

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1980 Vol. 8, No. 2 John Leaning, President Jennifer Roddick, Editor
Julian Smith, Artist

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HERITAGE OTTAWA MEETING

Architect Barry Padolsky will give a technical talk and tour of the Billings Estate, April 10th at 7:30 p.m.

Due to the rather limited on-ground parking available and because parking on the streets is also limited we ask that you not bring your cars, if at all possible.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE GATINEAU

The 9th Annual Essay Contest sponsored by the Historical Society of the Gatineau is underway. Your submission of 3,000 words, in English or French, pertaining to the history of the Gatineau Valley (places, people, events) must reach Sheila Strang, Secretary-Treasurer (Old Chelsea, Québec JOX 2N0) on or before 15 September 1980.

Winners will share over \$1,000 in prize money and may be published in the newsletter "Up the Gatineau".

EXHIBITION CONTINUES

The exhibition of photographs by John Flanders continues at the Fraser Schoolhouse Gallery, 62 John Street.

Entitled "Rural Architecture in the Ottawa Valley" the collection of National Film Board photographs depicts historically interesting homes and farms in the valley.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Heritage Ottawa's Annual General Meeting and election of board members will be held May 27th.

Time and location will be announced in the April Newsletter.

Please phone in your nominations for the election to Anne MacDonald at 563-1324 or 563-3592.

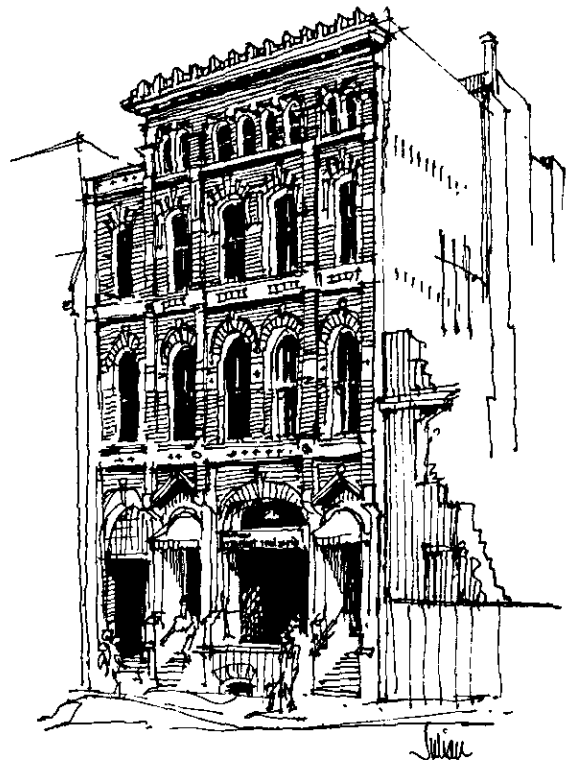
COMMITTEE VOLUNTEER NEEDED

The Cartier Square Advisory Committee is seeking help from Heritage Ottawa in the form of a volunteer to attend their weekly meetings on Thursdays from 5-7 p.m. If any of our members would be interested in helping this worthwhile cause by donating some of their time and energy please contact the Committee offices at 232-3482.

SCHOOLHOUSE RENOVATIONS

Planned renovations to the Fraser Schoolhouse are under discussion with the National Capital Commission, owners of the building.

Remodelling will enable tenants to make better use of the limited space available.



THE RIDEAU CLUB WALL

Strolling along Wellington Street I stopped to watch the clean-up operations on the site of the ruins of the Rideau Club which burnt down on October 24, 1979. Musing on the loss of that impressive and historic building, not only to the Wellington Street vista but to our cultural landscape, my eyes travelled across the heaps of rubble, past the yellow-helmeted workers and over the noisy bulldozer until they came to rest on a massive brick structure at the back of the site. As my eyes and mind focussed, I realized that it was the back wall of the Rideau Club. It seemed that it was being spared the wrecker's ball. Why, I wondered. To stand as a reminder to Ottawans and our visitors of the fine old building that once graced that site? To contribute to our sense of historical continuity as embodied in the buildings in the Parliament Hill area and the government's plans for its future?

Upon enquiry from the Department of Public Works I learned that the wall still stands for a more mundane reason. Since it adjoins the side wall of the Molson Bank Building next door, if the wall were to go, the Bank might collapse. In fact, the wall was damaged by the fire which destroyed the Rideau Club, so much so that the Bank's stability was threatened; apparently even the floors might have fallen away if the wall had been demolished at the same time as the remains of the Rideau Club. The Department of Public Works has "tied" the wall to the Bank Building with steel retaining rods whose square heads can be seen flush against the bricks from Wellington Street.

