

# East York History Bike Ride



Presented by

Ward 29 Bikes  
and  
The East York Historical Society

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### **Welcome!**

Welcome to the inaugural East York History bike ride, offered by Ward 29 Bikes and the East York Historical Society. We hope that you enjoy this self-guided tour that visits some of the interesting historical sites in and around Ward 29. At a leisurely pace, this ride should take between 90 minutes and two hours, including all stops.

### ***Caution!***

Although most of the recommended route follows quiet residential streets or bike lanes, short sections are on main neighbourhood roads. Please use discretion at all times, especially if you're riding with children. Cross streets only at intersections or marked crossings. If you are using a pedestrian crossing, dismount and walk your bike across the street. Every crossing of a main street on this tour is at or within a block of a stop light or crosswalk. Don't be afraid to make a short detour if traffic is too busy to cross. Always ride on the right side of the road. When you pull over at a site, pull your bikes right off the road and out of traffic.

### ***Privacy***

Many of the sites that you'll see today are private residences; please respect the privacy of the people living there.

Above all, have fun, and good riding!

## **Playter Gardens**

*4 Cambridge Avenue*

Captain George Playter of the British army was given a grant of 500 acres of land near the Don River in 1793. Some portions of the land were subdivided to create the village of Chester in the area surrounding the intersection of Broadview and Danforth. The village remained relatively isolated from Toronto thanks to the natural barrier created by the Don Valley, which kept Chester and its neighbouring village to the north, Todmorden, largely rural.

The opening of the Bloor Viaduct in 1918 brought extensive commercial and residential development to the Danforth, with the entire length of the street being developed in just a few years, turning the former farm lane into the city's longest commercial street. Several streets, this park, and the entire neighbourhood of Playter Estates were named after the Playter family. The Playters also erected the Playter Society Building on the southeast corner of Broadview and Danforth.

## **Public Lavatory**

*55 Danforth Avenue*

The building just across the street at 55 Danforth Avenue was built in 1920 as a public washroom. It was used continuously through 1988, when it was closed after being deemed too expensive to operate. At the time, it had two attendants and averaged just 30 daily users. The building was designed by G.F.W Price, the same architect who designed the Coliseum at Exhibition Place.

## **Cambridge Cottages**

*138-146 Cambridge Avenue*

The workers' cottages on Cambridge Avenue are prime examples of the Ontario Vernacular style of architecture. This style was very common throughout Ontario from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Small cottages like this are found in Cabbagetown and other older areas of the city. A long row of such cottages outside of a heritage conservation district is quite rare.

## **Chester Hill Lookout**

*Chester Hill Road*



From this lookout over the Don Valley, you can see much of the industrial and transportation history of the Don Valley. Just on the other side of the Don Valley Parkway is the "half-mile bridge," which carries a Canadian Pacific line across the Valley. The bridge was originally built in the 1880s and reconstructed in the 1920s. The line is no longer in active use.

Beyond the bridge is the Don Valley Brickworks, the quarry and factory that supplied Toronto with bricks for more than a century. Numerous Toronto landmarks are

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built with bricks from this quarry, including Casa Loma and Massey Hall. The quarry is perhaps best known for the north wall, which exposes the geological history of the area through the visible sediment layers that were laid during and between ice ages in North America.

The Bayview-Bloor ramp was originally constructed as the first leg of the Crosstown Expressway, which was to link the DVP to the Spadina Expressway. That project was effectively cancelled at the same time as the Spadina Expressway, but the ramp remained.

### ***Chester School***

*958 Broadview Avenue*



The Chester School, built in the Romanesque style in 1891, was a six-room schoolhouse constructed to alleviate overcrowding in the area's other school at the corner of Don Mills Road and Leslie Street (currently O'Connor Drive and Donlands Avenue). The School's six rooms were all in use by 1906, necessitating plans to expand once again to a larger building in a new location. This building served the community for 35 years.

The school was sold to the Estonian House in 1960, which constructed additions to the front and rear. The old brick schoolhouse is still preserved as the core of the current building.

The original brickwork is still intact along the sides, where you can see the bell tower and decorative brickwork around arched windows and doors. It is the oldest surviving school structure in East York.

### ***Sammon Avenue***



Sammon used to have dozens of storefronts between Donlands and Coxwell Avenues. A few remain, especially small clusters at Greenwood Avenue and Monarch Park Avenue, along with a surprising number of service stations between Greenwood and Woodbine Avenues. Most of the old storefronts have been converted to residential units.

