

■ The Toronto Pilgrimage Beyond the SkyDome ■

by Richard Bottomley

Their names become part of Adventist history—those cities in which General Conference sessions are held. Utrecht, Mexico City, and Indianapolis are remembered for what happened there. This year Toronto joins the list.

To welcome the world church to Canada for the fifty-seventh General Conference convocation, Canadian Adventists have commissioned the sculptor Victor Issa to prepare a work of art that depicts the Second Coming of Christ in twelve life-size castings. Issa captures the expectancy, joy, and idea of being “caught up” to Christ as the heavenly hosts descend toward the earth. The sculpture will be unveiled at the opening meeting in the SkyDome, one of Toronto’s major landmarks, on June 29.

“Almost Home” is the theme for the ten-day session, at which officials expect daily attendance to average 10,000, with 50,000 on weekends. “We have this hope” is the theme song that will be sung each day. Between meetings, where the 2,000 official delegates work through the agenda of elections and church manual changes, explorations of Toronto and its environs may be an important part of the pilgrimage.

The landscape upon which the city of Toronto sits is a wonder of the age of glaciers. Only a relatively few years ago, all of Ontario was buried beneath kilometers of ice. As the ice rapidly melted back, it left evidence of its passing in the drumlins, eskers, and hundreds of thousands of lakes carved into the pristine granite of the Canadian Shield. The endless expanse of the Great Lakes is only a tawdry reminder of the majestic greater lakes of melt water that previously existed here. The city itself is a hundred miles south of the bare rock of the shield, and sits on limestone that resisted the relentless bulldozing of the ice.

Native Americans of the region realized that the site where Toronto now stands was a natural place to spend the winter. Due to the effects of the nearby Great Lakes, Toronto is remarkably snow free, although to the north, east, and west of the city, snow belts blanket the fertile farmland until the advent of the spring. To the south lies the city of Buffalo, and we all know what happens there in the winter.

The local Adventist population, traditionally made up of WASPs, is now heavily leavened with the sounds of Caribbean English. This mirrors the makeup of modern Toronto, which is slowly shaking off its traditional reputation of being Toronto the Good (and the Bland). It is a city of neighborhoods, often ethnic in their makeup. There is a Little Italy, Little Portugal, five Chinatowns, a Vietnamese Village, and the Danforth (Greek) and Indian conclaves, but remarkably no ghettos or slums.

The city is amicable and relatively crime free. This is partly attributable to the live-and-let-live sensibility of the Canadian society and to the fact that the city planners kept people living in the core of the city by zoning, restricting development, and having a first-rate transportation system.

Adventist Population a Blend of Ethnic Communities

The Adventists have traditionally lived in two pockets. The enclave at Oshawa, thirty miles east of Toronto, is the home of Kingsway College, a senior boarding academy, the Ontario Conference Office, and the headquarters of the Adventist church in Canada. The other community, Willowdale, in north Toronto, grew up around the Adventist Branson Hospital, which has recently been amalgamated with another community hospital and has an uncertain future. Willowdale is also the home of Crawford Adventist Academy, a K-12 day academy of almost 500 students that is now the largest Adventist school of its kind in Canada.

Recent Adventist immigration has tended to spread itself out much more across the city, especially

because the Church no longer employs the majority of members. Today, there are numerous ethnic churches and companies: Chinese, Estonian, Filipino (5), Ghanaian, Hispanic (3), Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean (2), Portuguese (2), Ukranian, and Yugoslavian. As well, there are a number of churches facilitating smaller groups through Sabbath School classes, for Finnish, Romanian, French, and East Indian immigrants.

The center of the city is a compact series of tall modern buildings sandwiched between older buildings of a much less grand scale. Here is Bay Street, the financial heart of Canada, akin to Wall Street in the

United States and the City, in London. The most memorable street is University Avenue, a wide boulevard lined by hospitals and insurance companies, that ends in the Ontario legislature and the University District. Just a couple of blocks east is the more retail-friendly Yonge Street.

Underneath the city center are miles of passageways that link the major build-



"The King is Coming," Victor Issa, sculptor.

A work commissioned by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists © Victor Issa Studios, Loveland, CO.

ings. The passages are actually an endless mall of small stores and shops that line bright and safe corridors and enable citizens and visitors to avoid contact with the elements outside.

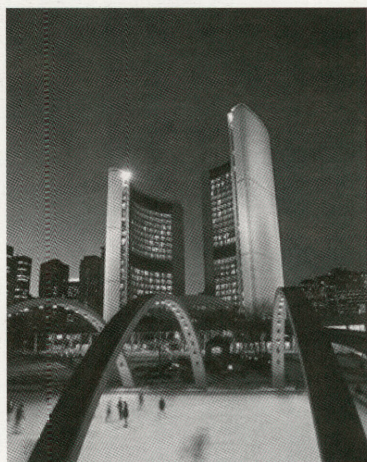
The city is well served by parks, a large number created in the aftermath of Hurricane Hazel. In 1954, Hazel stormed up from the Gulf of Mexico and dropped an amazing amount of rain in twenty-four hours. The resulting flood wiped out all the houses built in the rivers and ravines of Toronto and southern Ontario. To prevent this from happening again, all the river valleys have been turned into public parks and conservation areas. As a result, there are long linear parks for biking, walking, and picnicking, even in the middle of the city.

