

Your Home Our City

100 Years of Public Control over Private Space

 **TORONTO** Archives

The City of Toronto Archives is the repository for Toronto's archival holdings, comprised of municipal and private records dating back to 1834. They include: over one million photographs; maps; architectural and engineering plans; political cartoons; correspondence, diaries and other textual materials; audiovisual records, computer media – all documenting different aspects of Toronto's history. Many of these records can be reproduced for a nominal fee.

The large atrium on the main floor immediately engages the public in a variety of programs and activities. Visitors can explore exhibits of archival treasures in this attractive exhibit space, enjoy presentations in the theatre, view the high-tech Records Centre and watch the three-storey "order-picker" in action, or do research using the archival records and other reference material in the Research Hall.

Researchers of all types visit the Archives to discover what we have to offer. Archives' staff can arrange tours for organized groups, offer reference help, and provide access to historic materials to develop a better understanding of Toronto's history, its current issues, and its future directions.

The City of Toronto Archives is a program of the City Clerk's Division, Corporate Services Department

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Your Home Our City

Welcome to Your Home, Our City: 100 Years of Public Control over Private Space. The City of Toronto and its predecessor municipalities have been involved in the regulation and control of private residential space since 1834, acting alone and in conjunction with other levels of government. Although this involvement has been direct at times, at other times the City has stepped back to allow private building and development interests to proceed with relatively little interference. The city's residential neighbourhoods are long-term collective works. With this exhibit, we examine how they have been shaped by the often competing aspirations, interests and objectives of the public efforts of the City, the collective will of neighbourhood groups, private interests and individual enterprise. The reconciliation of these tensions has had a significant impact on the look and character of your home, and our city.

This brochure provides an abbreviated version of the text from each section of the exhibit, including the three display tables, which expand on some of the show's themes. After viewing the show, please visit our Research Hall, where staff will be happy to assist you in pursuing any of the topics and issues raised by the exhibition, or any other research interests you may have.



RG 8, Series 4, Subseries 33, Items 688 and 759

THE 19th CENTURY

Housing in 19th century Toronto consisted of a mixture of modest and substantial dwellings, both freestanding and in rows of attached and semi-detached units. Toronto experienced two significant periods of subdivision activity, in the 1850s and the 1880s, resulting in an increasing number of urban lots. In addition, its boundaries were expanded through a series of annexations between 1883 and 1893. Both of these stimulated the construction of housing, quickly filling in the city's limits by the end of the century. Outside of the city, the rest of York County was largely rural, with housing consisting of farm homes, along with the small clusters of houses associated with the towns and villages that grew up around mills, post offices and railway stations.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office collection,
SC 498, Item 17





William James family fonds, Fonds 1244, Item 2

THE 1904 FIRE

In 1904, a great fire devastated a downtown Toronto warehouse district. Although no dwellings were destroyed, the fire prompted extensive changes to building regulations that had far-reaching effects, extending across the city to all types of structures. One direct effect was a shift from wood to brick in new housing construction. After the fire, more comprehensive planning and land regulation was introduced, serving as an effective response to increasing urban congestion.

ANNEXATION & SUBDIVISION

Toronto experienced tremendous growth between 1906 and 1912, as it annexed many adjoining areas. Development activity increased along the suburban fringes of the city during this period, as speculators banked on the economic benefits to be gained from further annexations. Since these developments were outside of the city, they were without the services and improvements available to city taxpayers, relying instead on the inadequate services provided by the rural townships. In an effort to exercise some control over the indiscriminate subdivision occurring along its fringes, Toronto petitioned the province for regional planning legislation, which was achieved in 1912.



William James family fonds, Fonds 1244, Item 2418
Series 410, File 1762



RG 8, Series 4, Subseries 52, Item 35
Series 410, File 1834



BUILDING BOOM

The annexation period prompted a building boom as real estate developers and other speculators scrambled to fill in vacant lots within recently annexed areas. A significant feature of this building boom was the adoption of the semi-detached housing template as a popular and affordable option, both for builders and for buyers. At the same time, there was a concerted effort by the City to quickly service annexed areas, building schools, police stations, fire halls, civic streetcar lines, and other public amenities. One by-product of the construction of the civic car-lines were the long rows of commercial structures with apartments above that sprung up along their routes.