École élémentaire La Mosaique (formerly St. Aloysius school), which backs onto Sammon two blocks east of Greenwood, occupies the location of the original municipal offices established when East York Township was founded

in 1924.

The apartment building at 280 Sammon was the location of Gunner Knudsen's Greenhouses. It was advertised as "East York's Only Florist", with the slogan "Not the Gunner that Shoots, but the Gunner that Suits". It operated into the 1940s.

Other businesses along Sammon included East York Shoe Repair (232), and Cooper's Food Market (256).

## **Century Schoolhouse**

*502 Sammon Avenue*

This reproduction of a late-nineteenth century one-room schoolhouse is used by the TDSB to give modern schoolchildren a taste of a typical school day in the 1890s, when their great-great-grandparents may have attended a school like this one.

## **Toronto East General Hospital**

*825 Coxwell Avenue*

The original building of the Toronto East General Hospital was opened in 1925. The Moderne style main building facing Coxwell was completed in 1951 and gives the hospital its primary visual identity. The building is slated to be demolished as part of the hospital's planned long-term expansion and revitalization.

## **First Branch of the East York Public Library**

*Northeast corner of Coxwell and Mortimer Avenues.*

This building was originally built as the Township of East York's first public library. It was opened on April 26, 1950 and is currently the home of Hippocrates Medical Clinic.

## **East York Civic Centre and Memorial Gardens**

*850 Coxwell Avenue*

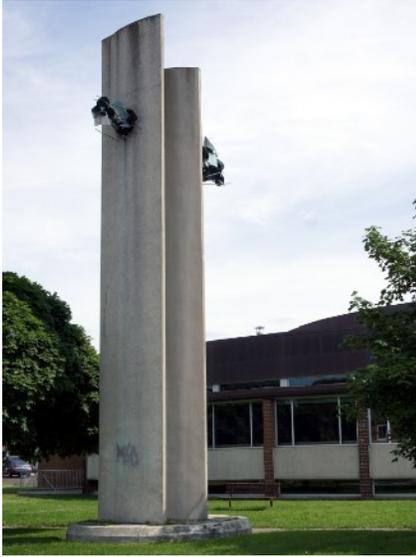
The East York Civic Centre, Memorial Gardens, and R.H. McGregor public school are all located on land donated by farmer Billy McKay to York County (prior to the formation of the Township of East York). He also donated part of the land for Toronto East General Hospital in 1924.



The current Civic Centre building was opened in 1990, replacing the much smaller 1970s-era building that fronted on Mortimer Avenue. At the time of the construction, Memorial Gardens was reoriented and the cenotaph relocated to its current prominent position.

## **S. Walter Stewart Library**

170 Memorial Park Avenue



Named after a long-serving member of the East York Public Library Board, this building is the only circular branch in the Toronto Public Library system (and one of few round libraries in the world, including at least two more in Canada: the Library of Parliament in Ottawa and the Vancouver Central Library). It was built in 1960 as the main branch of the East York Public Library and is home to a collection of sixteen A.Y. Jackson paintings on permanent loan from the East York Foundation. Long-time visitors will recognize the inlay in the foyer of the cardinal logo of the East York Public Library, which was saved and restored during extensive renovations that were completed in 2008.

The large concrete, aluminum, and steel sculpture in the park beside the library is *Pylon* by artist Gerald Gladstone.

## **Donlands Theatre**

397 Donlands Avenue

Built in 1948, The Donlands Theatre was one of Toronto's relatively modern "nabes," the local theatres that dotted most neighbourhoods in Toronto and East York. The Donlands showed movies into the 1980s before it was converted into the Pie in the Sky Studios. The elaborate lobby has been preserved, and features a mural of Chinese mythological scenes painted on the domed ceiling and the Chinese symbol for prosperity embedded in the floor. In his youth, John Candy worked as an usher at this theatre and lived nearby on Woodville Avenue.

Did you know that there used to be at least four theatres in Ward 29, and that all but one of the buildings still exist, having been adapted to other uses?

## **Rivercourt Pillars**

Rivercourt Boulevard and O'Connor Drive (north side)



The rather grandiose pillars which flank Rivercourt Boulevard at O'Connor Drive were placed by the developer as the entrance to a new planned community. Rivercourt was originally designed around a series of semi-circular streets in the space between Donlands, Pape, and O'Connor. The Depression put a halt to the plans, and the Township eventually took over the land for back taxes and laid out straight north-south streets, ignoring the original plan.

## ***Rivercourt Dance Pavilion***

*39 Rivercourt Boulevard*

One building in the new development did get built as planned: the building at 39 Rivercourt Boulevard was built between 1922 and 1926 as a dance pavilion at the very centre of the development. It was later turned into a private home.

