

Heritage London Foundation announces “Buildings on the Brink”, a new program to mark its 25th Anniversary

To commemorate its 25th anniversary, Heritage London Foundation is initiating a new program: Buildings on the Brink, an annual list of the 5 most threatened historic or heritage properties in London. Each year, the list will be released on Heritage Day as a way of communicating 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 Genet Hodder (ghodder@execulink.com) or John Manness (jmanness@rogers.com) at 645-2845.

2006 Buildings on the Brink

Five Threatened Heritage Properties in London

1. Normal School (formerly the Monsignor Feeney Centre)

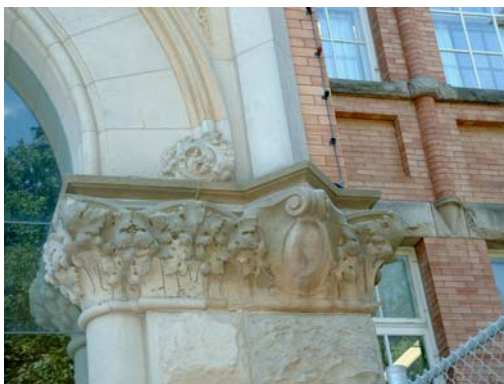
One of London's best loved buildings is the stately old Normal School on Elmwood Avenue, one of two remaining original schools for teachers in Ontario, and known most recently as the Monsignor Feeney Centre, home of the Catholic Board of Education. Situated as it is on the green at the center of Wortley Village, it is both the visual and cultural heart of London's Old South community.

Vital Statistics:

- Built in 1899.
- Beautiful Gothic/Queen Anne/Romanesque features with remarkable architectural details including the impressive centre tower.

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- One of Ontario's first teachers' colleges.
- Focal point of Old South and the Wortley Village community.
- Designated under the Ontario Heritage Act as one of London's prominent heritage resources.



Threats:

- Owned and managed by the province's Ontario Realty Corporation with unknown plans for the future.
- Expensive repairs and restoration required to stabilize the exterior features and upgrade the interior, estimated at \$3 – 4 million.

HLF Recommendations:

- Support the Old South Community Organization efforts to keep this gem.
- Identify potential modern uses.

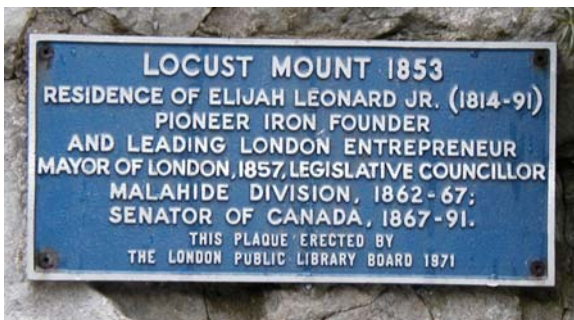
2. Locust Mount (661 Talbot Street)

Truly one of the city's most historic residences built before London was incorporated as a city. It was constructed for a prominent London businessman and politician, Elijah Leonard Jr. His machine shop and iron foundry manufactured boilers and steam engines to feed the demand during the railway construction boom in the 1850s. He served as mayor, then provincial representative and was the first Canadian senator from this area from 1867 until his death in 1891.



Vital Statistics:

- Built in 1853-54.
- Strong Georgian-influenced home overlooking the Thames river valley.



Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Residence of a former mayor and longtime political representative for London.
- Excellent example of Georgian period architecture.
- Identified as a Priority 1 property (London's most important heritage structures) in the Inventory of Heritage Resources.

Threats:

- Currently owned by a developer who appears to be neglecting the structure, leaving it to decay beyond hope for restoration with the stated intention of demolishing the home and building high density housing.

HLF Recommendations:

- Support designation of the structure immediately as a heritage property and ensure that plans are in place to stabilize the structure to prevent further deterioration.
- Consider alternate uses for the building after restoration. Its closeness to downtown makes it ideal for professional offices, a small inn and/or fine dining restaurant. It could also become offices and/or guest accommodations for any planned high density development adjacent to it.

3. Woodholme (former Lawson estate at 1384 Wonderland Road)

This magnificent mansion has both historic and heritage significance for London. It is a unique structure built during the late 1800s almost entirely of concrete in a style reminiscent of an English castle. Features include a secret passage between levels, maze-like hallways, floors and ceilings constructed of cement and decorated to look like tile and wood. Woodholme was designed and built as a residence by Richard Shaw-Wood. He lived there until his death in 1909, leaving the estate to his daughter, Anna. It served for many years as the residence of the Honourable Ray Lawson O.B.E., prominent London businessman, government representative and philanthropist. Subsequently his son, Col. Tom Lawson and his popular wife, Miggsie, lived there and expanded on the family business and philanthropic tradition.



