

Old Town Street Names & the Missing Virgin

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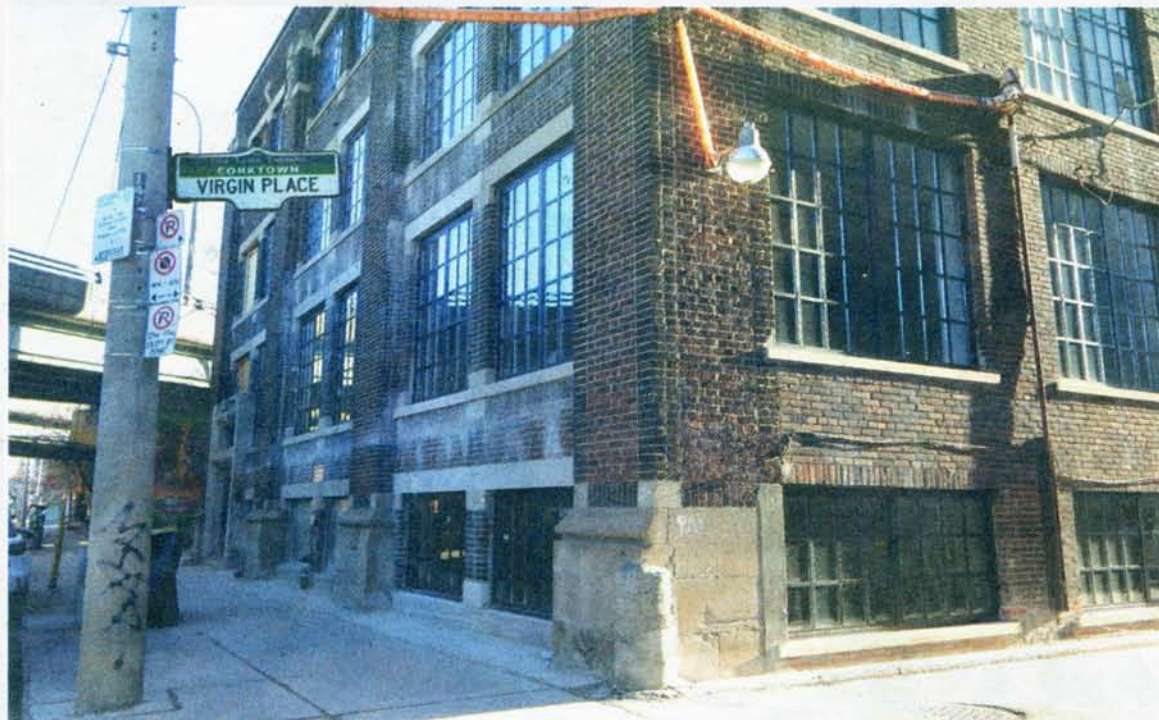
Street Names, can we live without them? It seems we give little thought to these monikers, embossed on metal, and yet what would a regular day be if we didn't have them to keep us on track and stay connected to people, places, and everyday life events.

The earliest record of street names along King, east of Ontario Street, was recorded by Reuben Sherwood, in 1819, while surveying the southern portion of the Government 'Park' reserve. He did so following councils' decision to sell these and other lands in order to raise money for the construction of a 'proper' hospital.

While King Street is an inherited corridor, extended eastward from the former Town of York, it's worth noting that 'Sumach Street' is the oldest name in Corktown, and reminds us of when this tree species flourished within the woodlands of the 'Park' reserve.

By 1830 the district was re-surveyed and as commercial enterprises were established, the area's settlement pattern evolved. As a result, new street names were added to city directories by virtue of land registered plans or City Bylaws. Early markers would have been made out of wood, metal or stone.

Following the arrival of a



Virgin Place sign has been missing since June, 2019. Last seen next to 507 King Street East. Photo: Coralina Lemos

new millennium, in 2002, local neighbourhood groups gathered to discuss a new branding approach meant to place Toronto's historic vicinity in the spotlight. With support from Councillor Pam McConnell, and City of Toronto Economic Development Department, funding was secured.

The main objective was to inform locals and visitors about the 'Old Town' area. Subsequently, it was decided that neighbourhoods, including special district areas like the St. Lawrence Market, and Moss Park (listed under the moniker of Historic Queen East), would be added to the "1793 Old Town Toronto"

marker. Thus, each and every word is meant to inform, educate, and convey direction. While 1793 was the year Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe arrived, Old Town Toronto assures pedestrians that they are in the historic section of the city. Each and every street sign is identified with a coloured strip distinct to the neighbourhood or district, followed by the street name. 'Kelly Green' is the colour that identifies Corktown's location, while Moss Park was metallic Arium.

Unfortunately, changes to City Street Sign Policies has resulted in the abandonment of the initial aim to maintain

our 'Old Town' branding. It's also unforgiving that in some instance's signs have been auctioned online rather than recycling them in the event a replacement is needed.

