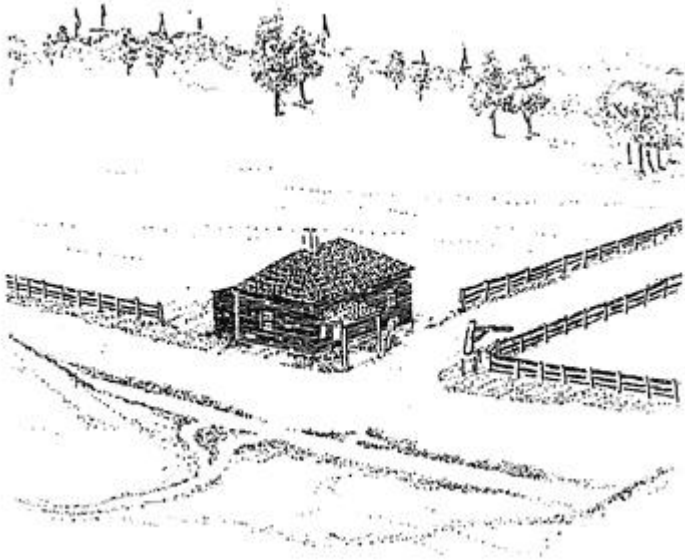


The Tollkeeper's Cottage



A local restoration project of national significance
by the

COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECT
c/o Spadina Road Library
10 Spadina Road
Toronto, Ontario, M5R 2S7

Office: Second Floor
719 Yonge Street
416-515-7546

BACKGROUND HISTORY

The drawing above is taken from an 1875 painting by Arthur Cox which shows the Tollkeeper's Cottage looking as if it stood at the southeast corner of Davenport Road and the future Bathurst Street. Tollgates were built on the road allowance and this site is now under the pavement of Bathurst Street at Davenport.

As Ontario's oldest road, begun at the end of the Ice Ages, the route had been well tested. In the early years of the nineteenth century, when the tolling system had been established, this ancient route had five tollgates between the Humber and Don Rivers: the first was at Yonge and Bloor and the fifth was at Lambton. This one was No. 3, and was also connected to the Yorkville and Vaughan Plank Road.

Research has revealed that this Cottage had four more locations, running from before to well after the abolition of the tolling system in 1895. When discovered by CHP it was two blocks east of its first location, and was well hidden inside a house. The site was slated for redevelopment. CHP struck a deal with the developers and bought the building for \$1 on condition that the site be cleared for re-development. CHP also had to find a place to "park" the building while making arrangements with the City of Toronto for a permanent home. The TTC kindly allowed the Cottage to rest in its former Wychwood Yard. Getting it to that yard and fulfilling arrangements with the developer took 2,626 hours of dirty work by volunteer labourers, and \$26,000 in unavoidable costs.

Among those donating their services were architects Klaus and Marjut Dunker who, during the process, identified the Cottage as built of rare vertical plank construction. Three other vertical plank buildings have been identified, but are unavailable to the public. A tollhouse of brick, fifty years younger, may be seen in the Village of Caledonia at the Grand River. A tollhouse perhaps as old as our No. 3 is on highway 2 but has been renovated out of recognition with much of the original building missing.

PLANNING FOR RESTORATION

Research had to be done, funds raised, and arrangements made with the City of Toronto for a lease on part of the parkland that would allow the Cottage to stand about 800 feet from its first site. Until the area was annexed in 1887, the Cottage was in York Township which lost all of its records to fire in 1881. And because tollgates were placed on road allowances, the land records proved to be interesting but devoid of information. Some interviews with previous owners proved to be very helpful. Archival records were scoured for any clues that would help with restoration. Fundraising continued with excellent local support and donations from the poverty-stricken heritage community. As word spread about the building, cheques came from as far away as British Columbia. Negotiations with the old staff of the Parks Department over a lease, dragged on and the architects had to produce a series of new drawings to accommodate the requested revisions.

One of the few forms of help that the old Toronto Historical Board could offer was the administration of the Tollkeeper's Fund. It had reached \$28,000 by the time amalgamation arrived, the THB was abolished, and the Fund vanished into city coffers. With the help of the new Heritage Toronto, it took three years to retrieve \$26,000. No fundraising took place in that period. The funds were received in February 2001 and the following month CHP was ordered to get the Tollkeeper's Cottage out of the Wychwood Yard. The new staff of the Parks Department assisted, and a lease was finalized. From a standing start, fundraising began again.

When the Cottage was first salvaged, there were many layers on the exterior, interior, and seven layers of asphalt shingles on the roof. These were carefully removed, analysis done, and a budget for restoration estimated. Experts came to visit and the building was dated circa 1835 although it contains earlier and later elements. The decision was taken to restore it to its first state, and furnish it to 1860 when a tollkeeper with a large family lived in its three rooms. 80% of the original building is intact, and only a front porch and rear shed, lost in its first move, were missing.

