectares) of land and a mill pond at the back of this property and the adjacent Lot 16, Concession 1 West, to son Thomas Shepard (1805–1889).

As mentioned in Stop 5.1, the Shepards were active in the movement advocating political reform in Upper Canada, and participated in William Lyon Mackenzie's armed uprising in 1837. On December 7, 1837, Thomas Shepard later recorded, he and brother "Mike" were assigned with 60 of the best riflemen to go from the rebel headquarters at Montgomery's Tavern on Yonge Street (near today's Eglinton Avenue) to the Don Bridge at Toronto's King Street to create a diversion. Before being intercepted by loyalist forces, the rebels set fire to the bridge and some nearby houses, and one person was killed. The brothers fled but soon were captured and imprisoned in Toronto. (They were in the city jail when fellow prisoners Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, the leader of the Don Bridge raid, were hanged in the jail-yard on April 12, 1838.) Without a trial, the brothers were sent in June 1838 to Fort Henry in Kingston to await exile to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania). They and 12 others managed to escape; the Shepards crossed the border into the United States where they lived until after the general pardon in 1843.

Upon his return to York Township, Michael opened a saw mill in Oriole (Leslie-Sheppard area). In 1846 he offered to sell his land on Yonge Street, "200 acres [80 hectares] with building and all for 2400£ well fenced and in good condition," but the property did not sell and was leased to tenant farmers. Michael took over the south half of Lot 17, Concession 1 West, in 1855, and sold his Oriole mill to brother Thomas in 1856. By decade's end, he had taken up farming on Lot 17, Concession 1 West, building this fine house facing east to Yonge Street. Here he lived until his death from heart disease on May 7, 1873.

Michael had sold off parts of his lot before he died, and the process continued in the ensuing years. The house continued as a private residence after the property was purchased in 1916 by the Trustees of the Toronto General Burying Grounds (Stop 7.2). Eventually the custodian of York Cemetery lived in the house, and it is now used as the cemetery's administrative office. The Michael Shepard House was designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act for its architectural and historical value on November 25, 1999 (City of Toronto By-Law No 775-1999).



## 7.2 War Memorial

Patricia Fulford, 1963



War memorial in York Cemetery, 2012

This impressive memorial, 45 feet (13 metres) tall and standing on a high point of land, was unveiled on October 20, 1963. It was dedicated “to the glory of God in memory of those of the Armed Services who lie in this hallowed ground.” Designed by Canadian sculptor Patricia Fulford (1935– ), the monument is made of Queenston limestone with side crosses of Laurentian pink granite. It was jointly financed by the Trustees of the Toronto General Burying Grounds and the Citizens’ Repatriation League.

The memorial is located a short distance from York Cemetery’s Section 5, which opened in 1949 for veterans of the Second World War. At the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs, a second section (B) opened in 1961 for veterans and their spouses; Section D was developed subsequently. Various weaponry is displayed in the veterans’ sections.

York Cemetery’s beginnings go back to 1916 when the Trustees of the Toronto General Burying Grounds purchased 200 acres (80 hectares) near Lansing Post Office for future use. The property was comprised of the old Michael Shepard Farm on Lot 17, Concession 1 West (Stop 7.1) with a small portion of Joseph Shepard II’s old property on Lot 16, Concession 1 West (Stop 5.1). The non-profit organization was founded in 1826 by leading citizens of York (Toronto) to provide non-sectarian burial places. Now called the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries, it presently operates at ten locations.

The Trustees applied to York Township’s Board of Health in November 1918 to

use the 200 acres (80 hectares) for a cemetery. Plans changed, and on January 30, 1926, they sold both properties to the Globe Land Company for \$1, taking back a mortgage of \$150,000. The developer’s proposal to subdivide and construct single-family houses on the site failed, however, and in 1934, the Supreme Court of Ontario restored the land to the cemetery trustees.

