

HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT



**WILLIAM ROBINSON BUILDING
832 YONGE STREET, TORONTO**

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services
City Planning Division
City of Toronto

December 2015

1. DESCRIPTION



Above: view of the west side of Yonge Street, north of Cumberland Street and showing the property at 832 Yonge near the south end of the block; cover: east elevation of the William Robinson Building (Heritage Preservation Services, 2014)

| 832 Yonge Street: William Robinson Building | |
|---|---|
| ADDRESS | 832 Yonge Street (west side between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue) |
| WARD | Ward 27 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale) |
| LEGAL DESCRIPTION | Concession C, Lot 21 |
| NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY | Yorkville |
| HISTORICAL NAME | William Robinson Building ¹ |
| CONSTRUCTION DATE | 1875 (completed) |
| ORIGINAL OWNER | Sleigh Estate |
| ORIGINAL USE | Commercial |
| CURRENT USE* | Commercial * This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law |
| ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER | None identified ² |
| DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION | Brick cladding with brick, stone and wood detailing |
| ARCHITECTURAL STYLE | See Section 2.iii |
| ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS | See Section 2. iii |
| CRITERIA | Design/Physical, Historical/Associative & Contextual |
| HERITAGE STATUS | Listed on City of Toronto's Heritage Register |
| RECORDER | Heritage Preservation Services: Kathryn Anderson |
| REPORT DATE | December 2015 |

¹ The building is named for the original and long-term tenant. Archival records indicate that the property, along with the adjoining site to the south was developed by the trustees of John Sleigh's estate

² No architect or building is identified at the time of the writing of this report. Building permits do not survive for this period and no reference to the property was found in the Globe's tender calls

2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 832 Yonge Street, and applies evaluation criteria to determine whether it merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The conclusions of the research and evaluation are found in Section 4 (Summary).

i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

| Key Date | Historical Event |
|---------------|--|
| 1838 and 1843 | John Sleigh purchases land in Lot 21 in Concession 2 west of Yonge Street (north of present-day Bloor Street West) |
| 1853 | The Village of Yorkville is incorporated |
| 1861 | When the 1861 Census is compiled, Sleigh occupies a single-storey rough cast (stucco) house on the subject property (it is recorded the following year on the first surviving tax assessment roll for Yorkville) |
| 1864 | Following Sleigh's death, his trustees rent the property to his son-in-law, builder William Rowsell |
| 1873 | Rowell remains the tenant on the site when the assessment roll is compiled in May, but dies later that year |
| 1874 | William Robinson, a pharmacist in Yorkville since the late 1860s, is the Sleigh Estate's tenant |
| 1875 June | When the tax assessment roll is compiled, the new building at present-day 832 Yonge is complete where Robinson remains the tenant |
| 1876 | The building is illustrated on a bird's eye view of the area |
| 1883 Feb | Yorkville is annexed by the City of Toronto and the subject property is renumbered as "730" Yonge (the current street number was assigned 6 years later) |
| 1883 Sept | The first assessment roll for St. Paul's Ward indicates that Robinson remains the tenant to the Sleigh Estate |
| 1884 | The subject property is shown on the first Goad's Atlas covering the area |
| 1889 | Following William Robinson's death, his son Ernest continues to operate the pharmacy at 832 Yonge Street |
| 1902 | When the assessment roll is compiled in 1902 for 1903 taxes, another druggist, George Evans is the new tenant to the Sleigh Estate and purchases the property by 1905 |
| 1923 | Loblaw Groceteria opens at 832 Yonge, remaining in this location until the 1950s |
| 1962 | Avrom Isaacs relocates the Isaacs Gallery to the subject property, where he showcases contemporary Canadian artists for over 20 years |
| 1984 | The property at 832 Yonge Street is listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties (now known as the Heritage Register) |

