



Heritage Ottawa NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Preserving Our Built Heritage December 2003 Volume 30, No. 4

Farewell to St. Patrick's Parish Hall: A Loss for All

By Donald E. Macdonald, architect

O St. Patrick's Parish Hall was a modest 2-storey brick building with a 66 feet wide and 100 feet long with a 35-feet high proscenium stage hall and full basement of similar size. The parish hall was built in 1913, and inaugurated by its first parish social in October of that year. The first St. Patrick's Day dance was held March 17, 1914, and the Patron Saint's Day receptions were held there right up to this year. In addition to its parish duties it grew to become the traditional home of Irish culture in Ottawa.

Early in 2003 the Tara Players, a local Irish theatre group as well as Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, an Irish musical group that teaches Irish music, were given notice to leave the Hall by August of this year. This came as a blow and a "heartbreak" to both organizations that had called the Hall home for twenty-five years.

Appeals to the Basilica parish by Irish Cultural groups, City Heritage officials, the City Councillor, Heritage Ottawa, among others, were to no avail. The Archbishop of Ottawa concurred with the parish administration that the building was no longer of use to the parish, as most social functions were now held in the smaller newly-renovated church basement hall. Also cited were the costs of maintenance and repair as being too much of a burden on parish finances, particularly with the demands of the current church restoration.

Furnace, roof replacements and brick repair were immediately needed along with some modernization of facilities, and the provision of barrier-free access. Curiously however, the Irish Society of the National Capital Region (ISNCR) had offered to pay more rent and take over maintenance and operating costs for two years. Unfortunately, whatever offer was made was not enough and the ISNCR's plan for an Irish Cultural Centre and St. Patrick's Basilica's needs for this property did not find common purpose.

The Basilica parish has stated its ambitions of creating housing on this property for senior citizens or retired priests. Adaptive reuse of this building was not seriously explored, with the exception of providing exterior parking on the floor slab structure in an otherwise demolished building. This study, commissioned last July, showed that for the structural slab to be used for parking it would require major structural modifications to meet the building code. This case including lateral reinforcement and provisions for slopes and reinforced



St. Patrick's Hall on Gloucester Street west of Kent as it was a few weeks ago. It is now gone.

Concluded on page 2

St. Patrick's Hall concluded...

concrete protection. This report concluded that it would be cheaper to build a new parking structure than turn a community hall into one. Unfortunately this study was not extended to consider other, more sympathetic, uses, such as its continued use as a Hall, perhaps the least expensive option.

City officials have called this a regrettable, even terrible, situation. However, the City's had no ability to prevent this demolition due to the Hall's not being designated.

Though not designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, it seemed to have as much character as the attached Rectory (built 1883 and modified later) which is designated. All three buildings are circled together on the City's heritage districts plan and all were mentioned together in *Exploring Ottawa*, H. Kalman and J. Roaf, 1983.

This building is a good example of the collegiate, Tudor gothic style popular for parish halls in its time. Some heritage defining features include the rusticated stone base and door surrounds, the dressed stone lintels, keystones and parapet coping stones, including stone Celtic crosses. The corbelling and cap stones of the brick work around the buttresses lend texture to the façade, and the door openings and arched headed wood windows lend stylistic interest.

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Heritage Ottawa is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Ottawa's built heritage.

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The interior of the Hall during its demolition.

The interior architectural value lies in the original concept of the main hall, solid hardwood flooring and in the proportions of its graceful proscenium stage. Later, its raked balconies were built up to provide level storage rooms and hoarded up. However, during the interior demolition in October 2003, when these partitions were removed, the design intent of the hall was revealed with north and south windows providing plenty of light and a sense of spaciousness.

The Hall also contributed to the parish precinct feeling and scale of its residential neighbourhood on its fragile border with the downtown commercial core, its parochial campus now weakened by this loss.

