



Heritage Ottawa NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Preserving Our Built Heritage

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Expropriate Somerset House, says Heritage Ottawa

By David B. Flemming

My first memories of Somerset House date back to the late 1960's when it was known as The Ritz Hotel. The main floor tavern and the basement "ladies & escorts" section was a welcome gathering place for my friends and colleagues for lunch, after work or on special occasions. Food was served in a small restaurant off the rear of the tavern where one could enjoy a cheap yet hearty meal.

When I returned to Ottawa in 2000 after a 25 years absence, it was known as Somerset House with the Lockmaster Tavern on the ground floor and the Duke of Somerset pub located in the basement replacing our beloved "downstairs at the Ritz."

When the business finally closed in 2003, I was president of Heritage Ottawa and we were pleased to learn that the building had been sold to TKS Holdings which planned to modernize the interior. We looked forward to this important part of Ottawa's built heritage again being put to a commercial use.

The building had not always been a tavern. Built in 1897-98 by Thomas Cleary it was a fine example of the



Somerset House in 1900 when Bank and Somerset was a happening place.

Victorian Italianate style with its red brick walls, contrasting stone banding, brick corbelling and large display windows. In 1900 a 4-storey flat roof apartment block of a similar style was added to the east side of the building.

It was first home to Crosby & Carruthers Dry Goods Company and other commercial enterprises before it became The Ritz Hotel in 1937. From the 1930's until the 60's it was part of a vibrant commercial area of Bank Street.

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

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Expropriate Somerset house cont'd.



Photos: David Flemming

Somerset House from Bank Street in 2018 – abandoned

Two other hotels – the Gilmour House and the Alexandra – further south on Bank Street formed a “golden triangle” of drinking establishments.

Although the Ritz’s owner blamed the City’s smoking bylaw with the decline in business in the early 2000’s, it was evident that the old downtown taverns were fast giving way to newer establishments in other parts of the city. By the 1980’s, the Alexandra and the Gilmour had closed and the Ritz needed an upgrade if it was to survive.

Somerset House was designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1967 as part of the Centretown Heritage Conservation District.

Bad Things Started to Happen

Plans to renovate the building were submitted in 2005. Building permits were issued to permit the removal of “all interior walls, partitions, finishes

and servicing on all floors of an existing four-storey hotel” and later to “install a new structural non-combustible floor infill in a four-storey off retail building.” City inspectors met with the owner’s engineer in September in anticipation of the approval of revised plans for cellar excavations.

On Friday, October 19, there was a partial collapse of the southeast corner of the building. In excavating the cellar, a worker driving a Bobcat dislodged a support beam. Although he was trapped in his vehicle for nearly two hours, he escaped uninjured. An assessment seemed to indicate that too much soil had been removed causing an underpinning of a portion of the walls.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour declared it an unsafe worksite, which thwarted attempts to assess the building’s condition. The City’s Chief Building Official subsequently then issued an emergency demolition

order for the building. Heritage Ottawa strongly opposed the recommendation and urged the City not to make a final decision until a thorough assessment could be undertaken. We also provided the City with a list of structural engineers with heritage restoration experience.

Because of the Ministry of Labour's unsafe work place edict, the engineers had to inspect the building from a "cherry picker." It was recommended that a large portion of the building could be saved if there was a controlled demolition of some badly damaged portions of the walls and roof. This was done and the owner was ordered to take measures to further secure the structure.

Local merchants whose businesses had been severely curtailed by the street closures, were successful in convincing the City to re-open at least one lane of traffic and one sidewalk on both Bank and Somerset. It would however be months later until normal street traffic resumed.

Take Action, says Heritage Ottawa

In December 2007, Heritage Ottawa recommended the creation of an emergency protocol to enable the various city departments to respond in a timelier manner to heritage buildings at risk. (Five years later the City instituted such a protocol.)

Meanwhile, further work on the building ceased while the City and the owner argued over responsibility for both the collapse and the further demolition and the cost of security and traffic re-routing arising from the collapse. This matter was settled out-of-court in December 2012.