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Yorkville

The property at 832 Yonge Street is located in Yorkville, which originated as a suburban village prior to becoming the first municipality annexed by the City of Toronto in 1883. Nearly a century earlier when Toronto was founded as the Town of York (1793), the area between present-day Bloor Street and Eglinton Avenue was subdivided into 100-acre farm lots that were accessed along concession lines and side roads. Yonge Street was surveyed during the same period as the main route from York to the northern hinterland, although portions of the road remained impassible for many years. An inn (the future Red Lion) was established on Yonge, north of the first concession line (Bloor) in the early 19th century and later became a popular hostelry for travellers passing through a toll gate near the intersection. On the northwest corner of Yonge and Bloor, York's first non-denominational cemetery opened in 1826 as the York General Burying Ground (commonly known as Potter's Field, it was marked on Cane's map of 1842, which is attached as Image 2). However, by the 1830s the first brick yards and breweries were operating in the ravine and along the watercourse that crossed Yonge Street north of Bloor, resulting in the subdivision of the adjacent lands for housing, shops and services.

By the mid 19th century, the steady development of the hamlet on Toronto's northern border was facilitated by an omnibus running directly from the Red Lion to Toronto's St. Lawrence Market (Image 3). Incorporated as the Village of Yorkville in 1853, the community's official boundaries were set at present-day Bloor Street, Sherbourne Street, Walker Avenue and a line near Bedford Road (Image 4).³ Yorkville's population doubled between 1851 and 1861 and, during the latter year the introduction of the first horse-drawn street railway offered more reliable connections to the city. Yorkville boasted 5000 residents in 1881, two years prior to its annexation by the neighbouring City of Toronto.⁴

During the 20th century as a Toronto neighbourhood, Yorkville evolved from a stable residential community to a primary cultural and commercial destination in the city. The widening of Bloor Street east and west of Yonge Street by 1929 displaced many small-scale proprietors who were drawn into the Yorkville neighbourhood where much of the residential building stock was converted to commercial uses. The decline of the area after World War II made it an affordable enclave for artists. In the 1960s (when the construction of the subway line along Bloor Street resulted in further redevelopment), Yorkville was a beacon for Toronto's music scene and "hippie culture", including the setting for Avrom Isaac's contemporary Canadian art gallery and innovative exhibits space at 832 Yonge Street. The following decade witnessed the community's transformation into a high-end shopping destination, supported by the conversion of

³ As shown on historical maps and atlases, Yorkville's boundaries encompassed parts of today's South Rosedale and the East Annex

⁴ With Yorkville's annexation as St. Paul's Ward, two streets required new names, with Sydenham becoming Cumberland Street and William renamed Yorkville Avenue. They anchor the block where the subject property is found and remain primary commercial streets in the Yorkville neighbourhood

remaining residential buildings into shops or their replacement by low-scale mixed use developments that included York Square and Hazelton Lanes. In the 1990s, part of Yorkville was designated as one of Toronto's first heritage conservation districts. Additional properties were recognized on the City's heritage register, including the Fire Hall No. 10 (incorporating the tower from the 1876 Yorkville Fire Hall and the coat-of-arms from the 1860 town hall), the original Olivet Congregational Church (now the Heliconian Club, 1876), and William Robinson Building at 832 Yonge Street, all of which were associated with the 19th century Village of Yorkville.

The historical maps and atlases, as well as other images in Section 6 of this report trace the development of Yorkville and the subject property at 832 Yonge Street.

832 Yonge Street

The subject property at 832 Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street West in Yorkville stands on land originally surveyed as Lot 21 in Concession 2 from the Bay, which was granted to military veteran and politician, David William Smith in 1798. The acreage was acquired by John Elmsley, the Chief Justice of Upper Canada, whose family began selling parcels along Yonge Street in the 1820s.