In the interim, a company called London Air Transport converted 24 acres (9.7 hectares) into an airfield that operated from 1927 to 1929. Advertisements in August 1928 promoted 30-mile sightseeing flights around Toronto (\$10 per passenger) and business flights to New York, Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, and Ottawa (50 cents per mile) from the “Flying Field, Stop 7, Yonge Street.” Other sections were leased for a golf driving range and farming.

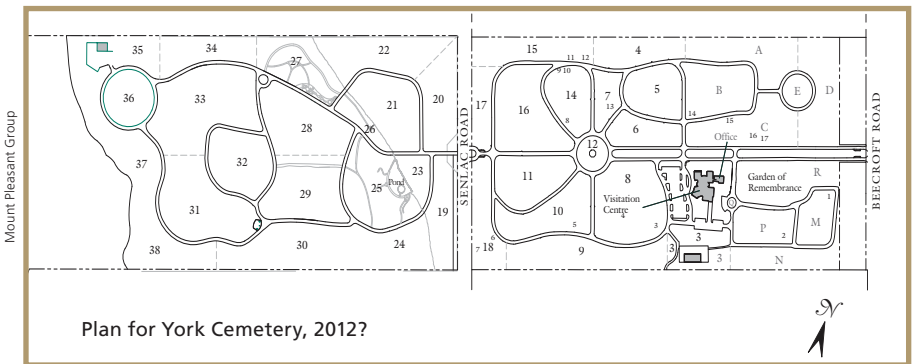
Greenhouses were constructed on the property in 1936 to supply plants to the four cemeteries — Toronto Necropolis, Mount Pleasant, Prospect and Pine Hills — then operated by Trustees. A tree nursery also was established in the early days, and ornamental trees from many different places now complement the native species in the cemetery.

In 1946, the Trustees finally began to develop the property for a cemetery, having received approval (once again) from the local board of health in 1944. Roads were graded, trees were planted (the large elm and Austrian pine trees along the central boulevard are from that time), and areas were bermed and sodded. On July 27, 1948, York Cemetery had its first burial, that of Eva Cooper in Section 8, Lot 471.

As North York grew, the Township requested and was sold some of the unused cemetery property fronting Yonge Street for various purposes including a community hall (Stop 1), a public library (Stop 3.3), a swimming pool, a lawn bowling club, and municipal offices (Stop 9). Cemetery officials sometimes placed conditions on the sales, in 1963, for example, that a “vista” be maintained from Yonge Street to the cemetery.

With development intensification in the ensuing years, York Cemetery now has the largest green space in the area (and is the only place to experience the old rural landscape). It attracts nature lovers, photographers, artists, joggers, walkers and others seeking quiet recreation. As part of their environmentally-friendly initiatives, the Trustees opened a geothermal columbarium here in 2011.

Since 1948, York Cemetery has had 54,500 interments, including newscaster,



journalist and TV host, Barbara Frum (29-1043); legendary hockey player Tim Horton (14-133); First World War Victoria Cross winner Henry Howie Robson (B-302); big band leader Cyril McLean (C-1276); radio broadcaster Cy Strange (7-623); Her Imperial Highness Grand Duchess Olga of Russia, the youngest daughter of Czar Alexander III and a sister of Nicholas II, the last Russian czar (15-254); artist and sculptor Sing Hoo Yuen (18-349); novelist and short story writer Hugh Garner (18-1751); and John William Billes, who with brother Alfred established Canadian Tire (8-1043).

## **STOP 8: 5040 Yonge Street, near the southwest corner of North York Boulevard**

### **8.1 North York Board of Education (now Toronto District School Board) offices 5050 Yonge Street, northwest corner of North York Boulevard. Mathers & Haldenby Architects, 1970**

This Modernist building opened in 1970 to house the offices of the North York Board of Education, established in 1954 (previously local schools were operated by smaller boards). By the early 1970s, North York had the second largest school system in Ontario, surpassing those of Ottawa and Hamilton.