What is the story of the wall? The Rideau Club Building was an amalgamation of three structures. The Merchants Bank on Metcalfe Street and the Ontario Bank on the corner of Metcalfe and Wellington were both constructed about 1878. The third building, further west along Wellington Street was built in 1911 when it was decided to expand the Rideau Club premises, hitherto housed on the second floor of the Ontario Bank. The wall, then, started out

as part of the Merchants Bank, one of the many financial institutions lining Wellington Street and environs, making it a centre of high finance and solid, Victorian architecture. Plans for the 1911 expansion were drawn up by H.C. Stone, an Ottawa architect, and among the many changes made, the external protuberances of the two bank buildings were removed and a terracotta veneer was applied. (An ingenious trick to meet a crisis. Didn't you think the Rideau Club was constructed of stone blocks? Not so. Due to a shortage of stone, the architect decided to substitute terracotta, fashioned to resemble stone blocks, rather than to wait for the real thing.) The wall in question "looked into" meeting rooms still being used by Club members at the time of the fire.

Looking at the wall and the Molson Building from Metcalfe Street, it can be seen that the cornices which top the columns on the right side of the Molson Building appear to have been sheared off. This was another of H.C. Stone's modifications. The Italianate style of the Merchant's Bank was identical to that of the Molson Building with a dominant cornice. His new design for the enlarged Rideau Club building was simpler, in the Classical style, so he took off the extra elements on the Merchants Bank which had been contiguous with the cornices on the Molson Bank, leaving the latter looking somewhat unfinished.

From Wellington Street the outline of a bricked-in arched door can be seen high up on the wall. This door opened up to a connecting passageway between the Rideau Club and the Molson Building which led, in turn, to an elevator. Thus it appears the Club at one time could be reached by entering the Molson Building on Metcalfe Street, riding up in the elevator and crossing through the connecting passageway into its quiet elegance.

Just an old brick wall, you might say, what does it mean? But its presence in the heart of Ottawa started me off on a train of thought leading to consideration of the "good old days" at the turn of the Century in this lumber town. Ottawa was a flourishing industrial city, the centre of the lumbering industry of Eastern Ontario.

Wilfred Laurier was Prime Minister and the Château Laurier, the Langevin Block and other stately buildings were appearing on Ottawa's streets. Women wore bustles and leg-of-mutton sleeves; men wore wing collars and waistcoats (a gold watch chain looped from one pocket to another across expansive "corporations"); motor cars were coming into vogue, the ages of flight and of motion pictures were beginning. Members of the Rideau Club sat in seats of power -- political, economic, social. Think of the political rhetoric, the high-powered financial discussions, far-reaching decisions and perhaps even a few discreet double crosses which that wall has been privy to! No doubt certain aspects of our lives, even today, are affected by events that occurred in the rarefied atmosphere of the Rideau Club.

The wall, and other witnesses to the history of Ottawa serve to remind us that yesterday is with us today, that continuity exists between the present and the past, that we do not live in isolation from history but we are what our history makes us. A real sense of satisfaction comes from looking at this remnant of our past and musing on the tales it could tell. But we should hurry if we want to have a look at the wall and soak in its meaning.

Although plans are tentative as yet, the wall's future may be in jeopardy. Because it is in such bad condition and cannot support the Molson Building the wall may have to be replaced. The NCC, in its role as caretaker of the capital, plans to replace the wall with another which would hopefully add to the attractiveness of the new plaza planned for the ex-Rideau Club area. Within a few weeks a decision may be made and the wall may be replaced by a structure that will no doubt be functional but it will not be a connection to our past, at least not for us today.

Perhaps a hundred years from now the new wall will be regarded by historically-minded Ottawans as a monument to the "good old days" of the 1980's in downtown Ottawa!

Janice L. Sutton

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Judy Burns

After many years of volunteer work in the community, Judy Burns feels she can now devote more time to the preservation of Ottawa's past. Although born and raised in Montreal, Judy's roots are in the Ottawa Valley: her father came from Centretown and her mother's family helped settle Chelsea, Quebec. Her marriage to John Burns connected her to another set of Ottawa roots, the Stewarts, who came to the area at the time of Colonel By. Apart from John, Judy's family consists of two daughters, Barbara and Pamela, and two grandsons.

