

ACO Matters

Architectural Conservancy of Ontario – Port Hope Branch

Newsletter – September 2011

President's Report Centre Pier Task Force

I made a presentation of our Brief on the Future of the Centre Pier to the Centre Pier Task Force chaired by Paul Evans. The Task Force presented an interim report to the Committee of the Whole on July 26. In that report they recommended that the buildings be demolished. This was based on an eleventh hour meeting with representations by Cameco and PHAI. This meeting excluded members of the Task Force, hence its members were not able to question the information given. That information was that saving the buildings would involve extraordinary costs due to delay and "poor condition" of the buildings.

There is no written information concerning the basis on which these assertions were made, and no independent study of this critical information is available. The Task Force is to make a final report in September, but some of its members have resigned due to late arrival of this information and their inability to respond to it. ACO will keep abreast of developments on this important issue. Members of the ACO are invited to write any comments to the Task Force. *

The Biennial Garden Tour

The Garden Tour was held July 9th on a glorious summer day. All the gardens were in Town, thus much less driving than usual and all the gardens were spectacular. It was a very successful tour and our thanks go to Mary Shaw-Rimington, the Chair of the tour, her committee and the many volunteers who guided visitors through the gardens. A special thanks also to the owners of the gardens who generously allowed visitors into their gardens.

The 46th Annual House Tour

We look forward to the House Tour on Saturday, October 1st. There is a great selection of houses on the tour and most are within walking distance of each other. I look forward to seeing you all on the tour.

Mel Chapple Scholarship

ACO has donated \$2500 to a scholarship fund for students to attend Willowbank School of Restoration Arts in Queenston, Ontario. This donation was made to honour Mel Chapple, a long-standing member of ACO and a person who dedicated a great deal of effort over her lifetime to the preservation of our architectural and cultural heritage. Other ACO members who would wish to donate to this fund should contact Sue Stickley at 905-885-1344, or Willowbank.ca directly.

The Future of our Downtown

I recently participated in Port Hope Heritage Business Improvement Area (HBIA)'s Round Table Discussion on the future of the Downtown of Port Hope. It was held at Molson Mill and attended by some 40 persons, representing a broad range of stakeholders of our downtown. The event was convened to attempt to develop a strategy for the reinvigoration of Downtown Port Hope. . . . continued pg 2

PORT HOPE HOUSE TOUR 46th ANNUAL ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY OF ONTARIO



Saturday October 1, 2011
10:00am to 4:00pm

Tickets \$25.00

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(Continued from pg 1)

A walk downtown highlights some of the problems. There are a number of empty stores and too many “dollar stores.” Also an obvious lack of maintenance on many buildings. The streetscape has not had any significant improvement in years. Some key buildings such as the Walton Hotel are stalled mid-construction. Another problem is that the Fire Marshall has been on a campaign to improve fire and life safety systems, imposing work orders on building-owners to improve their buildings. This often very costly renovation, while unassailable from a safety point of view, creates such a hardship that building owners contemplate vacating upper floor uses of their building, dramatically altering the building’s economic viability and removing population from the downtown.

Some of the causes for this state can be blamed on recent bad press concerning nuclear issues and the clean-up. This is a recurring problem in Port Hope and likely will continue throughout the clean-up period. While this has certainly had its impact, it is not the only cause of the downtown's problems. High gasoline prices, the economy and competition from other tourist destinations such as the County, and even Cobourg, contribute to the reduction in tourist visits. No coherent and inspired economic development strategy for the whole Municipality has left Port Hope somewhat stagnant in its growth, and a lack of Municipal input in terms of Walton streetscape improvements give it a somewhat shabby appearance compared with other municipalities. (The Riverfront Walkway, hopefully, will help.) In Cambridge (Galt), I am presently part of a team undertaking major streetscape improvements of their heritage Main Street. All of these factors have had a detrimental effect on the economic viability of Downtown and the appearance of our “Best Preserved Main Street in Ontario”, a moniker we are in danger of losing.