The new board offices were designed by the Toronto architectural firm of Mathers & Haldenby in the Brutalist style, so named for its “brutal” affront to traditionalism in architecture. Brutalism was popular in Ontario in the 1960s and 1970s, and was seen as an attractive and relatively inexpensive solution during a period of great expansion in universities and public buildings. Typically, Brutalist buildings are linear, fortress-like, and blockish, and are constructed of concrete (*béton brut*). University of Toronto’s Robarts Library (1973), also planned by Mathers & Haldenby, is one of the best-known examples of Brutalism.



ERA Architects, North York's Modernist Architecture Revisited 2010

Toronto District School Board (formerly North York Board of Education) offices, 2010

While the Board of Education building displays several Brutalist features, unusually it has a steel structure with curtain walls of anodized aluminum. Floor slabs are concrete with no central columns. All services are on the south side of the building to provide uninterrupted working area. Internal walls have been kept to a minimum with demountable partitions for flexibility. The building occupies 114,381 square feet (10,625 square metres) on four floors, plus a mezzanine and a mechanical penthouse on the roof.

The North York Board of Education offices were the first in a group of buildings that were constructed over the next two decades on or near an 18.8-acre (7.6-hectare) site that the Borough of North York purchased for \$2,321,375 in January 1967 from the Trustees of the Toronto General Burying Grounds (Stop 7.2). North York planned to develop a civic centre on the property, which fronted the west side of Yonge Street between its second municipal building north of Burnett Avenue (Stop 8.2) and the public library in the Gladys Allison Building at the southwest corner of Park Home Avenue (Stop 3.3). “It will be a heart to lift us out of the suburban era,” Reeve James Singer proclaimed to the *Toronto Star* on September 14, 1966.

In September 1967, the North York Board of Education received four acres (1.6 hectares) of this property from the municipality. At the building’s opening ceremonies in September 1970, the Board chair explained that the site was “chosen deliberately in order that the two municipal jurisdictions — the Board of Education and the Borough of North York — may be in close proximity.”

The building became the main offices for the Toronto District School Board following municipal amalgamation in 1998. It was included in *North York’s Modernist Architecture* in 1997 and was listed on the City of Toronto’s Inventory of Heritage Properties on September 27, 2006.

Note the large boulder in front the building. Made of dolostone, a magnesium-rich variety of limestone, it was found in August 1972, about ten metres (32 feet) below the surface during the excavation of the Yonge Street subway. Weighing seven tonnes, the boulder likely was transported by glacial ice from what is now southern Quebec along the St. Lawrence Valley some 13,000 years ago.

## **8.2 North York Performing Arts Centre (now Toronto Centre for the Arts) 5040 Yonge Street. Zeidler Roberts Partnership, 1993**

Of the four Modernist public buildings on the walking tour (Stops 8.1, 9.1 and 10), only the North York Performing Arts Centre aspired to be a destination for the whole city, rather than a part of a key “regional downtown” in Metropolitan Toronto. Opened in October 1993, Zeidler Roberts Partnership (Principal Eberhard Zeidler, Project Architect George Friedman) planned three performance venues — the Main Stage Theatre, the Recital Hall and the Studio Theatre — plus an art gallery.

Already surrounded by tall buildings, the centre had to create its own presence, Eb Zeidler explained in *The Globe and Mail* on March 25, 1993. “We couldn’t compete with the height so we used the undulating roof form to announce ourselves.” The





North York Performing Arts Centre (now Toronto Centre for the Arts), 1993

article also noted, “The flowing multi-level roofline not only provides visual relief from the strong vertical lines of the nearby skyscrapers but gives the building dramatically different profiles depending on where one pauses to view it.”

The interior of the two-storey structure (which rises to four storeys at the back of the Main Stage Theatre) is also impressive. A grand lobby fronts the three theatres, and the 1,032-seat recital hall is “a priceless jewel with superb acoustics, and the best place in Toronto to hear music,” enthused *Toronto Star* critic Martin Knelman in January 2004.

The Zeidler firm, famous for designing Toronto’s Eaton Centre and Ontario Place, has been responsible for other major performance arts projects, notably the Raymond F. Kravis Centre for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida (1992) and the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga (1997). For the North York project, Zeidler joined forces with two New York consulting firms: Russell Johnson (Artec Consultants Inc.) for acoustics and Bob Lorelli (Robert Lorelli Associates Inc.) for the lighting, backstage facilities and other technical theatre systems.

