



Dedicated to Preserving Our Built Heritage

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Cow Castle Killed!

Ottawa City Council voted on August 7 to demolish the Aberdeen Pavilion and upheld an earlier vote to do away with the Horticulture Building.

Despite staff recommendations to postpone decisions on the buildings, as well as on the \$22.5 million trade show complex, Council voted 10-6 to dismember the city's architectural and cultural heritage. The complex was also voted down.

A final decision could come in September, after the issues have gone before Ottawa's heritage advisory and planning committees, neither of which can stop demolition.

Heritage Ottawa acting president Fem Graham, who spoke of a national campaign to save the Castle, warned that Council didn't know what kind of fight it would face.

Lansdowne Madness

by Rhys Phillips

In recent years, the major threat to our built heritage has come not from the private sector but from public institutions charged with protecting our past.

Not only is there the threat that priceless buildings will be lost — like the Rockcliffe hangars, but the battles tie up enormous heritage resources, whether the struggle is won or lost.

Certainly the current move, by the laughingly-named Culture and Recreation Branch of the City of Ottawa, to destroy Francis Sullivan's 1914 Horticulture Building is the most jarring attempt at cultural vandalism by a public body since the National Capital Commission's successful move to demolish the hangars.

The Horticulture Building is more than a potentially attractive heritage building. Sullivan produced, between 1911 and 1915, Canada's first truly modern architecture.

Largely self-taught, the architect was a brash, brawling eccentric who joined with Frank Lloyd Wright to design the Pembroke Library (1911).

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LANDMARK DESIGNATION

by Hagit Hadaya

The former Bank Street Café may soon be designated a heritage structure by the City of Ottawa.

The former Bank of Montreal, at 294 Bank St., was built in 1908-09 and stands as the last example of a series of secondary bank branches dating from the turn of the century's commercial and residential expansion of Centretown.

After serving as a Bank of Montreal branch until 1973, 294 Bank was left vacant until 1978, when it was converted into the café that closed on April 27 of this year.

The Beaux Arts limestone and brick structure was designed by prominent architects Keefer and Weeks. Significant architectural elements include an elaborate entablature and modified Roman Doric columns framing the door, three windows, and a rounded corner entranceway. The Toronto Dominion bank at the corner of Sparks St. and Bank is the only other bank in Ottawa to feature a corner entrance. The latter, however, was designed as an office building.

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Beaux Arts Beauty

HULL'S MAISONS ALLUMETTES

by Eric J. Calvert

Across the river from Ottawa, behind the facade of high-rise office buildings and just beyond the late-night beat of clubs and dance bars, is the community of l'île de Hull. The heart of what was perhaps Quebec's original frontier town, it is bordered to the south by the Ottawa River and ringed by Brewer's Creek.

Like most city centres, l'île de Hull features impressive architectural testimonials to the past, such as the Maisons Carrière and Aubry and l'église Saint James. But the area's most telling structures are neither architecturally important, nor pretty.

A few blocks from the Promenade du Portage and in the grid of side streets stand rows of narrow two-story houses that are almost monotonous in their similarity to one another. These steep-roofed, unadorned buildings are the maisons allumettes, the matchstick houses of early Hull's working class.

During the second half of the 19th Century, Hull's booming lumber yards and pulp mills attracted an influx of workers, and their families, from across Canada and abroad. At the time, most of the real estate in and around l'île de Hull was owned by a handful of its wealthier families. To accommodate new arrivals, the land was divided into small lots and rented to workers on five-year leases.

The style built by the workers was influenced as much by the lots' meagre dimensions (33 ft. by 90 ft.) and the available materials (usually scrap wood bought or "collected" from nearby lumber yards) as by the builders' modest wages and the insecurity of the rental arrangement. (It was not uncommon for workers to be evicted at the end of their leases if a slowdown reduced the demand for labour.)

The leasing practice wasn't abolished until 1926, with the maisons allumettes standing as a humble reminder of when workers' land ownership rights were few.

Raymond Ouimet, a Hull alderman, is president of the *comité de promotion de l'identité hulloise*, and an active proponent of the cultural and architectural history of Hull. He is committed to the preservation of the maisons allumettes.

"We should use history to prevent mistakes in the future. These houses show the way the land was used to take profits from the poor workers. There's a lesson to learn from that... Allow the maisons allumettes to vanish and we allow part of the history of the common person, 'Monsieur et madame Tout le Monde,' to vanish."

Although they are not glorious examples of architectural art and have not housed any prominent individuals, the maisons allumettes, points out Mr. Ouimet, remind us of what should not be forgotten.

Cont'd Madness

The Horticulture Building remains Sullivan's most important commission in the Ottawa area. Others include the fine house at 166B Huron St., the Japanese-influenced Ste. Claire de Goulbourne Church at Dwyer Hill, the Powers House at Bay St. and James St., and the two remarkably modern houses at 99 Acacia Ave. and 8 McLeod St.