The owner has since then submitted two proposals for the restoration of the building (2013 and 2017) both of which were approved by the City but resulted in no action by the owner. A steel support structure was built to support the north side of the building. Heritage Ottawa strongly

opposed the owner's application for further partial demolition until it had assurances that the 2017 proposal would proceed. Despite our objections, the City approved the further demolition of a substantial section of the north wall and some of the interior floors

The City continues to issue work orders to protect the surviving structure, the latest of which had an April 30, 2019 deadline for completion. A third proposal, to erect a six-storey apartment building incorporating the surviving façade, is expected later this year. In the meantime, it has also been rumoured that the owner is seeking to sell the property or to purchase adjacent properties on Bank Street for incorporation into a much larger development.

The property is on the "Heritage Watch List" instituted in 2015 at Heritage Ottawa's urging and the Mayor's Heritage Matters Task Force are provided with regular updates on the status of the property.

Heritage Ottawa believes that given the owner's seeming inability or interest in developing the property, the City should consider expropriation of the property and its resale on the condition that the current structure be incorporated as part of a new building. The City has this authority to do this under the *Ontario Municipal Act*, but clearly lacks the political will to take such action. Meanwhile, the building has endured a twelfth winter exposed to the elements with no end in sight.

Stay tuned!

David Flemming is co-chair of the Advocacy Committee of Heritage Ottawa



Rear of Somerset House from Somerset Street

Former Union Station is New Home of Senate of Canada

By Carolyn Quinn

Photos: Courtesy of the Senate of Canada



Aerial view of the new Senate of Canada Building and the city beyond in late fall 2018.

Last December I had the privilege of touring the new Senate of Canada Building with some of the talented and committed people who helped make the transformation of Ottawa's old Union Station possible. As well as adapting the historic Rideau Street landmark to meet the requirements of a functioning Senate, the six year rehabilitation project restored its most spectacular interior spaces.

A Beaux-Arts gem completed in 1912 as Ottawa's central train station, the building served as a transportation hub until 1966 when rail was removed from the downtown core.

In what seems like twisted logic, Union Station was then slated for demolition to make way for cars and buses to park during the 1967 Centennial. Destroy history to celebrate heritage. Thankfully, pioneering advocacy efforts by Heritage Ottawa's founders saved the noble pile, which allowed for its renovation two years later into the Government of Canada Conference Centre.

Forty-plus years on, the deteriorated heritage site has returned to its former glory, thanks to senators who saw an opportunity to reuse an existing

building rather than erect an interim Senate Chamber in the courtyard of the East Block. Rob Wright, Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Services and Procurement Canada who welcomed our tour, told the group that the decision bumped the former Union Station from the bottom of the list of federally-owned heritage buildings in need of refurbishment to the top, while saving taxpayers some \$200 million.

The upgrades are impressive. Diamond Schmitt Architects of Toronto and KWC Architects of Ottawa oversaw the challenging

project. The design integrates seismic reinforcements, barrier-free access, Green Globe certified energy-efficient technologies — including a green roof, water-saving plumbing fixtures and 1912 chandeliers retrieved from storage and refitted with LED lighting — as well as the Senate Chamber’s new broadcasting and acoustic requirements.

In what seems like twisted logic, Union Station was then slated for demolition to make way for cars and buses to park during the 1967 Centennial. Destroy history to celebrate heritage.

But the highlight of the project is the revitalization of the former train station’s grand public spaces. Two new committee rooms and a mezzanine level were added to the monumental waiting room and the concourse converted into the temporary Senate Chamber. ERA Architects brought heritage conservation expertise to the meticulous restoration of the vaulted plaster coffered ceiling, marble floors, faux travertine panels and columns, and arched cast-iron Diocletian windows. For the first time in decades, natural light floods into the hall. Original elements were refurbished providing visual reminders of the building’s transportation history, like the station’s clock over the entrance to the former ticketing block and the mahogany high-back bench — one of 12 that once sat here — donated by the Museum of Science and Technology.

