



Special 100th Anniversary Insert – 1913 to 2013

THE HISTORIC JOHN McKENZIE HOUSE

THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2013



The oldest known photograph of Willowdale's historic John McKenzie House, taken circa 1919, was relied upon for many of the restoration efforts undertaken by The Ontario Historical Society between 1993 and 1998 (see insert page 4). Learn more about the John McKenzie House and the OHS's stewardship of it: www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/jmhouse.

John McKenzie House 1913 – 2013

1913	Construction of Willowdale's John McKenzie House is completed
1975	McKenzie family sells home
1988	House last used as private residence
1993	25-year lease signed with City of Toronto; OHS gains stewardship of the property and buildings; OHS restoration project begins
1994-98	OHS headquarters established in the house; restoration project is completed; OHS New Home Fundraiser reaches \$485,000 goal
2009	Inaugural planting day for Parkview Neighbourhood Garden
2013	Heritage conservation easement signed

John McKenzie House and Gardens Receive Special 100th Birthday Gift: A Heritage Conservation Easement!

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Editor's Note: Be sure to also read "Partnering for conservation," which was published in the September 2013 issue of *Heritage Matters*, a publication of The Ontario Heritage Trust.

The Ontario Heritage Trust protects places of cultural, natural and archaeological value across the province with heritage easement agreements. These agreements are essentially a "heritage contract" between the Trust and a property owner, forming a partnership between the two parties to conserve the provincially significant property. The easement is registered on title with the Trust and protects the provincial heritage values of the property, typically in perpetuity. Property owners can range from private individuals, municipalities and conservation authorities to not-for-profit organizations.

Trust easements are a flexible tool and can be tailored to the specific requirements of a wide array of property types, and have been used to protect mansions, bridges, cemeteries, cultural landscapes, gardens, institutional buildings, archaeological sites, natural heritage values and even a carousel.

Recently the Trust acquired an easement on the John McKenzie

House, the headquarters of The Ontario Historical Society. While the OHS is a long-term tenant and advocate for the John McKenzie House, the easement agreement is with the property owner, the City of Toronto. The easement protects the Edwardian Classical style house (1913), attached coach house (1918), milk house (1907), stable (1915), a commemorative parkette (the McKenzie Parkette) to the north of the House and a community garden (the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden) to the east. Selected interiors are included to protect the beautiful woodwork. Any alterations to the heritage features, demolition or severances on the property must obtain Trust approval. This process, which involves the input of the Trust's technical staff, ensures alterations undertaken on the property will not negatively impact those features that are of value.

The John McKenzie House is located just east of Yonge Street at 34 Parkview Avenue in the intensely developed Willowdale neighbourhood in North York. While the setting of condominiums and modern residential infill detracts from the historic context of the John McKenzie House, the property prevails as a heritage oasis amidst a busy urban landscape. In fact, it is one of the few remaining houses in the Willowdale neighbourhood from the early twentieth century still standing and

"The Ontario Historical Society (OHS) is thrilled that after four years of hard work, a heritage conservation easement for the historic John McKenzie House and adjacent buildings and property has been completed.

Congratulations to the Ontario Heritage Trust and City of Toronto staff for their outstanding efforts on this challenging heritage initiative!

The OHS deeply appreciates the strong leadership of John Filion, City of Toronto Councillor (Willowdale), on this file; without his unwavering support and timely interventions, the completion of this easement would not have been possible.

With 2013 marking both the 125th Anniversary of the OHS and the 100th Anniversary of the John McKenzie House, this announcement is indeed a timely victory for all Ontarians to cherish and celebrate. The easement represents an important step forward for the OHS in its over twenty-year campaign to preserve this invaluable heritage asset for current and future generations."

– OHS Executive Director Rob Leverty

in its original location.

The John McKenzie House was determined to be of provincial heritage value, which is one of the conditions a property must meet in order to be considered for Trust easement protection. The criteria used by the Trust for determining provincial significance are outlined in the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The John McKenzie House was found to represent themes of developing economies, settlement (suburbanization) and building social and community life. The construction of this house and the subdivision of land around it represent an

economic pattern that was seen across the province – the assembling of land for development, the subdivision and sale of lots for profit and subsequent housing construction. The property demonstrates the early mass transformation of farmland for development into residential neighbourhoods.

The Trust is pleased to continue its partnership with the City of Toronto and the OHS with the common objective to see the John McKenzie House property preserved for present and future generations of Ontarians.



John McKenzie House: Community Voices

In preparation of this special issue of the
OHS Bulletin, the Society asked Willowdale residents
and OHS volunteers and friends:

What does the John McKenzie House mean to you?

Chris Nitsopoulos
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When thinking about the community of Willowdale, many picture the towering condo buildings that dot the landscape, meeting the diverse housing needs of thousands of people. Historically, though, the John McKenzie House was much like the condo buildings of today: a pillar of the

community. The farmland on which the home was built was later sub-divided and sold, kick-starting a community that still thrives in 2013. The John McKenzie House continues to be a significant part of Willowdale one hundred years later, bringing people together from all over Toronto.

We asked individuals with ties to the John McKenzie House why the house has meaning to them:

Bill Aird, President, North York Historical Society

"Members and friends of the North York Historical Society (NYHS) have a special appreciation of the historical significance of the John McKenzie House. The house, built in 1913, existed even before North York. It was part of the development of the village of Willowdale, one of four villages along Yonge Street in the area that would become North York in 1922. These villages and several others beyond the Yonge Street corridor would continue to be the core of a largely rural North York until after the Second World War when the growing population began the transformation of the area from rural to urban.