Vital Statistics:

- Built in 1893-94.
- Unique castle-like structure built of concrete in late Victorian Gothic Revival style.

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Residence of two very prominent London families; Shaw-Wood and Lawson.
- Identified as Priority 1 property in the Inventory of Heritage Resources.

Threat:

- Currently owned by a developer with a redevelopment plan for the property which will preserve the old home within a condominium development of new luxury detached houses. The surrounding neighbourhood is against the proposed development and the developer has taken the issue to the Ontario Municipal Board.

HLF Recommendation:

- City Council should support the developer's proposal and allow the development subject to heritage designation of the home to ensure that this unique building will be preserved.

4. Wonderland Gardens

Built during the “big band” era of the 1930s, Wonderland Gardens was managed by the Jones family on property leased from the city. Wonderland was best known for the local and international bands and groups which the site hosted for the entertainment of people from all over southwestern Ontario



and beyond. Over the years this facility had beautifully landscaped grounds with gardens, fountains, walking paths, romantic bridges, a swimming pool, boat dock, snack bar, restaurant and outdoor patio complete with friendly wildlife making the banks of the Thames River their home. Wonderland was the ideal spot for large parties and celebrations and a fabulous venue for musical entertainment. Alas, the popularity of the centre declined although the Riverview restaurant, which opened in 1984, was a popular dining spot until it closed in 2004 when the city regained ownership of the facility. In August of 2005 the dance hall suffered major damage from fire; thankfully, the band shell and restaurant are still intact.

Vital Statistics:

- Built circa 1935
- California Spanish inspired design.

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Holds wonderful memories of music, dancing and recreation for a great many people.
- Connected to the Thames River park system by the Maurice Chapman walkway as a link between downtown and Springbank Park.
- Venue for area musicians and bands, including Johnny Downs and Lionel Thornton, as well as countless internationally famous talents.

Threat:

- Under city control with plans announced last week to transform the site into parkland while retaining the heritage band shell. If acted upon as reported, the city plan will keep the space in the public domain; this is important to maintain the integrity of the waterfront and park network.

HLF Recommendation:

- In considering future use, London City Council must keep in mind the aesthetic, environmental and historic use of these lands. Any new construction should retain the Spanish influenced style of the band shell and restaurant buildings.

5. London Psychiatric Hospital (London Asylum for the Insane – 850 Highbury Ave.)

After Confederation, provincial politicians decided to build a second asylum for southwestern Ontario two miles outside the London city limits. The London Asylum for the Insane opened at the present site November 18, 1870 on 3 acres of farmland. The hospital grew in size and by 1914 there were 1,130 patients. In 1968 the hospital was renamed the London Psychiatric Hospital and joined the St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital to operate under a single administration in 1995. The original main hospital building was demolished in 1975, but the 1894 horse barn, the Infirmary or Exam



building (built in 1902), Recreation Hall (constructed in the 1920s), and the Chapel of Hope (built by patients in 1884), still exist. Some of the facilities are being regularly used today.

Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke was the second superintendent of the London Asylum for the Insane (1877 to 1902). Acting on his conviction that the mentally ill respond favourably to humanitarian and sympathetic treatment, he elaborated on the efforts of his predecessor, Dr. Henry Landor, to provide therapeutic activity for patients by making the asylum into a working farm. Dr. Bucke provided improved farm facilities and he created grounds that were more ornamental. He implemented an elaborate plan for the beautification of the grounds, in keeping with his theory that beautiful surroundings were conducive to mental health. He provided the patients with many social occasions and reduced the use of alcohol and mechanical constraints as means of controlling them. The London Psychiatric Hospital is truly a reflection of Dr. Bucke's innovative ideas.



Vital Statistics:

- Built 1868-1870.
- Impressive scale and architecture of Victorian period public buildings and landscape.

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- The large barn, the chapel and the Infirmary building are all that remain now of the early portion (prior to 1900) of this important facility. The buildings represent the implementation of innovative care and maintenance of patients at this asylum.
- The entrance from Dundas Street, along a wide tree-lined avenue, forms a magnificent vista north to the hospital grounds.

Threats:

- The Exam building is fenced off and outwardly shows signs of extreme neglect and decay. Breaks in the roof have let water to damage the structure and the building may not be able to be saved.
- The barn appears to be in better shape, at least from the outside, but has been abandoned, with no current use.

HLF Recommendations:

- Assess and immediately stabilize the buildings to prevent further deterioration.
- Involve Londoners in a project to preserve the site and determine suitable public or private uses for the facilities which will retain the heritage and historic nature of the grounds and buildings.