

# Heritage Collingwood

Vol. 17, Issue 1 | NEWSLETTER OF COLLINGWOOD'S HERITAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE | Winter 2020

## The Tremont marks 10th anniversary

Ten years ago this fall, a crowd gathered at 80 Simcoe Street to toast the grand opening of the newly restored Tremont House. Guests marvelled at the remarkable transformation of the once-derelict building. Derided as a no-hope eyesore and threatened with demolition, the 120-year-old structure now boasted airy commercial space, quirky artist studios, art-lined hallways, desirable third-floor apartments and a chic, atmospheric café.

September 21, 2010 was a day of vindication for owners Anke and Rick Lex, who had defied skeptics, and put body, soul and cash into the 15-month rehabilitation.

"It was daunting," recalls Anke, "but the more we worked on it, the more we saw the beauty of the building."

As a founder and then-president of the Collingwood branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Rick had been involved in efforts to save the Town-owned building from demolition. In a last-ditch effort to rescue the building, the couple, who had already successfully restored two storefront buildings on Hurontario St., bought the property with the goal of turning it into an inspiring rental space for artist studios and arts-centred retail.

"The Tremont House was one of the last remaining 19th-century hotels in Collingwood – the only one left as a cultural reference," says Rick. "Even though it looked terrible, we did find several archival photos that showed what it looked like originally, and we felt it could be saved."

Built in 1889 by John McCormick, the 24-room Tremont House was a popular stop for travellers arriving at the nearby railway station.

The landmark hotel was rated as "exceptional" in the Collingwood Heritage



*Now: The Tremont, as it looks today, 10 years after being restored to its original 1889 appearance.*



*Then: Restoration begins in the summer of 2009. The painstaking removal of paint from the brick exterior of the old hotel was a turning point for the new owners. For more on cleaning historic masonry, see Page 4. Photo courtesy of Rick and Anke Lex.*

District's Inventory of Buildings and considered architecturally and historically significant.

Initially, however, many residential neighbours were not impressed.

"Even after we bought it, I think they thought, 'Oh no, now they're going to try and save that wreck of a building,'" says Rick. "But we had a lot of confidence going in."

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## Changes coming to Heritage Act

The Ontario government is moving ahead with changes to the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA), which could have far-reaching impact on heritage conservation across the province.

The Province has given notice of a proposed regulation under the OHA, implementing amendments passed as part of *Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*.

The amended Act and the regulation are set to come into effect January 1, 2021.

The stated aim of the changes is "to improve provincial direction on how to use the Ontario Heritage Act, provide clearer rules and tools for decision making and support consistency in the appeals process."

In response, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario has expressed concern that the changes could discourage designation listings and allow for open-ended objections by owners of proposed designated properties.

The ACO fears the changes to the appeal process "is likely to inhibit valid designation of cultural heritage property across the province."

"The change to giving a provincial tribunal (the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal) final say on designation represents a fundamental change to Ontario's heritage protection regime, which goes back to the passage of the OHA in 1975. It runs directly contrary to the concept of heritage as something of significance to a community that should be determined by the community."

On the other hand, the ACO sees certain changes as improvements: One proposal is designed to address confusion about what cultural heritage landscapes are and how they should be protected.

"Clearer provincial guidance material on cultural heritage landscapes is long overdue and will be most welcome," the ACO states.

The ACO also welcomes a proposed change calling for a new 60-day timeline for a municipality to notify whether or not an application for alteration or demolition is complete.

"These changes should help expedite the heritage approvals process and are modelled on recent amendments and planning procedures in the Planning Act." ❏

## Demand for heritage permits soars

After a lull in the Spring, demand for heritage permits has been heating up in Collingwood. By early fall, the number of applications for permits to alter heritage buildings, at 75, was on track to match last year's total tally.

"It's been unbelievable," says Kandas Bondarchuk, Community Planner (Heritage), Planning Services for the Town of Collingwood.

After an initial slowdown in construction, triggered by uncertainty around the pandemic, local building activity has accelerated at a dizzying pace. Owners of heritage buildings appear to have joined homeowners in general in fixing up their properties.

Projects that are being ticked off the to-do list include exterior painting, replacement of windows and doors, porch repair, chimney restoration, paint removal and signage.

There has also been growing interest in Collingwood's heritage properties from outside the region.

"We have been getting a lot of calls and emails from the GTA," says Bondarchuk. "People are looking to move here or buy a heritage building. It seems to have something to do with COVID. The Collingwood real estate market is hot."

The downside of all this activity: some people are carrying on with work without applying for a heritage permit.