The Senate Chamber features a 20-metre-long illuminated skylight uncovered during the restoration. The historic senators’ desks were carefully identified, moved from the Red Chamber in Centre Block, and reinstated in their rightful location inside the temporary chamber. The introduction of new materials and craftsmanship are artistically juxtaposed against the classically inspired ornamentation. All 10 varieties of maple leaves found in Canada are depicted in the chamber’s walnut entry doors and the translucent glass panels that separate the antechamber. The traditional carving skills of Phil White, the Dominion Sculptor of Canada, were merged with digital techniques developed by Carleton University’s Immersive Media Studio under the direction of Dr. Stephen Fei; an innovation developed here and exported around



View of the monumental Senate foyer. Adorning the lower walls are large bronze panels perforated with thousands of tiny holes to create landscapes of the country’s regions.

the world. The resulting carved walnut panels depicting Canadian flags that flank the Senate thrones create the illusion of movement, as though the flags are fluttering in the wind.

The overall approach to this stunning revitalization focused on its reversibility. The Senate is scheduled to return to Centre Block in 2030, but the building will be ready to adapt to a new function. You can see for yourself. Guided tours of the award-winning new Senate of Canada Building can be scheduled at visit. parl.ca.

Carolyn Quinn is member of Ottawa's Built Heritage Sub-Committee as well as Board of Heritage Ottawa.



A new mezzanine level added to the grand former waiting room with the massive cast-iron Diocletian windows restored.



All ten varieties of maple leaves found in Canada are depicted in the Senate Chamber's walnut entry doors.



The Red Chamber with new royal thrones (each incorporating a piece of English walnut gifted by Queen Elizabeth II) set against panels of white marble from Vancouver Island under the restored and repainted original coffered ceiling and skylight.

The Firestone Collection of Canadian Art — An Evening with Brenda Firestone

By Danielle Jones

Each February during Heritage Week, Heritage Ottawa's annual Phillips Memorial Lecture honours the memory of Bob and Mary Ann Phillips, pioneering advocates of heritage conservation and co-founders of Heritage Ottawa.

This year's event, held in the Alma Duncan Salon at the spectacular new Ottawa Art Gallery, also honoured the memory of another couple who have left a lasting cultural legacy for our city. Heritage Ottawa was pleased to host guest speaker Brenda Firestone, eldest daughter of O.J. and Isobel Firestone, as she presented the fascinating story of her family's significant collection of Canadian art — now permanently housed at the OAG's Firestone Gallery.

O.J. and Isobel Firestone were passionate collectors of Canadian art. In the early 1950's, they embarked upon a collection that would grow to more than 1,600 works by now-famous Canadian artists, spanning the modern era from 1890 to 1985.

Most works in the Collection were purchased directly from the artists themselves. While travelling across the country on business, the couple often visited artist studios and spent hours in conversation over sketches, drawings and paintings. Several close personal relationships developed with artists including Jack Shadbolt, A.J. Casson and A. Y. Jackson.

Along with an extensive number of works by the Group of Seven, the Collection includes works by prominent Quebec artists of the 1950s and 60s such as Jean Paul



Photo: Danielle Jones

Barbara Firestone lecturing with a slide of the former Firestone family home on Minto Place in the background

Riopelle and Paul-Émile Borduas, and female artists including Ghitta Caiserman-Roth, Ann Savage and Molly Lamb.

By 1960 the family's modestly sized dwelling on Springfield Road was filled with Canadian art. Dr. Firestone worked closely with architects Sam Gitterman and George Bemi to design a new, landmark modernist home on Minto Place in Ottawa's Rockcliffe Park. Featuring state-of-the-art lighting, temperature and humidity controls, an open salon with soaring ceilings, and three levels of living space totalling some 8,000 square feet, the resulting space was a stylish combination of family home and private museum.

The Firestone home was the site of frequent dinners, concerts and special occasions hosted by the couple (A.Y. Jackson famously celebrated his 80th birthday there in 1962) and regular tours of the many paintings and sculptures displayed throughout.