We have much to celebrate in our Downtown: the wealth of heritage buildings, the Capitol Theatre, some fine restaurants, a River and its walkway, and a fine Town Hall and Library. We have some great events that draw tourists to Town, the Capitol, the Jazz festival, the ACO House and Garden Tours, the Farmers Market, and don’t forget, Float Your Fanny Down the Ganny. And we have a new condominium which should bring new residents to the Downtown.

What Should be Done?

The rejuvenation of Downtown involves many stakeholders. Working together on a coherent and innovative strategy can arrest and reverse the fortunes of our Downtown.

The nuclear legacy has had a great impact on the Town and the multi-million (if not billion) dollar clean-up acknowledges this legacy. Part of the damage that needs to be restored is, in fact, the Downtown. When a gravel pit shuts down, the owners must remediate the site, re-establish the landscape and create an asset for the community. Similarly,

it is not just enough to remove contaminated material, but there must be a plan for remediation of the sites. This should include Downtown and monies should be forwarded from the clean-up for the remediation of Downtown.


The Municipality itself should be brought to the table and initiate an overall Urban Design Plan for the Downtown and undertake a new pedestrian-friendly streetscape plan for it. The Municipality should also, through an expanded grant program, help building-owners comply with fire safety upgrades and heritage restoration of the buildings.

As well, an innovative economic development strategy should be initiated that would encourage the establishment of new business in the Downtown. A cultural economic strategy should be developed to assist cultural activities in the downtown aimed at attracting tourists to Downtown Port Hope.

Many groups already exist in the Town and have worked hard to develop appropriate strategies. These groups are volunteer, such as the Capitol Theatre Heritage Foundation, the Northumberland Art Gallery, the All Canadian Jazz festival, the Farmers Market, the HBIA, the ACO and others. These groups need funding and encouragement to help them develop and expand their programs.

We of the ACO stand ready to be part of the dialogue on how to improve our Downtown. We are always ready to assist in the preservation and restoration of its heritage buildings and streetscape.

We must all work together to ensure that Walton Street will continue to hold the title of "The Best Preserved Main Street in Ontario".


 Phillip H. Carter
 M. Arch., M.C.P., OAA, FRAIC, CAHP

*** We received this message from Chris Wallace of the Pier Group:** *"Please ask ACO members to write to Council with their concerns about this. As it stands, the 'public input' period ends the day after Labour Day. We're going to push for a proper public meeting, but this will only happen if we can demonstrate that there's enough show of public interest."*



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An Airborne ACO Matters

ACO Matters is entering the 21st Century and will now be available online. Those of you who aren't on e-mail or dislike reading electronic publications may still receive it by post.

Nevertheless there is very much to be said in favour of an electronic newsletter. Apart from saving all those trees, it rescues us from the vagaries of the Post Office (we just, just got the June issue out in time to escape the strike, but no doubt the further afield addresses got held up. Furthermore, 30 copies of our February issue 'got lost' for two weeks and the Post Office declined responsibility. I guess it was the pigeons' fault).

An electronic version will also save large sums which four times a year pay for high-quality paper, printing, envelopes, labels and postage, which could otherwise be helping fund a student scholarship or supporting one of our projects. In addition, it will come out faster, which, in theory anyway, means the editor won't lose so much hair struggling to get it out on time. And we can even have colour images at no extra cost. What's there not to like?


So please let us know if you'd like to receive ACO Matters online by e-mailing to the Membership Chair, Trish Doney at: pdoney@sympatico.ca

We hope you feel as we do that it's the modern way to go.
Patsy Beeson, Editor

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THE YANK WHO BUILT OUR TOWN! & THE ROCHESTER-PORT HOPE CONNECTION



In 1851, 150 years ago, when Port Hope wished to build its Town Hall (the most significant building in every town's inventory) it chose a Rochester architect, Merwin Austin, to design it.