The Heritage Committee would like to remind owners of designated properties that heritage permits are required for any alteration or addition to the exterior, or work that is visible from the exterior. Heritage permits are also required for all new construction and development and for the removal of a building or structure on properties within the Heritage District or on designated properties outside the District.

For application forms and information, visit [www.heritagecollingwood.com](http://www.heritagecollingwood.com). ☒

# Gaslight Tour postponed

The theme was set. The research was done. The plays were written. But, like so many much-anticipated events this year, Gaslight Tour 2020 had to be postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

"We were so disappointed not to be able to hold the tour this year; however, we feel that we made a responsible and safe decision," said Laurie May, the new executive producer of Gaslight Community Theatre Productions.

The show will go on – but not until the same time next year (late October, 2021). The theme will also be the same: "Collingwood's Unsolved Mysteries," and the five plays that were selected this year will be performed in 2021.

"We were totally blown away by the excellent research and writing that went into these plays," said Laurie. "The topics were all so interesting and the story-lines were all well-developed. We simply had to choose them ALL."

Here's a sneak peek of what's in store:

*The Innards of William Gibbard*, by Amy Phelan: In 1863, the body of William Gibbard, the disreputable Officer of Fisheries, is lying on an

autopsy table in Collingwood, having been pulled out of the Georgian Bay waters days after leading an attack on native territories. A tailor who was there, in battle, has a lively conversation with the deceased while fitting him up for his final journey.

*Firebug*, by Dawn Hanley: It's 1886 and two star-crossed lovers are caught between the destruction of an unknown arsonist and the rivalry between their families.

*Glory*, by Eleanor Burke: Almost a century ago, a young girl is murdered in Collingwood. The murder of Gloria Whelan remains unsolved.

*The Sorcerer*, by Janet Wilkinson: As the shipping and sailing season comes to an end in November of 1879, fierce storms howl across Georgian Bay. G.P. Burditt, captain of the *Waubuno*, comes into conflict with the steamer's owners, its passengers and crew, and his own conscience as he contemplates the ship's departure from Collingwood harbour.

*Collingwood Bomberettes*, by Melissa Shaw: World War II factor workers prepare for an upcoming beauty contest. One contestant seems to be missing. ☒

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## Celebrating award-winning restoration

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The couple also had excellent advice from former deputy chief building official and heritage committee advisor Ron Martin.

"Ron was certainly very helpful as the Town's leading heritage resource," says Rick.

Removing multiple layers of paint from the brick exterior was the "single most concerning challenge," he says. The process didn't go well at first, as the company they hired to do the removal was not familiar with the environmentally friendly product (Dumond's Peel Away) they were using to strip the paint.

Once the paint had been removed, the elegant bones of the structure began to emerge.

"It wasn't until we started making good progress on the façade that people started to come around," says Anke.

When it comes to rescuing historic buildings, the key to changing minds is changing the use, the couple has learned.

"People always want to tear down old buildings because they don't like the use," says Anke.

In this case, the change of use – from low-income apartments to an arts-centred space – earned the Lexes both provincial and local recognition. In November 2010, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario presented them with the Peter Stokes Restoration Award for excellence in adaptive re-use.

An artist in her own right, Anke is especially proud of the success of the artists' studios on the second floor. Inspired by the footprint of the

former apartments, the re-design created nine small studios with a common hallway. The layout allows the artists to mingle and exchange ideas and critiques in the wide hallway but retreat to their private studios to work.

"All of the artists are extremely happy being here," says Anke. "They have become a community. A number of them have been here for the full ten years."

In a series of videos posted on Creative Simcoe Street's Facebook page, long-time resident artists express what The Tremont means to them.

The demand for arts space turned out to be so strong that the Lexes expanded their creative circle to neighbouring buildings. When the property across the street came up for sale, the Lexes jumped at the chance to grow their vision of "revitalization through the arts." The 1980s structure at 65 Simcoe Street, built to house the Enterprise-Bulletin newspaper staff and printing press, was divided into arts-related shops, galleries, a dance studio, and theatre space. A rundown brick duplex on the same property was restored and converted to offices for the remaining newspaper staff for several years. When the paper closed in December 2017, the building offered more space for artists' studios. Currently, 77=79 Simcoe Street is home to Collingwood Art School and Alexander Art Supplies.

As catalysts for creative heritage conservation, the Lexes have much to celebrate. But, due to the pandemic, in-person festivities will have to wait. ☒



# Hope for Victoria Annex

The future is looking a little brighter for a historically important but sadly neglected local landmark.

