



# Heritage Ottawa NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Preserving Our Built Heritage

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## Heritage News Now



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## Adaptive re-use of heritage buildings in ottawa – a conversation with a practitioner

By *Hunter McGill*



Photos: *Hunter McGill*

*150 Elgin Street*

Heritage Ottawa is interested in adaptive re-use of heritage buildings, as a way of combating demolition by neglect, and preserving heritage structures as contributing elements in our urban environment. To increase awareness of the opportunities possible through adaptive re-use,

Heritage Ottawa through this newsletter is showcasing the experience of practitioners who have varying stories to tell. Last issue we spoke with Leanne Moussa, developer of allsaints Event Space in Sandy Hill. This issue features a conversation with Stephen Beckta, proprietor

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

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## Adaptive re-use – a conversation cont'd.

of three well-known restaurants in heritage buildings in Ottawa: Play Food and Wine in the Byward Market (c.1850); Gezellig in Westboro (c.1950); and Beckta at 150 Elgin in the Grant House (c. 1875.)

**Q** As a successful person in business, with attention to reputation, market share, competition, costs, what drew you to use heritage buildings for your restaurants? Does the building matter?

**A** I'm not an owner of the buildings, but a tenant, on long leases. For the most recent of my "projects", Beckta on Elgin, I was approached by the developer of the site. For this project, involving a heritage-designated building, the owner assumed the capital costs of the renovations needed to bring the space up to code and to make it work as a high-end restaurant. In converting Gezellig, a former bank, there were challenges when altering the main floor, which held the vault with its massive walls and door. But the spaces in the heritage buildings – high ceilings, attractive decorative features – and the heritage patina were all appealing aspects. Places with character should be used, should be fun. In the case of Beckta on Elgin Street, I grew up in the neighbourhood, which was an additional reason for the move into that great space.

**Q** Are there particular features in re-using heritage buildings which you find an advantage?



*Steve Beckta in the historic Grant House*

**A** As well as the attractive architecture of the buildings, they are all in interesting locations with distinctive elements, which appeals to my clients and allows me to create a unique atmosphere. While I have not slavishly replicated the spaces, I find the heritage properties offer what I call the "grandeur of spaces" which fits with the dining experience we want to offer. At Beckta, I like the idea that the building was once a private residence and our team try to make visitors feel they are guests in our home.

**Q** And the downside of re-using heritage buildings?

**A** Adaptation of the buildings to restaurant use, or updating in the case of Beckta, involves a significant investment in room refurbishment, equipment installation etc. In the case of a listed building, there can be restrictions on interior modifications, although in my

experience this did not prevent installation of new interior walls, important when creating washrooms, for example. We have discovered that room dimensions may be irregular, and as mentioned in the case of Gezellig, we had to deal with the removal of one of the vaults. I feel very fortunate that the landlords for our restaurants have met many of these front-end costs.

**Q** Are there key people to the success of adaptive re-use projects?

**A** There is no question that skilled artisans were essential to the success of the adaptations, among them plasterers and carpenters who could make the special tools necessary to achieve the desired results. I also was fortunate to have top-notch design and architectural advice from heritage-experienced architects and creative engineers in Ottawa, for example to assist with installing the necessary HVAC equipment inside the building instead of concealing it on the roof.

**Q** How can governments (federal, provincial, municipal) assist in making adaptive re-use of heritage buildings more feasible?

**A** I don't believe that direct government involvement is the best idea. Don't have government distort the business case. That said, there is a role for government to help defray the front-end costs of adaptation, through targeted grants, low-interest loans or tax breaks.

*This interview has been condensed from the original conversation.*

## Château Laurier Update

Heritage Ottawa's submission to the Built Heritage Sub-Committee (BHSC) in response to the most recent proposed addition to the Château Laurier submitted by Larco Investments called for a re-examination of the design approach taken by the architect, Peter Clewes, which consistently overlooked the picturesque qualities of the historic hotel that make it – and its landmark site – so unique.

On June 18, BHSC met to consider the city staff's recommendation that the proposed design be approved. BHSC unanimously supported an amendment that would send the design back to the drawing board in order to make the addition "more visually compatible with the existing Château Laurier." The amendment was in turn supported unanimously by both Planning Committee and City Council.

