

University of Toronto
University Arts Women's Club - University of Toronto Women's Association

NEWS & EVENTS

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Volume 4 No 1

August 2021

2021: second year of the Covid-19 pandemic continues!

On **February 18, 2021**, in keeping the required physical distance from each other, we held our virtual General Meeting. Molly Thom, Director, Playwright, sometime Actor, and Alumnae Theatre Company Member was invited to be our guest speaker. The title of her talk: *Dramatic Women: 102 Years of the Alumnae Theatre Company*.

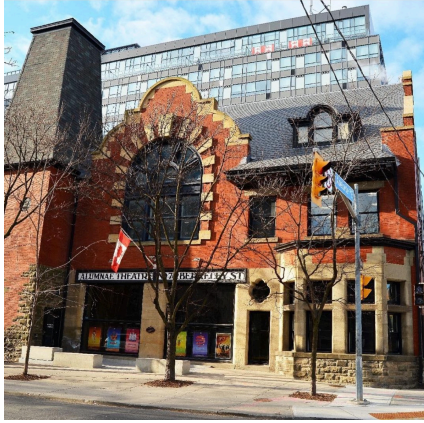
Gay Thomson, our Past President, gave a comprehensive introduction on Molly Thom. Molly treated us to a fascinating history of The Alumnae Theatre, an all-women's theatre founded in 1918. As Molly says, while the men were still at war, some women wanted to get involved in theatre. They created the first professional theatre in Toronto, producing plays with superior sets and costumes at Hart House. The Alumnae still plays an important role in the theatrical world.

Early on, the Alumnae produced exciting new playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. In 1957, they staged 50 performances of *Waiting for Godot* in a one-room theatre. It became apparent that they needed a bigger venue! They moved often over the years, then found their lasting home at Old Firehall No. 4, re-designed as a theatre by Molly's husband, the well-known architect Ron Thom. The 1960's were a great time for innovation in Toronto. The "Alum" expanded its mandate to focus on new Canadian plays, mostly written by women. *Thirteen Hands* by Carol Shields was a huge hit. Recently Molly and her colleagues premiered the FireWorks Festival, which features new plays in development. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has now forced all theatres to showcase their exciting productions online.

After a brief Q & A period, Claudia Colas, our Lunch Coordinator, thanked Molly for sharing with us over 100 years of staging adventures of The Alumnae Theatre Company in Toronto.



Molly Thom
Director, Playwright, sometime Actor and Alumnae Theatre Company Member



Old Firehall No. 4
re-designed by architect Ron Thom



A scene from *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett



A scene from *Thirteen Hands* by Carol Shields

On **March 18, 2021**, speaker Marta O'Brien was introduced by Christine McClymont, our Programmer.

Architectural historian Marta O'Brien, founder of Citywalks Tours and Talks, presented an enjoyable and informative talk on Zoom. With her detailed research and photographs, Marta brought to life one of Toronto's landmark buildings, the Eaton's College Street Store.

Opened by Lady Eaton and her son John David Eaton in 1930, it was the most magnificent retail store in Canada at the time. The building's main architect was René Cera. Nearly all the luxurious materials used were Canadian, including granite from Quebec and limestone from Manitoba. No expense was spared for the decorations. The style has been called Art Deco or *Art Moderne* – either way, it is a modern masterpiece. The Seventh Floor was considered a cultural centre in Toronto. Its spacious 1300-seat auditorium was designed by French architect Jacques Carlu, famous for his work on the grandest ocean liners. He also designed the magnificent Round Room, which featured a top-notch restaurant.

In 1977, Eaton's College Street Store was sold to developers and re-named College Park. The new owners divided the building into small retail spaces on the ground floor, with offices on the higher floors and space for courtrooms. Happily, the Round Room has been restored and re-opened as the Carlu.

During Marta's generous Q & A period, several Club members shared their own memories of shopping on the ground floor and dining on the seventh. We also received a message from a former member thanking Linda Andrews, our Membership Coordinator, for inviting her to Marta's presentation. She has heard Marta a number of times and she knew Marta's talk would be good. She commented that she often had lunch at the Round Room in the old days. She said: "Well, this was a lovely walk down memory lane!"

Kirsteen McLean, our President, thanked Marta for sharing the past and present fascinating history of Eaton's College Street Store with us.