The property at 400 Maple Street, known as the former Victoria School Annex, was officially designated in December 2019 after Collingwood Town Council gave final approval.

In use as part of an educational facility for more than a century, the two-and-a-half storey brick building has been vacant since the fall of 2001, and was badly in need of repairs to prevent further deterioration. Formal designation provides a measure of protection and facilitates the completion of remedial work to secure the building.

The property, which has been sold and resold several times, changed hands again this past summer. Responding to concerns about the fate of the heritage building, the buyer, Barrie-based Georgian Communities, has offered assurance that the developer plans to work with Town Council, staff, the

Collingwood Heritage Committee and the Collingwood branch of the ACO to address these issues.

In a designation report prepared for the Heritage Advisory Committee, historical consultant Su Murdoch recommended that Collingwood Council consider the property a suitable candidate for designation under Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, describing it as “a neighbourhood and town landmark.”

Supporting the significant cultural and heritage value of the property, Murdoch writes:

“The former Victoria School Annex building erected in 1894 on Maple Street represents the final stage in the chronology of Collingwood’s first common or public school, Centre Ward School, from makeshift classrooms elsewhere in the 1850s, to the sale of the Annex property by the Simcoe County District School Board in 2004.”

The main school building, constructed on the 2.5-acre site in 1884 and demolished about 1969, was designed by Collingwood architect Marshall B. Aylesworth, Murdoch notes.

“It was a well executed, locally rare example of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture being applied to institutional use.”

Aylesworth also designed the East Ward (renamed Connaught) School, which was erected in the same year on Napier Street. That building, which had also fallen into disrepair and faced demolition, has been successfully redeveloped into luxury condominiums known as the Duke Lofts.

In 1911, the Duke of Connaught, son of British monarchs Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, was appointed Governor General of Canada. To celebrate the occasion, many Canadian schools were renamed, and Collingwood followed suit: Central became Victoria School and East Ward became Connaught School. The newest school, erected on Second Street, was named King Edward School.

Victoria Annex was designed and constructed as a four-room, “standalone” building on a site west of the main school building. The construction contract went to Frank W. Bryan with local builders John Chamberlain, D. Peterman & Sons, and other Collingwood tradesmen.

“Although this attributes Bryan with the design, the Annex is a near duplicate of the 1884 school,” says Murdoch. “It could be argued that with the removal of the earlier building, the Annex also now represents



*Officially designated as a historically and culturally significant building, the Victoria Annex, at 400 Maple Street, awaits redevelopment.*

Aylesworth’s work at the site.

“Like the 1884 school, the Annex illustrates the 19th-century philosophy that a school building should be inspiring and have certain features such as separate entrances for boys and girls and natural lighting. The plan, massing, gable designs, masonry, decorative and polychromatic (red/buff) brickwork accented with black dye, round and segmental door and window openings together form an attractive composition.”

In her report, Murdoch recommended that “a survey of the exterior and interior of the Annex be conducted to identify any significant school related artifacts that may be suitable for incorporating into an adaptive reuse of the Annex or elsewhere in an historical display.” That would include vintage items such as school bells, lighting fixtures and classroom blackboards.

The Simcoe County District School Board sold the property in 2004.

Two wooden staircases leading to the second level were removed several years ago when the Annex was threatened with demolition. The application for demolition was withdrawn in 2007 and a Heritage Impact Assessment was commissioned to evaluate the impact of a proposed housing development.

The property was resold and plans for a new housing development were proposed but were not executed. Georgian Communities purchased the property in August 2020. The commercial and residential developer is currently developing Windfall at Blue Mountain, a six-phase development on 148 acres, and Mountain House at Windfall, a 230-unit residential development. Both are located at Mountain Road and Grey Road 19. ☒

## Time to apply for heritage grants

The Heritage Advisory Committee is now accepting applications for the 2021 Heritage Grant Program. **Deadline for applications is December 15, 2020.**

Under the program, owners of heritage properties in the downtown heritage district or properties designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act may be eligible for a grant of up to \$3,000 towards the preservation and restoration of the heritage features of their property. The grant must be matched by a contribution from the owner and is based on actual expenditures, verified by invoices.

**Applications for the 2021 Heritage Tax Refund Program will be accepted between January 1, 2021 and March 15, 2021.**

Please note: all participants must re-apply, even if they have previously taken part in the program. (Photographs and fees are only required for the first year.) Applications for all programs are available online at [www.heritagecollingwood.com](http://www.heritagecollingwood.com). ☒

# Black Bellows tapped for ACO award

Tapping into the blacksmithing history of a Collingwood landmark, the Black Bellows Brewing Company has forged a creative new use for an historic industrial building.

