



Buildings on the Brink - 2008

Heritage London Foundation announces its 2008 list of “Buildings on the Brink”

Over the past three years, Heritage London Foundation has highlighted threatened heritage buildings in the city of London. **Buildings on the Brink** is an annual list of 5 threatened historic or heritage properties. Each year, the list will be released, usually on Heritage Day, to communicate the importance of these buildings to the citizens of London and to recommend ways in which these structures may be preserved.

Heritage London Foundation is an innovative non-profit corporation, founded in 1981, which advocates the preservation of significant heritage properties. Created when the wrecker’s ball was rapidly destroying many of London’s architectural treasures, Heritage London Foundation now provides viable contemporary uses for two beautiful city-owned properties, the Elsie Perrin Williams Estate and Grosvenor Lodge, and is open to future projects. Today these buildings are popular sites for weddings, business conferences and private gatherings, as well as housing offices for heritage and environmental organizations. Revenues assist the foundation to preserve, protect and promote our heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Members of Heritage London Foundation also support the goals of the organization. Membership is open to anyone interested in supporting this worthy association. For more information, contact our offices at (hlfelsie@execulink.com) at (519) 645-2845.

2008 Buildings on the Brink

Five Threatened Heritage Properties in the London area

1. Buchan House 566 Dundas Street

At one time Dundas Street was lined from Waterloo to Adelaide streets with many expensive houses and mansions, the homes of London's entrepreneurs and business owners. Most of these buildings have been torn down or significantly altered, with the exception of Buchan House.

This large home was built c.1875 in the Italianate style for Thomas Aspden, a manufacturer of oilcloth. In 1887 under a new owner, Thomas Escott, a wholesale grocer, it was significantly redesigned and enlarged in the Romanesque Revival style so popular at this time. It was renamed "Oakhurst".



Over the years the structure has housed a number of organizations, including the London Institute of Musical Art, Western Ontario Conservatory of Music, a chapter of the Royal Canadian Legion and Sue's Blue's Bar.

Threats:

- The property is currently unoccupied and has recently been for sale. We know that buildings in this situation are threatened due to neglect and lack of purpose. Lack of care is evident from the exterior and the realtor's ad states that it needs TLC.

HLF Recommendations:

- It is our hope that the building will be purchased by a sympathetic buyer interested in restoring this wonderful structure to its former glory, perhaps using it as office space or living accommodation.

2. Queen's Park Art Building

In Queen's Park at the Western Fair Grounds stands a small structure with a varied past. The Art Building was designed and built in the neo-classical style in 1912, at the request of the Western Fair Board of Directors under President W.J. Reid. It was London's first art gallery.



During its history it has served many purposes. It was used initially to house temporary art exhibits, as it was unheated. During the period from 1939 – 1948, the military used the facility as an Officers' Mess and it later became a branch of the Bank of Montreal, a storage building, a special events

building, a restaurant, a senior's craft centre and as an archives for the Western Fair. It is now owned by the City of London.

Threats:

- While this is a delightful little building, in a great setting, with an interesting history; it currently lacks a useful purpose which would keep the building maintained and occupied.

HLF Recommendation:

- Actively search for an organization or a creative use for the Art Gallery. Could this house the Guy Lombardo exhibit or the First Hussars Museum?

3. Waterloo Pavilion at Western Counties Wing

The Western Counties Health and Occupational Centres opened in 1946, after World War II, as a facility to provide new approaches in rehabilitating injured soldiers and war veterans, particularly in the use of occupational therapy. The complex of 11 buildings was situated in a spacious semi-rural setting around Walkers Pond.



The largest remaining structure is the Waterloo Pavilion. It was built as the main treatment building and contained an indoor swimming pool and large auditorium. Patients in the Western Counties Wing and elsewhere in the Westminster Hospital complex made extensive use of the building.

The Waterloo Pavilion was used by patients and residents of Westminster Hospital and various community groups until 1997, when the building was closed.

Threat:

- As recently as 2000, the building was reported to be in fair condition, with the exception of minor maintenance issues. It remains unused and without purpose.

