

Authority: Downtown Community Council Report No. 1, Clause No. 25,  
as adopted by City of Toronto Council on January 30, 31 and February 1, 2001  
Enacted by Council: February 1, 2001

**CITY OF TORONTO**

**BY-LAW No. 51-2001**

**To designate the property at 203 Woodmount Avenue (True Davidson House) as being of architectural and historical value or interest.**

WHEREAS authority was granted by Council to designate the property at 203 Woodmount Avenue (True Davidson House) as being of architectural and historical value or interest; and

WHEREAS the *Ontario Heritage Act* authorizes the Council of a municipality to enact by-laws to designate real property, including all the buildings and structures thereon, to be of historical or architectural value or interest; and

WHEREAS the Council of the City of Toronto has caused to be served upon the owners of the land and premises known as 203 Woodmount Avenue and upon the Ontario Heritage Foundation, Notice of Intention to designate the property and has caused the Notice of Intention to be published in a newspaper having a general circulation in the municipality as required by the *Ontario Heritage Act*; and

WHEREAS the reasons for designation are set out in Schedule "A" to this by-law; and

WHEREAS no notice of objection to the proposed designation was served upon the Clerk of the municipality;

The Council of the City of Toronto HEREBY ENACTS as follows:

1. The property at 203 Woodmount Avenue, more particularly described in Schedule "B" and shown on Schedule "C" attached to this by-law, is designated as being of architectural and historical value or interest.
2. The City Solicitor is authorized to cause a copy of this by-law to be registered against the property described in Schedule "B" to this by-law in the proper Land Registry Office.
3. The City Clerk is authorized to cause a copy of this by-law to be served upon the owners of the property at 203 Woodmount Avenue and upon the Ontario Heritage Foundation and to cause notice of this by-law to be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the City of Toronto as required by the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

ENACTED AND PASSED this 1st day of February, A.D. 2001.

CASE OOTES,  
Deputy Mayor

NOVINA WONG,  
City Clerk

(Corporate Seal)

## **SCHEDULE “A” HERITAGE PROPERTY REPORT**

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is the “Long Statement of Reasons for Designation” for the designation of the property at 203 Woodmount Avenue (True Davidson House) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. It contains the Heritage Property Profile, as well as sections on the Historical Occupancy and Significance of the property. Sources are included. The introduction, below, forms the “Short Statement of Reasons for Designation”, intended for publication.

The property at 203 Woodmount Avenue is recommended for designation for historical reasons. From 1960 to 1978, True Davidson owned the property.

Jean Gertrude Davidson (1901-1978), known as “True”, led a varied life as a teacher, writer and politician. After moving to East York in 1947, True Davidson served on the East York Board of Education, becoming the first woman to chair the Board in 1952. Following her election to East York Council in 1958, True Davidson served as the first female Reeve of the Borough of East York from 1960-1962. She was elected the mayor of the amalgamated Borough of East York in 1966. She championed educational and cultural programs in East York, including the creation of the East York Foundation and the establishment of the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and Arts Centre.

The property at 203 Woodmount Avenue, located northwest of Danforth and Woodbine Avenues, is historically significant as the residence of True Davidson, an important figure in the political and cultural development of the East York community.



## 1.1 HERITAGE PROPERTY PROFILE



## TRUE DAVIDSON HOUSE

ADDRESS: 203 Woodmount Avenue (northeast corner of Woodmount and Mortimer Avenues)  
 WARD: 1  
 NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY: East York  
 HISTORICAL NAME: True Davidson House  
 CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1925  
 ORIGINAL OWNER: Walter Stewart  
 ORIGINAL USE: Residential (single family house)  
 CURRENT USE: \* Residential (single family house) (\* this does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law)  
 ARCHITECT: None found  
 BUILDER/CRAFTSMAN: Alfred James Baldwin  
 ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Not applicable  
 ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS: None found  
 EVALUATION: Historical criteria  
 RECORDER: Kathryn Anderson, Heritage Preservation Services  
 REPORT DATE: July 2000

