

Falling for history

Piecing together Toronto's waterfront

By **Katie Richard**
ONTARIO SAILOR MAGAZINE

Jane Fairburn had absolutely no idea that lying injured and helpless on a cliff about 250 feet above rushing water on a cold February day would prove to be an inspiration.

It was this ordeal that became the driving force behind Fairburn's book 'Along The Shore', a non-fiction novel that explores four of the five waterfront communities of Toronto.

It was a process she began more than 10 years ago after a life-altering event caused her to see the life she was living, and the place she called home, in a whole new light.

"I had a very bad fall while I was out jogging," she says. She slipped on some black ice and fell down the first cliff, known as Killer Hill, of the Scarborough Bluffs.

Unable to climb to the top because of an ankle broken in three spots, the mother of three then-young children laid cold and helpless, waiting for rescuers.

"I looked

out on that lake and I saw the lake as I hadn't before," she says, of scenery she saw so many times before.

Although familiar with it, it was like she was seeing it for the first time.

"I asked myself, 'Where am I?'"

Fairburn has called communities around the north shore of Lake Ontario, east Toronto home for many years. Today, she rests her hat in the Scarborough Bluffs.

An avid outdoors-person, Fairburn spends a lot of her time taking in the beautiful waterfront scenery and enjoying nature. Compound that with her love of history and the city

she's come to adore, and you have the recipe for her novel.

"I think really what resonated with me was that it was a lake I'd never seen," she says of looking out on to Lake Ontario from that cliff. "I started to imagine when the lake was the path for community relations with other areas and ports...when water was the main mode of transportation. It was once a wilderness."

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The Scarborough Bluffs are seen in this photo. Author of *Along The Shore* Jane Fairburn was inspired to write the book, which explores Toronto's waterfront heritage, after falling down a portion of the cliff more than 10 years ago.

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Fairburn says she never imagined herself as an author. She graduated from the University of Toronto with an honours B.A. in Political Science and then went on to study law at the University of Windsor. She was called to the Bar in 1990.

It was a few years after her fall and an ankle operation involving pins and wires, that she decided to set out in an effort to solve the question she kept asking herself, "where am I?"

She couldn't shake the questions that were first raised that day near the edge of the Bluff, she says.



Jane Fairburn
Author

From there, Fairburn spent a decade searching for people, many famous, who would share their stories of living along the waters edge. She spent countless hours learning about the history of the landscape and the geography that makes up Toronto's skyline.

"We've had some famous people who have lived here. We forget that. We've had painters and artists," she says.

Fairburn spoke to people like Marilyn Bell De Lascio who told her all about her historic swim across Lake Ontario. She spoke to Norman Jewison, a film director, producer, and founder of the Canadian

Film Centre.

She also explored and included more historic tales of the adventures of people like William Ward, who saved more than 150 people over the course of his lifetime in Toronto Harbour.

Ward, whose father David was a North Sea fisherman from England, helped his father haul nets out of the water even before kindergarten.

"In those days the bay, while yielding a good living, was no placid stretch of water. In our time of GPS tracking devices, navigational aids, and Harbour Police, it is difficult to imagine that the vagaries of wind and wave in Toronto Bay, so close to the mainland, had the potential to be life threatening. It was into that bay that fourteen-year-old Ward set out for a sail on Sunday, May 11, 1862, taking along his five sisters, Phoebe, Mary Ann, Jane, Cecilia, and Rose Ellen, who ranged in ages from four to thirteen," Fairburn writes in the novel.

A strong breeze was blowing that day, and despite their father's warning, the siblings set out on their journey. The Wards had already lost three other daughters to scarlet fever on a single night some years earlier.

"For an hour or more the Ward girls and big brother William sailed up and down, enjoying the mild spring weather. Only about half a mile from their cottage, turning the boat for home in the face of a stiff breeze, William sat on the gunwale, in the stern of the boat, to better grip the steering oar. He was probably trying to manage all the tasks of sailing the boat, rather than delegating responsibility to the girls, and in the circumstances, the rope for the sail was run through a hole on the side of the vessel, so he could steer at the same time. At that very moment a strong gust caught the sail and the rope jammed, flinging William and his sisters into the water and capsizing the boat. Unable to swim and dragged down by their dresses, all of the girls were drowning," it reads.

