



# THE UPDATE

York Pioneer and Historical Society

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## 2026 Annual General Meeting: Stewarding our Story Forward

**Date:** Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026  
**Time:** 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM  
**Location:** "Friends House"  
 60 Lowther Avenue, M5R 1C7  
**Speaker:** Rebecca Rizzo

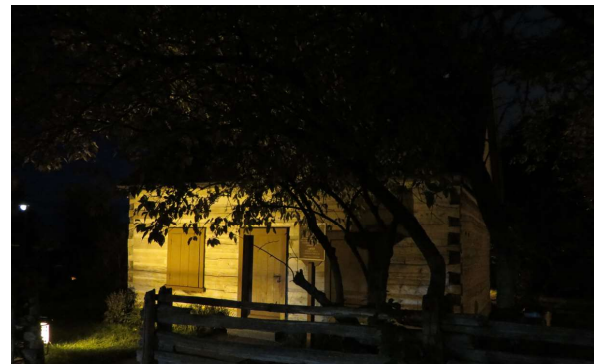
Join us for the 2026 Annual General Meeting of the York Pioneer & Historical Society. We are pleased to announce that Rebecca Rizzo, Museum Coordinator at Toronto's First Post Office/Town of York Historical Society, will be our guest speaker. She will share insights from their newly updated exhibit, which features the Scadding Cabin.

There will also be time to mix and mingle, with light refreshments served.

For more information, contact Beth Alaksa at [yorkpioneers@gmail.com](mailto:yorkpioneers@gmail.com).



*Above: Friends House. Source: Google Images.*



*Above: As October's ghosts fade, Scadding Cabin awaits the visit of three more – Past, Present, and Yet to Come. Photo: Brent Cunningham*

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## THE UNLIKELIEST OF STARS AT CNE 2025!

Despite a stellar line-up of spinners, quilters, and butterfly taggers, it was the unlikelyest of animals that stole the show at this year's Canadian National Exhibition. Each Saturday morning, the alpacas made their slow, deliberate trek from the ironically named Better Living Centre to the Scadding Cabin lawn – where, from their perspective, the living was clearly better. Grazing peacefully in the shadow of history, they proved the old axiom that the grass truly is greener on the other side.

Later, as the F-35 Lightning II thundered overhead during the air show, a quieter spectacle unfolded below. A pair of small baby squirrels emerged near our spinning demonstration, charming guests and momentarily stealing the spotlight from both history and high-speed aviation. It was a moment of unexpected joy – one that reminded us that even the smallest visitors leave the biggest impressions.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without our dedicated volunteers.



*Above: Curious Peruvian delegates arrive to inspect 1794 infrastructure. Photo: Brent Cunningham*



*Above: Came for the history; stayed for the buffet – Henry Mengers's alpacas doing some heritage landscaping. Photo: Brent Cunningham*

From the spinners outside to the storytellers inside, each person brought warmth, skill, and a sense of continuity to the Cabin. While the alpacas and squirrels may have drawn the crowds, it was our volunteers who made the experience meaningful.

The CNE is many things – historic, hectic, and occasionally surreal. But for those who attend and volunteer, it's also a place where memories are made, laughter is shared, and stories are passed down. Whether visitors came for the crafts, the critters, or the Cabin, we sincerely believe they left with a moment worth remembering.



*Above: In 1794, they spun wool. In 2025, we spin stories – starring small baby squirrels. Photo: Brent Cunningham*





*Above: History meets adorable. Where 1794 charm attracts 2025's fluffiest visitors. Photos: Brent Cunningham*



## GHOST WALKS 2025 – A FIVE FRIGHT FINALE

This year's Ghost Walks at Exhibition Place were haunted by a rare calendar quirk: five Fridays in October, culminating in a crescendo of chills on Hallowe'en night. For the York Pioneer & Historical Society, that meant five chances to summon the spirits of Muddy York – and summon we did...

As always, Steve "Ghost Guy" Collie of After Dark Tours led his spine-tingling two-hour journey through 200+ years of haunted history, from the Princes' Gates to the Scadding Cabin. But this year, something... shifted.

