

East York Tidbits

Stories About East York Presented by the East York Historical Society

GLIMPSES OF EAST YORK, THE *EAST YORKER* NEWSLETTER

East York experienced tremendous growth in the years after the Second World War. In 1931, seven years after the incorporation of the Township of East York, its population was 36,000. Twenty years later its population climbed to 64,000 and in 1961 it reached 72,000. After the war, the Town of Leaside, the Township's future municipal partner, also experienced tremendous growth. Leaside's population fewer than 1,000 in 1931 skyrocketed to 16,000 by 1951 and reached over 18,000 in 1961. By the end of the 1960s, the population of the amalgamated Township of East York and the Town of Leaside as the new Borough of East York was 102,000.

By the late 1950s, Township Council realised that they needed a voice to communicate the Township's recent and upcoming activities to the growing number of people who chose to make East York their home. The *East Yorker* newsletter became that voice. The inaugural March 1960 issue describes the purpose of the publication as "a suitable means of keeping East York residents informed about the affairs of the municipality..."

Percy Bustin, a long-time Township Alderman spearheaded the publication of the *East Yorker*, which he edited from 1960 to 1962. Published quarterly by the municipality, usually in March, June, September and December in an easy-to-read 4 to 6 page folded booklet format, it continued to be the voice of the municipality until December 1997. Gail Hill, the last editor of the *East Yorker*, closed the last issue with "Because of amalgamation, this is the last issue of the *East Yorker*. I have enjoyed editing the paper for the past 6 years, especially because it has allowed me to meet so many East York residents."

Along with editing the *East Yorker* in the early 1960s, Percy Bustin was an avid supporter of local history. Percy was a druggist who operated the drug store he opened in 1924 at the southeast corner of Coxwell Avenue and Sammon Avenue. In his 1974 self-published brief history of East York, Percy recounted the story of his first customer at his drug store in 1924.

In 1924 Coxwell Avenue ended near Percy's drug store. To the north of Sammon Avenue were dirt paths, open fields and wild bush. Not knowing how he would be accepted in the wilds of the newly created Township of East York, Percy nervously awaited his first customer behind the counter of his drug store. While he slipped into the back room to straighten his tie in the mirror he heard scratching at the front screen door and the door opening and shutting quickly several times. "Strange" thought Percy, "perhaps my first customer is as nervous as me; a little hesitant to step in the new drug store." With one last look in the mirror and putting on his most friendly smile, Percy stepped from the back room taking his place behind the counter to welcome his first customer. To Percy's amazement at his front door was a horse with its head sticking inside the screen door. Percy's first customer in the wilds of the new Township of East York was a horse!

Although experiencing tremendous growth itself, East York was surrounded by larger, faster-growing municipalities within Metro Toronto. As a minnow among whales, a reason East York and Leaside maintained a strong sense of place and character was the publication of the *East Yorker*. We owe Percy Bustin our gratitude for overseeing the creation of the *East Yorker* newsletter and his support of local history.

The *East Yorker* newsletter is a valuable time capsule containing local stories perhaps not available from any other source about important activities in the municipality. Whether you are a recent or an old East York resident, I urge you to read through issues of the *East Yorker* newsletter. Originals of the *East Yorker* are available at the S. Walter Stewart Library, Local History Section and the Toronto Reference Library.

To entice you, here are several stories carried in the *East Yorker* in the 1960s, a decade of growth, change, prosperity and confidence.

Between 1961 and 1969, every June issue of the *East Yorker* devoted a page to outlining the July 1 Dominion Day events. These events remained generally unchanged during the 1960s and most take place during today's successor Canada Day event. The daylong celebration starts with a parade featuring floats, fire trucks, girl guides, boy scouts and veterans. Local kids with decorated bicycles would join the parade. Prizes were given to the best decorated bicycles. The parade route changed yearly, but it usually started or ended at Cedarvale Park, Memorial Park or Dieppe Park.

After the parade, the afternoon would include stage shows of folk dancing, concert bands and precisionettes. A swim meet for kids would be held at the Kiwanis Pool. The track meet at East York Collegiate stadium was a popular afternoon event. Local athletes such as Bruce Kidd and Bill Crothers would compete against runners from the USA and Britain.