In 1913, Willowdale was the centre of a prosperous farming area. John McKenzie was a well-to-do but not especially prominent member of that community. The house he and his family moved into reflected the prosperity of the time. It was a house that was built well and with some care to detail. It was built to last – it has indeed lasted. The restoration of the house to its original features would not have been possible if the house had not retained the bones of those features for the 100 years of its existence.

The house was threatened with demolition, and the OHS, led by Dorothy Duncan, Executive Director, the local councillor (John Filion, then Ward 11), local residents, NYHS and many others in the heritage community lobbied endlessly to preserve this historic property. There was a long campaign supported by the heritage community to raise the funds needed for its restoration. It is with a great deal of pride that we now see the house being used as the headquarters for The Ontario Historical Society. The heritage community in North York appreciates that this heritage property is now serving the Ontario's entire heritage community."

City of Toronto Councillor John Filion (Ward 23: Willowdale)

"John McKenzie House is an important link to North York's past and, in the present, has become a meeting place for the local community. Together with the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden next door, it provides a wonderful example of how a small amount of publicly owned space can enhance the neighbourhood."

Dorothy Duncan, former Executive Director, Ontario Historical Society

"The John McKenzie House represents to me a modern miracle, when individual, organizational and institutional members donated time, talent and dollars to save, restore and renew this magnificent building as the first permanent headquarters for The Ontario Historical Society as it prepared to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Members of the Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, complete strangers, all ages, and all cultural backgrounds united to prove that "where there is a will, there is a way!" and now we must all unite to ensure that the John McKenzie House and its outbuildings survive and prosper to celebrate its 200th Anniversary."

Devon Peacock, former participant, OHS Young Citizen Program

"My time assisting The Ontario Historical Society in 1998 was brief but memorable. I've always had an interest in history so to have an opportunity to research the John McKenzie House, a building with rich history that just happened to be one block away from where I grew up, was truly enjoyable.

I often feel Canadians don't do enough to celebrate our history; luckily the John McKenzie House is an exception to that rule.

The fact that my father is now an OHS volunteer is an added bonus. It's a beautiful house with a rich history and I'm proud to be associated with it in a minor way."

Norma Thompson, descendent, Sarah Thompson, mother of John McKenzie

"Recently I had the distinct pleasure of touring the John McKenzie House, along with my sister, who was visiting from Denmark, and my daughter. This tour was of particular interest to us because John McKenzie was one of our ancestors. We have been researching the Thompson Family History for some time now, so it was a real thrill to see the house, and a photo of my great grand aunt, Sarah (Thompson) McKenzie. My great-great grandparents, William Thompson and Hannah Monkman were from England and settled in Whitchurch Township around 1834, Concession 1, Lot 64. They had eight children. Their third child was Sarah Thompson. Their fourth child was Robert M. Thompson, my great grandfather. He married Christena McGillivray. Many thanks to Heather for her hospitality and wonderful tour of the John McKenzie House. I was glad to see the house was preserved and we were able to have a glimpse into our ancestors' past."

President's Report

Dr. Brad Rudachyk, President
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Seldom does an organization have the happy opportunity to celebrate two milestones in the same year. In 2013, The Ontario Historical Society marks not only its 125th anniversary, but also, the centennial of the construction of its headquarters – John McKenzie House.

I will leave it to others to detail the history behind this storied pile. Suffice it to say that 34 Parkview Avenue was built by farmer-turned-developer John McKenzie for his wife and family in 1913 – one hundred years ago this year.

Instead, my remarks will suggest how your Society's headquarters reflects the Society itself and its province-wide mandate.

The Ontario Historical Society seeks "to preserve, interpret and publicize Ontario's multi-faceted heritage." The rescue and rehabilitation of John McKenzie House by OHS stands as a very visible reminder of the place of our province's built heritage and your Society's commitment to it.

The Society never stands alone. It is the very embodiment of its motto: "From all For all." John McKenzie House would not exist today but for the efforts of our friends. It took over 50 fundraising events and donations from more than 1,000 individuals and organizations, institutions, and corporations to raise the \$485,000 needed to restore the house (1913), milk house (1907), stable (1915), and coach house (1918) to their former glory.

In addition to the gift of treasure, there were countless gifts of time and talent. All of these were freely given in the dogged determination to get the job done in the finest tradition of the Society.

Of course, the saving of John McKenzie House exemplifies more than the protection of a very fine specimen of Edwardian Classical architecture in an urban Ontario that has redeveloped many of its kind out of existence. It also provides others with a model and a programme to emulate. As well, it allows your Society to share its broad expertise and experience in dealing with a significant heritage property – and all of the challenges

that go with it.

Moreover, it has anchored a fine residential neighbourhood – one that John McKenzie himself was instrumental in establishing. Indeed, without the successful rehabilitation of the house, there would be no Parkview Neighbourhood Garden – nominated this year as "one of the great front gardens in North York."

In leading the charge to save John McKenzie House, the OHS demonstrated its continuing vision, looking both ways to the past and to the future. It was not enough to "save" the house. It had to be put to good use. This led to another series of challenges as the old shell had to accommodate modern fire, accessibility and safety standards – not to mention telecommunication and computer equipment.

The end result is not only a very special space for your Society's headquarters, but also a welcoming venue for Society and community meetings and events. Indeed, John McKenzie House is a win for all of us.

The Edwardian Classical style has been described as eclectic and vernacular, as asymmetrical and solid – or "foursquare." It has also been portrayed as both stately and informal. It is indeed fitting that your Society should make John McKenzie House its corporate home. The make-up of The Ontario Historical Society – with its province-wide mandate and more than 850 affiliated societies, member organizations, and member institutions – is the very definition of eclectic and vernacular.