HEALTH REFORM

As the period of annexation subsided, so too did new housing construction. With the return of veterans and the increase in immigration following World War I, overcrowded and deteriorating housing conditions emerged as a serious problem. As a result, the City made its first great foray into social reform, extending public controls over formerly sacred private property rights. Between 1913 and 1918, 1,600 substandard houses were demolished at the call of the City's health officials. An increasing demand for subsidized housing also emerged at this time, leading to the formation of the Toronto Housing Commission, viewed by many as a regrettable but necessary intrusion into the free market.



The Toronto Housing Company fonds, Fonds 1018
RG 8, Series 4, Subseries 32, Item 244

WALK-UP APARTMENTS

From the late 1910s through the 1920s, a boom in the construction of walk-up apartment buildings occurred. In 1912, the City passed a bylaw prohibiting their intrusion into residential neighbourhoods. However, despite the bylaw and warnings against the “evil of tenements,” a significant number were built, in residential areas, through exemptions to the law, or along commercial stretches where the law allowed them. Additionally, significant clusters of these structures were built just outside of the city’s limits, in Forest Hill and York Township, where the City’s bylaw did not apply. By 1931, despite Toronto’s restrictive efforts, there were more than 20,000 apartment units in the city.



Series 410, File 1454

HOUSING STANDARDS REFORM

In 1934, a report on housing conditions in Toronto pointed out that, despite the gains made through the demolition of slum structures in the 1910s, poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating conditions had begun to take over. This was especially true in the downtown core where many large residential structures were no longer being maintained as single family dwellings. The City responded with its pioneering Standard of Housing By-law, which led to federal home improvement loans legislation making it easier for owners to repair or rebuild. By 1939, more than 9,000 homes had been inspected, with over half subsequently renovated or replaced.



RG 8, Series 4, Subseries 33, Items 420 and 809



PUBLIC & SOCIAL HOUSING

The postwar period witnessed a growing interest in social welfare planning. In Toronto, Regent Park was built in 1947, followed in the 1960s by Moss Park and Alexandra Park. In the growing suburban areas, the newly formed Metropolitan Toronto and the province became the main forces in the development and management of public housing. In the 1970s, increasing concerns arose over the concentration of low-income families in large-scale projects, their excessively bureaucratic administrations, and the wholesale expropriation and destruction of downtown neighbourhoods. This resulted in the development of alternative non-profit and co-operative approaches to social housing.



WARTIME HOUSING

The growing demand for low-cost accommodations brought on by World War II, with the need to house munitions workers as well as returning veterans, led to the federal government's first direct involvement in new house construction. Although the city and neighbouring municipalities were involved in the construction of emergency housing to cope with shortages, it was the federal government that became the major player on the local scene, constructing large tracts of housing in the townships around Toronto. In the postwar period, the federal government scaled down and finally withdrew from its housing programs, leaving the provision of housing to the private sector.



Series 361, Subseries 1, File 566
Globe and Mail collection, SC 266, Item 988-46

SUBURBAN GROWTH

In the 1950s, postwar immigration combined with the “baby boom” to dramatically increase Metropolitan Toronto’s population, creating a demand for new housing. Federal legislation made it easier for developers to build houses and for home-owners to buy them. It was now economically viable for developers to build on a much grander scale, creating entire subdivisions rather than just a few homes for resale. The increase in automobile use allowed for the construction of new housing further and further afield in the suburban reaches of Metropolitan Toronto. Not since the era before World War I had building activity in the suburbs been so rampant, as the private sector subdivided and developed them at a prodigious rate.