During the 1830s and 1840s, Toronto resident John Sleigh (1796-1864) purchased land near the northwest corner of present-day Yonge and Cumberland Streets in Yorkville. Sleigh was an English-born butcher who, in the early 19th century operated his business on York Street and was successful enough to live on Duke Street (now Adelaide Street East), which was the most fashionable residential district in the city.⁵ Sleigh was recorded on his Yorkville property in 1850, prior to the incorporation of the Village (1853) when he was chosen as one of the first municipal councillors.⁶ Sleigh resided in a single-storey roughcast (stucco) house until his death in 1864, after which it was occupied by his son-in-law, builder William Rowell (1824-1873).⁷

In 1874, the trustees for the Sleigh Estate rented the property at present-day 832 Yonge Street to William Sherlock Robinson (1834-1889). An English-born pharmacist, Robinson was recorded as a "dispensing and family chemist" in Yorkville in the late 1860s and, by 1870 operated his business on Yonge Street "two doors south of William Street (present-day Yorkville Avenue) near Town Hall, Yorkville."⁸ Robinson remained the tenant in the new building, which was completed by the time the tax assessment rolls

⁵ Sleigh's Duke Street residence is illustrated in Vol. 1 of Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto

⁶ Robinson, 41-42. However, according to Hutchinson (17) Sleigh was not among the first councillors identified on Yorkville's coat-of-arms, which were originally placed on the Yorkville Town Hall and, following that building's destruction by fire, re-erected on the extant Yorkville Fire Hall

⁷ In 1867 the sale of the Sleigh Estate was announced, but evidently did not proceed (Toronto Public Library, Item 2267718)

⁸ Robertson and Cook's Directory, 1871-72. These premises were replaced by James Weir's storefronts at present-day 846-848A Yonge in the early 1890s

were compiled in June 1875, and remained in this location until his death in 1889.⁹ Robinson's son, Ernest continued the business until 1902 when another pharmacist, George Evans, rented the property before purchasing it from the Sleight Estate.

Beginning in 1923 and continuing until the mid 1950s, a Loblaw Groceteria occupied the property at 832 Yonge Street.¹⁰ The grocery store was part of the chain co-founded in 1919 by retailer Theodore Pringle Loblaw, which opened 70 outlets across Ontario in the 1920s before expanding into the United States the following decade.

In 1961, the property at 832 Yonge Street became the new location of the Isaacs Gallery for contemporary Canadian art (Image 12). Founded in 1955 as the Greenwich Art Gallery by Avrom Isaacs (born 1926), the gallery was renamed to coincide with its move to Yonge Street. In this venue, Isaacs continued to represent and showcase contemporary Canadian artists, including Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, William Kurelek, the collective of Gordon Rayner, Robert Markle and Graham Coughtry, and countless others. In the flyer marking the opening of the Yonge Street gallery in May 1961, Isaacs wrote that

"The new gallery with its greatly increased space and facilities will enable me to realize the long-range plans I have been contemplating for the past few years. Greater scope for exhibitions will be provided by the division of the gallery into separate but flexible areas. The front gallery will house the current show, the centre gallery will contain recent works by the artists represented. The back gallery will be devoted to constant but changing show of graphics, which are an important but often neglected part of an artist's work."¹¹

As well as exhibitions, the Isaacs Gallery hosted mixed media concerts, poetry readings and underground film screenings at 832 Yonge Street. Avrom Isaacs's particular interest in contemporary aboriginal art led to the opening of the separate Inuit Gallery in 1970.¹² The Isaacs Gallery remained at 832 Yonge Street until the mid 1980s, and the property was listed on the City of Toronto's Inventory of Heritage Properties (now known as the Heritage Register) in 1984.

⁹ The replacement of the original house with the subject building at 832 Yonge, as well as its neighbour to the south at 830 Yonge, is confirmed by the dramatic increase in the assessed value of the property, which rose from \$3500 in 1874 to \$3225 and \$4875 (for present-day 830 and 832 Yonge, respectively) in 1875

¹⁰ While the subject property was one of the earliest locations of the retail chain in Toronto (that formed the basis for the renamed Loblaws grocery stores that followed), the first Loblaw Groceteria (sic) opened at 511 Yonge Street south of Wellesley Street East in 1919

¹¹ <http://ccca.concordia.ca/>

¹² The Inuit Gallery was the first commercial art gallery in the world devoted to Inuit Art. The two galleries were consolidated as the Isaacs Inuit Gallery in 1991 and closed a decade later when Avrom Isaacs retired

