

Planet Parkdale

A Short Tour of a Neighborhood

30 June 2009

2436 words



0 – Beatty St. Globe

This home made sculpture is but a few blocks from me, on Beatty Street. The same street sports a charming late 1870's mansion. I have another photo of this I really like (but isn't digital I'm afraid), that shows the same globe just after a heavy snowfall. A cap of snow covers the northern hemisphere, inspiring me to call it "Ice Age".

1 – Parkdale (south)

My apartment is on the 21st. floor. (I don't worry about cat-burglars much.) A more southerly view of my corner of Parkdale, showing the old houses (now mainly flats and boarding houses, but slowly gentrifying). The neighborhood ends with a bluff that hides Lakeshore Blvd. and the actual beach from view



2 – Parkdale (west)

From my balcony I can see all around the west end of Lake Ontario, though the falls at Niagara are around the corner of the building and out of sight. In this view, though, Hamilton and beyond it the Niagara escarpment are plainly visible on the horizon, and are about 40 miles away. The neighborhood visible is the southwest end of Parkdale. It ends with a bluff that hides

Lakeshore Blvd. and the actual beach. The curve in the Lakeshore is Humber Bay, and the mouth of the Humber River is under the white foot bridge.

3 – Parkdale (north)

Looking northwest from my balcony you can see about 20 miles perhaps. The difference in distance to the horizon is mainly due to elevation. The distant "heights" are about 300 above the level of the lake. The main cluster of apartments at center are at Bloor St. and High Park, about two miles away. Nearer the actual horizon and a little to the left is the location of Pearson International Airport, several more miles away. Its lights are easily visible most nights. The diagonal street visible is my main drag, Queen Street. If you ever saw the Robocop TV series, the camera was driven along this stretch of Queen for the end credits.



4 – Stormy Sky

One day I was awoken by the sounds of a severe wind storm, and went out on the balcony to be greeted by this site. I've seen similar stormy skies, but this particular windstorm beat all. It wasn't continuous, but gusts were probably hitting 100 kph. I thought my satellite dish would be damaged.

5 – Stormy Lake

This shot shows somewhat calmer skies, but a troubled lake. You can see skirls of white water where air bursts are kicking up the foam. No sign of rotational motion though, neither in the clouds nor on the water. I later heard there were no reports of twisters anywhere in the Southern Ontario area around Toronto. So it was just a bad wind-storm, nothing more. To be honest, the sky lacked that sickly yellow-green tinge that's common to twister weather.

6 – Queen Car

A closer view of Queen from my balcony. On the street is one of the TTC's "bendable" street cars. The center is actually hinged! You can stand on the hinged section of the floor and experience the front and rear halves of the car turn under your feet.



7 – King St. at Twilight

Only a few hundred yards south of Queen Street is King. It's my second main drag. While a major city thoroughfare, most of its length is commercially less well developed, but more industrial in many places. This particular stretch, immediately south of me, is more residential. You can see downtown Toronto lit up by the setting sun in the distance. The CN Tower, somewhat to the right, is about two or two and a half miles away, and downtown Toronto is between three and four. The McDonald's arches are where Dufferin St. intersects King, and the location of the old Bank of British North America building in a later photo.



8 – Roncesvalles Ave. (south)

"The Roncey" or Roncesvalles Ave. is the third major drag in my neighborhood. (The fourth is Bloor St. more than a mile north, but I don't consider it "my" neighborhood.) It's about a half mile west of my building, and more upscale than Queen. My bank, Kinko's, and the only decent used book stores are up this way.

9 – Queen West Turret

A really charming "turret" building on Queen St. not far from my place. It is just visible in the 4th. photo in this album, at far left. It's the building immediately left of the one with the pointed red roof, but the turret feature is barely recognizable from that angle.

10 – Cop Shop Clock

1313 Queen St. West, or the local cop shop. It hasn't been used as a police station in many years though. Today it's a drop-in center for some flavour or other of local immigrants. I imagine if I wandered in everyone would stare at me and wonder why the "round eyes" or "infidel" is on their turf, *sigh*. The building was used as the outside of the police station in the Robocop TV series. (They sued sets for the inside, of course.) The building is literally around the corner from my street.

11 – Gladstone House

At one time, Parkdale was a well-to-do community, neighboring the high-tech industrial area to the west. Since 1887 a lot has happened... Gladstone House, the hotel shown here, was in those days a fancy stay for salesmen coming by train. Two separate stations existed that would obscure this view if still standing. An underground tunnel under Queen Street connected them to the hotel. Alas, both stations have long since been demolished. In more recent times, demolition

of obsolete industrial facilities has made this view possible for the first time. Soon it will be developed, and this view will likely disappear for another hundred years!



12 – Gladstone Hotel

As the industrial area south of the Gladstone aged, it gave over the lesser businesses, and finally to tiny "production" companies, and software writers, and people willing to live in genuine lofts. Today it's being slowly razed and replaced by yuppie row houses, and trendy fake lofts. The hotel reflects all this change. Just a few years ago, a room at the Gladstone cost something like \$11 a night. The rooms were taller than they were wide, and still had old Peter Max posters that were yellow from age and patched over holes that were older still. The hotel had evidently not been seriously renovated since around the turn of the century. Accommodations had no bathrooms. Each floor still had a communal lavatory. The original wooden floors, plaster trim work, and tin ceilings were in place. In a way it's a pity that the hotel was bought and finally subjected to renovation. While some of the original features may survive, I'm certain the communal bathrooms are now a thing of the past. As are the \$11 a night rates. The usual crowd hanging around the restaurant and club on the ground floor are clearly "beautiful people".