WORK PROGRESSES

The lease with the City stipulated that no open flame could be used on the site. Therefore no woodstove or candles could be lit. In order to provide heat for winter use, foundations with a concrete pad containing a radiant heating system had to be built. The grounds of the site were full of municipal services so no basement was possible and an Addition planned for school

class and community uses. The Addition was planned to avoid detracting from the Cottage, and is smaller and dark, in contrast with the white clapboard of the Cottage. Major searches had to be made to find materials of the same age and type for the restoration.

In June 2002, the Cottage was moved to the site and further stripping and analysis done. The big sills upon which the great planks had rested were rotted away and had to be replaced first. Enough of the original clapboard remained to provide specifications for replacement clapboard which was pre-painted and carefully nailed in place in bitter November weather to protect the historic building during its first winter in a stripped-down state.

The next year, while the volunteers continued to strip down the interior, hand split cedar shakes for the roof and cedar lathing for the interior, professional carpenters were beginning to construct the Addition, using small vertical planks to mimic the big ones in the Cottage and vertical wood siding on the exterior which the volunteers painted.

Progress was interrupted when the Cottage floor was stripped and an original floor uncovered - a thrilling discovery but one that threw the work schedule and budget into chaos. The experts directed that the Cottage had to have a stone foundation wall, so the house mover had to return to raise the building, extensive work had to be done on the floor, stone found, and a mason with expertise found to make the foundation wall. With stone and bricks donated by the Town of Caledon from a house (now archaeological) site of the same date as the Cottage, the mason built the foundation wall and a suspended brick chimney. Costs surpassed the original estimate, and the Fund was exhausted.

Fundraising continued. Local 353 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers donated their skills and services; Plan Electric donated the outdoor lights; Guild Electric hoisted the ridge beam to the roof of the Addition, and the public offered antiques and furnishings.

THE WAY AHEAD

As the only known example of an early tollhouse extant in Canada, and of little-known vertical plank construction, this building had to be preserved and restored as a period piece. To explain it, its function, and its location on Ontario's oldest road, an Addition had to be built as a museum to accommodate everything that could not be put into the historic building. Owned by an incorporated historical society, it will be operated by trained volunteers. Although it is not yet complete, volunteers with the construction phase have already contributed well over 5000 hours of labour (to December 2005) and continue to work. Dr. Dorothy Duncan oversees furnishing the building; Sarah Walker assists the volunteers in making their costumes for first-person interpretation; and Marjorie Stuart and Diane Clendenan of the Ontario Genealogical Society assist in researching the lives of the tollkeepers. Not included above are the years of research done by CHP members, especially Brian Narhi and James Orr. Finishing the Cottage involves raising funds to complete the plastering, obtain and install all of the doors, windows and woodwork, restore the furniture, construct the missing front porch and tollgate, and paint the building. Finishing the Addition means raising funds for plumbing, sanitary sewer hookup,

appliances, all interior walls and cabinetry, flooring, two exterior end walls, a security system, and heating. Finishing the grounds means fundraising for the heavy-duty landscaping and, in conjunction with Grassroots Albany, heritage plantings around the site. The Tollkeeper's Fund is used exclusively for the costs of materials and construction professionals; all other costs are borne either by CHP or various individuals who are not reimbursed. The Fund has never paid for any research. When the \$500,000 complex is finished, CHP will build an Endowment Fund of the same amount to remain with and protect the Cottage forever.

The Tollkeeper's Cottage was designated by the City of Toronto in 2004, and will progress toward designation as a National Historic Site. CHP has asked for provincial designation of Davenport Road.

BEING PART OF HISTORY

Over 170 years or so, the Cottage has acquired a fascinating history, and the work being done now simply adds to that history. All who contribute to the restoration in any way become part of the history and are recorded in a Donors' Book and in a time capsule. Donors of money, materials, furniture, furnishings, and labour are all recorded, although major donors receive special attention. The latter include the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the McLean Foundation, Budd Sugarman, and the electricians mentioned earlier. Because of the changes forced by the discoveries in 2003, and the cost of work since, it is estimated that the Fund still requires a minimum of \$150,000 to complete construction. Donations of some items to furnish the Cottage and equip the Addition are also needed. Community groups which contribute \$200 or more will be able to meet in the buildings free of charge during the first six months after it opens. Donors of furnishings, equipment, materials and professional services are eligible to receive tax deductible receipts. Donors of much-needed funds should make out cheques as follows:

Tollkeeper's Fund -Heritage Toronto

and mail these to:

**Heritage Toronto
Historic St. Lawrence Hall
3rd floor
157 King Street East
Toronto, Ontario, M5C 1G9**

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The Tollkeeper's Cottage will be a period piece, and its history and people will be presented in the attached Addition along with the history of roads, construction of wooden buildings, Davenport Road, the tolling system and other tollhouses, the life of a tollkeeper and his family, the nature of the escarpment, and evolution of the surrounding area from dense forests to subdivisions. No. 3 Tollgate is surrounded by important heritage buildings and areas, such as Spadina House and Wychwood Park.