

THE LEADER & RECORDER'S History of the Junction

Diana Fancher, Editor

This book is history the way it should be told: through lively stories, thought-provoking memoirs, and a rich collection of archival images. The West Toronto Junction Historical Society demonstrates that they know how to bring the people and communities of this historic neighbourhood alive for a modern audience — by telling great stories.

Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto

Full of funny, poignant, revealing, true stories of West Toronto Junction. This is one of the great neighbourhoods of Toronto, and the West Toronto Junction Historical Society is one of Toronto's great assets. This new book makes wonderful reading for all its citizens.

Mike Filey

Few are those who seek out the past in local communities, but West Toronto activists have been keeping memories alive in the Junction. In this collection they have done a service for current and past Junction dwellers, and indeed Torontonians in general, in pulling together many of the studies.

James T. Lemon, Professor emeritus, University of Toronto
Author of *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History*

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Introduction

We were in the garden on a hot afternoon in the neighbourhood, and a visitor from the suburbs was admiring the great old oak tree next door and how it shades our garden so pleasantly. The tree must be, what, maybe eighty years old, we agreed, and we fell to speculating about just who planted these oaks that now rise from every third or fourth backyard all along our street, to our great pleasure and benefit. Those oak trees came from someone. They carry a hint of history. They remind us that people we barely know of contributed to this neighbourhood, even to the foliage above it, long before we dreamed of living here.

The day after that afternoon under the oak tree, I picked up the manuscript of this book, and I read with a shock of recognition about Mayor Clendenan. In 1896 Mayor Clendenan bullied the town council of West Toronto into spending \$2000 for the planting of shade trees all over the neighbourhood. He foresaw how property values would benefit from the way the trees would shelter and beautify the community for generations.

This book is like that. It makes few claims to earthshaking consequence; it's just some local stories and the pictures that go with them. But for anyone who knows the Junction, High Park, Bloor West, and the other neighbourhoods of West Toronto, it is full of small explosions of understanding. It is a set of pointers to how this place got to be the place we know. These short histories of local people and businesses and locations over the last century or so are an index to what has endured here in West Toronto — and to much that has vanished like an oak tree chopped down, or like the farms along Runnymede Road in our grandparents' childhood years.

We send our children to the local schools, and it occurs to us dimly that generations of students and teachers and ratepayers have contributed to those institutions. We enjoy the park or the rink, and remember something about a rink that used to be in Ravina Park, and a pool down by Bloor and Clendenan, and dance pavilions down by the lake. Reading the real estate notices with proprietorial satisfaction or renters' dread, we realize how someone long ago made decisions that filled one street with row houses on

narrow lots, another with detached homes on broad lawns. When we run our errands among the restored storefronts along Dundas Street, we have intimations of the business people who have thrived or struggled here during a century and more. Savouring the cultural diversity that has come to the neighbourhood in recent years, we might speculate about hardships and discriminations that other immigrant minorities must have confronted.

We pass by Mavety Street or St. John's Road, and maybe spare an idle thought about who gave names to all the streets. We watch the burgeoning development of retail stores and housing in the Stock Yards district, where there actually used to be stock yards, and we have just a sense of the economic forces, entrepreneurial efforts, and political decisions that have brought in great industries and taken them away again generations later. When we grab a bus down to the subway, do we ever consider how the buses came to follow the routes they do, or how the subway must have changed things?

No one absolutely needs to know how these things came to be or where they went. Perhaps we could get along without knowing about how things were done around here before, or how they evolved into the civic fabric of which we are the custodians. But since you are reading this book, you have probably already sensed how we are enriched by those small bursts of understanding about where our community came from, by that expanded dimension of time-depth that is available to us.

For some years now, members of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society have been enjoying those small discoveries through the society newsletter, *The Leader and Recorder*. We have encountered Miss Cherry and what her teaching meant to students and teachers on Indian Road in the 1920s. We have discovered Harry Lee's very different experience in the school system and the story behind the plaque to his memory at Annette Street Public School. We have explored how generations of Martins ran a local florist shop long before anyone imagined cut flowers might one day be air freighted from Venezuela. We have read about the leagues that played at the local rink, and what a big deal artificial ice was to future NHL stars like Busher Jackson.

The Leader and Recorder has often returned to the steam trains that thun-

dered down our rail lines, and the maintenance yards that sustained them, and the mills and the heavy industries they in turn sustained, and even to the local doll factory, the one that got by on child labour. It remembers the bootleggers of the neighbourhood after that rowdy night when all the bars were closed down, the pool halls and movie theatres of the Junction, and the dancehalls where you had to buy a membership to get around the law. It honours the family business that sold milk and coal for generations, the woman who attended all the home births, and the law firm that's been here more than a century. It evokes the assertive young Chinese Canadian girl who insisted on sitting downstairs, not in the balcony seats — and smashed a tradition of prejudice. Even Jenny Brown and the cow she herded through an ever less appreciative neighbourhood have not been forgotten.

This book is a sampling from *The Leader and Recorder*. Some of the stories here are first-person reminiscences of neighbourhood builders and pioneers. Some testify to the research and imagination of members and friends of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society. Some are drawn from the *West Toronto Weekly* and the other lively newspapers that served our community and the city a century ago.

"I never realized," said Stephen Leacock, "that there was history close at hand, beside my very own home. I did not realize that the old grave that stood among the brambles at the foot of our farm was history." In West Toronto, history can be the trees in our back yards, and the name on your street sign, and the new business in the old building down at the end of the street, and the rail tracks buried in concrete by the underpass. History is also the effort we make to see all that, and to document it, and to protect it, and bring it to the attention to those who might not yet have had an opportunity to notice.

This collection of stories and memories honours people and institutions of this community's past, and also the people and institutions who have maintained the record of those things. It is my experience that they ground me. They orient me to where I live and to how it all got here before I did. I think you will have the same experience.

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Christopher Moore is a Governor-General's Award winning historian who has written about many aspects of Canadian history. He and his family have lived in the neighbourhood for about twenty years. Though he has never actually written about West Toronto history, he has been a longtime member and supporter of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society.