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Current photographs of the property at 832 Yonge Street are found on the cover and in Sections 2 and 6 of this report. The William Robinson Building is a three-storey commercial building with architectural detailing inspired by the Italianate and Renaissance Revival styles popular for commercial buildings during the late Victorian era. With its scale, setback, cladding and decorative detailing, the William Robinson Building complements the neighbouring structures in the block that share its late 19th century vintage. Although the building has a flat roofline overlooking Yonge Street, the roof at the rear (west) is sloped with dormers (Image 16). The building is clad with brick and trimmed with brick and stone (now painted). On the principal (east) elevation on Yonge Street, the wall is symmetrically arranged into three bays with a pier at the north edge of the wall and a bracket at the south end.¹³ Above the first (ground) floor storefronts, which have been altered, the second and third stories each contain a trio of segmental-arched window openings with brick flat arches and stone keystones. The south wall is shared by the neighbouring building at 830 Yonge Street, which dates to the same era and complements the William Robinson Building in its scale, fenestration and detailing.

iv. CONTEXT

The location of the property at 832 Yonge Street is shown on the property data map attached as Image 1. The William Robinson Building is found on the west side of Yonge Street near the south end of the block between Cumberland Street (south) and Yorkville Avenue (north). This section of Yonge Street was initially developed prior to the annexation of Yorkville by the City of Toronto and contains an intact group of late 19th century commercial buildings. The William Robinson Building and its neighbours face east toward Yonge Street where the Albert Britnell Bookstore (1928) at 765 Yonge, between Bloor Street East and Asquith Avenue is also a recognized heritage property. The block with the William Robinson Building ends at Yorkville Avenue on the north, where the Yorkville Branch of the Toronto Public Library (1907) at 22 Yorkville and Fire Hall #10 (1889) at 34 Yorkville are proximate to the subject property and recognized on the City's heritage register.¹⁴ Further west, between Bay Street and Avenue Road, parts of the former Village of Yorkville were designated as the Yorkville-Hazelton Heritage Conservation District in 2002.¹⁵

¹³ A similar pier marks the south wall of the neighbouring building at 830 Yonge, which shares its construction date and appearance

¹⁴ The fire hall incorporates the tower from the earlier village fire hall, as well as the coat-of-arms from the Yorkville Town Hall, demolished in 1941. Further west on Yorkville Avenue, several 19th century house form buildings are recognized on the City's heritage register (with some also designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act), including the property at 100 Yorkville that was converted into a private hospital and became the first location for Mount Sinai Hospital

¹⁵ http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/urban_design/files/pdf/hcd_yorkville_proposal.pdf

3. EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the Ontario Heritage Act: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. While the criteria are prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, the City of Toronto uses it when assessing properties for inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties. The evaluation table is marked “N/A” if the criterion is “not applicable” to the property or X if it is applicable, with explanatory text below.

| Design or Physical Value | |
|--|------------|
| i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method | X |
| ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit | N/A |
| iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement | N/A |

Representative and Early Example of a Style and Type with a High Degree of Craftsmanship – The William Robinson Building has cultural heritage value for its design as a fine representative example of a commercial building that retains its decorative detailing that was inspired by the popular architectural styles of the late 19th century. It contributes to the collection of buildings on Yonge Street between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue that reflect the popular styles of the late Victorian era and represent an intact surviving group in Yorkville that share a common scale, setback and late 19th century architectural character.

| Historical or Associative Value | |
|--|------------|
| i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community | X |
| ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture | X |
| iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community | N/A |

Person - The associative value of the property at 832 Yonge Street is related to its connection to famed Toronto art dealer and promoter, Avrom Isaacs who, beginning in 1961 operated the Isaacs Gallery in this location for over two decades. As well as representing and showcasing contemporary Canadian artists that included Michael Show, Joyce Wieland, William Kurelek and Robert Bateman, Isaacs offered poetry readings, underground film screenings and mixed media productions that contributed to Toronto's vibrant art scene that was centered in the Yorkville neighbourhood in the late 20th century. While operating the Isaacs Gallery at 832 Yonge Street, Avrom Isaacs created the Inuit Gallery as the first commercial gallery in the world for contemporary aboriginal art, and later merged the two venues as the Isaacs Inuit Gallery.