Series 497, Item 845010



Series 361, Subseries 1, File 482

HIGHRISE LIVING

A second boom in apartment building construction got underway in the postwar period. The arrival of new construction technologies combined with rising land prices encouraged developers to engage in high-density site planning by constructing highrise apartment buildings, allowing for a large return on a small property. This kind of residential form proved to be as economically viable in single building projects as in multistructure developments built over several city blocks, such as St. Jamestown. Equally suited to any area of the metropolitan city, whether downtown Toronto, or in the suburban reaches of Etobicoke, Scarborough and North York, it was restricted only by the local zoning laws in effect in any given area. The arrival of Toronto's subway system in 1954 had a special impact on this type of development, triggering the construction of several pockets of highrise development along its route.



Series 497, Item 845010



Series 361, Subseries 1, File 482

THE 21st CENTURY

As the city enters the 21st century, it faces a variety of housing issues. Debates have arisen around the construction of "monster homes," the gentrification of neighbourhoods with the concurrent loss of low-income accommodation, and how to address the dramatic rise in the city's homeless population. As the city has spread to fill its metropolitan borders, one of the only ways to expand the tax base has been to allow redevelopment at higher densities. This has led to an increase in condominium conversions of existing warehouses and office buildings, a rise in the creation of rental units in single-family homes, and a renewed interest in housing above commercial developments on arterial streets. Whatever the issue, there continues to be an intersection of public and private interests in the effort to realize a safe and well-planned community.



RG 5A, Item 1990T-232

ISLAND HOUSING

By 1900, Toronto Island consisted of a 200-acre park and residential areas on Hanlan's Point, Centre Island and Ward's Island, housing both permanent and summer residents. With the substantial housing shortage during World War II, the City encouraged winterization of cottages, leading to an increase in permanent residents. The 1956 transfer of the Island to the new Metropolitan Toronto, to be a regional park, led to the destruction of over 400 homes. Since then, there has been a struggle, between Metro and the residents, to convert the entire Island to parkland or maintain the mix of parkland and residential community. The struggle continued until 1993, when a resolution was finally achieved.



William James family fonds, Fonds 1244, Item 6008



Globe and Mail collection, SC 266, Item 89253



Series 393, Item 13270

WYCHWOOD PARK

In 1888, landscape artist Marmaduke Matthews and businessman Alexander Jardine created Wychwood Park, a private residential enclave for artists and businessmen at Bathurst Street and Davenport Road. Between 1907 and 1911, much of the park was developed, with Eden Smith & Sons designing many of the houses in the English Arts and Crafts style. In the 1980s, this unique enclave was threatened by demolition of one of the larger houses for redevelopment, prompting the park trustees and residents to seek designation as a Heritage Conservation District under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

THE GUILD OF ALL ARTS

In 1932, H. Spencer and Rosa Clark established an artist collective, the Guild of All Arts, on the Scarborough Bluffs, which focused on their interests in arts and crafts, health and nutrition, alternative education, and co-operative movements. During World War II, the federal government used the site to train the Women's Royal Naval Service and as a military hospital. After the war, the Clarks had difficulties reviving the colony, and with the formation of Metropolitan Toronto in 1953, they faced a big tax hike, leading to redevelopment of much of the site as Guildwood Village, a planned residential community. The Clarks scaled down their activities and focused on operating the Guild Inn, constructing a seven-storey addition, with guestrooms, conference rooms and a banquet hall.

THE BAYVIEW GHOST

For 20 years, the unfinished Hampton Park apartments, known as the Bayview Ghost, stood at the north end of the Bayview Extension, overlooking the Don Valley. Construction ceased in 1959 when the developers realized that the Township of East York would not service the site with water and sewage facilities. East York claimed the building permit had been issued in error, during a period in which zoning legislation was being updated to control apartment building construction. Agreement was reached only in 1981 to demolish the structure. After two more decades of trying to develop the site, the original owners finally gave up and sold, and the site is only now being developed.



Eric Trussler collection, SC 567, Series C, Item 114