



RMRA Meeting October 29, 2013

1. Attendance and Notes:

5 board members, 7 presenters, 8 residents.

2. Special Guest

Roncesvalles Village Historical Society members presented the main topic – Haunted Roncesvalles.

Abby Bushby from DRPG talked about the DRPG plans.

3. Community Updates

West Side Roncesvalles

There was a community consultation meeting on October 28 – it was the third public meeting, hosted by City planners and Gord Perks. 40-50 people attended

Planners presented a set of standards by which they will look at all applications for change on the west side of Roncesvalles – they are not proposing changes to the zoning (remains residential) or Official Plan (remains Neighbourhood). This is what the community was looking for.

The criteria address setbacks, parking, traffic, urban design, and use issues. The criteria will allow a few new uses. Most attendees agreed with criteria.

Gord Perks' office will send us the City report and presentation slides from the meeting, which the RMRA will send around to our mailing list. Comments can be made to Gord Perks' office.

DRPG – Dundas Roncesvalles Peace Garden

Abby brought presentation boards to show the final design by Plant Architects.

Construction is scheduled for next fall. The DRPG newsletter coming out in the next few days.

4. Main Event – HAUNTED RONCESVALLES – stories presented by the RVHS

Grenadier Pond – in the early 1900s there appeared a newspaper article about a misty, horse-riding phantom arising nightly from the pond. After much public discussion and corroborating stories, it was found to be a prank by kids using flashlights and white sheets.

The pond is commonly thought to have earned its name from group of soldiers who had an encampment there in 1812. But there is rumour that during the war, a number of soldiers fell through the ice, and that the bodies were never discovered because the pond is actually bottomless! People often get a feeling that they are being watched from under the water...

Colborne Lodge has a ghost event during Halloween – there have been many years of sightings of John and Jemima Howard. Jemima was ill - she had cancer and was on medications that created delirium, so John Howard locked her in her room for her safety. John Howard built Jemima's grave while she was ill, and she was able to see it from her window. He did this so she would feel safe knowing where she would be buried. The first sighting of her looking out through the window of her room after her death was by a police officer in 1860s.

John Howard's ghost has been seen painting in the garden. People have felt that someone was walking with them as they toured Colborne Lodge and the Carriage House, and have seen John Howard's reflection in the glass of the carriage house windows... Sightings have also been seen on Spring Road, always in the same spot in the late evenings, near the Howard Park streetcar loop.

Howard Park Methodist Church (now Abbey Lofts on Sunnyside) – the church was often used by Howard School for concerts before it was converted to lofts. A teacher told a story about an underground passage where bones could be found. Some kids in the basement encountered an old woman who complimented them on their beauty – but there was no one there!

Swansea Town Hall – a human skull was discovered near a drainage pipe during a renovation. People reported paranormal activity before the skull was found, but never since. The skull belonged to a young aboriginal man who died well before the 1600s. It is believed that the skull was placed there during the 1958 renovation of the hall... for reasons unknown... and unknowable.

Lakeside Hall – a former mansion at 28 Jameson Ave (now where the Gardiner Expressway runs). On October 6th 1894 there was a front-page-worthy murder... A young heir named Frank Westwood was shot point blank by a man who rang at the door. Frank died in agony 3 days later. But a neighbour was convinced that the murderer was a woman dressed as a man. A poor black seamstress named Clara Ford, who lived in a boarding house on Jarvis Street, and who dressed in men's clothing, drank hard liquor, and had a gun that matched the bullet recovered from Frank's body, was arrested and initially confessed. The trial itself was also a newspaper spectacle – at first, Clara said she was guilty, then not. Her daughter was to provide an alibi at the trial but betrayed her. Then the brilliant head prosecutor withdrew from the case due to the death of his beloved wife. In a series of subsequent setbacks and errors, the prosecution's case fell apart. Their star witness proved unreliable – she had been let out of jail (for public drunkenness!) for the sole purpose of testifying in the trial. For her part, Clara Ford claimed that Frank Westwood assaulted her and destroyed her virtue, and that the murder was a retaliation. The jury sided with Clara and declared her not guilty, to much public support and celebration. The judge was highly displeased by the lack of justice for Frank Westwood, and told her to leave the country. Clara spent many years touring with a burlesque show in the US, in an act that included her men's clothing and the gun she used to kill Frank Westwood. Frank Westwood's ghost still haunts the Gardiner Expressway, where he can be seen raising his fist in anger at those responsible for letting his murderer go free...

Shooting of Officer Edmund Tong by the Boyd Gang. The notorious bank-robbing Boyd Gang had escaped the Don Jail and continued their crime spree, robbing banks and living the high life. They were the subject of a city-wide manhunt, and officers had an order to shoot to kill. Unknown to police, the gang were hiding out in the Roncesvalles neighbourhood! In March of 1952, the wife of one of the gang members had an errand at Fern Avenue School, and her husband stole her car.

Officer Tong and his partner were shot and wounded when the fugitives' car was spotted and stopped at the triangle of College, Dundas and Lansdowne. The murderers abandoned their car and fled the scene in a taxi to 27 Sorauren Ave. Officer Tong died several days later, but not before giving a detailed statement to fellow officers. The shooter and his accomplice were caught and publicly hanged at the Don Jail... whose new incarnation as the Bridgepoint Hospital will not erase its gruesome past... or its ghosts!

Homeless man Tony Clemens, who died in 2011 – Tony and his Elmo puppet were a fixture on Roncesvalles and his death caught the attention of many people in the neighbourhood. He was the eyes and ears of the community, and remained cheerful despite his difficulties. Tony had battled addiction for most of his life, and held odd jobs, including a limo driver who ferried Donny and Marie, and Michael Jackson around Toronto. Tony's life fell apart soon after his wife's death. He had a blog – homelessmanspeaks.com – which was widely admired internationally for its neighbourhood feel. Shortly before his death, Tony was able to re-connect with his daughter through the blog, and even enjoyed a visit from her and his grandsons. While Tony's not a ghost, his cheerful and caring spirit lives on in the neighbourhood.

The RVHS meets on the first Thursday of every month at the High Park Library at 7 pm.