As this account goes to print, one of Corktown's most intriguing street signs under the 'Old Town' signage initiative has been missing since June of 2019. Located between 501 and 507 King Street East, Virgin Place acquired the legal right, as a street moniker, 145 years ago following the purchase of two lots just east of Sackville Street by Samuel Virgin. He and his spouse, Ann McCulloch, settled in Corktown and in time raised eight

children. Earning his income as a general labourer, his passing was deeply lamented by friends and colleagues who remembered him as a devout Methodist and founding member of a church that once stood on the northwest corner of Bright and King Streets.

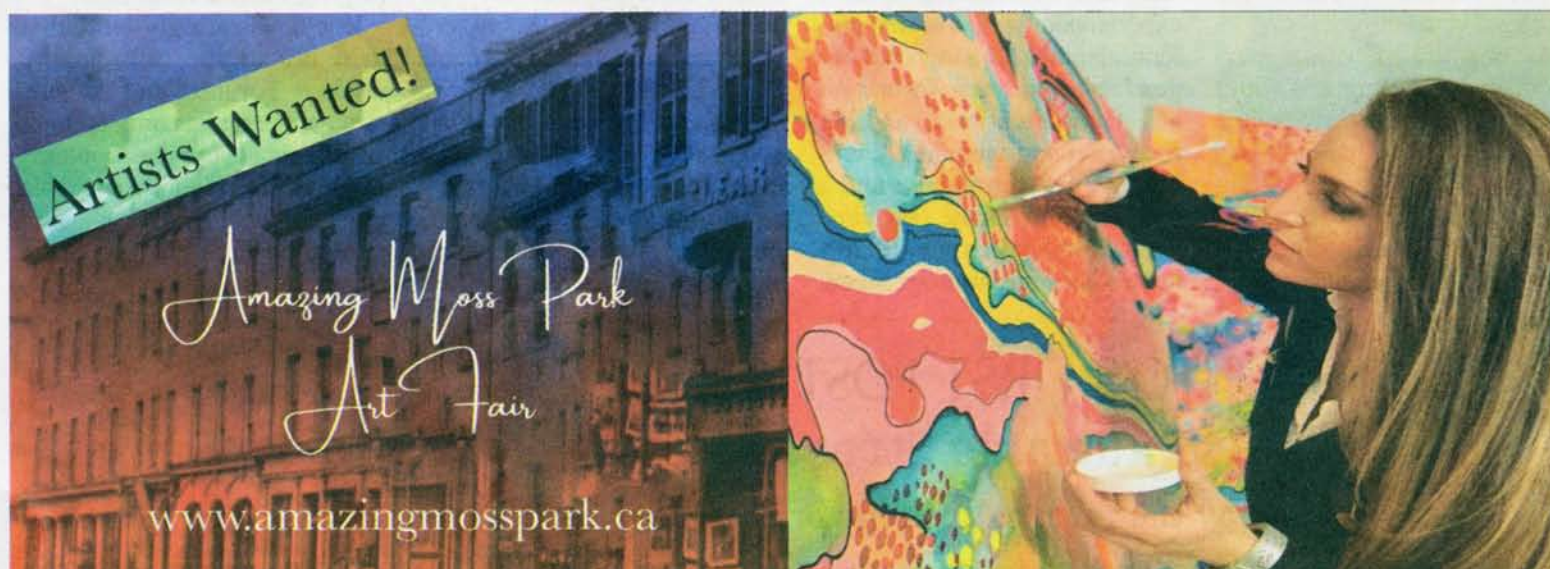
Upon hearing of the missing street sign, family descendant, Dr. Garry Virgin, commented:

"I was saddened to say the least. It would be a shame to forget about it, and just throw the issue into the bin of lost Toronto history. Samuel Virgin, for whom the street was named after, was a native of Huntingdonshire, England. He was my great-great grandfather. Arriving in Upper Canada c1830 he was one of the early inhabitants of Corktown. He was an active member in the community and resided there for most of his life until his death in 1899. Active in the church, Samuel Virgin was best known for his establishment of the first Methodist Church in the east end of Toronto, the King Street East Methodist Church, which still survives today albeit under a different name. In its day the church was an important meeting place for the local citizenry."

Street Sign Updates: There's no denying that much of Corktown's history lies within its street names as a result, communication on this missing street sign has been initiated with City of Toronto officials.

On a favourable note, this spring "Myer Willinsky Lane" will be Corktown's newest street sign to be located behind the row houses that line Queen Street East, between Parliament and Trefann Streets. Myer Willinsky ordered the construction of the IDLE HOUR, Corktown's first purpose-built theatre that opened in 1909. An article on the theatre is posted on my website (corktownhistory.com), and further story details are available in my book: Corktown: The History of a Toronto Neighbourhood and the People Who Made It.

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