

North York Garden Club Plants Splendid Gifts to Celebrate John McKenzie House's 100th

June 14, 2014 - North York Garden Club receives OHS Award of Merit

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To mark the 100th anniversary of the John McKenzie House, the North York Garden Club (NYGC) selected it for their annual community outreach project.

John McKenzie, the Willowdale-based farmer after whom the historic house is named, was a keen gardener, proud of his roses and a fine spring show of pink and white tulips. Quite possibly he was a member of the nascent North York Horticultural Society, as it was called when founded in 1924. For the past two years, the NYGC has planted flowerbeds at Parkview Neighbourhood Garden (PNG), the community market garden located next door to the house on land once part of the McKenzie family farm. The connections all came together in this centennial year when the NYGC approached Rob Leverty, Executive Director of The Ontario Historical Society, about re-landscaping the front planting, and he gave his enthusiastic approval.

PNG and NYGC volunteers pruned and reshaped the two overgrown shrubs flanking the front steps, and relocated a large fragrant sumac from Parkview garden to a sunny spot at the east corner of the front porch. Next, they trimmed an overgrown vine clambering up the porch's east side, above the peony bed. The NYGC then designed a fairly traditional planting plan to provide maximum impact with low maintenance, using a blend of hardy garden favourites and a few unexpected elements such as grass and alliums. For the dry, sunny western side they chose purple coneflower, fall sedum and Shasta daisy, bordered by lavender for spring fragrance, and a rose of Sharon to replace one that stood there for over 40 years. In the shaded front bed, they planted a border of dwarf Japanese spirea for fall colour, centred by an enormous hosta. Two skyrocket junipers, separated by a fragrant purple sand cherry added height and echo the porch columns. For winter interest, they added a dogwood, and for lightness, astilbe and goatsbeard.

A lovely dwarf Blue birdsnest spruce now punctuates the venerable peony bed on the exposed east side. And they didn't forget the tulips - 100 red and white bulbs, John McKenzie's favourites - will link the new planting to the house's history, assuming the squirrels don't get there first!

The NYGC undertook this project with great pleasure and are thrilled that Rob and the OHS staff are pleased with their work. They'll keep an eye on the garden as it grows and hope this visible celebration of the house's centennial will enhance it for another century. Learn more about the NYGC at www.northyorkgardenclub.ca

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