Community – The property at 832 Yonge Street is also valued for its historical association with the Village of Yorkville (1853-1883), which was an incorporated

municipality prior to its annexation by the City of Toronto. When the William Robinson Building was constructed, it was part of the commercial district along Yonge Street serving the brick yards, breweries and related industries that formed the basis of the community.

| Contextual Value | |
|---|------------|
| i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area | X |
| ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings | X |
| iii. landmark | N/A |

Character – Contextually, the William Robinson Building contributes to the character of Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street where it reflects the late 19th century development of the area at the time it evolved from an independent village to a city neighbourhood along the important corridor known as Toronto's "main street."

Surroundings – The William Robinson Building is also historically, visually and physically linked to its surroundings on Yonge Street where it is an integral part of the intact group of contiguous late 19th century commercial buildings that extends along the entire block on the west side of the street from Cumberland Street to Yorkville Avenue and marks the east entry into the commercial heart of the former Village of Yorkville.

4. SUMMARY

Following research and evaluation according to Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 832 Yonge Street has design, associative and contextual values as an important commercial building with period detailing that is historically associated with the former Village of Yorkville and supports the character and setting of the block on Yonge Street between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue with the intact group of late 19th century structures that includes the William Robinson Building.

5. SOURCES

Archival Sources

Abstract Index of Deeds, York Township, Concession 2 from the Bay (West), Lot 21
Archival Photographs, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, City of Toronto Archives,
Toronto Public Library, and Toronto Historical Board (individual citations in
Section 6)

Assessment Rolls, Village of Yorkville, 1862-77

Assessment Rolls, City of Toronto, St. Paul's Ward, 1884-92 and Ward 3, Division 3,
1893 ff.

Avrom Isaacs Fonds, York University Archives, Fonds F0134

Browne, Map of the Township of York, 1851

Building Records, City of Toronto, Toronto and East York, 1946 ff.

Cane, Topographical Plan of the City and Liberties of Toronto, 1842

City of Toronto Directories, 1851 ff.

Decennial Censuses of Canada, 1861 ff.
Goad's Atlases, 1884-1923
Gross, Bird's Eye View of Toronto, 1876
Liddy, Plan of the Incorporated Village of Yorkville, 1882
Miles and Company, Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York, 1878
Underwriters' Insurance Bureau Atlas, Vol. 1, 1965

Secondary Sources

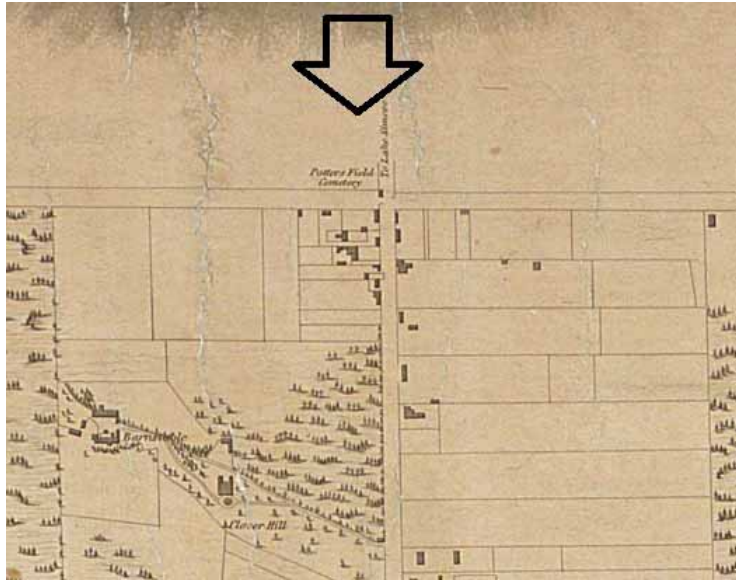
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Blumenson, John, Ontario Architecture, 1990
Dendy, William, Lost Toronto, 2nd ed., 1998
Hutcheson, Stephanie, Yorkville in Pictures 1853-1883, 1978
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Mulvany, C. Pelham, Toronto: past and present, 1884
Robertson, J. R., Landmarks of Toronto, Vol. 1, 1894
Robinson, C. Blackett, History of Toronto and the County of York, 1885
Robinson Family Records, www.ancestry.ca
Sleigh and Rowell Family Records, www.ancestry.ca