The evening included dancing “under the stars” at the Dominion Store (now Shoppers Drug Mart) parking lot at Woodbine Avenue and O’Connor Drive with celebrated square dance caller Margaret Hough. In addition to square dancing, the 1969 *East Yorker* mentions that “modern” dancing would be available at Cedarvale Park. The June 1970 issue of the *East Yorker* went a step further than “modern” dancing, as it announced that a “Rock Concert” was to take place in the valley.

A “mammoth fireworks display” at Cedarvale Park capped off every Dominion Day, as it still does today. As in the 1960s, the daylong July 1 celebration continues to be an integral part of the community’s fibre. The celebration was and continues to have the feel of a small town gathering.

In 1960 East York Hydro’s residential connection fee is \$2.00.

On April 13 1960, members of Council visited the latest dial exchange at the Bell Telephone building on Donlands Avenue, near O’Connor Drive. The new exchange known as GARDen will serve 3,400 customers formerly served by HOWard, OXFord and HUDson.

East York Track Club member Ergas Leps broke the Canadian open record for the 880 yards at the 1960 Dominion Day Track Meet at East York Collegiate stadium with a time of 1.49.8. Bruce Kidd, 16, also of the East York club established a new Canadian junior record for the mile with a time of 4.19.7.

In June 1961 the *East Yorker* reported that Bruce Kidd, the 17-year-old local running sensation, won the 2-mile run at Boston Garden in 8.42.2, nearly a full minute faster than any schoolboy has ever run that distance. In the U.S. championships at Madison Square Gardens, Kidd won the 3-mile race in 13.47.

In 1961, courses on personal survival, rescue, and radiation decontamination are available from the regional headquarters of the Metropolitan Civil Defence Organisation located on Sammon Avenue. Township Council has asked staff to report on the feasibility of establishing public fallout shelters in the Township.

Also in 1961, Council refuses to endorse the use of sweepstakes to raise money for hospitals.

In June 1961 the *East Yorker* announces the establishment of the new East York Historical Society. The Society is looking for prospective members. Anyone with old letters, pictures or other material about the early days of East York is asked to contact the East York Library.

In June 1961 the *East Yorker* published this poem about East York written by Mrs Gladys James of Chisholm Avenue.

*Though you boast about London,
Paris and Cork,
You'll ne'er find a place
To compare with East York;
Its people are friendly,
Warmhearted and true,
If you can't get along,
Then the trouble is you.*

A petition signed by 85% of the retail businessmen of the Township was presented to Council in early 1962 requesting that the early closing bylaw be retained and enforced. The merchants are opposed to the trend to longer business hours of some of the discount stores. The merchants feel the trend is a backward step and a temporary situation.

A Liquor Plebiscite will be held on November 3, 1962 on 2 questions: 1. "Are you in favour of the sale of liquor under a dining lounge license for consumption with meals on licensed premises?" and 2. "Are you in favour of the sale of liquor under a lounge license for consumption on licensed premises?" Also on the plebiscite, East Yorkers will be asked if they approve of sports on Sundays.

The 2 questions on the Liquor Plebiscite to allow dining room lounges and cocktail bars were defeated by East York residents. The other question on the plebiscite to allow Sunday sports was approved.

To celebrate Canada's centennial in 1967, in October 1964 the East York Centennial Committee has selected Todmorden Park, just southwest of Pottery Road, as the Township's centennial project. The site has 4 nineteenth century buildings that will be restored and used as an educational museum. The East York

Horticultural Society intends to plant an authentic old-fashion garden of flowers and vegetables beside one of the buildings and to plant wildflowers throughout the site.

On August 4, 1964, the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of World War 1, the "Old Contemptibles" remembered the beginning of the war by placing a wreath at the Township's cenotaph.

It is anticipated that the East York Foundation will be established in 1965 by private legislation at the next session at Queen's Park. The foundation will hold gifts to East York in permanent trust.

