

ARMOURY STREET DIG

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE WARD

Connecting with Toronto's Multicultural Past

"What's special about this site is that it provides a rare glimpse into Toronto's early multicultural past. The archaeological work that Infrastructure Ontario and its consultants are doing is essential for ensuring that the history of the site is documented and preserved before we prepare the site for full construction."

Abbey Flower,
Heritage Specialist, Infrastructure Ontario

"The Armoury Street Block is municipally, provincially, and nationally significant on many levels. Representing the remains of most of a city block, the site provides a rare glimpse of a neighbourhood and its evolution over time, as revealed by building remains and objects left behind. Equally rare is the opportunity to visualize intimate details of the daily life of the working class and immigrant families who helped build the city. Descendant communities, researchers, and the public will benefit much from the storytelling and educational opportunities this work has afforded."

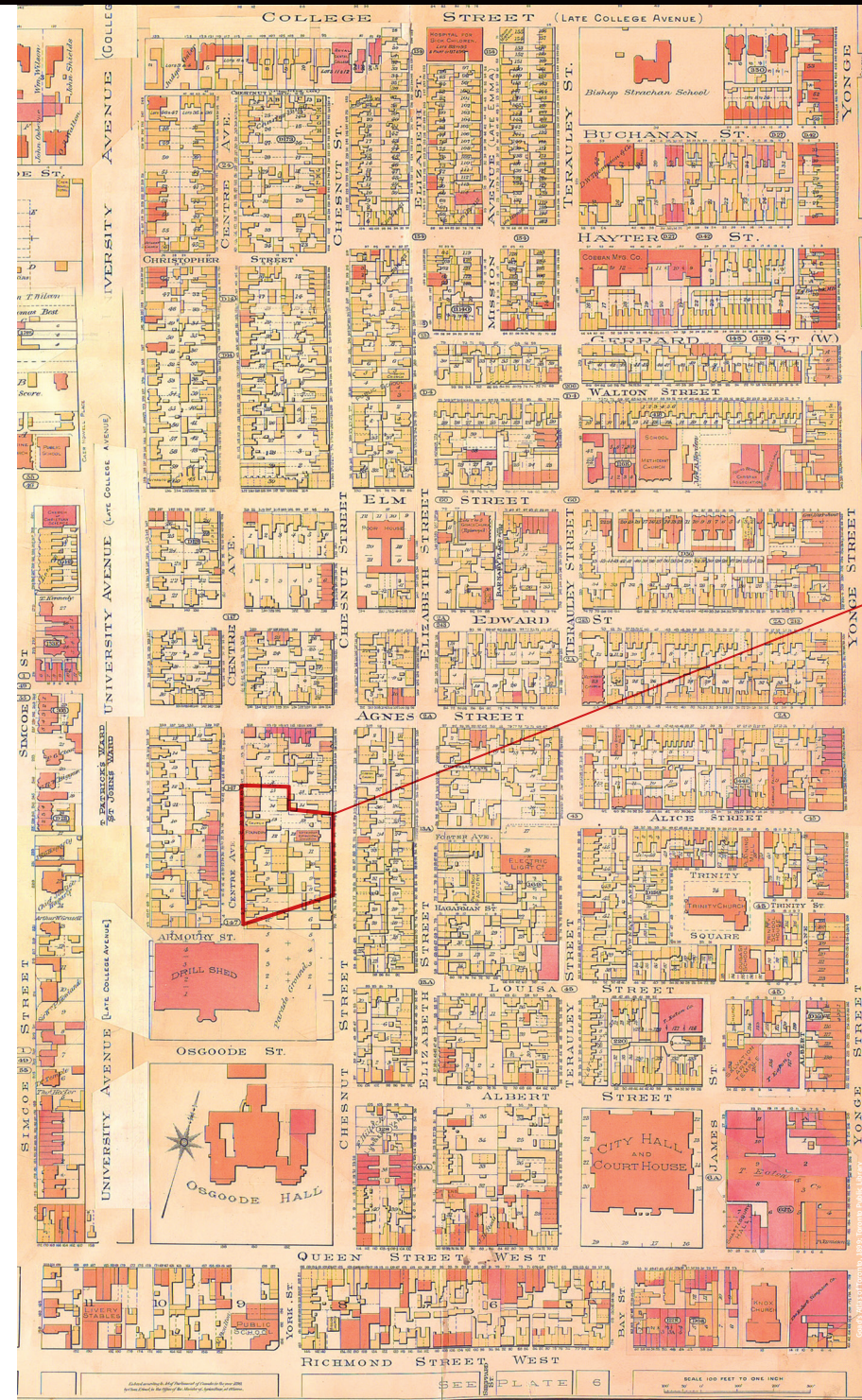
Holly Martelle,
Project Archaeologist, Timmins Martelle Heritage Consultants

Long before it became The Ward, this land was the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples, who were ultimately displaced by European settlement. Later, from the 1830s through the 1960s, St. John's Ward became home to African American freedom-seekers and black migrants living alongside their European neighbors, followed by waves of Irish, Jewish, Italian, and Chinese newcomers. They built a vibrant neighbourhood of homes, shops, factories, and places of worship. While early occupants of the new Toronto courthouse site were relatively affluent landowners, the area became overcrowded in the late 19th century. Wood-frame rooming houses and shanties sprang up, and The Ward's streets bustled with entertainers, paperboys, peddlers, and curious outsiders.

Despite the area's liveliness, its multicultural character aroused prejudice, and concerns over sanitary conditions led reformers and the City of Toronto to describe The Ward as a slum. In the 1950s, the City demolished part of the neighbourhood to make way for the new City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square.

Home to many newcomers in the 19th and early-20th centuries, The Ward represents a rich legacy of urban diversity and mutual support that characterizes Toronto's many intersecting communities to this day.

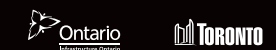
The wide variety of bottles in this display hints at the archaeological richness of the site. Bottles contained consumables such as beverages, condiments, and remedies, as well as personal and household products such as perfume, ink, and shoe polish. Glass was the preferred 19th century bottle material, though stoneware was also used.



Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of the Attorney General are developing a new Toronto courthouse on Armoury Street, steps away from City Hall. In preparation for construction, Infrastructure Ontario commissioned an extensive archaeological assessment. Although the site was a parking lot for decades, the excavations revealed its buried history as part of St. John's Ward, in later years known simply as The Ward. Through the hundreds of thousands of artifacts unearthed from the courthouse site, we have gained unprecedented insight into Toronto's multicultural past.



This exhibit is presented in partnership between Infrastructure Ontario, on behalf of the Ministry of the Attorney General, and the City of Toronto.



This exhibit shares a selection of the artifacts and stories unearthed in the archaeological assessment of the new Toronto courthouse site on Armoury Street, originally part of The Ward and just steps from City Hall. With thanks to the New Toronto Courthouse Heritage Interpretation Working Group, Timmins Martelle Heritage Consultants, ERA Architects.