6. IMAGES¹⁶ – the **arrows** mark the location of the subject properties

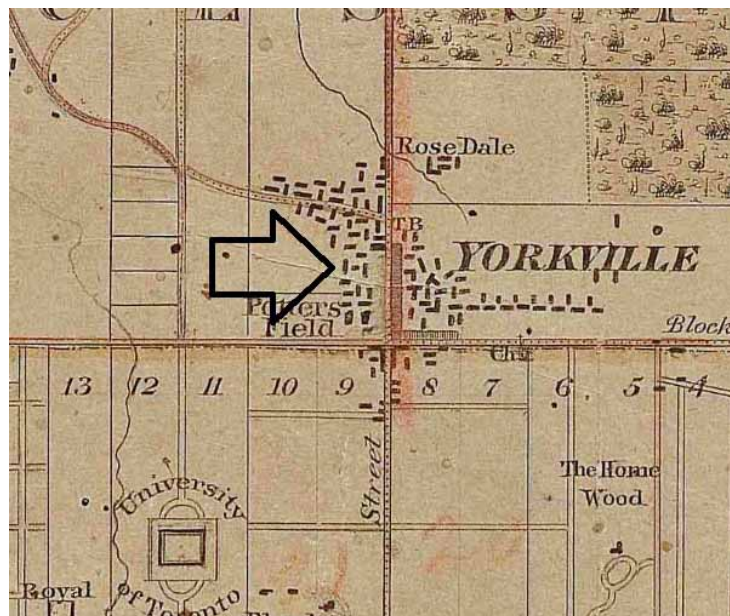


1. City of Toronto Property Data Map: showing the block on the west side of Yonge Street between Cumberland Street (south) and Yorkville Avenue (north) where the property at 832 Yonge Street is located.

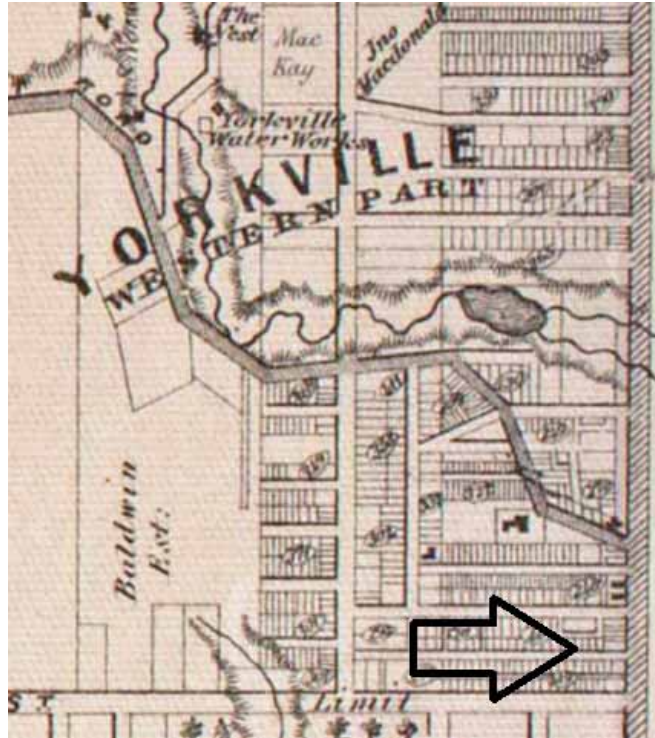
¹⁶ Additional maps and atlases tracing the development of Yorkville (but not reproduced here) are available, including those via <http://oldtorontomaps.blogspot.ca/>