13 – Bank of British North America

Down the street a number of blocks from the previous photo of King Street is this curious old Bank of British North America building. It's a bank of Montreal now. There hasn't been a Bank of BNA for longer than I can say -- maybe a hundred years. From the style, I'd say this was built during the oriental phase of late Victorian architecture -- 1890's perhaps. On the corner where I was standing when I took this shot was an even odder, one story building, who's purpose I never did learn. It was covered by a Chinese style roof. Unfortunately, it vanished under the wrecker's ball before I was out of my teens.



14 – Burnt Out Boarding House on Queen W.

Along Queen Street about a quarter of Queen Street is this old apartment building. It must have been quite handsome in the 1910's or 20's when it was likely built. By the 1990's though, it was basically a flop house. Then someone started a fire. Two or three people died, and initially the blame was placed on some drunken bum who fell asleep while smoking. Later, I believe it came out that it was more likely arson. We can guess who was probably behind *that*, but I don't know if charges were ever laid. After a number of years, no work has been done on the building yet.



15 – Toronto Carpet Mfg. Co. Ltd.

On King street, a few blocks east of my street, you come to an industrial area usually called Liberty these days. (It's the name of one of the longer streets in the area.) This beautiful 19th. century factory building isn't the biggest of its kind, but it is classic. It's still renting to small businesses and (I believe) lofts. Behind the building you can see a chimney. There's actually a small warren of lanes and separate buildings back there, as well as a classy restaurant. Successful businessmen are flooding back into Liberty after seventy-five years...

16 – Crisp-Pac Factory

How many of you know that the potato chip (not the french fry, also called a "chip" in some parts) was invented by a chef in Saratoga Springs in the late 19th. century? By the early 20th. century it was a popular snack food everywhere. Chips were mainly made locally until well into my life, though. This old factory is hidden from the public streets, and can be approached only through a small lane. Yet for many years it made the major local brand of potato chip, Cris-Pac. (It also roasted peanuts.) It's a favourite of mine for personal reasons. Both my grandmother and my mother have worked there. Alas, the brand vanished in the 60's. My grandmother's home is also gone. She and my Mom are deceased. But the Cris-Pac plant seems eternal.



17 – Melbourne Place

Another hidden location in Parkdale is Melbourne Place. It's a lane off of Melbourne Ave, closed by a gate. It's not a "gated" community in the new, pejorative sense, though. The style of these modest row houses suggests they were building in the last years of the 19th. century, in association with nearby factory buildings. I don't doubt they were once inhabited by factory workers or foremen.

18 – Trenton Terrace (west)

Trenton Terrace is another of my favourite, hidden places in Parkdale. It's only a foot path leading off a residential street, but it's the only access to this row of tiny bungalows. They are deeper than they look, mind you, but I doubt any is more than two bedrooms.

19 – Trenton Terrace (east)

This is Trenton Terrace again, but from the far end, looking toward Cowan Ave.



20 – Beatty St. Mansion

This 1870's French 2nd. Empire style mansion is on Beatty Street, a few blocks west of me. I took the shot from the street, but if you understand 2nd. Empire architecture at all, you can see that the present front entrance isn't the original one. The original front of this home is the side with the tower. But it faces another home! The answer to the puzzle is that when this mansion was built -- likely in the early 1880's rather than 1870's -- there were no other homes on the street. Indeed, there may have been no street. There was likely a private lane from the front of the house to King street, to the south. But thirty or thirty-five years later, when the neighborhood was developed, the owner of the property must have sold much of the land around this place. The land became the surrounding neighborhood, and suddenly this house was facing the wrong way! It has been recently renovated before I took this shot.

21 – Dowling Ave. Boarding House

Once an elegant single family home in the early 1900's, not far from here. By the 1950's this place was likely as you see it now, a boarding house. Yet I find the gingerbread verandas most attractive. (Otherwise the basic Victorian Gothic plain is rather plain.) Such verandahs would not have been built for a boarding house, so doubtlessly date to the original construction. The front verandahs, though are distinctly different. My guess is the 1930's, which would suggest they are older than the home's conversion to rental rooms. But they might possibly be more

recent and might be part of the conversion process. Wouldn't you love to convert a place of this size back into a single residence though? At least if you were going to be the resident...



22 – Laxton Ave. Turret

A lovely turret on an equally picturesque home a few blocks from here. I can't imagine what the "room" inside must be like. It would have to be so small, that likely its only a "bay" to a room inside. Must be charming though.

23 – Dunn Ave. Boarding House

This is a very ornate little landing on the upper story of a house on my street. Now its rooms are all rental, but at one time I would imagine the wooden corner was the head of a stairwell, or perhaps a small sitting room off a bedroom, leading to the landing. Notice the odd "H" made from coloured shingles on the roof. I don't know of anything like it, though I have often wondered why such patterns on roofs were never fashionable.

24 – The Ex

A look from the end of a short street overlooking the bluff over the lakeshore. At this point, the lake is actually some distance away. A railway cut made in 1912 separates the end of the street from the actual bluff, and below that was likely a stretch of marshy land before the lake. In the distance you can see the sunset illuminating the domes of the Canadian National Exhibition Grounds. (The "Ex.") The CNE isn't really part of my neighborhood, though the entry gate is right on the margin. From here it looks like some utopia just out of reach, and that's why I included it. Some utopia with a huge windmill at least...



25 – Parkdale Rain

Another rain shower over Parkdale. It was quite a bit heavier than this photo would suggest.

26 – Stormset

Within the hour after the rain shower (above) I shot this sunset.



27 – Gingerbread House

I rather like this place, a few blocks from my apartment. It isn't genuine 19th. century gingerbread work -- rather, the owner must have added it sometime in the last couple of years. When I first spotted it I knew I needed to take a picture. But I needed to wait a year first, for the greenery around the foundation to grow in.

