

for March 4, 2007

Birth of a City



Celebrating the Incorporation of Toronto, formerly Muddy York

1834 witnessed the death of a partner (James Worts, who committed suicide in late February about ten days after his beloved wife, Elizabeth, died in childbirth), and the birth of a new city.

On March 6th, the all-powerful province of Upper Canada transformed the little Town of York into the little City of Toronto, with its own elected mayor and council. The new city of 10,000 was divided into five wards, each electing two aldermen and two councilmen, creating a council of 20, including a mayor elected by council. Using similar ratios, modern Toronto, with 44 wards and about 2.4 million residents, would elect a council of between 176 (4×44) and 480 councillors ($2,400,000 \div 500$) ... and one mayor elected at-large. Now there's a democratic deficit!

The new ward of St. Lawrence, which encompassed the Gooderham & Worts milling operation, elected a future mayor (businessman George Monro) but no Worts or Gooderham (William Gooderham later served on the council of 1851, but gave up local politics after a single term).

Then, thumbing its nose at the Tory-dominated provincial government, the new city council elected outspoken reformer, William Lyon Mackenzie, as its first mayor.

In the absence of photographs (which didn't exist) or contemporary paintings (which haven't survived), we must rely on imaginative reconstructions of the 1834 celebration. In Frederic Waistell Jopling's spirited 1909 drawing, dogs bark, horses gallop, bands play, hand-bells ring, and a coven of "Torontonians" prances around a roaring bonfire on the edge of the bay, immediately south of Gooderham & Worts' towering windmill. The painting may not be an accurate representation of Toronto's built environment: the windmill is fairly accurate but the remaining structures are fanciful in the extreme. But it seems to capture the spirit of the times.

So, happy 173rd birthday Toronto ... from your older sibling, the Distillery District.

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