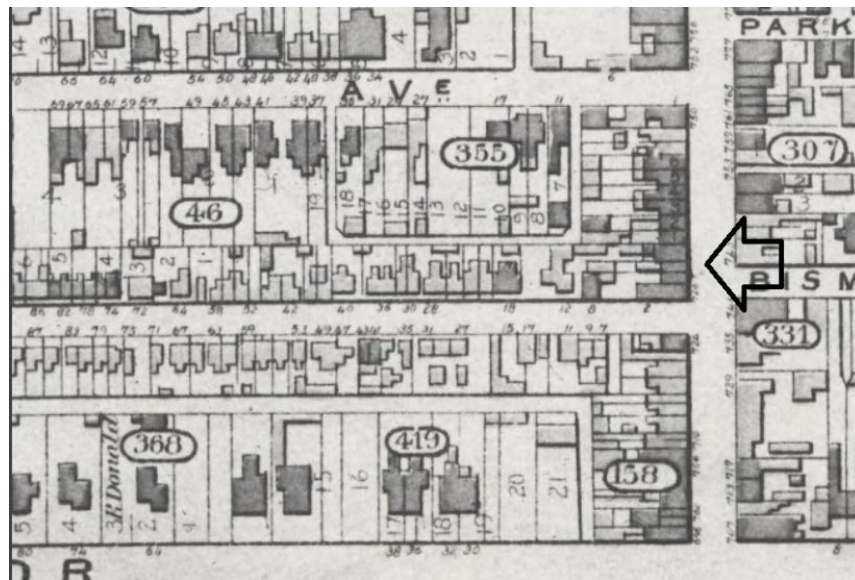
2. Cane's Topographical Map of the City of Toronto, 1842: the area where Yorkville was developed is shown adjoining Potter's Field and north of the City of Toronto boundary at the first concession line (Bloor Street).



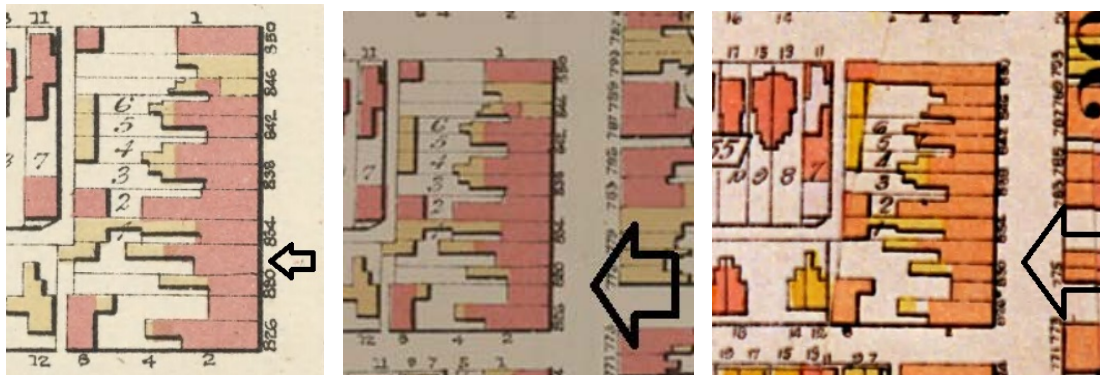
3. Browne's Plan of the City of Toronto, 1851: showing the development of the community at the south end of Township Lot 21, two years prior to the incorporation of the Village of Yorkville (other archival resources indicate a mixture of residential, commercial and small-scale industrial buildings along Yonge Street and Davenport Road).



6. Miles and Company's York County Atlas, 1878: the layout of Yorkville west of Yonge Street is shown prior to its annexation by the City of Toronto (only major landmarks including the Yorkville Town Hall and St. Paul's Church on Yonge Street are marked on the map).