## 2.0 HISTORIAL OCCUPANCY AND SIGNIFICANCE

### 2.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD

With the establishment of the Province of Upper Canada in 1791, Augustus Jones surveyed 11 townships across the southern edge of the province, including the Township of York. The township covered the lands north of the Town of York (established in 1793 with military and government reserves on either side of the townsite) between the Townships of Etobicoke (west) and Scarborough (east). At the end of the 19th century, the City of Toronto began a thirty-year period of continuous annexation of towns, villages and unincorporated areas within York Township, coupled with the extension of municipal services to those areas. When this activity ceased after World War I, different sectors of the Township sought independent status. In 1924, the east part of the former Township of York was incorporated as the Township of East York.

The part of East York located west of Woodbine Avenue and beyond the City of Toronto's limits north of Danforth Avenue was known as "Cedarvale" in local directories. The closest post offices serving the area were at Coleman's Corners (Danforth Avenue and Dawes Road) and Todmorden. A map of "Greater Toronto and Suburbs", housed at the Toronto Reference Library and dating to 1916, indicates a partial street plan was in place.

In 1886, William Sankey laid out Plan 297 on part of Lot 7 in the Second Concession from the Bay. Sankey immediately sold the entire parcel to John Noble Grant, a Toronto builder who, in turn, transferred the lands to Daniel McMichael in 1887. The tract remained undeveloped under the ownership of the McMichael family who sold it to Robert J. Hallowell in 1921. That year, Hallowell registered Plan M437 on part of the lands, outlining a series of streets including Woodmount and McMichael (now the extension of Mortimer Avenue).

In January 1925, Alfred J. Baldwin, a Toronto builder, purchased part of Lot 11 and all of Lot 12. The house at #203 Woodmount was evidently constructed that spring as Walter Stewart, an insurance agent, bought the property in May 1925. Stewart is listed in the City of Toronto suburban directory for 1926 (compiled in 1925) at this address. He retained the site until 1950. After a series of owners, True Davidson acquired #203 Woodmount in 1960. In 1978, following the death of True Davidson, the current owner bought the property.

### 2.2 TRUE DAVIDSON

Jean Gertrude Davidson (1901-1978), known as "True", was born in Hudson, Quebec. She lived in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia where her father served as a Methodist minister. Academically gifted, True Davidson entered Victoria College at the University of Toronto at age 16. She received a teaching certificate from the Regina Normal School in 1922 and secured teaching positions in Strasbourg, Saskatchewan and Brandon, Manitoba to earn tuition for the M. A. program at Victoria College. After a short stint teaching history at Havergal Ladies' Academy in Toronto, in 1926 True Davidson joined the Canadian branch office of J. M. Dent and Sons, a London, England publishing company, as the first female publishing sales representative in Canada.

True Davidson left J. M. Dent and Sons in 1930 to manage the Vocational Bureau of the Canadian Federation of University Women. The next year, she won the first prize for poetry in the annual contest of the Women's Canadian Club, an important competition for Canadian writers. J. M. Dent and Sons published her book of poetry, "Muses of the Modern Day and Other Days", to successful reviews. In 1931, William Perkins Bull, the controversial Toronto lawyer and businessman, engaged True Davidson to compile a library of Canadiana, leading to a position as his chief of staff. Supervising up to 70 researchers, she produced Bull's illustrated histories of Peel County over a seven-year period. True Davidson also wrote, directed and produced plays for local theatre companies. She continued this interest after moving to Streetsville in 1940, where she earned her living writing articles for Toronto's Board of Trade *Journal*. In 1941, she was appointed Clerk and Treasurer of the Village of Streetsville and Secretary of the Public Utilities Commission.

True Davidson moved to East York in 1947. Her establishment of a neighbourhood kindergarten on Linsmore Crescent led to a successful run for the East York School Board. Serving for a decade, True Davidson championed kindergarten programs, classes for students with special needs, improvements to playgrounds and libraries, and a curriculum that included Canadian literature. In 1952, True Davidson became the first woman to chair the East York Board of Education. She served as chairman of the finance committee of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board, President of the Ontario School Trustees and Ratepayers Board, and Chairman of the Canadian School Trustees Committee on French in Elementary Schools.

