Here’s How to Celebrate Black History Month in Toronto

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February marks Black History Month, and there are a number of ways Torontonians can observe the occasion, as the City has unveiled a lineup of COVID-safe, virtual programs and events.

“Toronto became the first Canadian municipality to proclaim Black History Month in 1979, and since then, each February we use this opportunity to learn more about the history of Black Canadians and celebrate their many contributions to our city and our country. I encourage all Torontonians to learn and celebrate Black History Month, and to participate in the programs and activities taking place across the city. By being informed and recognizing the contributions and achievements of Toronto's Black community we can continue to make our city more inclusive and equitable,” stated Toronto Mayor John Tory.

“The City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism unit (CABR) has developed the Toronto Action Plan to eliminate barriers and to ensure systemic changes are made to eradicate anti-Black racism and help create a culture that values inclusion, opposes racism and discrimination of all kinds and prioritizes the well-being and advancement of Black Torontonians,” he added in his official proclamation.

The Toronto Sign was also lit in red, black, and green to mark the month's kick-off.
Today, the #TorontoSign is lit red, black and green to mark the beginning of #BlackHistoryMonth.
Toronto History Museums have partnered with the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO)’s Virtual School Programs, with guest educators from Montgomery’s Inn, Fort York, and Mackenzie House, speaking in a series of live 30-minute virtual field trips on February 3, 17, and 24. Free of charge, they’ll discuss key moments in history inspired by notable Black Torontonians, such as Joshua Glover and Mary Ann Shadd.

Sessions will also include a discussion of artwork from the AGO Collection, and a mini-art making activity for kids. Programming is available for students in grades JK through to 12.

READ: Legendary Houses: The Draper Street Cottage of Canada’s First Black MP

Toronto History Museums has also curated Awakenings, its Black History Month YouTube Playlist, featuring short films and conversations with Black, Indigenous and artists of colour, operating under the principles of anti-oppression, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism.

Opening the Archives

As part of its #BlackHistoryMonth celebration, Toronto Archives is bringing to light records and resources featuring significant Black figures including William Peyton Hubbard, Dr. Alvin Curling and Donald Moore, as well as the histories of Black communities, service organizations, and activism.

READ: Legendary Houses: The Riverdale Home of Toronto’s First Black Alderman

This info can be viewed on the Archive’s social media platforms, including its Twitter and Instagram accounts.
William Peyton Hubbard was the first Black politician on Toronto’s city council. Serving from 1894 to 1898, and 1900 to 1903, he was also appointed to the Toronto Board of Control, the City’s executive committee. His accomplishments included improving Toronto’s waterworks, helping to create High Park, and advocating for the creation of the publicly-owned Toronto Hydro-Electric System. In this photo, he was looking spry at age 93 as he visited C.T. Sharpe’s grade four class at the Toronto Model School on February 1, 1935. The Model School for boys was attached to the Toronto Normal school, which trained teachers and eventually became the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The Globe and Mail reported that the children wanted Hubbard’s autograph.

From our Globe and Mail photos, Fonds 1266, Item 35818.

#BlackHistoryMonth #TorontoHistory #TorontoArchives

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Check Out Your Local Library

In addition to its focus on year-round Black History events, Toronto Public Library has a slew of upcoming programs to honour Black heritage and showcase both historical significance and contemporary contributions of Black activists and artists from around the world. Sessions include commentary from renowned marine biologist Daniel Pauly on his autobiography Climate — The Ocean’s Whistleblower, a look at Toronto’s internationally-recognized hip hop influence with Before the Six: Behind the Beat, and The Water is Troubled — Blackness in the Environmental Movement.

TPL will also be releasing reading lists, videos, podcasts, and more.

Look Out For Local Youth Art

As of February 1st, the “Did you know?” poster series can be viewed at City facilities, including outdoor ice rinks, Centennial and Earl Bales Ski and Snowboard Centres, and the five City golf courses. The posters, painted by local youth artists, feature captivating illustrations of notable Black figures and their contributions.

As well, for those looking to find programming at a local level, many Community Centres will have Black History Month themed activities. A full breakdown can be found on the City of Toronto’s website.

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