



HERITAGE TORONTO PLAQUES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT HERITAGE TORONTO

Heritage Toronto is an arms-length, charitable agency of the City of Toronto, which means that we are a registered charity and not-for-profit that receives a portion of its core operating funding via an annual grant from the City of Toronto. As an “arms-length” agency, we retain a degree of autonomy from the City, but also operate as a government agency.

ABOUT THE PLAQUES PROGRAM

The Heritage Toronto plaques program is one of the oldest, longest-running, and most active municipal plaques programs in North America. Started in 1969 by our predecessor, the Toronto Historical Board, the program has produced more than 750 plaques that are on permanent public display within the City of Toronto. Each year, we complete approximately 40 to 50 new plaques. Two full-time staff run the program.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HERITAGE PROPERTY AND COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE?

Heritage Property plaques are only for buildings that are on the City of Toronto’s Heritage Register and/or designated as heritage under the Ontario Heritage Act. These plaques contain the date the building was completed and a sentence at the bottom indicated the building’s heritage status.

Commemorative plaques are for all other subjects: people, places, events, and so on. The material of the plaque — bronze or enamel — is interchangeable between the two types of plaque. Buildings that are not legally designated as heritage may be the subject of a Commemorative plaque if there is a compelling reason to do so.

WHAT DOES THE PLAQUE FEE COVER?

Heritage Toronto charges a fee to produce all its historical plaques. We are a not-for-profit and the fee is designed to cover our expenses. It covers the writing and research required to produce the text, manufacturing of the plaque, installation by our contractor, and a contribution to a maintenance fund.

WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

Applicants can apply for a plaque without payment, however staff are unable to work on plaques that are not funded. Payment is due following review of the subject by Heritage Toronto’s Programs Committee at its next meeting following the application. Staff will invoice for the plaque fee following positive review by the Programs Committee.

WHAT MAKES FOR A STRONG PLAQUE SUBJECT?

Among other things, Heritage Toronto staff and the Programs Committee look for the following in plaque subjects:

- Heritage Property plaque subjects must be listed on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register and/or designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. (Buildings that are not legally designated may be the focus of a Commemorative plaque if there is a compelling reason to do so.)
- Plaque subjects should be based in Toronto and must have made a significant contribution to the heritage of the city, the province, or country.
- Plaques about topics that are not well known by the general public are encouraged.
- Applications from under-represented communities in Toronto's heritage are encouraged.
- Plaque applications should have broad community support.
- Proposed plaques must have full funding available from the applicant or another source. Full funding alone will not ensure automatic project approval.
- Plaque subjects that are already commemorated in Toronto will not be considered unless there are compelling circumstances.
- Plaques about events within the 40 years may be approved under compelling circumstances.
- If the plaque is commemorating a person, the subject must be deceased.

WHO WRITES THE PLAQUES?

Creating a plaque text is a collaborative process that involves thorough research, consultation with stakeholders, and discussion with historical experts. Ultimately, the finished text must be clear, engaging, and meet Heritage Toronto's written style and public education guidelines.

We provide applicants opportunities to provide feedback during the drafting of the text, however Heritage Toronto is ultimately responsible for approving the final wording. As experts in historical interpretation, Heritage Toronto retains the right to final edit of all plaques in the rare event of a disagreement over wording.

WHAT DO PLAQUES SAY?

Plaques are for the education of the general public, Toronto residents and visitors to the city, and the language will assume no prior knowledge of the subject. We work hard to ensure that historically marginalized narratives — Indigenous history, history related to people of colour — are included in our plaque texts. Readers should leave with a clear overview of the subject at hand in less than one minute of reading.

WHAT ARE PLAQUES MADE OF?

Heritage Toronto plaques are made from cast bronze or porcelain enamel. The bronze plaques, which are always in our distinctive oval shape, are text only. The porcelain enamel plaques can include full colour images in addition to text. Both plaques carry the City of Toronto coat of arms.

WHO OWNS THE PLAQUES?

Heritage Toronto retains ownership of all its historical plaques and is responsible for ongoing maintenance. A percentage of each plaque fee is placed in a maintenance fund, which ensures all our plaques are kept in a state of good repair and free from errors.

Heritage Toronto's ownership ensures plaques remain on public display in perpetuity, as intended, and can be repaired and replaced, if necessary, in a timely and efficient manner. Heritage Toronto also owns and is responsible for plaques produced by the former Toronto Historical Board.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PRODUCE A PLAQUE?

It depends on a number of factors. Generally, the bigger the plaque, the longer it takes to produce. Assuming prompt payment, most enamel plaques (i.e. those with images) and large bronze plaques take about 6 to 8 months from application to completion, which includes 6 to 8 weeks for manufacturing. Small bronze plaques can usually be completed within 2 to 3 months. For a detailed breakdown of the plaque creation process, please see our flowchart.

WHICH PLAQUES GET UNVEILED?

Each year, Heritage Toronto produces approximately 40 to 50 new plaques. Unfortunately, we aren't able to commit to organizing an unveiling ceremony for each plaque due to limitations on staff time. Heritage Toronto may be able to support community-organized unveilings by loaning equipment and providing a speaker from our board of directors.

WHERE DO PLAQUES GET INSTALLED?

The goal of the plaques program is to educate and inform the public about Toronto's rich and diverse history. Ideally, plaques should be installed in a location that is accessible to the public, 24/7, in a location that is relevant to the plaque subject. Plaques may be placed on private property provided the public is able to easily access and read it. Heritage Toronto plaques are recognized streetscape elements in the City of Toronto and may also be installed on the public right-of-way (pending permit approval).

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT CHRIS BATEMAN, ACTING MANAGER OF PLAQUES AND PUBLIC EDUCATION: CHRIS.BATEMAN@TORONTO.CA OR 416-392-3996.