Ward struggled with the boat but managed to drag three of his five sisters, barely alive, into the boat. One managed to climb in herself, while the other clung to the side out of desperation. A large wave swept in and carried that sister away.

Despite his attempts, it didn't end well for the Wards.

"Four of the bodies lay for four days in the cottage while men dragged for the fifth. It was not recovered until some days later. An inquest determined the girls' deaths had been an accident, and immediately following, they were laid in St. James Cemetery," she writes.

The family packed up and moved from the bay; the memories far too painful, especially for Ward who carried the death of his five sisters on his plate.

But his story didn't end there.

In 1868, he was given the chance to

redeem himself, Fairburn says.

The Jane Ann Marsh, a heavy schooner from Port Hope, was caught in a snowstorm.

"The crew was hanging to the rigging. Young Ward was faced with a choice: he could stay on shore and watch while the sailors died as his sisters had, or he could get out into the water and try for the wreck," she writes. "Ward chose the latter, and with the great black champion oarsmen and boxer Robert Berry and a lifeline tied fast to their skull, Ward climbed the rigging of the Jane Ann Marsh."

The pair chipped away at ice, some as thick as six inches, to free the crew. It took seven trips to rescue them. All hands were saved.

She also tells the tale of Jimmy Jones, an amusement park clown who entertained audiences with daring acrobats at Hanlan's Point Amusement Park, a park which operated in Toronto in the 1880s through the 1920s.



An artist's rendering used in the book *Along the Shore* depicts the Toronto waterfront when it was the main mode of transportation of goods in and out of the city.

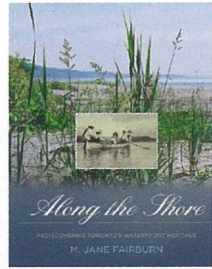
In 1935, Jones planned to ride his bicycle, which was secured to a wooden catamaran owned by his boss, across Lake Ontario, despite his boss' warning that he'd have him arrested if he tried to take the boat out of the bay.

Along The Shore captures the essence of the ordeal Jones went through to pedal the bike, which was steered using the handlebars, in an attempt to carry out his journey. Fairburn paints a comical picture of Jones atop his bike boat.

Those who shared their stories also shared their photos.

The book features 250 images, glimpses into history, Fairburn says.

"The waterfront is a part of our heritage, not just in Toronto but in the Greater



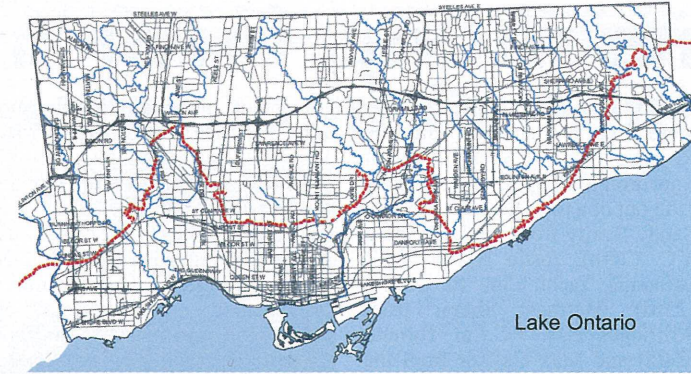
Toronto Area," she says of the 26-mile long shore. "There are a lot of disappearing stories of the Toronto shoreline."

Fairburn's book brings to life some of those stories, and talks about the development over the years, from four of the five communities - Scarborough Shore, the Beach, the Island and the Lakeshore - that are still connected to the water. She does also briefly touch on the fifth waterfront community, the inner harbour city side.

"I was really quite interested in the period of development that started to emerge in all four areas of the book," she explains. "I am at some point referencing other areas further east and further west (in the book)."

The author says for her, the people were what made the book a success, in her eyes.

"I've tried to include the story of people," she says. "I've gone from the Rouge River right through to the Etobicoke Creek. It's through the lens of four com-



A map of the City of Toronto shown in the book. It demonstrates the areas of the city that run alongside Lake Ontario and are featured in *Along The Shore*.

the water is always within reach even when it seems out of bounds.