Because the city is not very old and certainly was never as wealthy as places like New York City, the scale and grandeur of the buildings and monuments is a notch or two lower. Nonetheless, there are several gems of various styles, ranging from the BCE Place, a modern cathedral-like arcade of glass to the Grange, a Georgian-

age residence open to the public as part of the Art Gallery of Ontario. Fresh bread is baked daily on the hearth of The Grange.

Other examples include City Hall, a modern classic by Viljo Revell set off by a large public square from the Romanesque city hall that it replaced; Roy Thomson Hall, home of the Toronto Symphony and a stunning inverted glass pillbox in the center of the Theatre District; St. Lawrence Hall, the finest

Renaissance-style building in Toronto, just a kilometer east of the convention center; Eaton Centre, a glass galleria that is the center of downtown shopping; and the University of Toronto, a fine collection of collegiate architecture that includes gargoyles, quadrangles, chapels, and ivy-covered colleges that feature Gothic, Norman, and Neo-Pathetic styles.



City Hall

Photo courtesy of Tourism Toronto

town, including the Parliament and the home of the governor. The soldiers looted the town and then retreated, taking with them the mace, the traditional symbol of parliamentary government.

The burning of Washington D.C., a year later was partly in retaliation for the sacking of York. You burn my capital and I'll burn yours—an early form of capital punishment, if you like. The charred presidential residence in Washington was then painted white to cover the damage, which gave the mansion a new name. (To be honest, isn't the White House a better name than the President's Palace, as the house was known before the war?)

A visit to Old Fort York with its period buildings, furnishings, costumed troops, and musketry demonstrations makes for a vivid history lesson.

Incidentally for those Americans who will miss

the 4th of July fireworks back home, there will be a half hour of fireworks on the nights of July 1, 5, 8 as part of the annual Symphony of Fire on the waterfront at Ontario Place.



BCE Center

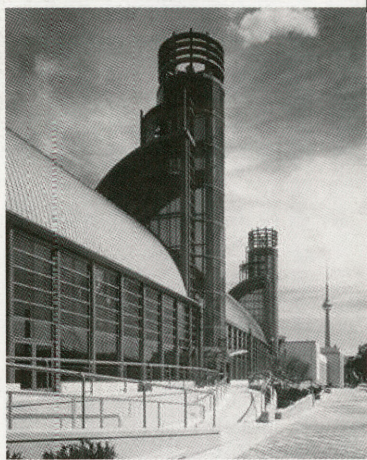
Photo courtesy of Tourism Toronto

Make sure you encourage the evening speaker to quit by 10.30 p.m. those evenings, because it won't be all quiet on the western front until 11 o'clock.

Historical Connection Between Washington and Toronto

There is an interesting historical connection between Washington D.C., the home base of the Adventist Church, and Toronto, the home base of this year's General Conference. In 1813, the Americans sailed a large raiding party into Toronto Bay and proceeded to attack the fort and town. Toronto was then known as York, and it was the capital of Upper Canada.

During this assault, Gen. Zebulon Pike, of Pike's Peak fame, was killed. The American soldiers took out their anger by burning all the public buildings in the



Trade Center

Photo courtesy of Tourism Toronto

Biblical History on Display at ROM

The Royal Ontario Museum houses a wonderful collection of historical artifacts, natural history, mummies, and dinosaurs. There is a ceramic tile lion from the wall of Nebuchadnezzar's throne room in Babylon. We like to think that Daniel once stood as close beside it as our family does every time we visit.

(Note to parents: the ROM runs an excellent series of day camps that utilize the wonders of history and nature housed within its walls. If you are looking for a safe, fun, and educational place to leave your kids during the day, contact the museum for registration in advance.)

Other lesser-known museums worth visiting include the Gardiner Museum of Ceramics and the Bata Shoe Museum. That's right—shoes!

New Music Garden Echoes Bach

One of Toronto's newest attractions is a small garden just east of the Harbourfront Park on the lakefront designed in collaboration with cellist Yo Yo Ma. The garden is based on the movements of Bach's First Suite for Cello: prelude, allemande, courante, sarabande, minuet, and gigue. Say aren't those last ones all dances?

Other gardens that are often chosen for Sabbath afternoon walks are the James Gardens, Edward's Gardens, and High Park—three beautiful parks with rock gardens and paths for walking that really lift your spirits but are infested to the gunwales with brides on Sabbath.

Moore for Art Lovers

The Art Gallery of Ontario contains a really fine collection of art. It is especially strong in Canadian Art and the sculptures of Henry Moore, who donated most of his working molds to the Gallery. The McMichael Canadian Collection, in Kleinburg just northwest of the city, is home to a remarkable collection of Group of Seven paintings and their contemporaries displayed in a series of log buildings on the ravine of the Humber River in Kleinburg, just northwest of the city. Here you find impressionistic landscape painting at its best.

Canadian Stamp to Commemorate Adventists

Expect postcards from friends who attend General Conference to carry a special Adventist stamp. Canada Post has announced that its year 2000 stamp program will include a special commemorative stamp that will feature Adventists. The forty-six-cent, first-class stamp will be released at the time of General Conference, a special seal for stories of this pilgrimage in the Adventist story.

Richard Bottomley graduated from Atlantic Union College with a degree in religion. After obtaining a doctorate in physics, he worked for Shell Oil in its exploration and research divisions. He teaches at the college level.
bottomley@cnet.com



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