I hope this article shows that underinvestment in historic buildings can lead

owners to self-fulfilling prophecies of destruction and an unwillingness to find ways to keep a building. St. Patrick's administration has said that this decision has been coming for a long time.

It is true that the Hall's present poor condition has taken time to develop, and has made the needed capital expenses look severe, yet there was not a corresponding effort to study, plan, market and invest in the building's future use and conservation.

More fundamentally, this story demonstrates a lack of will and vision to incorporate the work and contributions of our forebears into our own future, be that for purposes of parish mission, or the cultural and social life of the wider community. ♦

President's Report

By David B. Flemming

Two elections, a shameful decision by City Council and the ongoing fight to save older buildings have marked the past three months.

Heritage preservation was not a major issue in either the Ontario provincial election or the recent municipal election in Ottawa. On the provincial scene, Ottawa's own, Dalton McGuinty, formed a new Liberal government with former Rideau-Vanier Councillor and the new MPP for Ottawa-Vanier, Madeleine Meilleur, being appointed Minister of Culture, one of the duties of which is to oversee the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Having represented a ward with a large number of heritage designated buildings and two heritage districts, we hope that Minister Meilleur will be attentive to some of the changes in the Act proposed by Heritage Ottawa and other heritage organizations throughout the province.

Heritage Ottawa members whose e-mail addresses are on file, each received two issues of our new *Heritage Ottawa Update* concerning the Ottawa



David B. Flemming

Municipal election. Included in these mailings were a schedule of all-candidates meetings with suggested heritage-related questions that could be asked to candidates. Although heritage questions were posed at some all-candidates meetings, it was not a major issue in the campaign except for a few candidates who claimed that a good start in balancing the City's budget would be to cut all the arts and heritage grants! Given the return of all the incumbents who offered, and the platforms of the new councillors-elect,

we should not expect any groundswell of support for heritage over the next three years. With the Universal Program Review and the Heritage Advisory Committee disappearing into the newly-merged Arts, Heritage and Culture Advisory Committee,* we should not be at all optimistic that many gains will be made without much more effort and much more membership involvement than we have had in the past.

We can, however, take some solace with the election of both a former Heritage Ottawa President (Diane Holmes) and Vice-President (Georges Bédard). Both have a good record on heritage matters dating from their previous stints on Council: Bédard in the late 70's and Holmes in the 80's and 90's. It should be noted however, that their election does not amount to a "gain" since we have lost the support on Council of retiring Councillors Arnold and Munter, two of the strong heritage supporters on Council. A few of the returning Councillors supported heritage issues during the last term of office and we can hope that it will continue.

Advocacy

In early September, Council approved a \$250,000 settlement to be paid by Groupe Lépine for the loss of two historic buildings on the Laurier Tower site last November. This settlement was recommended at an *in camera* session of the Corporate Services and Economic Planning Committee chaired by Mayor Chiarelli and approved at another *in camera* session of a September 3 meeting of Council. Details of the "deal" were not mentioned at the Council meeting but were posted on the City of Ottawa website and were only made public in *The Ottawa Citizen* and on CBC Radio thanks to the efforts of your President. (See Letter to the Mayor and Councillors reprinted on page 5).

[* Editor's Note: One could say "re-merged." Remember the sad Cultural Leadership Committee in the old City of Ottawa, 1993-1999, now unable to RIP.]



Caplan building under demolition.

Heritage and Politics – An Activist’s Experience

By Richard Cannings

Former President of Heritage Ottawa;
former City of Ottawa Councillor

Let’s be frank! I am an unabashed militant when it comes to saving heritage buildings. I am a product of the social activism of the sixties. I took part in the Paris riots in 1968. I was one of the founders in the seventies of **Save Montreal**. During that time, we had our successes and failures. A high point: saving Windsor Station. An outstanding failure: the loss of the Van Horne home.