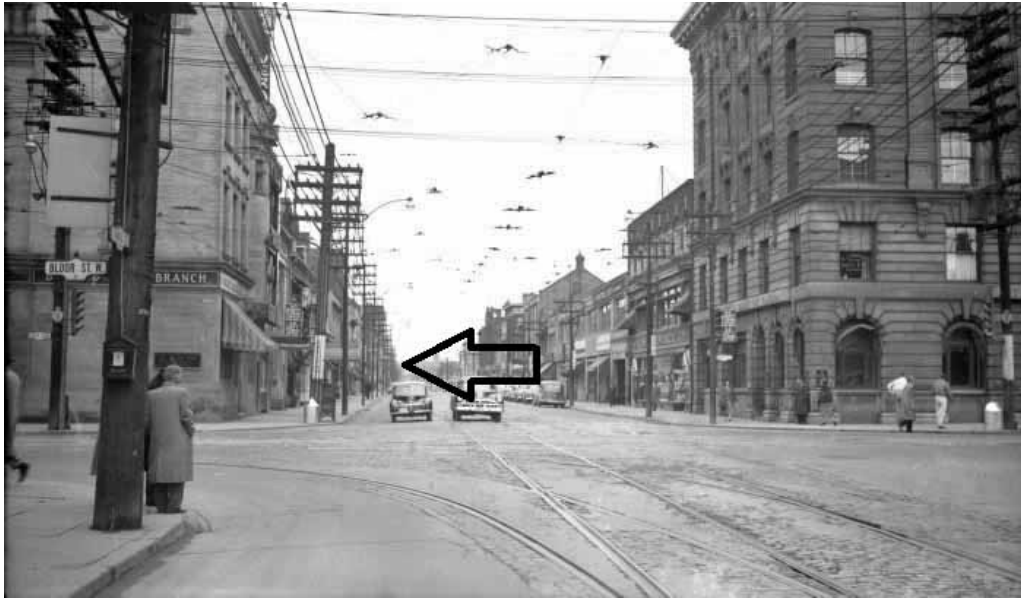
7. Goad's Atlas, 1884: showing Yorkville following annexation where the subject property is in place on the west side of Yonge Street.



8. Goad's Atlases, 1890 to 1912: the series of the fire insurance maps in 1890 (left), 1903 (centre) and 1910 revised to 1912 (right) shows the status of the building at 832 Yonge Street over three decades.



9. Fire Insurance Atlases, 1923 and 1965: showing the William Robinson Building at 834 Yonge Street on Goad's Atlas of 1910 revised to 1923 (left) and the Underwriters' Survey Bureau Atlas in the mid 1960s (right) when it was occupied by the Isaacs Gallery.



10. Archival Photograph, Yonge Street north of Bloor Street, 1953: the low-rise buildings along the street, including the block between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue where the subject property at 832 Yonge Street is found, are marked by the arrow (Toronto Reference Library, Item #1966).



11. Archival Photograph, Yonge Street near Cumberland Street, 1961: showing the property at 832 Yonge Street mid block (City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 16, File 185).



12. Archival Photograph, Isaacs Gallery, May 1961: the storefront of the building at 832 Yonge Street is shown at the time it was redesigned for the opening of the Isaacs Gallery (<http://ccca.concordia.ca/videoportrait/english/isaacs.html?languagePref=en&>).



13. Archival Photograph, Yonge Street north of Cumberland Street, c. 1970: the property at 832 Yonge Street is shown when it was occupied by the Isaacs Gallery (City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, Item 114).



14. Archival Photographs, 832 Yonge Street, 1980 and 1991: showing the subject property in the block, looking south from Yorkville Avenue in 1980 (left) and north from Cumberland Street in 1991 (right) (Toronto Historical Board).



15. Current Photograph, 832 Yonge Street, 2015: showing the property at 832 Yonge Street (centre) between its neighbours at 830 Yonge (left) and 834 Yonge (right), which complement it in vintage, scale and detailing (Heritage Preservation Services).



16. Aerial Photograph, 832 Yonge Street, 2015: looking northeast over Cumberland Street to Yonge Street and showing the rear roofline with the dormer windows (<https://www.google.ca/maps>).