## ***Pinegrove***

*1311 Pape Avenue*

Dating from 1880, this house was built in the Victorian Gothic style. The massive bargeboard under the eaves differentiates it from the lighter gingerbread of Gothic Revival. The cream-coloured window heads, also typical of this style, contrast with the red-orange brick to highlight the lines of the windows. The only changes to the structure itself are the replacement or bricking-in of various windows and the addition of a fire escape because of the building's present use as apartments.

The biggest change to the building is its reorientation away from the street. Because of the extension of Pape Avenue north of O'Connor Drive the house's front door now faces the side door of its neighbour and the side of the house faces the street. Pape was the laneway to the house.

## ***Don Mills United Church & Taylor Cemetery***

*126 O'Connor Drive*

This was the first church in Todmorden, although the original building has been replaced.

The earliest reference to religious services in the area comes to us from the diary of Mr. Summersides, a preacher sent to Canada in 1829 by the Primitive Methodist Connexion in England. In February 1832, he writes that "in the last 13 days, I have preached 16 times... ridden 50 miles, walked 70." Among the preaching places he visited, he lists *Don Mills*.

In 1851, the land for the church was granted by Samuel Sinclair, yeoman, for the sum of "Five Shillings" to the "Trustees of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in Canada and their successors" for a site of the "Primitive Methodist Chapel". The graves of Samuel Sinclair (spelled "Sinckler" on the stone) and of his wife, are in the cemetery to the north of the church. This cemetery dates back to at least 1841. The graves were moved and condensed when the church was expanded.

In 1859, a brick church was built with funds donated by George Taylor. This replaced a frame church about which little is known. The earlier frame building was moved over and used for a Sunday School for a while. Later there was a fire in the church and many of the early records of the area were lost.

In 1860, a new deed was granted to the Trustees of the Church by the three Taylor brothers, John, Thomas and George, apparently to settle the exact boundaries of the church property.

In 1933 the present Sunday School wing was erected.

This church was used continuously until it was demolished in 1950 to make room for the new building which you now see. The original stone containing the date has been placed inside the front entrance.

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The Taylors were intimately connected with the work of the church, the Sunday School and the choir. Many of the early congregation were employees of the paper mills.

The Taylor family's private graveyard lies to the west of the church. In this graveyard are buried members of the Taylor, Helliwell, Skinner and David Smith families as well as other early residents of the Todmorden area.

### ***Beechwood***

*20–22 Beechwood Crescent*

Built in 1840 in the Regency style, *Beechwood* was the home of George Taylor, one of the founders of the *John Taylor and Brothers Paper Manufacturers* company. With brothers John and Thomas, the family business empire included paper mills, sawmills, and grist mills in the Todmorden area. The house, now two separate addresses, is located at 20–22 Beechwood Crescent, formerly part of Don Mills Road.

In 1880, after George's two brothers died, he passed the family business on to his three sons, John F., George A., and William T. George died in 1894 and his widow Annie continued to live at *Beechwood*.

The exterior of this house has remained virtually unchanged over the years. The four large, pierced chimneys are in excellent condition and one of them has been repaired in exactly the same style as the originals. The only change that has been made is the replacement of the original porch with its bell cast roof which once spanned the entire front of the house by a wooden pediment and columns around the front door. The house is in excellent condition and is the oldest privately owned house in East York and one of the only surviving authentic examples of Regency architecture in the area.

### ***Ina Grafton Gage Home / Sisters of St. Joseph***

*2 O'Connor Drive*

The house built by John Fred Taylor in 1885 is just around the corner from his father George's home, *Beechwood*. John F. Taylor was married to Elizabeth Patterson and they had one child, a daughter named Katie. At the time the house was built John and his two brothers, George A. and William T., were running the Taylor Paper Mills which had been passed on to them by their father. The extent of the family fortune is reflected in the size and grandeur of this mansion.

In 1930 the large home was purchased for \$45,000 by the United Church of Canada with funds donated by Sir William Gage. The building was then turned into a home for the aged and was named in memory of Ina Grafton Gage, Sir William's wife.

The architecture of the building is a mixture of the Renaissance Eclectic and Queen Anne styles. The finest materials and workmanship are evident throughout in such details as the etched glass front door, cut stone base, decorative brickwork and round tower. The most outstanding feature of the house is its second storey oriel with a four panel stained glass window depicting the seasons, capped by an ornate brass roof. Unfortunately, the stained glass window was stolen in Sept. 2010.