In a terrifying first, the **Ghost of John Scadding himself** emerged from the shadows – seeking haunting revenge for the mysterious tree that struck him down in his prime. Eyewitnesses report a spectral figure lamenting his fate, vowing to track down the culprit and haunt him for the rest of HIS natural life! Who played this vengeful apparition? Some have suggested the ghost writer of this article may have taken his role a little too seriously.

Of course, Mrs. Scadding, played once again by Diane Reid, charmed and chilled in equal measure. Volunteers Kayoko Smith, Beth Alaksa, John Marshall, and Brent Cunningham kept spirits high with hot apple cider and bottomless Hallowe'en candy, even as the weather swung from summer-like warmth (Week 1) to rain-soaked gloom (Week 3).

Week 3 also marked the **debut of newcomer Miles Griffin**, who stepped into the mist with enthusiasm and poise. We are thrilled to welcome Miles to the York Pioneers volunteer family – and hope his ghostly initiation inspires others to join our ranks!



***Above:** As night falls over Scadding Cabin – its secrets darker than the night itself – even the windmill dares not speak, Friday October 17, 2025. **Photo:** Brent Cunningham.*

Despite competing with the [Blue Jays' historic World Series](#) run, turnout remained strong – 35 or more guests some nights, including during Game 1 of the Finals. And really, what better way to honour the Jays than by remembering the humble settlers like John Scadding, whose toil laid the groundwork for the city that birthed them?

As the final lantern flickered out and the Cabin doors creaked closed, the ghosts of York – Simcoe, Scadding, Playter, and the rest – retreated once more into the annals of history. But their echoes linger, reminding us that [Toronto's greatness](#) was built on resilience, remembrance, and the occasional well-timed scare.

Until next year, we bid farewell to our spectral guests – and thank all who made Ghost Walks 2025 a frightfully unforgettable experience.

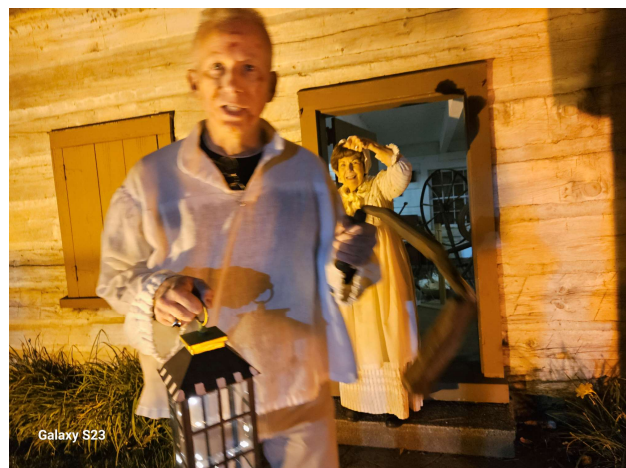


*Above: Before the guests arrive, the Scaddings steal a quiet moment – one ghost, one grieving heart, and two centuries of unfinished business. Photo: Kayoko Smith.*





***Above:** Candlelight, cider, and tales from beyond – Steve ‘Ghost Guy’ Collie sets the scene for another unforgettable Ghost Walk. **Photo:** Brent Cunningham. **Left and below:** The ghost of John Scadding rises – angry, dramatic, and determined to avenge his fate. But fear not: he’s mostly here for the apple cider. **Photos:** Beth Alaksa and Kayoko Smith.*



## SIMCOE DAY IN TORONTO 2025!

By Beth Alaksa,

By tradition, holiday Mondays are named in commemoration of someone or something. In the summer we have Victoria Day in May, Canada Day in July, and Labour Day in September. But do most Torontonians know that the August holiday Monday is Simcoe Day?

On Monday, August 4, 2025, the York Pioneer and Historical Society, the Town of York Historical Society, and the Riverdale Historical Society came together at the St. Matthew's Clubhouse on Broadview to celebrate the legacy of John Graves Simcoe and deepen public engagement with Toronto's early history.

The event brought together three historical societies, three authors of local history, an antiquarian bookseller, historic reenactors, and two guided walks – offering attendees a chance to indulge their love of Toronto history and welcome new converts to the cause. This was the second Simcoe Day gathering on the Scadding estate land near the YPHS Scadding Estate Plaque at Broadview and Withrow. Stay tuned for number three next year! When do we commit to calling it an annual event?