In 1972, the Firestone family made an extraordinary decision. Recognizing the significance of their collection and the importance of keeping it intact, they unanimously agreed to donate the collection of 1,600 works—along with their modernist home for the collection's continued display, and a \$100,000 endowment fund—to the Ontario Heritage Foundation (now the

Ontario Heritage Trust) on the understanding that O.J. and Isobel could live there for the rest of their lives, and that Dr. Firestone would continue to conduct public tours of the house and Collection by appointment.

For many years Dr. Firestone did just that — and with great pleasure. Thousands of people had the opportunity to experience the Collection in its uniquely designed, intended context.

But by 1990, his health had deteriorated and the family house became vacant. The Ontario Heritage Foundation (OHF) considered moving the collection to Toronto — a move to which the Firestone family firmly objected, citing the condition of their donation that the Collection remain in Ottawa.

The OHF agreed to transfer ownership of both the Firestone house and Collection to the City of Ottawa, which in 1992 moved the 1,600 works to the city-owned gallery at Arts Court where it could be safely housed and secured for the future.

Sadly, the modernist house on Minto Place met a less fortunate fate. The city sold the building to private hands in 1995, eventually granting a permit for demolition to a subsequent owner in 2006.

While the loss was poignant for the family (and bemoaned by admirers of modernist architecture), Ms. Firestone was the epitome of resilience and grace in conveying the silver lining. In addition to the Firestone Collection now having its permanent home at the Firestone Gallery in the magnificent new Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG), an integral part of the family home lives on.



Detail of the modernist Firestone house staircase in its new home.

In a cooperative effort between the City of Ottawa and OAG, the home's original modernist staircase was carefully salvaged and stored

— and in a feat of engineering, incorporated in the new OAG where it now leads, poetically, to the Firestone Gallery.

Warm thanks to Brenda Firestone for her engaging presentation, which concluded in the Firestone Gallery where she conversed with many attendees until closing time. And thanks to the entire Firestone family for their wonderfully generous gift to the people of Ottawa.

The Ottawa Art Gallery is open daily from 9 am to 9 pm. Admission is free. For more information visit oaggao.ca

Danielle Jones is an artist, designer and heritage advocate with a particular interest in modernist architecture.



The modernist staircase from the Firestone house on Minto Place now incorporated in the new Ottawa Art Gallery

Photos: Sampoorna Bhattacharya

Reuse and Renewal of Historic Places

By Sampoorna Bhattacharya

On Valentine's Day, Heritage Ottawa joined the National Capital Commission and the National Trust for Canada to co-host the two-part NCC Urbanism Lab "Reuse and Renewal."

Tom Morrison of Heritage Standing Inc. opened the presentations by sharing insights he gained from a number of historical reuse projects in the Maritime provinces. In his view, the key to adaptive reuse is understanding the relationship between people and buildings.

The importance of that approach was made evident by speaker Laura Waldie from the City of Cambridge who described the restoration and addition to the Old Galt Post Office, a landmark overlooking the Grand River. Built in 1884, the building was purchased by the City of Cambridge in 2012 to house Idea Exchange, the town's fully digital library. The 2013 project by RDH Architects included restoration of the existing structure, plus new glass additions, one that cantilevers out over the river.

Bernard Serge Gagné spoke about the restoration of the Monastère des Augustines in Quebec City. Part of a UNESCO designated historic district, it was restored as a hospital of holistic wellness, a spiritual retreat for tourists and a conservation facility for all Augustine monasteries in Quebec. The project, while deeply rooted in Quebec heritage, was inspired by Spanish monastic adaptive reuse projects, which pay homage to history while adapting for future needs.

In the discussion period, concerns were raised regarding the increased

use of glass as "expressions of transparency on robust structures". A representative from Safe Wings pointed out how its use can transform a "bird-friendly" building into one that is collision-prone. The importance of environmental sustainability in adaptive reuse practices was strongly supported by students and youth in attendance.

The two days of inspiring lectures and brainstorming invigorated the conversation on adaptive reuse with respect to the interplay between heritage values, sustainability, and economic viability, and within contexts of the monumental and the modest.

Sampoorna Bhattacharya is the 2019 recipient of the Heritage Ottawa Management Internship.