New wings were added in 1941, 1955, and 1970, but the front façade retains most of its original characteristics.

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The property is being redeveloped by the Sisters of St. Joseph for an assisted living residence for retired nuns. The heritage house will be preserved and integrated into the new complex.

### ***Worker's Houses***

*9, 11 and 13 Hassard Avenue*



These three homes were all built by George Taylor for some of his more important workers and their families. The street was originally named Hawthorne Lane after George's mother, Margaret Hawthorne, who died in 1824, and the houses were originally numbered 9, 8, and 7 respectively. This street was later renamed and renumbered in the opposite direction.

Numbers 11 and 13 Hassard are semi-detached and were built in 1854. The house at number 9 was built eighteen years after the others in 1872. All three houses were built in the Gothic Revival style which was popular from 1830 to 1860 and are characterized by steep roofs, decorative brickwork and gingerbread trim.

### ***89 Woodville Avenue***

This house is identical to the one at 1148 Logan Avenue, both having been commissioned to be built by Mrs. Alice Woolfrey in 1888.

The Queen Anne architectural style of this home is characterized by its several types of wood siding and shingles, vergeboards, protruding, flared second storey, and steep hipped roof.

Unfortunately, changes to the home, such as bricking-in the front porch (a major characteristic of the Queen Anne style) and topping it with a tar shingle roof, along with changes in the window style, detract from the original nature of the home.

### ***William Burgess Public School***

*100 Torrens Avenue*

The William Burgess Public School was built in 1914. The name was originally the Torrens Avenue School but was changed around 1925 to honour William Burgess who had devoted much of his time to education in East York.

Two expansions to the building were made in 1922 and 1923.

### ***1232-1234 Broadview Avenue***

It is believed that the building at 1232–1234 Broadview Avenue was built by Frederick Cramp, the son of David and Elizabeth Cramp, in 1907. The Cramps both emigrated from England with their parents. The couple was married in 1857 and had five children. David Cramp worked for the Taylor Paper Mills and also ran a successful general store.

1232 – 1234 Broadview is of the Ontario Vernacular type of architecture. Around the turn of the century there was a store in the left part of the building, as indicated by the large display window. The rest of the building was used as a dwelling. In 2005 it began to be used as a tailor's shop.

### ***1224-1228 Broadview Avenue***



The large white building which houses 1224, 1226 and 1228 Broadview Avenue was built in 1900 and was owned by the Howarth family until 1948. The building, first used as a hotel or store, is now residential.

There are faint traces of Italianate influence in the curved windows and flat roof of the structure but the appearance of the building has been changed by the addition of aluminum and wood siding on the first floor façade. Extensive restoration could make the building into a fine example of turn of the century commercial architecture. It is now 3 row houses each individually owned.

### ***1148 Logan Avenue***

The house located at 1148 Logan Avenue is one of two identical dwellings, the other located at 89 Woodville Avenue, which were commissioned to be built by Mrs. Alice Woolfrey in 1888. Mrs. Woolfrey owned a large parcel of land in the area and both homes were built on her property.

An excellent example of the Queen Anne style of architecture prevalent from 1880 to 1900, 1148 Logan displays the varied types and patterns of sheathing and shingles, vergeboards and protruding, flared second storey front façade which characterized the Queen Anne style.

The coloured glass panel above the home's main entry, its steep hipped roof (covered with the original slate shingles) and front porch complete this decoratively rich dwelling.

This was the William Burgess family home.

### ***Playter Farmhouse***

*28 Playter Crescent*

This farmhouse was built by John Lea Playter around 1875. It remained in the Playter family until it was sold in 2006. An extensive renovation underway since then has restored and exposed the decorative brickwork on the house, which had been hidden under layers of paint and dirt. An addition at the back of the house has more than doubled the interior floor space. Unfortunately, the renovation also saw the demolition of the original stone veranda, and the stone fence around the front of the house is little more than a rubble pile.

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## Thanks!

Thanks for taking this tour with us. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you. We can't hope to cover all of the interesting stories and sights in Ward 29, but we hope that we've given you a taste of the history that's hidden in your own neighbourhood.

We'd appreciate any feedback you have, positive or negative. We'd be particularly interested in hearing about any problems you encountered with the recommended route, or if there are particular locations that you'd like to see included in future tours.

Feel free to chat with any of the volunteers from Ward 29 Bikes and the East York Historical Society at the table in Playter Gardens, or email your feedback to [info@29bikes.ca](mailto:info@29bikes.ca).

### **Ward 29 Bikes**

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### **East York Historical Society**

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