In working towards meeting its challenging mandate, board, staff and volunteers are constantly reminded of the asymmetry of ever-growing demands and limited human and financial resources. Nonetheless, despite the challenges, the Society is solid – resolutely standing "foursquare." And yet, for all of our provincial stateliness, your board and staff retain a friendly informality. Do drop by for a visit – you will quickly see what I mean.

Happy 100th Birthday John McKenzie House! May you grace your precincts and our collective consciousness for another century and more.



The Ontario Historical Society has participated in every Doors Open Toronto weekend since its inception in 2000.

In doing so, OHS has provided free local history educational tours at the John McKenzie House to over 15,000 individuals from around the world.

The Farm, the Families, and the Future

Editor's Note: The following article was originally published in 1998 in a special issue (no. 114) of the *OHS Bulletin*. It was written by a student of nearby Earl Haig Collegiate, Devon Peacock, under the direction of the late Dr. Jean Burnet, both of whom were OHS volunteers.

The new home of The Ontario Historical Society is built on land that, in the early nineteenth century, would have been a forested hinterland surrounding the Town of York. In 1801, a Crown grant of 285 acres stretching from the newly surveyed Yonge Street to recent day Bayview Avenue was deeded to Jacob Cummer, known as Lot 18, Concession 1, East of Yonge.

Jacob Cummer (1767-1841) had come to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania. Although his family was Lutheran, he became a Methodist, beginning in 1816 to hold church and Sunday school meetings in his log house on Yonge Street to serve the developing community of Willowdale. Later, he built a church, doing most of the work himself, and set aside two acres of his property for camp meetings. The log church was replaced by a brick church in 1856 with a spire built by his son. The brick church was demolished a century later.

Philip McKenzie (1824-1901) was an English immigrant, car-

penter and cabinet maker by trade, who purchased a part of the Cummer property in 1884. He moved his family into the old Cummer farmhouse, which faced Yonge Street between Parkview and Norton Avenue.

Philip took an active part in community life and was a Warden at St. John's Anglican Church, York Mills, in 1888 when plans were made to reseal the church and change its layout.

When Philip died in 1901, his third son John operated the farm. John married Allie Carson in 1902, however, she died the following year. His second wife was Eva Hill, who survived him. The McKenzies specialized in Holstein cattle, raised pigs, and kept poultry.

The "order book" for the years 1899 to 1920 contains many details about the farm and livestock: a record of which cows were serviced by which bulls (one was named Sir Mercedes Johanna), dates of birth, and markings of calves. In 1909, a heifer calf is described as "all black except white spot on forehead, half front foot white, 3 white legs and half tail and white belly." Prices were recorded for animals and eggs sold, milk yields for cows, purchases of feed and seed, gravel, payments to hired men and to fellow farmers, and recipes for remedies including "Drink for cow that is off her feed." In the same book are the costs for when Allie



It is hard to imagine that the residential and commercial intensification that has occurred in Willowdale was preceded by rural vistas such as the one pictured above. Here, John McKenzie is pictured farming Willowdale land (date unknown).

A Lavish Home Built on Willowdale Farmland

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For over one hundred years, the John McKenzie House has served as a landmark in the Willowdale neighbourhood of North York. As read above, the process by which John built this home was a typical story of early twentieth century real estate development that saw a wheat and cattle farm transformed into a residential property: John McKenzie's "dream home."

The elegant structure, a three-storey red brick house, built in the Classic Edwardian and Queen Anne Revival style with elements of Arts and Crafts, sat on two lots along Parkview Avenue. It sports a large L-shaped verandah and Doric columns. Inside, the ground floor was laid out to allow guests to walk easily through the large bevelled glass entrance and through the spacious parlours; John and Eva entertained lavishly and often.

The house featured many modern elements, including iron radia-



In front of their original farmhouse on Yonge Street stood (circa 1890) John McKenzie's father Philip, his mother Sarah, and Sarah's mother Hannah Thompson (right).

McKenzie became ill in 1902 and 1903, including the expenses of a "Burial lot and fees, 2 photos and frames, [and] Monument."

When the McKenzies believed that conditions for agriculture had begun to deteriorate, the farm was subdivided for residential development; the Empress subdivision was registered in October 1912.

In 1913 construction began on a new house on a large lot to replace the farmhouse on Yonge Street. William McKenzie, John's older brother, was in the lumber business and supplied some of the materials for the construction. The same "order book" that had been used for recording farming activities was now used to record the costs of building the "new House" at 34 Parkview, its coach house and the stable.

Built in a style that has been identified as Queen Anne Revival, Arts and Crafts, and Edwardian, the house was commodious enough to accommodate Eva and John and their four daughters Florence, Ethel, Gretchen and Jean, and their domestic servants. A son Philip, born in 1918, completed the family. The old Cummer farmhouse was moved east of the new house and converted into a double house. William McKenzie occupied one of them.

When John retired from farming in 1920, he continued to keep two Jersey cows. The McKenzies had kept the brick milk house built in 1907, and in 1914 a brick stable was built. John joined his brother George in the Kingsdale Builder's Supply Company, a coal and lumber business close to Yonge Street.

In addition to his business interests and his growing family,

John was a life-long member and several times Warden of St. John's Anglican Church (like his father), an active Mason, participating in the Paterson Lodge A.F. & A.M., Thornhill, Ontario, and a Trustee for Queen Mary School for over twenty-five years. The business closed in 1936 when John became gravely ill. He died on March 6, 1941 and is buried in St. John's Cemetery.

When John died, his eldest daughter Florence took over the house. Florence was married to Frank H. Brown, who was Treasurer of the Township of North York from 1931 to 1967. The family sold the house in 1975, just four years before Florence's death. In the late 1980s, air rights from 34 Parkview were transferred to an adjacent property. In return, 34 Parkview was transferred to the City of North York for \$1.