Before the theatre complex was built on the site, it was home to North York’s second municipal building, designed by Sproatt & Rolph and opened in 1956, with wings added in 1958, 1961 and 1965. In 1975, with the completion of its third municipal building (Stop 9.1), North York sold the 9.5-acre (3.8-hectare) parcel to the Province of Ontario, which intended to build a courthouse there. Eventually Ontario Hydro acquired the property, and signed a 99-year lease with North York for 1.85 acres (.75 hectares) to accommodate a new performing arts centre.



Despite some initial success, the arts complex has struggled to maintain the city-wide role that was envisaged originally. Garth Drabinsky's Live Entertainment (Livent), contracted by North York Council to manage the three-theatre complex for ten years, went bankrupt in late 1998. (Under

Second North York Municipal Building, 1964

its management, the complex was known from 1994 to 1998 as the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts.) The City of Toronto assumed control of the facility, renaming it the Toronto Centre for the Arts (TCA) in 2000. Toronto entrepreneur Aubrey Dan launched Dancap Productions in 2007, but in April 2012 he announced that after five years of presenting Broadway shows at TCA, his Tony Award-winning company would be not be mounting a 2013 season.

## STOP 9: 5100 Yonge Street

### 9.1 Third North York Municipal Building (now North York Civic Centre) Adamson Associates Architects, 1979



Third North York Municipal Building, 1979

North York's third stand-alone municipal office was designed by Adamson Associates in 1974. Its construction, which began in October 1975, was intended to act as a catalyst for the redevelopment of North York's downtown. The Modernist building was ready for use in April 1979, and with North York having become a city on February 14, 1979, it was called North York City Hall. It received the Governor General's Medal for Architecture in 1982.

With five floors above grade and one floor below, the 555,000 square-foot (51,600 square-metre) building uses the atrium concept so that each floor overlooks the floors below. The sloping roof incorporates large areas of glazing panels to provide natural light to the interior court on the east side and the offices on the upper floors, which are stepped back in a stadium-like fashion. Suspended from the ceiling is a metal sculpture by Micheline Beauchemin entitled, *Golden Bird*. Three glass-enclosed elevators service the building's six floors as well as the three parking floors below, which were built to accommodate 565 cars.



Adamson Associates Architects

Third North York Municipal Building, 1979

Following municipal amalgamation in 1998, the building became known as North York Civic Centre. It is home to the North York Community Council and a number of local municipal departments serving the North York District.

## 9.2 Mel Lastman Square Jones and Kirkland Architects, 1989

Surrounded by Yonge Street on the east, the Toronto District School Board headquarters on the south, North York Civic Centre on the west, and the North York Central Library and City Centre on the north, Mel Lastman Square is the focal point of North York Centre.

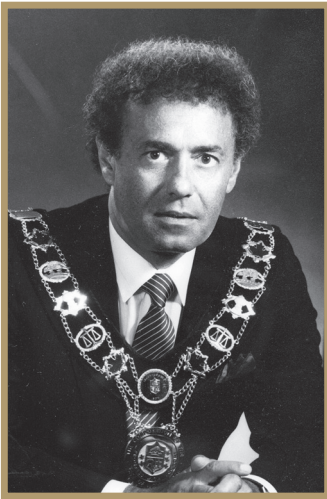
The North York Civic Square (as it was known in the planning stages) was developed in two phases. In the first phase started in about 1985, the 3.4-acre (1.3-hectare) site was cleared, paved and landscaped; flag poles and general site





### Mel Lastman Square

lighting were installed; a new entrance to City Hall was built on the lower level; and the watercourse from Yonge Street and the reflecting pool/skating rink — the park's centerpiece — were constructed. Additional facilities were completed in phase two, including structured amphitheatre seating, a bandshell, an open-air wedding pavilion, public washrooms, and a concession booth. The North York Chime of Bells, a carillon of 14 bells, is located 26 floors above the square on the Petro-Canada Building (Stop 1.2.1).