I have been a community activist for most of my adult life. I was an ardent follower of Saul Alinsky, the American who organized the Chicago meat packers in the 1930s and ‘40s. I realized very early that the only way to sway a developer or government from demolishing heritage buildings was a head-to-head confrontation.

In 1985, Mayor Jim Durrell and City Council had given approval to a 17-storey building in the heart of the Byward Market. It would have cast a shadow over the market destroying the ambience. We had a pro-development Council approve a major project it thought would improve the Market. In order to defeat it, it would have taken two-thirds of council to reverse its decision. We started with a petition. We collected about ten thousand names over a weekend. People would line up ten deep to sign the petition. What this showed was just how much the people of Ottawa loved, and would not like to live without, the buildings of their past.

We contacted and allied ourselves with thirty-two community associations. We enlisted professional associations of planners and architects to decry the city’s intentions. Even the NCC was on board. We had a major press conference once a week. We had the merchants, vegetable growers and flower vendors make individual appeals to stop what we saw as insanity. It appeared that thousands agreed.

It soon became clear that City Council wanted to reverse course, but it needed a reason. It came unexpectedly. Grant Hooker, owner of Hooker Beavertails, had been researching the zoning history of the 99 Rideau site and stumbled upon a gem. A city planner had made a dreadful mistake which proved to be our salvation. The property in question had never been zoned high-rise.

Instantly, City Council, was transformed from adversary to ally. The vote was reversed in favor of cancelling the development. The developer took the case to the OMB. The City gave us \$30,000 to cover our legal and planning experts. We spent two weeks at the hearings. Finally, after dozens of witnesses appeared on our behalf, the Commissioner ruled that a 17-storey building was not appropriate for the Byward Market. Today, only the footings of the high-rise remain as testimony of what could have been built had we not been vigilant and vocal.

The list of successes and defeats are too long to outline in this space. I would be remiss however if I neglected to mention the sweetest victory of all: the Cattle Castle. We spent our days in demonstrations, press conferences, constant lobbying of Councillors and the Mayor. We enlisted the help of provincial and federal politicians to lean on city Councillors. At one time, there were two back-to-back 13-hour Council meetings, packed with an interested public.

Activism makes certain that Ottawa residents and developers take into consideration the concerns of Heritage Ottawa. Activism strikes fear into the hearts or wallets of those who would like to destroy our heritage for monetary gain.

Demonstrations show that the organization is vibrant, alive and caring. Protests would take about three days to organize. I would phone potential participants at seven AM. This would avoid voice-mail and unanswered

phones and ensure that people would be home. There would be a reminder call the day of the demonstration. The protest would take on a personal nature. We would name a developer, a politician who was at fault, this would take away the anonymity of blaming a faceless government or institution. But demonstrations alone, would not be enough. Alliances, lobbying moral suasion and persuasive arm-twisting would be needed to back them up.

Never underestimate the pro-heritage constituency in the nation’s capital. Ottawa may not have the high architecture of London or Rome but most people care about the urban environment. They appreciate the scale, the decorative elements and the irreplaceable history of heritage buildings. They may not know Neo-Gothic from Italianate, but they know that ninety-nine per cent of modern buildings can’t begin to replace what others would destroy. ♦

Richard Cannings

WANTED!

by Heritage Ottawa

a
Volunteer

to
Oversee and coordinate program activities; and to

Organize special projects

Contact Heritage Ottawa at 230-8841 and leave a message.



**Heritage Ottawa
2 Daly Street
Ottawa, ON K1N 6E2**

November 3, 2003

Your Worship & Members of Council:

It has been exactly two months since Council, at an *in camera* session, approved a \$250,000 "financial settlement" by Groupe Lépine, developers of Laurier Tower at 50 Laurier Avenue East, in return for the City dropping charges against them for the collapse and illegal demolition of two buildings on the site on November 13-14, 2002.