The proposal to build a ring road to relieve Yonge Street traffic placed this unique complex of buildings in a very vulnerable position. Delegations to the North York City Council persuaded them that the new road could be moved a few feet and the buildings survive. In 1994, the name of the block of Doris Avenue between Kingsdale Avenue and Parkview was changed to John McKenzie Gate and in 1997, a new park built to the north of the complex at 34 Parkview was named the McKenzie Parkette.

The rest is history and will remain so, at least until July 2018, when the long-term lease with the City of Toronto ends, as the OHS maintains this unique legacy from Ontario's rural beginnings, surrounded by Canada's largest city.

tors, push-button light switches, and a generator in the basement to provide electricity.

Throughout the house there are many decorative details, all representing elegance and wealth. At the top of the wide staircase is a stained-glass window with an elaborate trailing rose motif. In the living room and parlour are fireplaces surrounded by intricately carved bookcases.

The house was often decorated for special events with flowers from the McKenzie's gardens. Both John and Eva were avid gardeners who were involved with local hor-

tical societies, and won prizes for their fruits and vegetables. Each spring, red and white tulips bloomed in the front of their house – red and white being John's favourite patriotic colours.

As such, it is most appropriate that the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden and the North York Garden Club has restored some of the land use back to agriculture (see special insert page 5).

Niagara-on-the-Lake War of 1812 Bicentennial

Don't miss these exciting events:

➤ **Bicentennial Symposium** November 17, 2013.
Featuring Dr. Donald Hickey, author and historian.
For tickets: www.niagarahistorical.museum/events

➤ **Niagara on Fire!** A spectacular sound and light show and premiere of a video depicting the event that eventually led to 200 years of peace between Canada and the U.S. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, 6:00 p.m. December 7, 2013. Open to the public. See niagaraonfire.com



Restoration of the John McKenzie House

1993 – 1998

Rob Leverty, Executive Director
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Editor's Note: The following was originally published in a 1998 special issue of the *OHS Bulletin*. It outlines the challenges faced and obstacles overcome by the OHS during the project to restore the historic John McKenzie House between 1993 and 1998. It was originally titled "A Restoration in Progress" and was prepared by Rob Leverty, then Restoration Manager. Since this article was published, the OHS has continued to pay all of the maintenance and repair costs – over \$250,000 – for the buildings and grounds.



The milk house, built in 1907, is also designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. As evidenced (left), its structure and features required significant repair and restoration. The right picture shows the restoration required to rebuild the foundation and exterior front wall of the milk house.



Late on the afternoon of August 17, 1993, we signed the 25-year lease for the historic John McKenzie House at 34 Parkview Avenue in Willowdale. The next morning, the OHS began the restoration of the house, stable, milk house, and coach house.

The first two months consisted of sorting the huge piles of unidentified junk and valuables stored in the four buildings. For weeks we sent enormous quantities to be recycled, to the toxic waste station, and to the garbage dump. During the sorting we found some real gems that would be crucial to our work, including valuable oak doors and moulding and items that gave us historical insights into the buildings, the people who built them, and those who lived in them.

By October, we had made a photographic and written inventory of the site before the restoration started. Winter was coming and we soon discovered that the boiler in the basement had completely rotted out and was quite dangerous. It was dismantled in early November and replaced by two new energy efficient boilers. The plumbers and pipe fitters worked miracles. We

have kept the old house warm ever since.

From December 1993 to mid-April 1994, we concentrated on the house. Since its interior was also designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, the work had to proceed with care and enormous patience. The main house was entirely rewired using as many of the original fixtures as possible. We also had to meet the commercial building and fire codes by installing an outdoor fire escape, fire doors and exits, emergency signs and lighting. The basement ceiling had to be enclosed with fire rated drywall. This latter task was very challenging and almost provoked a mutiny.

We upgraded the security of the house with a new wireless alarm and fire system. All the rotten basement windows were replaced with reinforced glass blocks. A new wheelchair accessible washroom and ramp were created. The entire basement was given two coats of paint by hardworking volunteers.

Of course, we had some unexpected surprises and expenses. During our work, all of the trees to the west of the house were clear cut for the development of the ring road, Doris Avenue. Those trees had protected, cooled and moderated the temperatures. It became apparent that the destruction of the trees would require us to install an air conditioning system. The installation of the duct work created an enormous challenge, and added considerably to the overall costs of the project.

While Doris Avenue was being constructed, major plumbing problems in the house suddenly emerged. We were forced to dig up the basement floor and install new tiles and drains. We also discovered two rotten and leaking chimneys. They were capped and the bricks were recycled for the next phase of our restoration. By August 1994, the milk house was in desperate condition and obviously would not survive another winter. A plastic shelter was constructed to protect the public and allow the stone mason and his apprentice to perform their craft. The rotten roof was jacked up and suspended with supports. The leaning and crumbling front wall was dismantled. New foundations were created and the wall was rebuilt as it was

originally. Rotten wood was replaced, the cupola was rebuilt and, just before Christmas, cedar shingles were installed on the roof.

In the spring and summer of 1995, the stable was restored to its former glory. The stone mason was busy again with new challenges. Paint and a new cedar shingle roof provided the final touches (see photo on page 6 of special insert).

On September 27, 1995, we received our building permit for the coach house. The floor was demolished and the walls were stripped. For weeks, there were long days devoted to removing the rubbish and debris. Plumbing pipes and insulation were installed before a new cement floor was poured.

The winter of 1996 was bitterly cold and electricians, carpenters, plumbers, and stone masons worked in difficult circumstances.