Mayor Mel Lastman wearing the North York Chain of Office, 1980

The square, designed by J. Michael Kirkland, officially opened on June 16, 1989. It was named for Mel Lastman, who had been the mayor of North York since 1973; he continued in office until 1997, becoming mayor of Toronto after municipal amalgamation, serving from 1998 until his retirement after the 2003 municipal election. One of the country's longest serving mayors and one of its most colourful politicians, Lastman campaigned tirelessly for a new downtown in North York — "a \$5 billion undertaking that created 70,000 new jobs and resulted in \$75 million in annual business and realty taxes", according to his biography on the City of Toronto's website.

Mel Lastman Square hosts a variety of activities throughout the year, including a weekly, seasonal farmer's market, cultural festivals, concerts, Canada Day celebrations and numerous family events. It is primarily a quiet space in which to relax, eat lunch and skate during the winter.



## STOP 10: 5120 Yonge Street

### North York Central Library Moriyama & Teshima Architects, 1987



Moriyama & Teshima Architects

#### North York Central Library, renovated Teen Zone, 2012

North York Central Library officially opened on June 4, 1987. The seven-storey library of 15,609 square metres (168,022 square feet) is four times larger than the old Gladys Allison Building (Stop 3.3), which had served as North York's central library since 1959.

The new library was part of the \$250 million North York City Centre development (Stop 1-2.1), planned by Moriyama & Teshima. The architects designed a stepped profile for the library, explaining, "Areas clad in stainless steel explode out of the 'discipline plane' — a granite-clad wall used to unify all the buildings in the complex." Polished and matte finishes are used for both materials, and some of stainless steel squares are coloured red for accent.

Red- and blue-coloured glass highlights the arched main entrances. On the south, the glass panels are four-stories high; while on the north, they are not as tall to accommodate the Harold Town frieze relocated from the old Gladys Allison Building. Six letters from old and contemporary languages — Roman, Cree, Semitic, Chinese, Assamese and Runic — are created in porcelain enamel.

Once inside the library, an open atrium connects the upper six floors. The sculpted space is defined by sweeping staircases and stacked semi-circular balconies; curved planters echo the shape of the balconies. Repeated archway motifs over entrances, elevators and gates unify the building. The granite of the "discipline plane" is repeated on the library's exterior.

Planning for the new library started in 1980. The year before, the North York Public Library Board asked the municipality for \$4.5 million to expand and renovate the cramped and outmoded Gladys Allison Building. Mayor Mel Lastman made an alternative suggestion: that a new library might be provided by a developer in exchange for its use of library land.

On April 5, 1982, North York Council redesignated and rezoned the civic centre/library lands to permit a mixed-use project comprising office, retail and library space, to allow the implementation of a joint municipal and private project, including the construction, at no cost to the city, of a new central library. On October 4, 1982, North York Council adjusted the 45-degree angular plane height limit on the lands, and also selected Rampart Enterprises as the city's partner in the so-called City Centre Development, based on the design scheme prepared by Moriyma and Teshima, Architects. The construction contract for the complex was signed between North York Council and Rampart Enterprises in November 1983. Nevertheless the Ontario Municipal Board rejected the development in July 1984 on the grounds that it violated the North York's official plan and would create instability in the surrounding residential neighbourhood; the provincial cabinet overturned the OMB ruling in October 1984 and the project went ahead.

After several years of planning under the direction of then-CEO Jean Orpwood, staff determined that the new library should act as both a regional and a neighbourhood branch for its immediate community and as a resource branch, with more in-depth and comprehensive collections, for the rest of the North York system. The Gladys Allison Building closed on October 5, 1985, and a support branch, Central-on-Sheppard, opened to serve the community until the new North York Central Library was ready. Construction started in January 1985 and the new library was substantially completed in February 1987. When it opened in 1987, the central library's staff and services and its collections of 250,000 items provided support to five regional branches, 13 community branches and to various deposit collections in North York.