HLF Recommendation:

- The Waterloo Pavilion could serve a variety of uses; a private club, a fitness centre or a banquet hall. The major issue facing the building's reuse is the willingness of the present owners to allow these private uses in some contractual manner.

4. Blackfriars

90 Central Avenue

This large home has an interesting history. It was built in 1875 for Thomas Kent, a financier and real estate promoter, founder and president of London Loan and Savings Company and son of John Kent. John had purchased 200 acres of crown land in 1824



roughly bordered by present day Carling Street on the south to John Street on the north and from Richmond Street to Wharnccliffe Road on the east and west.

“Firbrae”, Thomas Kent’s home was designed by London architect, William Robinson, as a two storey, centre hall plan structure in the Italianate style. The front veranda and portico was designed by the firm of Moore and Monroe and was added to the building in 1912 by the new owner, Bishop Michael Fallon, who changed the name to “Blackfriars”. The enclosed second storey porch was an even later addition. This home has a great many wonderful architectural details both on the exterior and throughout the interior including: 4 brick width coursing

between the first and second storey, brick dentils, dog’s hind leg design in brick, segmental arched windows with brick headings and textured keystones, double Ionic columns supporting the portico, interior decorative arch in the front foyer and elegant staircase with a bronze statue and candelabra light topping the newel post, ceiling medallions and white marble fireplace, among many other features.

Threat:

- It may seem premature to include this magnificent structure in this year’s list. However, the house was listed for sale in 2007 and is located in an area of the city zoned for dense residential development. The risk is that, should the property be sold to a developer, the pattern that spelt the demise of Locust Mount, a short distance away, could be repeated at this site.

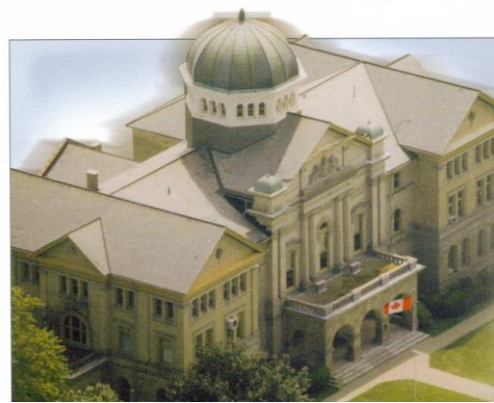
HLF Recommendation:

- We encourage the Planning Department to designate the home under the Ontario Heritage Act and appeal to the owners, the Roman Catholic Church, to be respectful of the historic and heritage value of the property if placed up for sale again.
- We further recommend that the Planning Department and Council revise the zoning in the Talbot Street neighbourhood to a lower density and protect the heritage properties in the area from further destruction.

5. Elgin County Courthouse

Wellington Street, St Thomas

The saga of the Elgin County Courthouse is particularly frustrating. The building was designed by architect John Turner and constructed in 1852 – 1854 and reconstructed in 1898 after a serious fire. It has been the court facility for Elgin County for 155 years. In 1988 the building was purchased by Farhi Holdings Corporation and a thorough restoration was completed to preserve the many unique, irreplaceable heritage features of this magnificent structure.



Threat:

- The threat comes from the Provincial Government. Last fall the Ontario Realty Corporation, the provinces real estate department, issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) on behalf of the Attorney General for a new courthouse in Elgin County to consolidate the county court requirements into one site. If the existing facility is abandoned, finding an alternate use would be extremely difficult; the building would be neglected and abandoned.
- Repeated attempts by the owner, Shmuel Farhi, to negotiate with various departments and ministries to meet the requirements at the existing site and retain the heritage features of the old courthouse have not been successful.

HLF Recommendations:

- We recommend that the process for handling requests for new facilities through the Ontario Realty Corporation, particularly when involving historic or heritage structures, be examined to ensure that the continued use of these buildings be the first priority. We believe that sympathetic renovation of existing facilities will prove to be cost effective and result in the preservation of important heritage buildings.
- Examples of similar projects can be found on the internet. One company's work can be viewed at: <http://www.theingeniumgroup.com/justice7.asp>