Heritage Ottawa supported the intention of the BHSC initiative, but retains strong concerns that the amendment did not go far enough to ensure that the subsequent design change will achieve the level of excellence this iconic building so rightly deserves.

Heritage Ottawa made a more robust series of recommendations, which included reconstituting the Château Laurier Heritage Working Group; inviting the public to an Open House for comment; and returning the resulting design to BHSC, Planning Committee and City Council for final approval.

The last point is of particular concern because by supporting the amended staff recommendation, Council is leaving the final design approval for the Château Laurier addition with city staff. The final design will not go back to elected officials for approval. Members of the BHSC and councillors will only be able to comment on the Site Plan, which will address issues of landscaping and traffic and pedestrian access.

The only Heritage Ottawa recommendation that city staff agreed to implement was to re-engage the city's Urban Design Review Panel in a formal review of the resulting design.

The changes to the design of the addition that result from the directive to make it "more visually compatible" with the hotel will not be ready until next February.

Stay tuned!



Photo: Peter Coffman

# Hail & Farewell: the Heritage Ottawa Board

Heritage Ottawa sees the departure of several of our long-standing board members, and we wish to thank them for their dedication to Ottawa's built heritage.

We thank Jay Baltz for 7 years of wise counsel on the board and for his leadership as chair of the Advocacy Committee. We are pleased that Jay is continuing as a volunteer member of the Advocacy Committee. We thank Glen Gower, who brought his social media savvy to communications, and shepherded us through a very productive board retreat. Krista Gowan brought youthful vigour to the board, and we wish her well in her future career in heritage. Linda Dicaire, one of Canada's foremost landscape architects, kept us focused on the importance of physical setting in our deliberations, and remains a member of the Lecture Series Committee. Doug Beaton took on the management of our membership at a time of transition, and he

has done a wonderful job getting us a more modern system which better serves our membership. We were very saddened by Ian Doull's untimely death; he had only just joined the board and was ready to roll up his sleeves and dive in. His many friends and colleagues celebrated his life at a memorial service at the RA Centre.

Because of his many years of service to Heritage Ottawa and to heritage conservation in Canada, Heritage Ottawa sends a special thank-you to Ken Elder. A heritage engineer for the federal government for many years, Ken's wealth of knowledge and experience helped us understand many complex heritage conservation issues, and kept us focused on our goals. Ken was the primary author of Heritage Ottawa's 50 Years|50 Stories, which was Heritage Ottawa's principal undertaking for Canada's 150. Thank you so much, Ken!

We are very thankful for our returning members, who are: Richard Belliveau, Peter Coffman, Ian Ferguson, Louise Fox, Linda Hoad, David Jeanes, Anne Maheux, Leslie Maitland, Heather McArthur, Hunter McGill, Carolyn Quinn, Martin Rice, Nicole Sammut, and Katherine Spencer Ross.

We have recruited four new members to the board. Julie Dompierre recently retired from Parks Canada where she was the Director, Heritage Designations and Programs Branch, as well as Executive Secretary to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Zeynep Ekim holds a Bachelor of Architectural Studies degree (with a specialization in Conservation & Sustainability) and a Master of Architecture degree from Carleton University. Hilary Grant holds a Master's Degree in heritage and museums from the University of Cambridge and an Undergraduate Degree in history and theory of architecture from Carleton University. She is currently a PhD student in Carleton University's Cultural Mediations Program in the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture. Robert Moreau comes to us most recently from Parks Canada, where he held a variety of positions, including Superintendent for the Northern New Brunswick Field Unit, and was most recently Director of the Collections, Curatorial and Conservation Branch of Parks Canada. He has agreed to take on Membership, and he has joined Heritage Ottawa's Executive.

Welcome back and welcome new members!



Photo: Tom Wright

*Colonel By Day 2018*

*David and Helga Jeanes at the Heritage Ottawa display.*

# Heritage and the City – Finding Committed Candidates

Photo: Peter Coffman



*Magee House partial wall collapse and emergency demolition*

The municipal election on October 22 provides an opportunity to raise the profile of the important role the conservation of heritage buildings plays in the health of our communities. This year a number of wards in Ottawa have several new candidates running, most of whom have not articulated their position on heritage conservation. It is also a chance to ask incumbents some straightforward questions about where they stand on heritage issues.