The inside of the coach house was completely rebuilt with a new furnace and air conditioning system. Steel beams were inserted to reinforce the walls and second floor. The outside of the coach house was restored exactly like the pictures the McKenzie family had given us (see photo below). Somehow, we managed to meet our deadline of March 29th – we were installing the new light bulbs during the registration for our first workshop in the coach house!

In the fall of 1996, we had some small leaks in the roof in the main house. The new condominiums to the west of the house created

unexpected and powerful new wind tunnels. During the winter of 1997, shingles were literally flying off the house when we were struck with a severe wind and thunder storm. The next summer, we were forced to replace the existing roof on the house and coach house. Before the roofers arrived, the carpenters spent two weeks replacing rotten roof boards and repairing fascia and soffits. An army of painters took five weeks to scrape and paint the entire outside of the house.

During the Christmas holidays and in early January 1998, we started some interior work in the main house. Wallpaper was repaired and the upstairs offices, kitchen and main hall were painted. The kitchen sink and stove were finally replaced. Drapes and curtains were custom made and hung. The interior work on the house will continue to depend on money and manpower.

Throughout our restoration work, we were very conscious that the John McKenzie House existed within a living neighbourhood. Children play and go to school nearby; our top priority was always public safety. Every day the buildings and grounds had to be constantly secured and safely guarded. And unlike many big developers in the area, we did not let our debris pollute the neighbourhood.

In conclusion, we didn't meet all our deadlines but somehow we did reach the finish line – a new home for the OHS. The battles over getting the two building permits are forgotten. Disagreements between some of the trades are forgiven. Now we should all count our blessings.

We met all the building codes while maintaining the integrity of all designated buildings. We honoured all the commitments in the 25-year lease and much more. No shortcuts taken. The best materials were used. There were no accidents in the workplace.

All the individuals who participated in the restoration of 34 Parkview should be proud of their contributions. Colleagues, workers and volunteers donated countless hours of their time. I think the McKenzie family would have respected their talents, admired their dedication and approved of their hard work.



Reaching areas of the house to complete the exterior painting was often a challenging task!



Significant work was required in order to restore the coach house doors to their original style in 1918. Design decisions were made using evidence from historic photographs donated to the OHS by members of the McKenzie family.

From Forest to Family Farm to Parkview Neighbourhood Garden Back to the Farm in the 21st Century

Fran Moscall
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Imagine a land, in 1797, forested with sugar maple, beech and hemlock. Imagine those first settlers, having received a 200-acre land grant envisioning good farm land on which to grow crops and feed livestock; a land covered with trees that stood in the way of survival. This was the site that would later become the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden.

Once the land was cleared, it was adapted for farm use, with the families of Jacob Cummer and Lawrence Johnson among its first pioneers. Their respective lands were bordered by Finch Avenue and Park Home Avenue and both sides of Yonge Street. By 1798, four log houses had been built with approximately twelve acres of land cleared on each land grant. Tradesmen and women in the area between 1799 and 1878 included land surveyors, blacksmiths, builders, carpenters, shoemakers, wagon makers, well diggers, tanners, dressmakers, potters, distillers, and many more. This settlement became known as “Willow Dale” in 1855.

A portion of the original Cummer farm was sold to Philip McKenzie, a carpenter and casket-maker. McKenzie and his family lived in the old Cummer farmhouse, a one-and-a-half storey brick-style dwelling. The house, built in the 1840s or 1850s, was constructed between Parkview and Norton Avenues and faced Yonge Street. After Philip’s death, his son John farmed the land, specializing in Holstein cattle. Later, when market conditions faltered, McKenzie subdivided the farm for suburban residential development. The “Empress Subdivision” was registered in October



Photo Mike Pochwat

Each spring, Parkview Neighbourhood Garden (PNG) holds a Planting Day, for which dozens of community members volunteer their time and hard work to plant seeds for vegetables and flowers. Learn how you can get involved at www.parkviewneighbourhoodgarden.org

1912.

In 1913, McKenzie built a new brick house to replace the earlier farmhouse on a large lot at 34 Parkview Avenue. A strip of land was retained to allow room for two Jersey cows to graze. At the rear of the house the brick milk house (1907) and the brick stable (1915) served the scaled-down farming practices of the household after the creation of the subdivision. A coach house was added as well. Today, this brick house, registered under the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its architectural and interior features, is known as the John McKenzie House, headquarters for The Ontario Historical Society.

In 2008, City of Toronto Councillor (Willowdale) John Filion and OHS Executive Director Rob Leverty headed up a working group to realize a vision of a market garden growing fresh local produce for the community. With the financial support of the City of Toronto’s Clean and Beautiful Program, City staff, service groups, community animators and

volunteers, the garden took root in 2008, surrounded by these vestiges of the original farm. A group of interested citizens met in the historic John McKenzie House at 34 Parkview Avenue to discuss what practical uses could be made of the vacant City of Toronto-owned lot next door (44 Parkview Ave.) that would complement the early farm workings of this area and agricultural use of the land.

The group decided that an organic market garden should be created and operated by skilled volunteer gardeners as well as those who had a desire to learn. Its purpose was, and continues to be, to nurture community involvement in this garden, to educate local residents, to feed the needy, and to donate funds from sales to worthy causes. On May 23, 2009, more than 100 volunteers participated in the first planting day. On June 3rd, the first volunteer steering committee formed to operate the garden.

Thus the land was prepared and planting began, forming the first urban garden on the original farm

site. The John McKenzie stable has been invaluable, as it serves as an important garden hub where tools and other equipment and supplies are stored, seeds and plants are prepared, where a message board is used for communication purposes and where brief onsite garden meetings take place. The stable is truly “original.” In fact, a volunteer unearthed an antique horseshoe inside, and it now hangs over the entrance. Indeed, horses had once lived in the brick-floored stable because their teeth marks show where they had gnawed the wood of the vertical supports (see photo, special insert page 6).