Original and restoration drawings of the Horticulture Building show a unique, beautiful composition. Characteristically powerful eaves shelter a marvellously-varied screen facade that allows the building to open up to its forecourt. The higher centre pavilion provides a counter thrust to the horizontal effect of the eaves.

Sullivan interpreted and adapted the Prairie School of architecture to the history and geography of our area. Strong verticality, so important to Ontario's Gothic tradition, struggles through in most of his work. Not only did Sullivan sow the seeds of modern architecture, he attempted to establish a regional design expression.

But there is yet another reason for preserving the Horticulture Building. While the Aberdeen Pavilion used radical technology cloaked in a thin icing of traditional detail, the former was a radical design expression realized with traditional load-bearing masonry technology.

The juxtaposition of the two structures is an architectural marvel. If there is a hint of savvy in Commissioner Gamble's office, Lansdowne Park could end up with a truly world-class exhibition complex.

Bank St. Café

Some of the original interior features designed by Maclean and MacPhayden of Ottawa survive, such as wooden beams with ornate mouldings and brackets, moulded rosettes, and centrepieces that articulate the ceiling. The tellers' wickets, which served as the restaurant's bar, as well as the carved mantelpiece surrounding the fireplace, are fine examples of period woodwork.

The future of 294 Bank, which is owned by Hartman Foodliner, is up in the air. Because the interior is not included in the proposed heritage designation, the company has the right to gut the interior and expand its IGA store into it.

Proposals must be sympathetic to the structure's exterior and should not destroy the beautiful interior that helps give 294 Bank its unique heritage character.



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OLD POLICE BUILDING

by Mark Glassford

The former Ottawa Police Headquarters building on Waller St., threatened by demolition last year, is to be purchased from the City of Ottawa by developer and architect Robin H. Fyfe. He plans to renovate the building and rent it out as office space.

A women's shelter from the mid-eighties until 1990, when it was closed for structural reasons, the building served as police headquarters from its completion in 1957 until 1983.

The Police Building is one of the reknowned Peter Dickenson's early efforts. The British-trained architect was working for Toronto's Page and Steele who, along with John C. Parkin, were designing the first modern buildings in Ontario.

Dickenson's design, which won a national competition, was representative of the optimistic post-war era during which architects explored new technologies and materials and brash entrepreneurs financed their creations.

Dickenson provided a simple, box-like form to accomodate the many functions required of the Police Building, which included underground parking, a shooting range, offices, two courtrooms, detention cells, and a gymnasium.

With characteristic flair, he drew a delicate, sweeping canopy to mark the entrance and create symmetry on the main facade. Above, a curved, recessed balcony, set into an intricate lacework of steel sash glazing and spandrel panels, graced the third floor courtrooms.

The building's other limestone faces set up a visual hierarchy with glazing that reflected the status of those who would work within. The clerical and lawyers' offices enjoyed a generous expanse of glass, while small cellular windows were provided for the inspectors.

Designed around a linear core of services, the building has a clear span area of 90 ft. by 54 ft., corresponding to the size of the gym, which occupies the fifth floor.

Ottawa mayor Charlotte Whitton applauded the Police Building's "vivid imagination, precision of execution, and sense of vitality."

During eleven and a half years with Page and Steele, as chief designer, and three and a half on his own, Dickenson turned Canadian architecture around, so that when he died of cancer in 1961, at 36, modern architecture was the order of the day. He left behind offices in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and London, England.

"Peter was a good man to work for," according to local architect Alistair Ross. "He was a pleasant, charming rogue who would bring his style of design into his offices by offering suggestions and guidance to his design staff, thus creating within his offices his own style of architecture while at the same time allowing his staff to explore their own commitments to the design process."

There is one other Dickenson work in Ottawa, the Sandringham Apartments on Range Rd..

Fyfe's plan to save the Police Building involves a sensitive upgrading of the exterior, maintaining its colours and character and stabilizing the limestone cladding. The interior would be refurbished so as to make it leasable. Stated Fyfe, "It would be a shame to tear down this building as it can readily be re-adapted to a new use."

Buildings of the recent past deserve the same protection as older heritage structures, because they too reflect the cultural values and technology of their time.



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Cannings Resigns

Richard Cannings is stepping down from the presidency of Heritage Ottawa, after three years.

Cannings had his start in the heritage movement in Montreal, 20 years ago, as he and Marc Denhez worked on the constitution of a Heritage Ottawa counterpart.

Cannings, who unabashedly described his first Heritage Ottawa meetings as deadly, got more involved as his interest became piqued by the public relations issues, and he eventually replaced Denhez as president in 1988.

The energy the new president brought to his endeavours was remarkable, even by the group's demanding standards, and he turned the volunteer position into an unpaid full-time job. Hardly a week went by during which Cannings wasn't burning the midnight oil over a media blitz or cooling his heels at interminable City Hall meetings, waiting to make Heritage Ottawa's pitch.

Cannings is soon to be the father of three children under two and a half years old, so volunteer time will be at a premium. He will be well-remembered for his tireless efforts.