It wasn't the first building Austin had designed in Port Hope, nor would it be the last. Over the years, starting in 1850 he was responsible for four, possibly five, commercial blocks on Walton Street. Three were for members of the well-established Smith family: the riverside block, now containing Gould's, at 16-24, belonging to Mayor James Smith and his brother John; the Elias Smith Block at 35-46 Walton; and the one at 48-60, (which later burned and was replaced by another architect and now houses Randall's) owned by yet another brother, Robert [Charles] Smith. According to Katherine Ashenburg, author of *Going To Town*, probably the elegant Metcalfe Terrace, up the hill at 134-136 immediately east of Brown Street, was also from Austin's office. And his culminating flourish on the street was the St. Lawrence Hotel (now St. Lawrence Apartments), at numbers 87-97, the most important building on Walton. So an extremely significant part of Port Hope's main street originated on an American drawing board in Rochester.

So why was this, one has to ask? It wasn't as if there weren't extremely capable architects north of the lake. William Thomas, distinguished for his St. Lawrence Hall and St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto, had already dignified the foot of Walton Street with his extremely handsome Waddell Block (now Gusto's), and Frederick Cumberland (notable for St. James's Cathedral) would very soon design what is now Dr. Corbett's Inn. Were they unavailable? It's certainly possible. There had been an appalling fire in Toronto in 1849 and its architects might well have had their hands full.

But the answer seems just as likely to have been the strong bonds that existed at the time between Port Hope and Rochester, a point not always appreciated. Then the lake was the obvious transportation route, far more efficient and comfortable than the teeth-rattling travel on the abominable highroads to Toronto or Kingston. And by steamer or schooner Rochester was no further away than Toronto (the prevailing winds actually blew schooners there faster) so Port Hopers might well have looked to Rochester



34-46 Walton, built for Elias Peter Smith. The building to the left was originally built by Austin for Robert [Charles] Smith but burned and was replaced in a later architect's style.



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134-136 Walton, Metcalfe Terrace

first. The daily passenger and trade traffic between them was such that a U.S. consul was appointed in Port Hope.

Another reason why this Canadian village might have had these cross-lake links could have been how Americanized the country had become after the Revolutionary War. The Loyalists, 45- 50,000 of them, despite being forced from their homes during the war, were nonetheless Americans, and, love for the crown notwithstanding, many maintained ties with the U.S., and some, after hostilities ended in 1783, returned there. But then countless more 'Late Loyalists' arrived, drawn by Governor Simcoe's offer of 200 acres to each immigrant, leaving behind close relatives and business associates. And in their new abode they could keep in touch with home news and fashions with The New York Herald Tribune, The Saturday Evening Post, and Godey's Ladies' Book of Fashion. So the Lake's north shore must have contained a strong climate of American ideas and tastes in dress, furniture - and housing. Witness the transplanted New England Georgian homes found throughout Prince Edward County (almost entirely settled by Loyalists), and along Lake Ontario's north shore.

Port Hope's original settlers were American too. Nine years after the war the Loyalists Elias Smith and the Walton cousins petitioned for grants for the whole site of what would become Port Hope, and there established its first forty-one families, all Americans.

This Yankee link persisted into the next generation too. Elias Smith's New York-born youngest son, John David Smith, in due course had a fleet of ships which traded busily on both sides of the lake, and his second wife, Augusta Woodward, was from Bridgewater in upper New York State. When in 1834 they built their elegant Bluestone House (to a very American design) understandably they turned to Rochester to buy many of its interior features including all its fireplaces. So such a family's offspring would have been conversant with trends on both sides of the lake.

At mid-century, when the Town Hall was built, John David Smith's eldest son, James, was mayor of Port Hope. And as it happened Merwin Austin had just completed the highly impressive Second Monroe Courthouse in central Rochester, a dramatic Neo-Classical edifice of brick and limestone fronted with an important portico and topped with a cupola. As mentioned, the architect was no stranger to the mayor and his brothers, having already designed three commercial blocks for them, so plainly the Smith brothers would have favoured his selection as Town Hall architect. In fact, when the Austin-designed Town Hall's foundation stone was laid, a celebratory 'rich and sumptuous dinner' for more than a hundred was held in the still empty third floor of Charles Smith's newly built block at 48-60 Walton Street.