Furthermore, the coach house is used for meetings and events, including a celebratory potluck meal that occurs each fall during the harvest.

Produce includes many kinds of vegetables, herbs and berries. Plum, pear and apple trees have been planted, as well as two hazelnut trees. Each year, volunteers increase the variety of produce to provide for the diversity of culinary tastes enjoyed by the many cultural groups that call Willowdale home, including kale, basil and chutney. Flowers are planted in vegetable and herb beds to discourage unfriendly bugs and to entice and serve bees and butterflies for our mutual benefit. Lush flowers and shrubs planted by the North York Garden Club at the entrance of the garden extend a warm welcome to all visitors.

Variety describes the character of the garden. This is borne out in our volunteers who have come from many countries and willingly share their cultural gardening traditions. Many children, teenagers and adults find a role in the ongoing success of the garden. Community members contribute their skills for many projects, including the construction of wooden plant climbing structures and a huge compost bin; student construction of a market garden wagon; installation of wild bee houses for research purposes; storytelling during garden tours; construction and installation of a

“Garden” cont’d page 6...

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

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North York Garden Club
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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

Archaeological Investigation Reveals Interesting Past of John McKenzie Property 10,000 artifacts excavated by 28 volunteers

Editor's Note: The following article was compiled using material originally published in a number of *OHS Bulletin* issues.

The Toronto Branch of the Ontario Archaeological Society (OAS) was very busy in the summer of 1994 conducting an archaeological assessment of the property surrounding the John McKenzie House, the then-recently acquired historic headquarters of The Ontario Historical Society. Volunteers Greg Purmal and Elise Sherman headed up the excavations, which were undertaken during weekends all throughout the summer. The OAS Branch received funding from the Ontario Heritage Trust (then Foundation) to carry out its investigations. Also involved with the dig were then OAS Executive Director (ED) Charles Garrad, and from the OHS, Dorothy Duncan and Rob Levery. "Summer weekends – the ideal time for a picnic in the park, relaxing at the beach or a trip to the family cottage. Not so for my husband Duane and I... When we heard [of the] archaeological dig... we decided we had to participate," remarked Ronda Margolese, a member of the volunteer archaeology team.

After surveying and gridding out the backyard, the team of archaeologists and volunteers chose several key areas in which to begin the assessment. Some of these test units had hoped to reveal evidence of a barn that once stood between the present-day house and dairy. Early photographs provided by McKenzie family members reveal a plaster-covered building which once stood adjacent to the milk



house. Unfortunately, though, no archaeological evidence was recovered to substantiate the claim.

Two other units were excavated to the east of the stable to determine the size of the original building. Evidence in the form of bricks outlining possible walkways, drive areas and walls of an earlier structure, or an extension of the present one, indicate that the stable has gone through many transformations since its construction in 1914. The paving bricks found have maker's marks showing the name of the manufacturer, Ontario P.B. (Paving Brick) Company and 1895, the date that the company, once located in the West Toronto Junction area, was formed.

The archaeologists also excavated the floor of the stable, and discovered some fire red clay and charcoal approximately two feet below the surface. This evidence indicates that a fire probably occurred on the site, and that the pres-

ent structure may have been preceded by another that burned.

Other units were dug to the north of the stable to find clues of a piggery, which may have once stood in the area. An excavation right next to the north stable wall revealed the evidence of a midden or garbage dump, dated to the 20th century.

Over 10,000 artifacts were recovered from the site during the field session by 28 dedicated volunteers. Other notable items excavated during the dig included a "pre-McKenzie" well, a bone crochet hook, a slate pencil and copper slate pencil sleeve, a number of brass clothing studs, a variety of fine blue and white transfer wares, fragments of a smoking pipe, and at least eight



After the archaeological dig was completed, the grounds at 34 Parkview Avenue required landscaping. In 1998, sod was planted on the property – one of the finishing touches to a five-year restoration project.

leather shoes.

The findings and analysis of the dig project were published in a report, *Excavations at the John McKenzie House Site 1994*, by the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Archaeological Society, which included a shoe analysis by Claire Friesenhausen.

Was the entire dig worth it? Ronda believes it was: "By the end of the day, our muscles ached and our clothes were soiled beyond recognition. Yet the project was a rewarding experience. It allowed us to meet people who shared our interest in archaeology and discover something new about the history of our city."



The OHS's restoration project also included replacing the stable's cedar shingle roof and significant masonry and brick repair. The John McKenzie stable, built in 1915, was designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* and is now used by the community as it serves as an operational headquarters for the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden (see special insert page 5).

"Garden" from page 5

permanent cedar display board at street level; creation of the PNG website and Facebook page; and preparation of food stuffs for sale using the wealth of the garden. Casual visitors share their photos and give us practical advice.

The garden has evolved into its fifth year of operation by successfully growing lush produce, some of which is shared with those in need and some sold with profits donated at the end of the growing season. In 2012, having kept aside funds for supplies, we donated \$550 to a local church that feeds over 100 people every Wednesday and has been doing so for the past 13 years. We have also conducted workshops on seed saving and planting techniques; wrote an article for publication in *Our Canada*; hosted tours, including an ESL

tour in Farsi; translated signage into several languages; partnered with schools and community groups such as McKee Preschool and North York Garden Club; and exchanged services and expertise with historic Spadina House garden staff.