In 2005, she received a Toronto Arts Council grant for some of the research that has gone into the book.

She says her interest in the Toronto shore derives not only from living near the water for so many years, but also from the fact that her antecedents in Ontario go back to the first generations of Anglo and

Irish Canadian settlement.

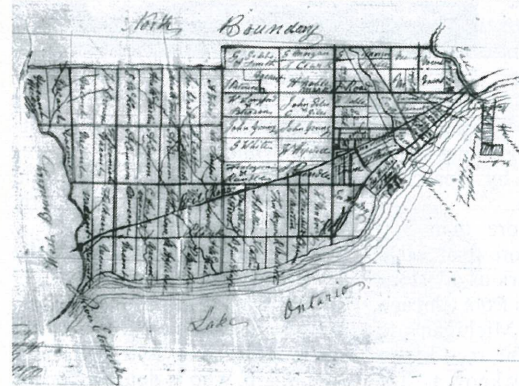
Her own earliest memories include playing on the former estate of her great-grandfather, the lawyer, author, and economist William Henry Moore, whose property Moorlands, near the mouth of the Rouge River, is now known as the Petticoat Creek Conservation Area, her website says.

Writing the book was a long process, but a process that she so enjoyed, she says.

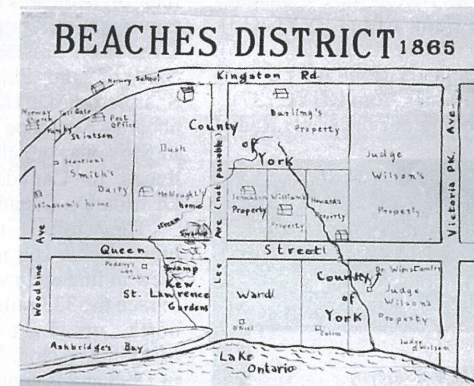
"I must say it was quite something. In my early years, when my kids were young, I wasn't working away at it every day," she says, adding that as her

youngsters grew into the teens they are today, she was able to dedicate more time to her new-found passion. "In the final years of writing this, it became my first profession."

'*Along The Shore*' was published and released in July 2013. By August, the non-fiction had made it to the number three spot on the *Globe and Mail's* non-fiction



This census map of Etobicoke from 1861 was given to Fairburn to use in the book to depict parts of Toronto many years ago.



Jane Fairburn explores four distinct areas of Toronto in her book. The Beaches, where she's lived in the past, is shown here in this map as it appeared in 1865.



In an image given to Jane Fairburn while she carried out her research, the Alexandria is shown shipwrecked at the Scarborough Bluffs in August 1915.

munities who are attached to the lake still."

She relied on her research skills and on an oral tradition from each of these distinct communities because so much of the history has been forgotten or remains uninvestigated.

The book links the waterfront communities together, and unveils a number of untold stories.

It talks about the massive growth the shoreline of Toronto has experienced since 1793, when it came to be. About how it was Toronto's whole existence back then.

"Likewise, as the city has grown, the northern boundary of Toronto has moved farther and farther away from the water's edge, so much so that for many city residents today, the lake may seem somewhere on the periphery and not part on their active awareness," she writes in her introduction.

Fairburn says though no matter what,



Artist William Kurelek depicts a scene along Balsam Avenue, a street in Toronto, after a heavy snowfall. The image was given to Jane Fairburn while she spent years speaking with life-long residents about life in Toronto for the book.

list, just behind Neil Young and Kevin O'Leary.

"It was a marvelous moment to finally have finished. To have your first book published..." she trails off in a sense of disbelief. "It's the first book I've had published."

A decade come and gone, Fairburn says she has an even deeper appreciation for the place she calls home after researching and interviewing and writing the book.

"A question like, 'Where am I?' and then answering that... ultimately connects you deeper to the place," Fairburn explains. "When I'm driving along Kingston Road or walking along the beach, I'm not only seeing what's in front of me at that moment but I'm able to access all those images of people who have gone before me. We're part of an evolving story of our waterfront."

For more on Fairburn, and '*Along The Shore*', visit www.janefairburn.com.