The Second Monroe County Courthouse, Rochester
... continued next page



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(Continued from previous page)

So just who was this Rochester architect who was known to the Smiths and probably many other Port Hoppers? What was his work like in Rochester, and has it any resemblance to the buildings here?

Austin was born in 1814, possibly in New Haven, Connecticut, and initially worked there in his 10-year-old brother Henry's architectural office over their father, Eli's, store. What he knew he seems to have learned from his brother. He arrived in Rochester in 1844 where he instantly exerted considerable influence on its architecture. He designed a number of houses, among them the Josiah Bissell house of stone salvaged from the first Erie Canal aqueduct, and the arresting Brewster-Burke House which was basically Italianate but with an ornate 'Turkish palace' entrance porch. He also introduced the 'Gothic Cottage' style to Rochester. Austin then designed the first jail, and in 1850 the aforementioned second Monroe County Court House. In 1853 (while designing the St. Lawrence Hotel in Port Hope) he was responsible for the Plymouth Congregational Church, described as having "massive buttresses and heavy English Norman details typical of the Gothic Revival work of Merwin Austin". But Gothic Revival is nowhere to be seen here north of the lake - not in our staid Neo-Classical Town Hall, Greek Revival Metcalfe Terrace, the Smith blocks, nor the fine, avant-garde Italianate St. Lawrence building. In fact it would seem the common denominator distinguishing Austin's work appears to have been its disparity - he tried on styles like hats in spring!

In the 1850's he formed a partnership with his nephew, Andrew J. Warner, also from Connecticut, under the name Austin and Warner. Warner became extremely successful. Perhaps success made him wish for independence. At any rate, for whatever reason, by the 1860s Austin was again practising alone and in 1868 returned to New Haven where it's thought he re-joined his brother's office and continued to work there. He died in 1890 but, interestingly, is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester.

Plainly Austin was a distinguished architect in his time, in demand on both sides of the border. Yet in Port Hope, where "the best preserved nineteenth century high street in Ontario" owes so very much to him and where he gave physical form to its residents' daily setting, the only mention of him is on a tiny Town Hall plaque that misspells his first name. And in Rochester's architectural historical circles there appears to be total ignorance of Austin's involvement in either Canada or Port Hope.

Patsy Beeson

ACO Membership – 2012

ACO Central has advised that after much consideration, the following changes to membership categories and fees have been adopted effective January 1st 2011. As many members had renewed their membership for 2011 prior to their advice, your Board in Port Hope decided to defer the increase for our existing members until 2012.

As of 2012 Port Hope ACO Membership Fees will be as follows:

1. Individual Membership: will now be \$35 (previously \$30), with \$18 to be remitted to ACO Central;
2. Household Membership: will now be \$40 (previously \$35.), with \$18 to be remitted to ACO Central;
3. Student Membership: will now be \$12 (previously \$20), with all money to be kept by the Branch;
4. Non-Profit Organization (formerly Associate) Membership including libraries, museums, historical societies, and other non-profit or cooperative associations: will now be \$45 (previously \$40) with \$18 to be remitted to ACO Central.
5. Corporate Membership: remains at \$60 (but under review for next year), with \$18 to be remitted to ACO Central;
6. The category of Sustaining Membership is eliminated.

Trish Doney, Membership Chair



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Report on Port Hope Biennial Garden Tour

I am delighted to report that the 2011 Garden Tour was a splendid success with high ticket sales, wonderful gardens and perfect summer weather.

Because of the spring mail strike, a large number of tickets had to be picked up the morning of the tour at the Caretaker's Cottage, a process which went very smoothly.

