

NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0808-0506

MARCH 1981 Vol. 9 No. 3 John Leaning, President Jennifer Roddick, Editor

GATINEAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Historical Society of the Gatineau invites you to compete in it's 10th annual Essay Contest and win one of the prizes totalling over \$1,000.

Authors may choose their own subjects providing they pertain to the history of the Gatineau Valley (i.e. be about people, places, events of the area). Anyone is eligible except members of the Committee and the judges.

Compositions should not exceed 3,000 words, may be illustrated by photographs, maps, etc. and may be submitted in French or English.

Manuscripts must be mailed on or before 15 September 1981 to:

Secretary-Treasurer
Historical Society of the Gatineau
Old Chelsea, P.Q. JOX 2N0

NOTES FROM THE BOARD

The Board of Directors had occasion to meet twice during the month of February -- the first meeting held on February 12th was an emergency meeting to discuss possible action our organization could take in the matter of the Clegg House. The Board expressed its concern that the City was considering dropping legal charges against St. Peter's Lutheran Church as it felt that to do so would render heritage legislation in the province ineffective, and possible action by Heritage Ottawa was discussed.

The second meeting was held ten days later and again centred on discussion of the Clegg House issue. President John Leaning will ask Ken Brown, Secretary of City Hall's Planning Board, to notify Heritage Ottawa when the Planning Board will discuss the Clegg House and the surrounding Heritage District. Leaning agreed to appear before the Board if requested to comment on the property at 152 Bay St. owned by developer L.A.T. MacDonald. Articles in the local press indicated that the property may be moved lock, stock and barrel and attached to the remains

of the Clegg House. The Board generally agreed that it would be preferable for the building to be moved on its own axis to be adjacent to the other heritage buildings, thereby making a fairly strong "heritage block". Some Board members felt that the Clegg House could be reconstructed as all the necessary material is on the premises; others felt that the site should be turned into a park with a monument.

Gerald White commented that the Fraser Schoolhouse, which has been undergoing renovations for the last several months by our landlord, the National Capital Commission, is almost completed. Helmut Schade agreed that he would organize a new exhibition to open upon its completion.

Anne E. MacDonald

HERITAGE DAY AT THE BILLINGS HOUSE

Heritage Day was celebrated at the Billings House on Sunday, February 15th, where over a thousand people took advantage of a program entitled "Caring for Your Old House". The program was organized by the manager of the Billings Estate, Glen Ferguson, and, in order to carry out the theme, each room in the house was assigned different aspects of the subject. One room housed an excellent presentation by architects while another dealt with landscape architecture. A group of experts advised on specific problems faced by those restoring or maintaining their "old home". Members of the City's Planning Department were present to answer questions on zoning, heritage areas and other pertinent subjects. Heritage Canada was represented and even contractors specializing in restoration were ready to offer guidance. Four interesting illustrated workshops were given by home-owners who shared, from their own experiences, do's and don'ts when restoring an older property.

Heritage Ottawa was invited to take care of the section called "Architectural Styles in Ottawa". A pamphlet with this title was specially prepared by Lyette Fortin under the direction of the President, John Leaning and it proved to be very popular with visitors. A copy is enclosed with

this Newsletter and, although it covers a large number of architectural styles complete with illustrations, it is concise as well as informative and attractive. Heritage Ottawa offered, as part of their display, a continuous slide program entitled "The Romance of Gables" by Helmut Schade. These pictures, accompanied by well-chosen music added an interesting and lively touch. Selected articles from back issues of the Newsletter were well-received by the public and there was a brisk demand for hasti-notes and walking tour booklets.

~~The community participated by contributing~~ mounds of delicious cookies and the city provided hot beverages served by volunteers in a large bright room arranged for the purpose. Even the children weren't forgotten, they had their own corner filled with pencils, crayons and colouring books.

A friendly atmosphere and spirit of co-operation pervaded the house due mainly to the fact that the program had been so carefully organized. It was comprehensive, thoroughly enjoyable and all entirely free-of-charge!

Jenny Morgan

CENTRAL CHAMBERS

As we bustle about our daily lives how often do we stop and look, really look, at our surroundings? How many of us stop to think that our heritage is embodied not only in some dusty files, faded photos, or museum-like edifices, but also in the very buildings in which we live, work and shop? Maybe we should occasionally step back during our shopping/working/socializing rounds and study for a moment the cityscape through heritage-tuned eyes. We may well discover that familiar buildings which we often look at but do not see have unique features that, once noticed, add to our appreciation of the world around us.