Because the City chose to negotiate a settlement with the offender, the public has never been informed of the reasons for Council's actions in this regard, nor has the City's Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee or any other community heritage organizations such as Heritage Ottawa or Action Sandy Hill had any formal input into the matter. Any requests to the Mayor and Council for information in this regard have been passed along to Ned Lathrop, General Manager Development Services who refuses to answer any specific questions because the discussions were the subject of legal negotiations between the Groupe Lépine and the City.

Along with the insignificant amount of the "financial settlement" compared to the financial benefits received by the developer from the City, such as the waiving of \$200,000 in development fees and the millions of dollars in value added to the property as a result of the Council's re-zoning of the property, the developer now adds insult to injury by submitting a Site Plan Control Application to turn the site of the two lost historic buildings into a landscaped parking lot, two months after already completing the work outlined in the application..

Heritage Ottawa feels that the public deserves an explanation of how this matter was resolved and why the decided course of action was taken. For this reason, we urge the Mayor and Councillors to reply to the following questions:

1. Why did the Mayor and Council not take swift action to suspend the building permit for the site after the collapse of one building and the developer's speedy and illegal demolition of another and immediately initiate a police investigation to determine whether any laws had been contravened in the destruction of the buildings?
2. Why did the Mayor and Council agree to secretly negotiate a "financial settlement" with a company which had contravened the *Building Code Act* and *Provincial Offences Act*, instead of charging them and suing them for contravening the terms of the Site Plan Control Agreement?
3. Why did the Mayor and Council not instruct City staff to prosecute the developer in such a manner that would recognize the seriousness of the offence and would result in a penalty that could serve as deterrent to other developers who would act in a similar manner?

Yours sincerely,
David B. Flemming,
President, Heritage Ottawa

“We’ll miss you...”

The Heritage Ottawa Board

At our October meeting, your Board of Directors bade farewell to two Heritage Ottawa loyalists, Jennifer Jimmo and Barbara McMullen.

Jennifer Jimmo served as our part-time (one day per week) paid office staff for the past two years. Her involvement with the organization, however, goes back to 1988 when she was curator of an exhibit of her own artwork, *Impressions of Old Ottawa*, at the Heritage Ottawa Gallery in the Fraser Schoolhouse. Over the years she assisted with many Heritage Ottawa

displays and was most recently responsible for producing the *House, Home, Street Millennium Project*. We shall miss her administrative ability and her amazing knack of putting a display together at very short notice. We wish Jennifer all the best in her move to Burnstown, where she hopes to work full time as an artist.

Barbara McMullen joined the Board as Secretary in 1999. Besides her work in this capacity, Heritage Ottawa also benefited from her knowledge of terra cotta architecture. Not only did

she write our latest publication, *Ottawa’s Terra Cotta Architecture: Two Walking Tours*, but she also project managed its production and publication. Drawing on her background as an urban planner, Barbara played a key role in helping to prepare Heritage Ottawa’s many submissions to the Ottawa 20/20 public consultation process leading up to the completion of the new City of Ottawa *Official Plan*. She and her partner Larry have recently moved to a century home in Bloomfield, Prince Edward County, a community where Barbara will no doubt soon be involved in advocating on behalf of her new community’s built heritage. Best wishes, Barbara, from all of your friends in Heritage Ottawa! ♦

TERRA COTTA

A Heritage Ottawa booklet containing two Walking Tours

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Barbara McMullen

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2 Daly Avenue, Ottawa ON
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Are you wired?

Heritage Ottawa has inaugurated an on-line (www.heritageottawa.org) newsletter called **Heritage Ottawa Update**, six issues of which have appeared since September. The purpose of these communications is to provide Heritage Ottawa members with up-to date information between the quarterly editions of the Newsletter.

If we have your e-mail address, you should have already received six issues of the **Update**. If we don’t have your e-mail address, contact us at: info@heritageottawa.org and we’ll make sure that you are one of the more than seventy members who will receive a copy of **Update** #7!