Heritage Ottawa offers the following list of questions which could be posed to contenders at all-candidate meetings or at the door, both to raise the profile of built heritage conservation and to find out how individuals vying to represent Ottawa's population view the issue.

1 What are examples of your heritage engagement, and when elected, what are the heritage priorities you will address?

2 Please describe a successful heritage project in the community.

3 What role can political leadership play in heritage promotion and conservation, and how would you support educating residents about the importance of maintaining our city's heritage buildings?

4 Do you see a more substantive role for the City's Built Heritage Sub-committee, particularly when it comes to preventing demolition by neglect of heritage buildings?

5 Currently, the Heritage Grant Program for Building Restoration provides funding for just 1% of Ottawa's eligible heritage properties to a maximum of \$5,000 per property, an amount that hasn't changed in over 15 years. Would you support raising this allocation to better support owners of designated heritage properties?

6 Since 2001, the *Ontario Municipal Act* has allowed the implementation of a heritage property tax relief program, which has been used successfully by many municipalities in the province. Would you support implementing such a program in Ottawa that would provide important tax incentives for owners to invest in their heritage properties?

7 In your view, what other opportunities exist to better support heritage in the community?



Photo: Linda Hoad

*31 Sweetland Avenue restoration*

There are no right answers, of course, but the willingness of candidates to respond to these questions in a clear, unequivocal way will provide voters concerned about protecting the important places that represent the experiences of our communities with useful information on which to base their vote on October 22.



# Hidden Heritage – Sisters of the Visitation Monastery

By Linda Hoad

The Monastery of the Sisters of the Visitation (*Soeurs de la Visitation de Ste-Marie*), home of a cloistered, contemplative order of nuns, was known to those living nearby but hidden to most behind fifteen-foot-high stone walls.

In 2009 their declining numbers forced the Sisters to sell the five-acre property which stretched from Richmond Road south to the Byron linear park. The City of Ottawa acted quickly to indicate its intention to designate this unique building and adjacent landscape prior to the sale to Ashcroft Homes. Lengthy negotiations followed, among city planners and heritage staff, the communities adjoining the property, and the new owners. A zoning by-law amendment in 2010 set out the location and heights of new development.

With the construction of new mixed-use towers at 88-108



*The Elms (left) and Monastery (right) from the courtyard of 88-98 Richmond Road*

Richmond Road in 2012-2017, the monastery is once again hidden, except for views through two large carriageways, and from the Nun's Walk, a new public thoroughfare along the eastern edge of the site. The recent application to construct a previously approved 9-storey residential building to the south of the monastery will again restrict views of the monastery from that direction as well.

## Some history\*

In 1910 the Soeurs de la Visitation (Sisters of the Visitation) purchased "The Elms" from the Holland family to house their contemplative and cloistered order.

The original two and a half storey stone house was built in 1864-1865 in the Gothic Revival style.

It was designed by English architect Sidney Bowles Fripp in a distinctive "pin-wheel style" for James Dyke, a local hardware merchant. Dyke quickly sold it to George Eaton, a gentleman farmer who occupied the home until 1880.

Eaton then sold the property to the Honourable James Skead, a lumberman, senator, Ottawa booster and founder of the nearby Skead's Mills (now Westboro). In 1887 Skead's widow sold The Elms to Alison Hilson Holland, wife of George Holland, the publisher with his brother Andrew of the Senate Hansard. The Hollands lived in the house until 1910 when it was sold to the *Soeurs de la Visitation*.

The sisters immediately constructed a new building anchored by the house, consisting of three wings around a central courtyard.

Following the traditional monastic pattern, the building includes a Chapel, an infirmary, a refectory, rooms for the sisters, an office for the Mother Superior, and workrooms, arranged around the courtyard. The property was surrounded by a fence and later a stone wall, enclosing a garden and areas for the sisters to exercise in private.

