Industrial Dundas + Carlaw
A Self-Guided Tour Through a Lively Heritage District

Industrial Dundas + Carlaw

From the 1910s to the 1980s, thousands of people worked in factories in the Dundas and Carlaw area. They made chewing gum, musical instruments, toys, clothing, and many other products that were shipped across Canada and internationally.

Like other industrial centres in North America, the neighbourhood experienced a period of decline in the 1980s.

But today it has rebounded to become a thriving residential, cultural, and commercial centre with many notable buildings that have been adapted from their original use.

On this 45 minute tour you will discover the area’s industrial past and learn how the modern neighbourhood was created. Along the way, you will also encounter historical plaques with additional information, context, and historical images.
Wrigley’s main factory in Chicago, which was demolished in 2013, leaving Toronto with an important piece of North American industrial heritage.

Palmolive plant workers and fireman, circa 1925. Library and Archives Canada

A Worker remembers: “My sister, when she married her husband, the both of them weren’t allowed to work at Reliable Toy Co. She just walked across the road to Wrigley and she got a job there.” —Vonne Neuring

During the war years, many women entered the workforce in place of men who were serving in the military. Factories also joined the war effort. You are in front of the Reliable Toy factory which began making plastic bullet tips and oil drums during the Second World War. After the war, it made some of the first plastic toys in Canada.

A Worker remembers: “The day they made Doublemint and Spearmint [chewing gum] it would clear your sinuses. There was sugar in the air. I only worked there three summers and I got cavities at my gum line.” —Denise White

The GTR installed Niagara Falls electricity to nearby homes and factories, supplementing or replacing power generated by burning coal. It was one of many infrastructure improvements built in response to the area’s growth, along with new sewers, schools, fire and police stations. Underpasses reduced the number of railroad crossings and saved traffic.

The industrial history of the Dundas and Carlaw neighbour- hood and the adaptive reuse of many of its factories have created a unique community that continues to change. Its architectural heritage brings to light the stories of the people who worked, lived, and played along Carlaw Ave.

A Planner remembers: “When the factories closed it left an economic vacuum in the area. But when Sears went to get filled and some far reaching entrepreneurs bought these buildings and cut out spaces, then rented them.” —Paul Winterling speaking to the Toronto Star, August 23, 1999.

PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENTS IN DUNDAS + CARLAW:

This tour is part of a project initiated by Councilor Paula Fletcher and the local community that integrates historical structures, features, and stories into public space improvements in the Dundas and Carlaw neighbour- hood. From a new entrance to Jimmie Simpson Park will be an accessible gateway to the community’s largest greenspace and a signature 9.2-metre brick obelisk by internationally-acclaimed Toronto artist Fioren Fournaisi will mark a new public space at the intersection of Dundas and Carlaw. Badgeron Packer will also be refurbished. The East End “ Bridges to Art” project will create murals in four local rail underpasses.

ABOUT US

Heritage Toronto is a charity and agency of the City of Toronto that celebrates and commemorates the city’s rich heritage and the diverse stories of its people, places, and events. Through programs, events, including walking tours, historical plaques, special lectures, and pop-up exhibits, we engage the public to reflect on the past—both to make sense of our present and to inform our future.

A worker laying the floor at the Wrigley Building. 1916. City of Toronto Archives

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