Heritage Notes

(*Being odds and ends of heritage interest in Ottawa*)

- **Central Experimental Farm.** Agriculture and Agrifood Canada has revealed its Management Plan for the future. The Farm will be preserved as a research facility, without a mammoth botanical garden.
- **The National Capital Commission** has announced the abandonment of its unpopular plan to massively widen Metcalfe Street at the north end, to build a huge underground garage there, and to demolish or move some nearby heritage buildings on Sparks Street.
- **The Glebe Community Association** has requested the City of Ottawa to undertake a heritage conservation study of the area around Central Park East.
- **The NCC's** remodelling of **Sparks Street** is well underway in two projects, the blocks running east and west of O'Connor, in each case extending through to and fronting on Queen Street. Many heritage buildings are affected, but assurance has been given that most façades will be preserved. The CBC building in the western block will have no doorways to invite pedestrians to stop and consider investigating further – but there will be CBC personalities working away on air just inside the show windows, à la commercial stations.

For more substantial items of heritage interest, see the "President's Report."

Restoration-renovation Demystified

How to improve your home

Everyone has a horror story about renovation projects: cost overruns, lousy workmanship, unreliable contractors. Often a searing experience.

HELP IS ON THE WAY!

Heritage Ottawa is offering in the spring of 2004 a course on the complex subjects of planning, contracting and financing the restoration-renovation of your building. It is designed for owners who have little or no experience in construction project management.

The course is being organized in cooperation with various restoration-oriented organizations, such as the Ottawa Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC), the Association of Preservation Technology and Historic Ottawa Development Incorporated (HODI).

The presenters will all be recognized experts in their fields.

For more details see the next issue of this Newsletter around February 2004.

President's Report concluded...

Despite the extensive publicity surrounding this issue, no comments were forthcoming from either the Mayor or any Councillors nor did I receive a reply to my letter.

Heritage Ottawa supported the efforts of some parishioners to save the Saint Patrick's Parish Hall from demolition. Letters were sent to City Development Services staff, the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC), to the Planning & Development Committee and to the Mayor and Council in six cases of buildings under threat of demolition. We also supported the designation of four buildings under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, including the former March House Restaurant and the Pinhey Cottage, both in the former city of Kanata.

Our current focus is on preserving the former Ottawa Registry Office on Nicholas Street by urging Council to make its preservation *in situ* a condition of any money granted to Viking-Rideau Corporation (the building's owner) to expand the Congress Centre. Despite a letter to the editor published in *The Ottawa Citizen* on November 2 and a letter sent to the Mayor and Council,

the latter have not responded to our suggestion. At our urging the Heritage Advisory Committee wrote to Viking-Rideau urging them to preserve the building in its original location.

Universal Program Review (UPR)

Perhaps the biggest challenge over the next few months will be the fight to save arts and heritage funding in light of Council's close scrutiny of all municipal programs in an effort to eliminate a shortfall of \$120 million in next year's operating budget. Even if they cut the entire arts and heritage budget, already



Photo: David B. Flemming

Registry Office.

one of the lowest per capita of any major city in Canada, it would only provide them with a little over 2% of the amount needed to balance the budget. However, it is easy for many politicians who see cultural funding of any kind as a "frill" to advocate such measures.

It is crucial that those of us who care about our city's cultural well-being, speak out about the importance of protecting the current level of funding for arts and heritage in the City of Ottawa. I therefore urge all Heritage Ottawa members to write to the Mayor and to their Councillor urging them:

- to support at least the current level of funding for arts and heritage programs during the upcoming Universal Program Review
- to support the preservation of Ottawa's built heritage as a well-funded and integral part of the city's plan to encourage the intensification of new housing development in the city.

Best wishes to each of you for a happy holiday season and for your renewed involvement in 2004 in helping Heritage Ottawa preserve our city's rich built heritage! ♦



Please, forward with payment to:

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E-mail: info@heritageottawa.org

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