There are many heart-warming stories to tell about the wonderful interactions among the volunteers with our various communities and even with wildlife visitors to the garden. We are realizing our goal of urban farming by enabling neighbours to enjoy our produce and encouraging them to grow their own. Thus, Parkview Neighbourhood Garden is our 21st century version of 'back to the farm,' with our garden described by journalist Catherine Porter as being the 'farm gate.'



Photo Mike Pochwat

Willowdale residents young and old have taken pleasure in getting involved with the Parkview Neighbourhood Garden, located on what was once John McKenzie's farmland.

Strengthening Ontario's Heritage Network Project Update

Next webinar: December 5

Alison Little,
SOHN Program Manager
sohn@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca

The OHS's Strengthening Ontario's Heritage Network Project is bringing new learning and collaboration opportunities to its members. The webinar series launched in September and has become increasingly successful with each session.

Our first webinar, "Building Stories," was led by Kayla Jonas Galvin of the University of Waterloo's Heritage Resources Centre with over 65 participants. Despite a few technical bumps, webinar participants learned how to share their local built heritage on the Building Stories website and increase the online exposure of Ontario's historic sites and trails.

Do you have a webinar idea?
Tell us what you'd like to see!
Email sohn@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca
to make suggestions and take
part in our webinar survey!

The second webinar, "Historical Educators," welcomed a large audience of classroom and museum educators – many of them new to the OHS. This session was hosted in partnership with the Ontario Elementary Social Studies Teachers' Association, and was led by Jill Colyer of The Historical Thinking Project. Response to this event was fantastic, and we registered 166 participants for the live session. The audience learned about applying historical thinking concepts in conjunction with the revised Social Studies, History and Geography curriculum document published by the Government of Ontario.

The webinar series will continue to meet the needs of our members with the third webinar scheduled for Thursday, December 5th, 2013. This session, led by Kim Pittaway,

will focus on navigating and using social media tools to target and effectively reach online audiences, a topic relevant to many of our members and affiliates as Ontario's heritage community becomes increasingly digital. By the end of this session, participants will feel confident in choosing the appropriate online communication tool for their group or institution, finding their intended online audience, and generating content that will engage and interest their followers.

Kim Pittaway is a journalist, educator and editorial consultant. She is the former editor-in-chief of *Chatelaine* magazine, and has worked with magazines and editorial teams across Canada to help them develop their editorial and communication plans, including social media strategies. She teaches in the journalism program at the University of King's College in Halifax.

Register for
the December 5th

webinar "@OntarioHistory: Social Media & Online Communication in Heritage" by visiting www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/webinars.

Registration is available to OHS members for \$10 and to non-members for \$15.

Be sure to follow the OHS on Twitter (@OntarioHistory) and Facebook, or check our website for more details.

We're also hard at work developing the online map showing the location of sites, groups and organizations in our popular online Ontario Heritage Directory, to be launched in early 2014. This map will provide a visual representation of heritage activity across Ontario, helping users find and connect with our members and affiliates. Please check your listing in the Heritage Directory to ensure we have accurate contact information on record.

The OHS acknowledges the Government of Ontario through the Museum and Technology Fund for their financial support of this project.

Questions or comments? Email Alison Little at sohn@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca

125th Anniversary Campaign Seeks Funds to Digitize *Ontario History*

Andrea Izzo,
Communications Coordinator
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In 1899, the OHS published its first issue of *Ontario History*, then titled *Papers and Records*. What began primarily as an effort to preserve important primary source documents has evolved over the past century into its current form: a scholarly peer-reviewed journal that publishes new research and scholarship on topics related to all aspects of Ontario's diverse heritage.

As a publisher, the OHS is planning and looking forward into a period of opportunity and of uncertainty. It has made a strategic decision to digitize all of the articles and book reviews since 1899, in order to preserve and make them available for generations to come. It has also committed to providing digital access to the journal, allowing subscribers in the near future to choose between print or electronic delivery options.

The Society knows that it cannot escape the struggles currently experienced by major publishers, which include national newspa-

pers and book publishing firms, to distribute and sell their print products in a digital age.

Members of the OHS and subscribers to its journal will be familiar with the 125th Anniversary fundraising campaign to raise \$125,000 to digitize *Ontario History*. Thus far, the response to this fundraiser has been tremendous – to all those members and subscribers who have already contributed, we share our sincere thanks; however, we are still shy of our goal.

This is a large undertaking (since 1899, over 325 issues have been published, with well over 2,000 articles written by a "who's who" of Ontario historians). Digitizing this invaluable resource will require new computers, custom software and web technology, a database equal to the task, and the personnel to get the job done.

In support of this, we are asking for your donation. Please give generously either through our website at ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/125th, by mail, or by calling our office toll free at 1.866.955.2755. Tax receipts will be issued for donations. Thank you for your support!

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www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/webinars