**Left:** Exploring Toronto's layered past – one estate at a time. **Right:** History comes alive through conversation. David Raymont welcomes visitors with wit and wisdom. **Photos:** Beth Alaksa and Kayoko Smith.



Thank you to the following for making the day a success:

- **Town of York Historical Society**
- **Riverdale Historical Society**
- **Authors:** Adam Bunch, Elizabeth Gillan Muir, and *Richard Fiennes-Clinton*
- **Walking Tour Guides:** Bob Georgiou (Castle Frank and the Scadding Estate) and Patricia Stowe (Riverside Area and the Development of the Scadding Estate)
- **Special Guests:** Adam Waiser of the Muddy York Podcast and reenactors from The Pronoic Collective
- **YPHS members, friends of the YPHS, and local residents** who joined us for the afternoon

Richard's participation in this event—his final with the York Pioneers—was marked by his usual generosity of spirit and encyclopedic knowledge. His presence enriched the day, and we are grateful to have shared this moment with him.



**Above left:** Artifacts and anecdotes – history on display, including our beloved Scadding Cabin in miniature. **Above right:** Flag facts and heritage chats – David Raymont holds a flag from Upper Canada's earliest chapter. **Bottom:** Redcoats and refinement – history never looked so well-dressed. **Photos:** Kayoko Smith



## IN MEMORIAM: REMEMBERING RICHARD FIENNES-CLINTON

By: David Raymont

Suddenly, on August 23, Richard Fiennes-Clinton passed. He was a life member of the York Pioneers and a well-known and respected local historian. He led walking tours through his business Muddy York Tours and, in 2015, published *Muddy York: A History of Toronto Until 1834*.

Richard became a life member of the York Pioneers in 2016, and made an entertaining presentation to the Society about the Town of York in November of that year. He was a constant friend to the York Pioneers – introducing the Society to participants during his walking tours and commending our work.

Talking to Richard about local heritage was a refreshing experience. He was knowledgeable, earnest and always positive about what local groups and enthusiasts could achieve. His passion for our city, its people and its past never wavered.

Through Muddy York Tours, Richard led a wide range of walking tours through Old Town, and other city neighbourhoods. He understood the dynamics of a successful walking tour – good research, a walkable route and a bit of show business by the walk leader to animate the presentation.

Richard would frequently appear at his walks wearing an Edwardian coat or jacket. And then there were the hats – his trademark for his walking tour company was an image of him wearing an early 20th century straw boater.



*Above: Richard Fiennes-Clinton sporting his trademark straw boater. Photo: Courtesy of David Raymont*

But he did not wear that hat all year. He had a top hat, several derbies and many cloth caps of different colours and sizes. And in the winter months, he wore an enormous fur hat so large that it seemed to be swallowing his head rather than warming it.

In addition to his walking tours, Richard was a strong supporter of the city's museums and was often found welcoming guests to Gibson House, Fort York and Colborne Lodge. He also found a market for his talks at seniors' homes as well as different local heritage groups.

I last spoke to Richard on Simcoe Day at St. Matthew's Club House in Riverdale. He was packing up after a successful day and remarked that he was planning a second print run of his book *Muddy York*, a remarkable achievement for a self-published local history.

Richard was thinking of writing a second book. A friend had encouraged him to put into print some of the scripts he used for his walking tours.

We can only speculate what that book would have contained. His first book, *Muddy York*, is remarkable for its wealth of detail and seldom-seen photographs. He wrote about the evolution of the city from the formation of the rivers and lakes that helped define its boundaries to the First Nations and the coming of settlers.

Let's leave the last word to Richard. In the epilogue to his book, he writes with insight about the many people he encountered in his research into Toronto's past.