A good example of a building centred in the thick of things and which forms part of the backdrop of many of Ottawa's centretown activities is Central Chambers at 46 Elgin Street. The Chambers, facing Confederation Square, now houses, among others, McIntosh and Watts and the Snow Goose on the ground floor. Its red brick façade, with black and grey trim above and around its many windows, its charming, almost whimsical style and slender lines make it stand out from its grey, rather stolid, eminently respectable neighbours like an elegant debutante with a glint in her eye among a group of ponderous matrons.

When the six-storey building was designed in 1890 by architect John James Brown of Montreal and erected at the magnificent cost of \$100,000, it was the most prestigious

building in town. John James apparently had contacts with some advanced thinkers in the United States (or maybe he was an advanced thinker himself), for the Chambers building is almost certainly a forerunner of the Chicago style of architecture, whose Ottawa embodiment is the Daly Building. Central Chambers is a radical departure from the Second Empire (and, could one say? colonial Canadian) style of the Post Office and the Langevin Block just up the street. The use of large, bay windows and plate glass and the installation of an electric elevator were "firsts" for Ottawa; the lumber barons, drygoods merchants, railwaymen, lawyers and architects who moved into the building must surely have been delighted with these innovations which brought light into their offices, and afforded them an excellent view of the street and the Canal. And just think of the wonder of being whisked silently up six storeys in a small, stable cage instead of having to huff and puff one's way up the stairs! The style and concept of the Chambers express fittingly the philosophy underlying the Chicago style -- that commercial buildings must be attractive and functional, and must attempt to increase productivity through sound functional design.

Features of the exterior that bring particular pleasure include the richness and variety of masonry detailing, typical of the labour intensive craftsmanship possible in the "good old days", the Islamic or Indian grey-coloured designs in the arches above the top floor windows and the apparent flatiron shape. Fossils and shells can be seen in the limestone used in the pillars at street level which are topped by red granite pillars; they in turn are topped by well-defined carvings of floral designs. Each of the twelve or so columns shows a different motif. Sunflowers, poppies, grapes, oak leaves and acorns and some flowers I couldn't identify -- perhaps they are mythical -- remain in bloom or fruit all year round. On the left side of the front door the column caps show a rabbit and on the right a winged serpent. A long ago stonemason must have had a fanciful imagination! Inside, Tennessee white wood was finished in mahogany and maple was used for the floors. Taylor vaults were installed on each floor and some of them can still be seen today, empty, alas. The skylight gives a lovely glow to the staircase, with its elaborate bannisters carved in geometrical designs.

From across Confederation Square it is the combination of curves and lines that attract the eye -- the half moons above the top and ground floor windows,

the curved shingles like ruffles over the windows and the arch at the center top with "1980" inscribed within it. The interplay of shapes is enhanced by the triangular tops above the upper storey windows which break the roofline and by the square bay and rectangular side windows topped by smaller windows, all highlighted by black trim. One cannot help but smile in satisfaction at seeing such pleasing use of colour and style in a business building on a prominent site in the centre of the City.

The Chambers were purchased in the 1960's by the National Capital Commission who refurbished the building and removed the fire escape that had cluttered up its exterior lines. In 1978 it was designated of architectural and heritage value. It continues its useful life today, as a fully working building with offices on every floor.

The next time you pass through Confederation Square stop for a moment to take in this building and compare it to its neighbours. Give your eyes a lift by letting them sweep over its lovely lines and restful colours. And give your spirits a lift at the thought that John James Brown knew how to use colour and form in a way that would delight Canadians for generations.

Janice Sutton

APRIL TALK

Heritage Ottawa invites you to a talk to be held Tuesday, April 28th at 8:00 p.m. in the NRC Auditorium, 100 Sussex Drive.

Mr. Courtney Bond, local author, historian and celebrity will give a talk entitled "Tracks into Ottawa" describing the comings and goings of the Railway in bygone days.

Many thanks to contributing authors this issue:

Janice Sutton and Jenny Morgan

and to Ann MacDonald for "Notes from the Board".

Please send your submissions before the 10th of the month to: The Editor, Heritage Ottawa Newsletter, 44 Carmichael Court, Kanata, Ontario K2K 1K2.