North York Public Library became part of the new Toronto Public Library following municipal amalgamation in January 1998. North York Central Library is now one of two research and reference libraries in a system of 98 branches that is among the world's busiest urban libraries. In 2011, North York Central Library's collections totalled 638,893 items in many formats.

Many design features from the original building remain. In the children's section, for example, a fantasy play castle continues to draw young library users into an area especially conceived for their convenience, with child-level shelving, furniture and windows. But the building also was planned, it was noted in 1987, for "anticipated changes in the future, as the 'information age' advances." The library now has 115 computer workstations (there weren't any 25 years ago) and wireless Internet service (Wi-Fi), as well as self-service checkout and checkin (RFID) installed in 2010. Other recent changes include the opening of a new performance space on the Concourse level in 2009, a renovated auditorium in 2010, and a renovated Teen Zone in 2012.

# About the Authors

## Mary Ann Cross



Mary Ann Cross has been a resident of Willowdale for more than 32 years. She first became actively involved in the heritage field in the late 1990s, trying to save the Dempsey Store for historical and community use and providing input for the design of the second phase of Dempsey Park. Since then, she has served on the North York Community Preservation Panel and the Board of the North York Historical Society. She is especially interested in highlighting and maintaining the historical sites of North York's early rural past, and has led several walking tours of "Rural Willow Dale" for Heritage Toronto.

Mary Ann graduated with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Applied Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Toronto, and was the first woman engineer at Lakeview Generating Station in Mississauga. As the Career Guidance Co-ordinator of *Women in Science and Engineering*, she encouraged girls in the non-traditional careers of science and engineering, and was the author of "You Can Be an Engineer" in *The Writer's Voice*, in 1985.

## Geoff Kettel



Geoff Kettel has been Chair of the North York Community Preservation Panel since February 2009 and is a member of the Toronto Preservation Board. Under his leadership, the Preservation Panel has sought to highlight North York's rich Modernist architectural legacy through sponsoring architecture forums (held in 2009, 2010 and 2011); nominating properties for listing and designation on the City of Toronto's Inventory of Heritage Properties; and contributing to publications — Geoff wrote the forwards to *North York's Modernist Architecture* (2009) and *North York's Modernist Architecture Revisited* (2010).

Geoff is also Vice Chair of the Leaside Property Owners' Association and Co-Chair of the steering committee of the Federation of North Toronto Residents' Association (FoNTRA). He is the 2008 recipient of East York's Agnes Macphail Award for social justice.

Geoff retired in 2008 from a career of more than 30 years as an analyst and senior manager with the Ontario Public Service. Prior to that he was a land use planner with Kilborn Engineering in Toronto. Geoff has B.Sc. and Master's degrees in Geography, from the University of Wales and the University of Western Ontario, respectively, and a Master of Business Administration degree from the Schulich School, York University.

## Barbara Myrvold



Barbara Myrvold has coordinated local history collections and services for the Toronto Public Library since 1982. In this capacity, she has written or supervised the publication of 15 books about Toronto communities and neighbourhoods. Her books include *The Beach in Pictures*, a Canadian bestseller, and *The People of Scarborough*, both recipients of Heritage Toronto letters of commendation, and *St. Clair West in Pictures*, winner of Heritage Toronto's Award of Merit. Her office is at the North York Central Library, and she enjoys exploring the neighbourhood and visiting the sites described in this walking tour booklet.

Barbara also has spearheaded efforts to present the library's historical collections about Toronto and its neighbourhoods online and digitally on the Toronto Public Library's website, first as the coordinator of *Historicity: Toronto and Then and Now* (winner in 2002 of the Ontario Library and Information Technology Association (OLITA) Award and a Heritage Toronto Award of Merit) and now as a member of the *Find Your Way to Local History and Genealogy* team.

Barbara has been the archivist for both the Toronto Public Library and the Toronto Transit Commission, and has worked as a reference librarian in public libraries in Toronto and Scarborough. She holds a BA from McMaster University and BLS and MLS degrees from the University of Toronto.



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