In June 1965 Council has arranged a mass public meeting at the East York Collegiate auditorium to discuss the Goldenberg Report, which recommends that the City of Toronto annex East York and other local municipalities in Metro. A fear is that annexation will bring higher taxes to East Yorkers. Also, many of the local recreational and cultural programmes cherished by East Yorkers, like the Dominion Day festivities might be lost.

On September 8, 1965 a public meeting will be held for East York and Leaside residents at the S. Walter Stewart Library. Reeve True Davidson will warn citizens about the disastrous effects of the Goldenberg Report recommendation that the City of Toronto annex East York. She intends to stress that East York would lose control over many services enjoyed by East Yorkers like cultural and recreational facilities, welfare and building regulations. As an alternative to the Goldenberg Report, she will propose a 6-city plan for Metro. After the question period, citizens will be given the opportunity to mark ballots indicating their tentative preferences. The East York and Leaside ballots will be different colours and the ballot results given to the East York and Leaside Councils.

With the tolling of the bells to bring in the 1967 two important events came into being: Canada's centennial year and the birth of the Borough of East York, consisting of the former Township of East York and the Town of Leaside. The population of the new Borough is 97,000. Despite the misgivings of many individuals that the amalgamation of these 2 proud municipalities would prove a failure, the transition has taken place smoothly. Mayor True Davidson and the 8 Aldermen representing the 4 wards in the Borough will work hard to make all citizens proud of the new Borough.

Voter turnout at the recent December 1966 municipal election was over 43% in the new Borough, by far the highest of the new 6 Metro municipalities.

On October 7, 1967 Judy La Marsh, Secretary of State will officially open East York's Todmorden Mills Park Centennial Project.

The design by Harry Faulks of Brentcliffe Road was selected as the Borough's new crest. The design features green maple leaves, a brown beaver, a red shield and a bulldog. The Mayor presented Mr. Faulks with a pair of cuff links.

In her 1968 state of the Borough address, Mayor True Davidson points out that this is the era of soft services to supplement the hard services. When the family fails government must act. She emphasised that the Borough is fortunate to have many residents willing to contribute to the recreational, cultural and social needs of the community on a voluntary basis.

After about 2 years of discussion in September 1968 Borough Council has approved a huge 33 acre housing development at Victoria Park Avenue and Dawes Road. The development will be known as Crescent Town, named after the private school "Crescent School" currently on the site. Designed by James Murray, Professor of Architecture at the University of Toronto, the \$50 million project is the second biggest in Metro and will house 3,000 families. It incorporates the most advanced ideas in people-oriented high density development, with much landscaping, natural areas, recreational facilities and a new public school.

In December 1968 the *East Yorker* reports that East York is not just a municipality-it's a way of life. The East York Foundation offers citizens the opportunity to leave something of lasting value to their community. The Foundation already has contributions totalling over \$1,000 and custody of pictures, antiques and rare books. Gifts can be made to the Foundation by completing the "Patrons of East York Foundation" form.

No taxes for East Yorkers in 1969? Prince Edward Island gets about 65% (about \$30 million) of its annual budget from the federal government. East York's population is about equal to that of P.E.I. and the Borough's 1968 budget was \$23.3 million. If East York could get the same treatment from the federal government as P.E.I. there would be no taxes in East York in 1969!

In 1969 the last unpaved street in the Borough, Halsey Avenue east off Dawes Road, will be paved at a cost of \$8,614.52.

The twin Leaside Towers will be built in 1970 in Thorncliffe Park. The 43 storey towers will be Canada's tallest residential apartment buildings. Each tower will have 494 air-conditioned suites and three levels of parking. The project will cost \$20 million.

Dominion Regalia, which was located of Elm Street in Toronto, moved its operations to O'Connor Drive in East York and is now on Overlea Blvd. in Thorncliffe Park.

**Prepared by John Michailidis
January 2013**

The East York Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and sharing information about East York's rich past. The Society meets 5 evenings a year usually on the last Tuesday in January, March, May, September and November and selected afternoons in the autumn and winter months.

INTERESTED IN THE EAST YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, VISIT:

Web: <http://www.eastyork.org/eyhs.html>