*\* based on research prepared by city heritage staff and David Jeanes*

For more details see this Heritage Ottawa web page:

<https://heritageottawa.org/50years/monastery-visitation-holy-mary>



*View of the Monastery through one of the two carriageways*



*The Nun's Walk linking Richmond Road and the Byron Avenue linear park*

## Demolition of part to save most?

The City recently received a formal request to alter this designated heritage building and construct a revised version of the previously approved 9-storey building to the south. This request had been modified following the heritage staff's rejection of an earlier proposal requiring considerably more loss of the building fabric and its character defining elements.

The application was heard on August 2 by the Built Heritage Sub Committee (BHSC).

Although the current proposal maintains and restores much of the original monastery, almost half of the west wing—a key component of the cloistered courtyard—would be demolished and replaced by an angled extension of the new 9-storey building to the immediate south. The separation between the monastery and the new building contemplated in the original zoning by-law is eliminated.

Heritage Ottawa opposed this partial demolition, while supporting the proposed restoration of other features of the monastery.

We emphasized the need, expressed by a 2010 Peer Review Panel and the Cultural Heritage Impact Statement (CHIS) prepared for this application, to establish a respectful transition between the heritage building and the intrusive massing of the much higher new construction. Heritage Ottawa urged the BHSC to “recommend significant design refinements to the 9-storey building with the objective of minimizing the impact of its form and massing on the existing heritage building.”

The Built Heritage Sub-Committee rejected the staff recommendation

that the proposed demolition and new construction be approved in a four to two vote. Members expressed a desire to see revisions to the plans which would incorporate several recommendations in the CHIS such as:

- consideration of the difference in scale between new and existing structures
- reduction of the the addition to the west wing to align with the face of the chapel.
- increase the width of the proposed glass connection between the addition and the original wing to facilitate the transition between new and old
- careful detailing of the addition to ensure a suitable transition and mitigation of height impacts to the existing monastery

## Next steps

Planning Committee will vote on this application to alter, as well as an amendment to the Zoning By-law and Site Plan to permit the proposal on August 28. Recommendations from Planning Committee will be heard by City Council the following day.



Photo: Jules Alexandre Castonguay; Ken Elder post card collection

# From the President

By David Jeanes



## Advocacy

The past several months have seen Heritage Ottawa executive and board members very active on the advocacy front. You will read elsewhere in this newsletter a report on the ongoing saga of the proposed addition on the north side of the existing iconic Chateau Laurier..

We have also been engaged in monitoring development proposals for the former Monastery of the Sisters of the Visitation in Westboro, the subject of an article in this issue. This is a long-running story, made more complicated by concern that the existing structure may be seriously deteriorating. On August 2, the Built

Heritage Sub-committee (BHSC) of the City's Planning Committee rejected the staff recommendation to accept the development proposal; it is not known if this decision will be upheld at Planning Committee. (see page 7 for more details). Heritage Ottawa presented its concerns, involving issues related to height, setback and proposed demolition of certain elements of the convent; you can find this presentation on our website. In an individual capacity I made a presentation, reflecting my research findings and personal concerns.

In the category of "breaking news", we have seen the partial collapse, followed by a controlled demolition, of about a third of the Magee House in Hintonburg. Spectacular events like this attract significant media attention, but serve also to underline the ongoing problem of demolition by neglect of heritage structures in Ottawa. We must be vigilant.

City staff reported to the Built Heritage Sub-committee that as a result of this dramatic event Property Standards officers will get further

training in how to detect structural issues and now have instructions to request an inspection by an engineer if there is any concern about structural failure.

## Heritage Ottawa Programs

Our 2017-2018 lectures series ended with a member-only event at the Orange Gallery – a presentation, including tools, by John-Philippe Smith on the history, art and craft of stone carving. You will also find with this newsletter the program for the fall and winter lecture series, which promises to offer stimulating and informative sessions on topics related to heritage and conservation.

The current walking tour program is proving to be very popular in spite of challenging weather. There remain a number of tours to come, with knowledgeable guides, so check what is on offer and come on down!

Heritage Ottawa appreciates your ongoing support. Volunteers are always welcome. If you know friends and family members who are interested in heritage, share this newsletter and encourage them to become involved.

*David Jeanes, President, Heritage Ottawa / Patrimoine Ottawa*

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