*The current population of Toronto is exponentially larger than it was in 1793, of course, and the city's buildings may be grander and finer than ever. But scant attention is paid to all the confluence of circumstances that led to the city's creation. Even less thought is given to the wild expanse that lay here before that, or to the first people who wandered through the region after it finally was set free from a giant sheet of ice. Hopefully [this book] will increase interest in the lives of those who set up what became Toronto. They were a motley crew of heroes and rogues, of merchants and bankers, of gamblers, churchmen and sinners, and they were without a doubt some of the most colourful characters ever to saunter across a national landscape.*



## LAUNCH OF THE 2025 YORK PIONEER!

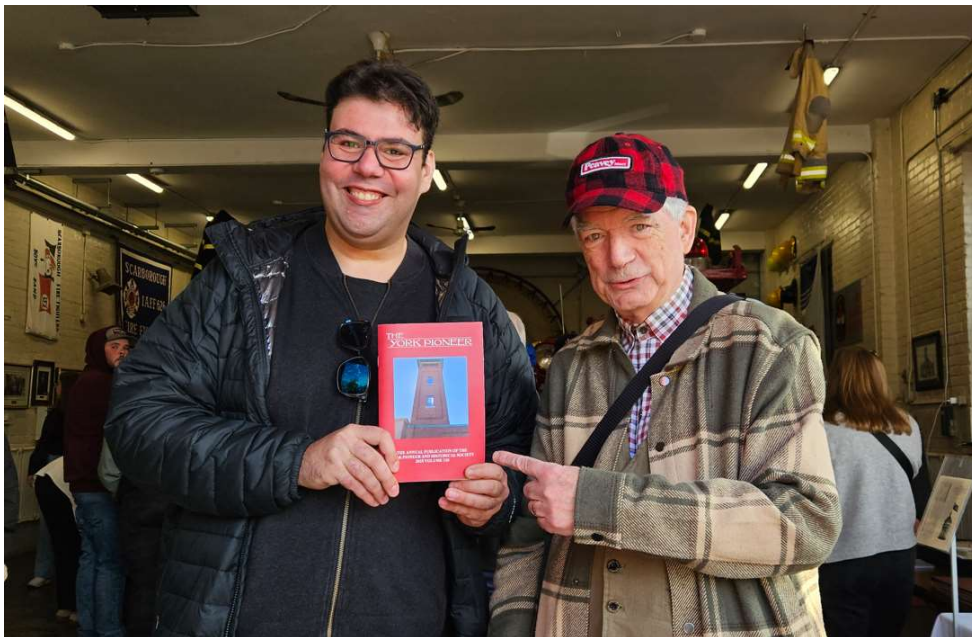
The 2025 edition of *The York Pioneer* was celebrated with a special launch event held in collaboration with the Toronto Fire Historical Society. The occasion coincided with the 100th anniversary of Scarborough's first fire hall and featured the donation of a ceremonial trowel originally used in laying its cornerstone in 1925. The event highlighted the historical significance of the artifact and the enduring contributions of local volunteers and institutions.

The November 2, 2025 program drew more than 100 attendees, including dignitaries from all levels of government, Toronto Fire Service officials, and members of the York Pioneers. The proceedings emphasized the symbolism of cornerstone-laying as a reflection of community building. The trowel was presented as a symbol of civil society, and the cornerstone as a reminder of truth as the foundation of civic life.

Following the donation, the century-old cornerstone was formally re-dedicated. Attendees joined together in a brief chant marking the occasion and affirming a commitment to another century of public service.

The celebration concluded with tours of the Scarborough Fire Fighting Museum, a community barbecue, and sales of *The York Pioneer*.

The 2025 issue features lead articles highlighting Scarborough's fire history. Special thanks are extended to the Toronto Fire Historical Society and local community news outlets for their support in marking this milestone.



*Above: Bob Georgiou and David Raymont with the freshly released York Pioneer, honouring the legacy of Ontario's oldest historical society journal. Photo: Kayoko Smith.*

## PHOTO WORKSHOP ILLUMINATES SCADDING CABIN

On September 25, photographer **Phil Sutherland** of the **West Toronto Photography Group** led a workshop at the historic Scadding Cabin. Participants captured images with a striking atmosphere — evoking the stillness of 17th-century Dutch paintings. The lighting and composition made the evening unforgettable.





## THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE 2026

The 2026 Nominating Committee members:

- From the 2025 Board: Paul Litt, Brent Cunningham, Sebastian Aguanno
- From the 2025 general membership: David Raymont, John Marshall

The Committee hereby reports, proposing the following slate of candidates for the 2026 Board of Directors:

**Officers:**

**Past President:** Angus D. Palmer

**President:** Paul Litt

**Vice President:** Brent Cunningham

**Treasurer:** Erich Welz

**Recording Secretary:** Robert Horwood

**Corresponding Secretary [Social media]:** Bob Georgiou

**Archivist:** Erin Baxter

**Directors:**

**Editorial:** Dawn Ayer

**Membership:** vacant

**Programme:** Beth Alaksa

**Publicity (newsletter):** Brent Cunningham

**Scadding Cabin:** Kayoko Smith

**Representative on the Board of Sharon Temple:** Glenn Bonnetta

**Representative to the Canadian National Exhibition Association:** Liam Peppiatt

**Members at Large:** Marilyn Horwood, Sebastian Aguanno

In addition to the above slate of candidates, any member of the organization in good standing is free to put his or her own name forward and to stand for election to any Board position.

If you wish to stand for a Board position or wish to recommend a candidate to the Nominating Committee, please reach out to any member of the Nominating Committee or send your recommendation to [yorkpioneers@gmail.com](mailto:yorkpioneers@gmail.com).

## HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE YORK PIONEER & HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN YOUR LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT?

As we reflect on Toronto's rich history, we are reminded of figures like Lady Eaton, whose bequests helped preserve our city's heritage. Many of our members have already contributed – through volunteering, donations, and storytelling. Including the York Pioneer & Historical Society in your Will is a meaningful continuation of that legacy.

If you believe in the importance of preserving Toronto's history, this is a powerful way to ensure your values live on.

Scadding Cabin, standing since 1794, remains one of our most cherished landmarks. Thanks to our donors, it has endured for over two centuries. With your support, it can remain a vital part of our community for the next 231 years.

Several members have already taken this step. Whether your gesture is grand or modest, it affirms your commitment to preserving Toronto's story. Even sharing your intention with loved ones helps strengthen our collective legacy.

Please speak with your legal counsel, accountant, or financial planner to ensure your wishes are honoured and your legacy is preserved. Your support – past, present, and future – is invaluable.

Thank you for your generosity and dedication.

### IN MEMORIAM

The York Pioneer & Historical Society notes with sadness the passing of **Thomas Richard Nettleton** on October 29, 2025. He was the father of long-time member and past Board member Michael Nettleton, whose contributions to the Society have been deeply valued. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Michael and his family, and we honour Thomas's memory with gratitude and respect.

[https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/toronto-on/thomas-nettleton-12587803?utm\\_source=obit\\_link\\_txt](https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/toronto-on/thomas-nettleton-12587803?utm_source=obit_link_txt)

We also note with sadness the passing of life member **James Laidlaw**, whose extraordinary achievements and tireless contributions marked him as an over-achiever in every sense:

<https://www.legacy.com/ca/obituaries/theglobeandmail/name/james-laidlaw-obituary?id=60215811>



**RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY**

Hot off the press: the 2025 Volume of “The York Pioneer” has been delivered to our active members.

Renew your membership today to ensure you receive the 2026 edition and secure your vote at the Annual General Meeting of the York Pioneer and Historical Society.

Individual membership is an affordable **\$30.00**, with students eligible to join for only **\$20.00**. Or sign-up your family for just **\$50.00**.

Send us your cheque payable to:

The York Pioneer and Historical Society  
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or, visit our website at [www.yorkpioneers.com](http://www.yorkpioneers.com), and pay by credit card, PayPal, or e-transfer at [yorkpioneers2@gmail.com](mailto:yorkpioneers2@gmail.com).

**Important Tax Note:**

Due to CRA rules that require us to deduct the value of any benefits received — such as our \$20 York Pioneer magazine — from membership dues, we can no longer issue donation tax receipts for Annual, Family, or Student Memberships after December 31, 2025. Donation tax receipts will continue to be issued for Life Memberships, and all other donations over \$20 remain eligible. Thank you for your understanding and support.

Don't miss your chance - renew your membership **today!**

**Welcome New Life Members**

Victoria Moorshead

**Welcome New Members**

Miles Griffin   Mark Kiteley   Shayda Spakowski

The YPHS gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport



BEST WISHES IN 2026 FROM  
THE YORK PIONEER & HISTORICAL SOCIETY!!!