

for June 17, 2007

Asparagus



Asparagus, Leslie Street Community Gardens

Gardening is not normally associated with our Victorian industrial district. But gardening is exactly what James Worts tackled with vigor in the spring of 1832 while waiting for the windmill to be completed and the rest of the Gooderham and Worts families to arrive from Norfolk.

At the end of March, Worts purchased 3 ¼ acres and a house on the north side of King Street near the Don River, from Rev. Dr. William J. O’Grady. O’Grady was the controversial Irish priest whose support for fiery, anti-Family Compact, rebel-rousing William Lyon Mackenzie, got him ousted as parish priest for the first St. Paul’s Church at King and Power Street. Whether

the sale of this property, for £987.11.0, was directly related to the church controversy is not known, but seems likely.

According to Gooderham & Worts historian, E. B. Shuttleworth, spring arrived early in 1832 and gardening was carried on “very energetically” at the new house. Worts had brought a good deal of seed from England, which was promptly sown. Then on April 25th, he also purchased 150 asparagus roots – for 7s. 6d. – from local nurseryman, George Leslie, whose pioneering presence is now commemorated by “Leslie Street” and, more pertinently, by the Leslie Street Community Gardens near the waterfront and the Leslie Street Spit.

During that spring, any spare energy was “assiduously applied to gardening,” by James Worts. No doubt, his efforts were rewarded just about 175 years ago this month, when the first asparagus was harvested and savoured.

Many thanks to Leslie Street Community Gardener, Leslie Yost, for showing me where asparagus now grows near Toronto’s waterfront, east of today’s Distillery District.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com