An Ottawa resident for 34 years, Judy has been active in her neighbourhood (Manor Park), her Church (St. Columba's) and such organizations as the May Court Club of Ottawa and the Children's Aid Society. She served on the Board of Directors of both these organizations for many years; she conducted a feasibility study on a volunteer program for the CAS and her recommendations were later implemented.

The preservation of Ottawa's heritage buildings and the exploration of this City's history have fascinated Judy for years. Her concept of heritage extends beyond the preservation of old buildings, however. The protections of our most basic heritage - Nature has also been her concern: she helped organize the first pollution committee in the Perth area where the Burns have a summer cottage.

Personal heritage is equally important, as evidenced by her collection of antiques, most of them inherited, which she has enhanced with her own quilting and needlepoint.

Judy has been a member of Heritage Ottawa since its inception and has served on its Board of Directors for two years; she is also on the Board of the Ottawa Historical Society and active in the running of the Bytown Museum. Much of the material accumulated by Heritage Ottawa has been reorganized into a useful archives by Judy. She is presently sorting out material at home too -- the Stewart Family letters -- a collection of which she hopes to publish.

Lyse Champagne

CARTIER SQUARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE --
AN INSIGHT

History of the Committee

The first public meeting on Cartier Square, held in November of 1979 by the Centretown Citizens' Community Association was attended by over 150 concerned citizens as well as an invited panel of speakers. The meeting called for a three-month moratorium on all decisions regarding Cartier Square so that the public could be involved in the decision-making. The Cartier Square Advisory Committee was formed at that meeting to study the issues and recommend action. All elected representatives endorsed these decisions. Since then, the City of Ottawa has been working closely with the Committee: Controller Bourns was the first chairperson, and Mayor Marion Dewar has attempted to meet with the U.S. Ambassador to present the Committee's views.

Reasons for the C.S.A.C. Position

The CSAC believe that Cartier Square is a site of national significance and that it has great historic, cultural, and recreational value to the City of Ottawa.

The name of the square commemorates one of the founding Fathers of Confederation. The site is in the heart of the City, adjacent to the National Arts Centre, has a unique view of Parliament Hill and is bounded on one side by the historic Rideau Canal. As an important piece of land for both visitors to and residents of Ottawa, this land should be put to public use, representative of the Canadian identity. Indeed, it should not be divided into separate enclaves, but developed as an attractive focal point for all Canadians.

Plans since 1937, recognizing the potential of the site, have proposed to locate a national museum on this land, when it became available. It is widely accepted that this is an ideal use for Cartier Square.

The CSAC are concerned that opposition to a U.S. embassy on Cartier Square should not be seen as an anti-American stance, but rather that any foreign embassy on the site would be inappropriate.

We are aware that our government has asked that the U.S. embassy move from its present location, directly across from Parliament Hill. We have been told that, in return, the new embassy should be situated in an important, prestigious location in the city. We understand this need; however, six alternative embassy sites have been offered. In particular, the site between Sussex Drive and MacKenzie Street, recently occupied by the temporary Finance buildings, is most

appropriate and requires more careful consideration, both by our government and by the Americans.

It is interesting to note that a site in Washington is being chosen for the new Canadian Embassy, and before the negotiations for the transfer of land can be finalized, they must meet with citizens' approval. If the citizens of Washington have a say in the location of the Canadian embassy in their city, it would only seem logical that the citizens of Ottawa should have the same right.

Cartier Square Advisory Committee

NOTES FROM LACAC

New Members

Dr. Harold Kalman, ex-officio member of the Board of Directors of Heritage Ottawa is among the new members appointed to the LACAC Committee.

Grand Hotel

A motion to repeal their intention to designate the Grand Hotel has rejected by LACAC February 19th. The motion was intended to make demolitions of the Hotel easier in order to leave room for the new Rideau Centre complex.

According to an attachment to the LACAC agenda, the Grand Hotel is the second oldest surviving hotel in Ottawa, Norton's Tavern having been erected on the site shortly after the property was acquired by Samuel Norton in 1848. It has been in almost continuous operation since. City Council established its intention to designate the property on September 20th, 1978.

Special thanks to Janice Sutton and Lyse Champagne for their excellent articles.

Please send your submissions to: The Editor, 44 Carmichael Court, Kanata, Ontario K2K 1K2 - Tel: 592-4209

Jennifer