Gordon Cullingham Grant 2019



Janet Irwin with award winners Emily Guy and Carolyn Gillespie, left to right.

The annual Gordon Cullingham Research and Publication Grant was awarded this year to Carolyn Gillespie and Emily Guy.

Ottawa researcher Emily Guy is undertaking "The History of Cambridge Street, Ottawa," a socio-cultural history of an important but unassuming street in Centretown-West with a diverse cultural landscape that has been overlooked in neighbourhood studies.

Working with Women of Architecture, Ottawa architect Carolyn Gillespie is researching the contributions of women architects who have worked in Ottawa with the aim of raising awareness of their contributions to the city's built environment. A user-friendly, folded pocket-sized map and online digital map will be developed from this research.

The grant awards, established by Heritage Ottawa in 2008, were presented to Ms. Guy and Ms. Gillespie on February 19 by Janet Irwin, Gordon Cullingham's widow, and Heritage Ottawa president David Jeanes.

Thank You David Jeanes

By Richard Belliveau

David Jeanes, who is stepping down from the presidency of the board of Heritage Ottawa after the Annual General Meeting in May, is one of Heritage Ottawa's most well known and long-serving members. He has made a variety of contributions to the organization, including leading various popular walking tours, lectures on heritage properties and personalities, and administrative assistance to the office. He has served as president from 2015-19.

We had a conversation with David to elicit his views on the challenges ahead for Heritage Ottawa and the future of heritage conservation in Ottawa. He spoke of the changes that had affected the organization in the last four years, noting that the City grant had expanded, and – along with important private donations – the organization's resources and activities have grown substantially.

During his time in office, Heritage Ottawa had to revise and re-enact its by-laws to reincorporate in line with new federal and provincial legislation.

The organization, with the gift of a private donation, has been able to staff the office from year to year with an office-manager/intern. As well, a vigorous semi-autonomous committee structure of the board has permitted a richer range of activities in the pursuit of its mission.

This requires the continued evolution of new ways of managing and doing things. And the key to that, according to David, is a renewal of leadership and continued recruitment to the board of new members with specific and varied talents. He also recognizes that an intense approach to revenue generation and fundraising will be required to meet these new challenges.

David himself anticipates remaining on the board and continuing with the activities he likes best – researching heritage properties, continuing with walking tours and bus tours and talks in a number of fora – David has always been active with Ottawa's Heritage Day and the city's Doors Open events, and with Jane's Walks as well as Heritage

Ottawa's walks, lectures and bus outings. Indeed, David reminded us that over the 17 years he has been with Heritage Ottawa, he has led 30 walking tours covering ten different themes or locales. This is certainly a record for any of our many volunteer guides.

David is also proud of his personal involvement in the successful pursuit of heritage designation for three important properties in the city, namely the Maison Jeanne d'Arc in Westboro, the Broadview Public School, and the Soeurs de la Visitation convent on Richmond Road.

So, on behalf of the board and membership of Heritage Ottawa, we wish to thank David Jeanes for his many contributions to Heritage Ottawa and to the project of built heritage conservation and appreciation over the years.

Richard Belliveau is a member of the Board of Heritage Ottawa

Sponsored Naming Rights of Heritage Property

The HO Advocacy Committee sent a letter to City Hall in March recommending that heritage buildings, such as the Aberdeen Pavilion, be excluded from the City's Naming Rights Policy so that heritage buildings would not lose their identities to corporate sponsors.

The Chair of the Built Heritage Sub-Committee, Councillor Glen Gower, took this issue immediately to the Mayor, and on March 12, Mayor Jim Watson wrote directly to Heritage Ottawa confirming that the Aberdeen Pavilion and the Horticultural Building would be removed from the list of facilities available for corporate sponsorship.

Erratum: Qualicum Beach

In the Spring 2019 issue of Newsletter, in the article by Andrew King on Ottawa's Qualicum neighbourhood, we inadvertently noted that the neighbourhood was named for Qualicum Beach in Vancouver. In fact, Qualicum Beach is on Vancouver Island. Heritage Ottawa knows better, and apologizes for the error.