Marta O'Brien

Architectural Historian, Founder of Citywalks Tours & Talks



Eaton's College Street Store Opens in 1930



Up to 7th Floor to Carlu



Eaton's College Street Store
Into the Round Room on 7th Floor



Eaton's College Street Store
The Round Room on 7th Floor

Despite the pandemic, on **April 15, 2021**, at the UAWC-UTWA Annual General Meeting (AGM) we were extraordinarily grateful to have Barbara Dickson as guest speaker. Barbara was introduced by our Programme Coordinator, Christine McClymont. Christine said: "Besides her prolific speaking schedule, Barbara is an avid historian and a journalist who studied at Ryerson University. Her many articles have been published around the world. Barbara is the celebrated author of *Bomb Girls: Trading Aprons for Ammo*, her first non-fiction book, the subject of her talk today."

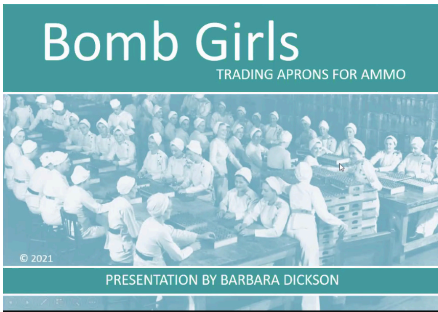
Barbara Dickson was born and raised in Scarborough, Ontario, and still lives there. Twenty years ago, she became curious about the rumours of tunnels running under Scarborough streets and determined to find out what they were.

Barbara talked about the General Engineering Company Ltd (GEC) plant located in Scarborough, the largest munitions plant in Canadian history during World War II that hired mostly women, to work with dangerous explosives. Even though the government had destroyed all documents related to GEC, in her research, she found out that the GEC plant was a fortified mini city with 172 buildings built on 346 acres of farmland, located at Warden & Eglinton Avenue. A four-kilometre tunnel system totally isolated the facility from the general population of Toronto. She described life in the plant, the use of highly volatile yellow powder, white uniforms from head to toe, the removal of all (static inducing) metal including rings, hair clips, buckles and clasps, and day and night nine-hour shifts with one-hour meal breaks. With Barbara's perseverance she has interviewed ten of the ladies who worked at the GEC plant, of whom two are still alive. Barbara's book about this amazing activity was a big success and was made into a 25-minute film in 2017. The film, "Bomb Girls: A Documentary," includes interviews with five of these dedicated and charming women, still full of memories good and bad.

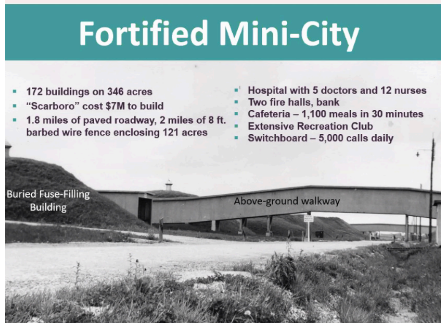
After Q & A period, Patricia Nevins, our Publications Coordinator, thanked Barbara for giving us the opportunity to hear the fascinating story of these patriotic women who risked their lives undertaking dangerous work at a top-secret factory in Scarborough.



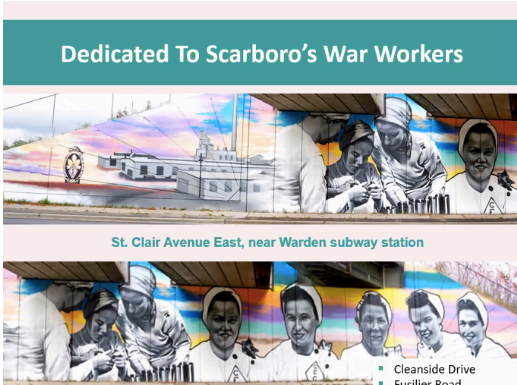
Barbara Dickson
Author, Speaker, and Researcher in Local & Canadian History



Bomb Girls – Trading Aprons for Ammo



GEC Plant – Fortified Mini-City



A Mural paying tribute to the real Bomb Girls of WWII in Scarborough

May 13, 2021, Special Events - Hummingbird 101



A zoom presentation, through slides and videos on various hummingbirds, gave us a better appreciation of these amazing tiny creatures. This was presented by Gay Thomson, our Special Events Coordinator.

June 17, 2021, Special Events – Monarch Butterflies



Betty McCulloch

Our second Special Events Zoom presentation was led by Betty McCulloch. She is a citizen scientist who has seven years of tagging and studying Monarch Butterflies in Rosetta McClain Gardens in Scarborough, ON, overlooking the Bluffs. She shared her knowledge of monarch's life cycle, tagging process, and their annual migratory cycle to their winter quarters in Mexico. We plan to visit Rosetta McClain Gardens later in the summer to view the banding process.

Those interested in joining UAWC/UTWA are invited to contact Linda Andrews, Membership Coordinator, at 416-485-4903 or lindajanea@sympatico.ca

Maggy Stepanian

August 16, 2021