



Name game

By Jamie Bradburn

“Street names provide a highly visible record of Toronto’s history,” observe Leonard Wise and Allan Gould in their book *Toronto Street Names*. Our roads honour early settlers, fine homes, scandalous figures, imaginative children, and trailblazers among our diverse cultures. Here are some of the stories that live on in our streets.



Yonge Street

No, Toronto’s most famous street is not a misspelled celebration of youth. It honours Sir George Yonge, who was Great Britain’s Secretary at War from 1782 to 1794.

Toronto Street

The name “Toronto” may derive from the Huron word for “meeting place,” or it may be from the Mohawk “tkaronto,” meaning “where there are trees standing in the water.” The street debuted on maps of York circa 1797 as an extension of Yonge Street south of Queen.

De Grassi Street

This street has never lacked for teen angst—even before the Canadian TV shows that bear its name. Its namesakes, sisters Charlotte and Cornelia De Grassi, at the tender ages of 15 and 13, respectively, served as government spies during the Rebellion of 1837.

St. Clair Avenue

This avenue owes its name to Albert Grainger, who as a child gave himself the middle name “St. Clair,” perhaps a misspelling of “St. Clare,” a character in his favourite book, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Grainger reputedly painted the name on a sign and nailed it to a tree, which surveyors noted while passing the family farm.

Alexander Street

Alexander Wood was an early-19th-century public servant who was publicly shamed because of a homosexual scandal. He owned property that eventually formed the south end of Church-Wellesley Village. In 2005, the neighbourhood commissioned a statue of him to celebrate his achievements as a municipal official and forefather of Toronto’s gay community.



Hubbard Boulevard

This boulevard, which faces the boardwalk in The Beach, was named after Frederick Langdon Hubbard, who served as the first black chairman of the Transit Commission from 1929 to 1930. His father, William Peyton Hubbard, was Toronto’s first black alderman and had also served as acting mayor.

Bloor Street

Meeting friends for a beer on Bloor Street? Raise a glass to the street’s namesake, Joseph Bloor, a mid-19th-century innkeeper, brewer and well-respected philanthropist. He co-founded the Village of Yorkville.

Avenue Road

This odd name has inspired several stories about its origins. The silliest one claims an early engineer exclaimed, “Let’s ’ave a new road here!” More likely, it was named for the trees that line it (French avenues, or *allées*, are typically treed).

Spadina Avenue

“Spadina” is an indigenous word for “hill.” It’s pronounced “Spa-dee-na,” however most Torontonians call this street “Spa-dye-na.” The street honours the politically prominent Baldwin family, who called their hilltop home Spadina because it offered a view of the city below.

Danforth Avenue

Asa Danforth Jr. was a route land speculator who built a road between York and the mouth of the Trent River. Although completed in 1800, the road caused him financial problems during construction and quickly fell into disuse. Embittered by the experience, Danforth moved to the United States, vowing never to return.



Photography: Peter Gaffney