True Davidson ran twice as a candidate for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the riding of East York, but was not elected. She had joined the CCF in 1934 following a meeting with J. S. Woodsworth, the first leader of the political party, and worked briefly with Agnes Macphail, the first woman elected to Canada's Parliament.

In 1958, True Davidson was elected to the East York Council, chairing the Works Committee during her first term. She was an avid promoter of public celebrations in East York, including Dominion Day parades and Simcoe Day festivities. In 1960, True Davidson was elected the first female Reeve of the Borough of East York. This position included a seat on the Metropolitan Toronto Council where she fought plans to eliminate East York as a separate municipality. Defeated in the election of 1962, True Davidson rebounded as the mayor of the amalgamated Borough (uniting East York with the former Town of Leaside) in 1967. That year, she spearheaded the opening of the Todmorden Mills Museum and Arts Centre as East York's Centennial project and remained the site's Honorary Curator. True Davidson founded and served as the first director of the East York Foundation, a fund-raising organization for cultural, educational and recreational programs.

In 1969, True Davidson served as the President of the Association of Mayors and Reeves of Ontario and won reelection as mayor. She was unsuccessful in her quest for the provincial Liberal nomination in 1971. During her political career, with forays into municipal, provincial and federal politics, True Davidson nearly equalled John Diefenbaker's record of 10 consecutive election wins. After her retirement from municipal politics, True Davidson served on the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority while working as a newspaper columnist and political commentator. In 1973, her book "The Golden Strings" was published. Following her receipt of an honorary degree from Victoria College in 1971, she was awarded the Order of Canada in 1973 and the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977. Her retirement plans included enrolling at York University as a PhD candidate, and international travel.

After her death in September 1978, True Davidson lay in state at the East York Council Chambers. The True Davidson Collection of Canadian Literature was established at York University, based on the earlier donation of her personal papers. In November 1997, at the last meeting of the East York Council prior to the amalgamation of the new City of Toronto, the East York Council Chamber was renamed the True Davidson Council Chamber. True Davidson received a posthumous honorary degree from York University. Referring to her colourful personality and attire, the citation partly read, “In her public life she has always had a chieftain’s presence – and on the head of True Davidson, alone among Canadian women of her time, a lady’s hat became a political weapon, charming, formidable and renowned” (Darke, 106).

### 3.0 SUMMARY

The property at 203 Woodmount Avenue is historically significant as the home of True Davidson, the first female mayor of East York and an important figure in the political and cultural development of the municipality.

### 4.0 SOURCES

City of Toronto Directories, Suburbs (Cedarvale) and Woodmount Avenue, 1925 ff.

Darke, Eleanor. Call Me True: A Biography of True Davidson. Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, 1997.

Land Records, Plan M437, Part Lot 12.

Morley, J. T. “Co-operative Commonwealth Federation”. Entry in The Canadian Encyclopedia. Year 2000 edition. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999.

Myrvold, Barbara. The Danforth in Pictures. Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1979.

Subject: By-law: Designation of premises 203 Woodmount Avenue (True Davidson House) under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act  
(Ward 31-Beaches-East York)  
File: W84-H1