The nine very varied gardens were all within Port Hope and were clustered in groups of two which meant less driving and more time to relax and thoroughly explore each property. A small army of volunteers was on hand to welcome ticket holders and show them around, answer questions and point out unique features.

We were fortunate to have members of the local Master Gardeners' group in every garden to deal with the hard questions! Feedback from the this group of volunteers has been very positive.

Port Hope United Church offered a wonderful lunch during the day which was well supported and raised money for another good cause.

We were pleased to have the well-known gardening expert, Marjorie Harris (who designed one of our gardens this year), come to Port Hope for the day and be on hand to speak to people. Marjorie was our guest of honour (and speaker) at a second, sold-out event following the tour itself, a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception in the garden she had worked on in 2010.

On Sunday afternoon a private lunch for the garden owners and committee members was held followed by a group tour to look at all the gardens again.

We were delighted to have worked with such welcoming, enthusiastic and knowledgeable owners, whose marvellous properties were a such a pleasure to showcase. Their willingness to allow the public in to wander and enjoy their gardens is the reason our tour was the great success it was!

Between the tour itself and the hors d'oeuvres reception close to \$9000 will be donated to the ACO Port Hope.

Our great thanks to all. See you in 2013!

Mary Shaw-Rimington, Chair.

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Friends of Wesleyville Village – Fall Activities

Art & Theatre in the Country – Sat., Sept. 10th

At Wesleyville Church, Port Hope artist **Herb Jung's** "Trevi Fountain" painting will be brought to life with two, one-hour, dramatic performance readings of Canadian playwright **Dave Carley's** play based on characters in the painting: **2pm & 4pm**. There will also be an exhibit of Herb Jung's latest paintings: **11am – 5pm**.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided by the Friends and we encourage all our members to attend this event. Maybe you could make it another stop on the Northumberland Hills Studio Tour!

Admission for performances:
recommended donation \$10 or PWYC
Contact Herb Jung for info:
herbjung@gmail.com 905 885 6328

Run or Walk for Wesleyville – Sat., Oct. 15th

Northumberland Sunrise Rotary Harvest Hike starting at **10am** at the Ganaraska Forest Centre. We are asking friends & members of FOWV to do the walk/run & get sponsors to donate a set fee if the walker/runner completes the 5km course. \$20 entry fee entitles participant to a t-shirt, bottle of water and a chili lunch.

Contact Blake Holton (905) 885-7439 to join in.

2nd Annual Harvest Festival – Sun., Oct. 16th

Please plan to participate in this afternoon of **music, fun, good food & story-telling** at Wesleyville Church.

Last year was a great event!

Contact Roz Farber at (905) 885-1575 for details.

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Major Upcoming Events
47th ACO PORT HOPE HOUSE TOUR
 Saturday, October 1st, 10am – 4pm.
 (see pg 1 for details)

Three F.O.W.V. Events (see pg 7 for details):
ART & THEATRE IN THE COUNTRY
 Saturday, Sept, 10th

RUN OR WALK FOR WESLEYVILLE
 Saturday, October 15th

HARVEST FESTIVAL
 Sunday, October 16th


QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If you have questions or comments, we would like to receive them and will pass them on to be answered by the appropriate member of the board.

If the subject is of general interest, we shall publish the question and answer.

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Annual memberships in the ACO, Port Hope Branch are due each January 1st. Membership cut-off is July each year. The Port Hope Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario is financed through membership fees and voluntary contributions which are tax deductible. Additional funds are raised through the annual House Tour, Biennial Garden Tour, Antiques & Artifacts Auction and other fund raising initiatives. Educational programs, including bus/walking tours of Port Hope and other learning forums are part of our yearly program. Each member is invited to participate in branch and provincial activities. Membership also includes a subscription to *Acorn*, the provincial ACO publication, and *ACO Matters*, our Port Hope Chapter publication.

Please send your cheque to address below:

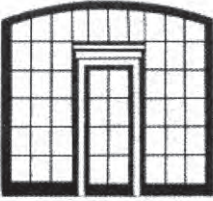
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