History of Willowdale Published by Dundurn

OHS Thanks 2013 Summer Students

OHS co-hosts book launch December 10th at Historic John McKenzie House

Scott Kennedy
Author
firesyde@sympatico.ca

**"If you ate today,
thank a farmer"**
— Sign on a fence post,
south of Perth, Ontario

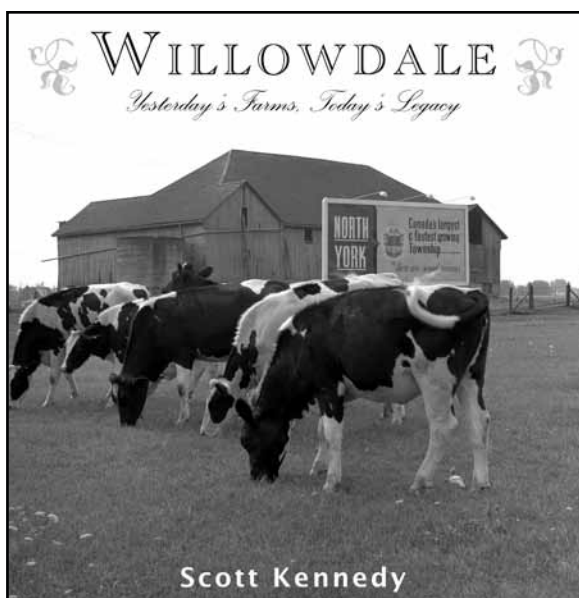
Kids take everything for granted. I was no different. Growing up on Toronto's rural fringe, I explored the land and buildings of abandoned farms with more a sense of adventure than a sense of loss. Abandoned barns with buggies suspended from the rafters were more playgrounds than nostalgia to me then, but what I wouldn't give now to tuck my middle-aged brain into my boyhood skin — to go back with a camera and a notebook and at least document what I saw in a respectful fashion.

This book then, must partly be regarded as an apology to the families who worked so hard to build their beautiful farms to feed us all; an apology from a boy on a bike who was more impressed by the bulldozers than what they were bulldozing. We can never go back. Life doesn't flow in that direction. We will never again see fields of grain at the corner of Leslie and Finch or hear the blacksmith's hammer ringing out across Hogg's Hollow, but we can take comfort in the stories and photos of the past, close our eyes and imagine a quieter time.

We can learn to appreciate the lives and accomplishments of these families whose names we may have only seen on street signs or historical plaques and, in so doing, offer our long overdue "thanks."

Each chapter in this book describes either a specific farm or a specific family, and follows their stories from the original Crown land grants near the dawn of the nineteenth century to the present day. It is my sincere wish that this book will give readers a new connection to present-day Willowdale and a new appreciation of those who have gone before. It's a lot easier to be stuck in traffic if you know whose farm you are on and can take the time to consider what they had to go through to make ends meet.

I grew up in North York in the 1950s and 1960s, surrounded by working farms that soon gave way to the urban landscape we endure today. Ten years ago — feeling a little nostalgic — I walked into the North York Central Library to borrow a book on the farms of North York only to find that no such book existed, so I went upstairs



Scott Kennedy's *Willowdale: Yesterday's Farms, Today's Legacy* was recently published by Dundurn. Its 192 pages tell stories that embrace the evolution of Willowdale from the earliest acquisition of land to today's urban environment. It is available in softcover for \$30 and in ePub format for \$15, and can be purchased at www.dundurn.com.

A book launch will be hosted by The Ontario Historical Society in partnership with Dundurn, on December 10th, 2013 between 3 and 6 p.m. at the historic John McKenzie House, 34 Parkview Avenue in Willowdale. RSVP by emailing ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca or calling 416.226.9011.

to the Canadiana Department and started rifling through the files of old photographs to see if I could find enough information to satisfy my curiosity. It soon became clear that there was lots of information all right, but it had never been assembled in such a way as to tell the story of the farms of North York in a chronological fashion from the eighteenth century land grants to the present day. I started to fill a three-ring binder with photocopies of stories and photographs to take home and read for my own enjoyment, but as the project progressed, it became clear to me that these stories were well worth sharing, so I decided to write a book: my first.

I am delighted that this book will

In 2013, the Society received special funding to hire two students over the summer to work on special projects and events. OHS successfully applied to the Government of Canada's Department of Canadian Heritage through its Young Canada Works (YCW) Program, and issued through YCW delivery organizations Canadian Museums Association and Heritage Canada Foundation. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport also provided funding through its Summer Experience Program (SEP). The Society would like to acknowledge these government programs for providing the funding to create opportunities for Ontario youth seeking employment in our cultural heritage sector. Thanks Chris and Elora for your hard work and invaluable contributions this summer!

Elora Vink

This summer, I worked as the Membership and Public Outreach Assistant. I am a fourth year Co-op Humanities student at the University of Toronto Scarborough campus studying English, history and drama. My position with the OHS pertains to an ongoing project to organize affiliated membership files in chronological order and separating the incorporation documents in preparation for being scanned on a digital database. I also lended my experience in event planning to several smaller projects as needed. It is a privilege to be a part of this great organization, and I value the learning and new experience gained during my time here.

Christopher Nitsopoulos

I have always had an interest in architectural preservation within Toronto and not-for-profit organizations that serve the public in one way or another. The Ontario Historical Society has allowed me to explore these interests, while also contributing to their flagship scholarly journal *Ontario History* and conducting research on its heritage home, the John McKenzie House. As a student currently enrolled in Ryerson University's nursing program with hopes to deliver health care to the public in a not-for-profit environment upon graduation, the experience gained with the OHS will help me in future endeavors.

be launched in partnership with The Ontario Historical Society in their 125th year of providing service to people of this province. Without the dedication of OHS staff, members and volunteers, we would all be living with a much less vivid image of our common past.

Congratulations also to the wonderful John McKenzie House, home to the OHS and celebrating its centennial in 2013. Without the OHS, especially through the efforts of OHS staff Rob Leverty and Dorothy Duncan, this

spectacular structure would have been torn down years ago.

I am grateful to Rob for his help in preparing a chapter on the John McKenzie farm that closes my new book, With the help of Barry Penhale and Jane Gibson, I have been granted the privilege of having my book published by Dundurn.



Robert J. Burns, Ph.D.
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The historic John McKenzie House also serves as a community hub and meeting place for local citizens and organizations; the OHS provides rental opportunities for the space at reasonable rates. Pictured here is author and historian Chris Raible speaking at the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Friends Historical Association (OHS affiliated society incorporated in September 2009) in September 2013.