**SCHEDULE “B”**

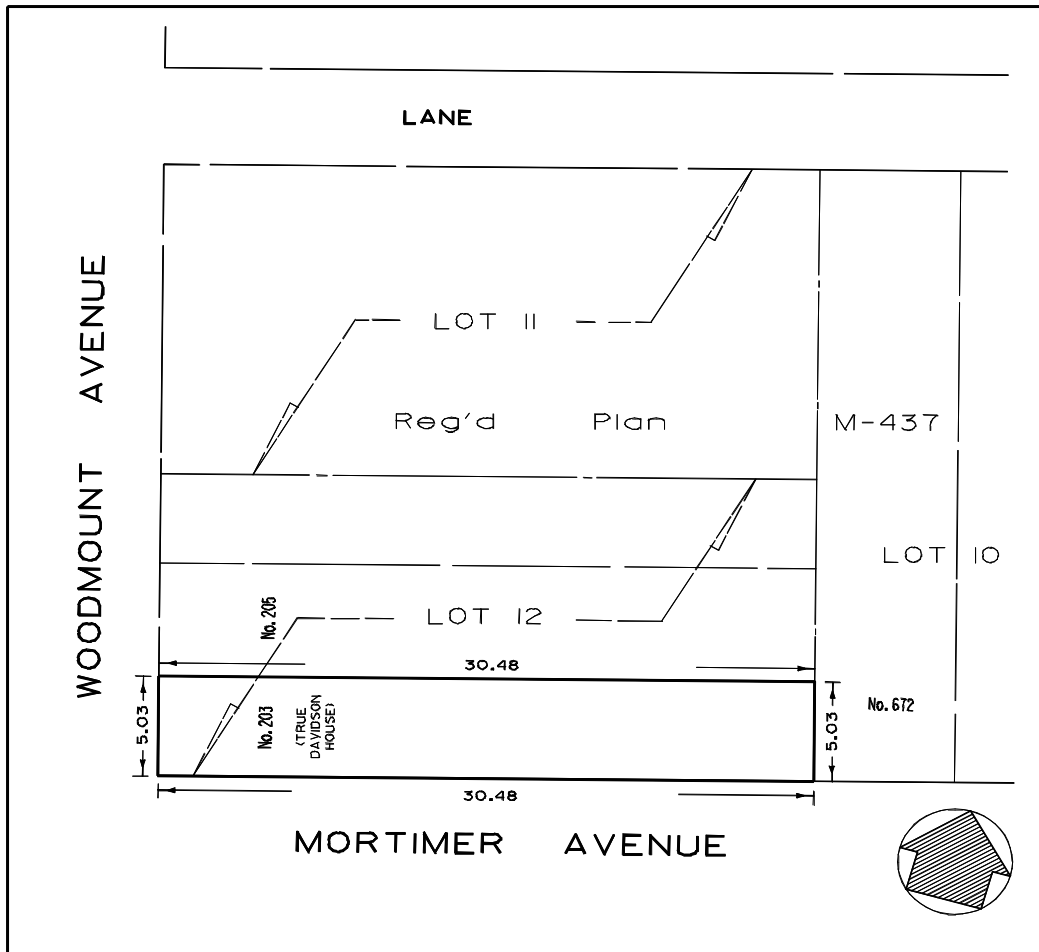
PIN 10425-0035 (LT).


Being the southerly 5.03 metres in width throughout from front to rear of Lot 12 on Plan M-437 registered in the Land Registry Office for the Land Titles Division of Metropolitan Toronto (No. 66).

In the City of Toronto (formerly in the Borough of East York) and Province of Ontario.

The hereinbefore described land being delineated by heavy outline on Plan SYE 2955 dated January 16, 2001, as set out in Schedule “C”.

Schedule "C"




 Premises No. 203 WOODMOUNT AVENUE

NOTE:  
THIS SKETCH IS NOT A PLAN OF SURVEY  
AND HAS BEEN COMPILED FROM SURVEY  
NOTES AND OFFICE RECORDS, IT SHALL  
NOT BE USED EXCEPT FOR THE PURPOSE  
INDICATED IN THE TITLE BLOCK.

**Toronto**  
WORKS AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

SKETCH TO ILLUSTRATE  
LAND DESIGNATED AS  
BEING OF ARCHITECTURAL AND  
HISTORICAL VALUE OR INTEREST

RATIO 1:250  
Metres  Metres

Drawn ME  
Checked W.J.M.  
Date: JAN.16, 2001

W.Kowalenko-City Surveyor

FILE  
WB4-HI

PLAN SYE2955

SYE2955