And the efforts of new owners Bryn Davies, Scott Brown and Peter Braul to revive the former auto body shop at 40 Simcoe Street have not gone unnoticed in heritage circles.

Earlier this fall, the project was nominated for an Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Award (the Paul Oberman Award for Adaptive Re-use in the Small Scale/Individual/Small Business category). The nomination description commended the Collingwood entrepreneurs “for their repurposing of the late 19th-century Dey’s building in Collingwood into the Black Bellows Brewing Company, preserving its historic elements.”

While the award ultimately went to the restoration and conversion of a small church in Poplar Hill, Ontario, the nomination brought welcome attention and validation to the Black Bellows team.

“It was amazing,” says Bryn Davies. “We were super thrilled to get the nomination. It means a lot.”

“It’s a huge honour to be nominated and get the reassurance that the work we have done was worthwhile and we had developed this really cool and funky heritage space.”

The history of the property and location within an emerging arts and culture hub have always been key to the vision for the brewpub, says Davies.

“This is part of what creates the story for us. The brand is inspired by it. That’s the beauty of this space, what inspired us to move into the building – there’s such rich character to it. It adds to the story that we’re trying to tell.”

Creating the story took a little longer than the partners anticipated. Construction began in May 2018, but the brewpub did not officially open until January 15, 2020. Aside from the typical construction delays, the crew ran into unexpected problems with the original wood flooring of the historic building, which they had counted on refinishing.

“One of the major challenges was having to pull out the flooring and replace it, says Davies. “That set us back.”

Then, just a few months after opening,



*Converting the former Dey’s Body Shop to a brewpub earned the Black Bellows Brewing Company provincial recognition for excellence in adaptive re-use.*

the bar and restaurant had to close due to the pandemic, only re-opening in July with patio dining. With safety measures in place to fully open after Labour Day, the business was up and running with 22 employees.

“It’s been an interesting year to open a business,” he says, “but we had a huge local outpouring of support in terms of keeping the bottling plant open and product deliveries going.”

Being able to reopen in July for outdoor dining was really important and helped the business get back on track.”

Whenever possible, the team was determined to retain the historical elements, such as the original forge, of the c.1906 building. An old shed at the rear of the property had to be taken down, but the useable planks were reclaimed and used to build a staircase leading to the mezzanine.

The casual seating area around the forge is decorated with end rolls of vintage wallpaper from Belgium, salvaged furniture and vintage distressed leather sofas.

“It’s very eclectic, bringing in the past but with a creative edge,” explains Davies. “We wanted it to be something different for Collingwood – something people would remember – but not lose that rich history.”

Dey’s Body Shop, known as ‘Dey’s,’ closed in April 2018, ending a family tradition that spanned five generations and 144 years. The auto body shop had roots as a marine blacksmith shop, which was originally located on the north side of Huron Street. After moving to the property at the corner of Ste. Marie and Simcoe streets, the core business gradually shifted to building carriages, buggies and sleighs, and eventually focused on auto body work. ❏



*Co-owners Bryn Davies (pictured), Scott Brown and Peter Braul have overcome many challenges in their first year of business.*



*Heritage Collingwood* is published by the Collingwood Heritage Advisory Committee.

The group of citizen volunteers serves as an advisory committee to Council on heritage matters.

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# How to clean historic masonry: Gently, please

**B**e gentle. When it comes to cleaning or removing paint from historic masonry, that's the message from heritage conservation specialists.

Do it right – leaving the patina that highlights and protects the old brick – and you can take pride in restoring the original beauty of your heritage building. Do it wrong – with harsh chemicals or abrasive materials – and you may cut short the life of your century-old bricks as they spall and crumble.

“Cleaning of buildings should occur in a non-destructive manner,” writes Phillip H. Carter in *Collingwood Downtown Heritage District Study and Plan Guidelines*. “Ontario bricks are soft and subject to deterioration by harsh cleaning methods. Good results can usually be obtained with detergent and water and a stiff natural-bristled brush. Some professional water-borne chemicals are acceptable. Sand-blasting and high-pressure water blasting are prohibited.”

Experts in heritage restoration caution against the urge to make historic masonry “too clean.”

“It is vital to establish the level of clean required for the specific job and not to clean any more deeply than absolutely necessary,” advises Mark Fram in *Well-Preserved: The Ontario Heritage Foundation's Manual of Principles and Practice for Architectural Conservation*. “Clean masonry only to uncover deterioration, to halt further deterioration, or to remove organic deposits.

“Removal of dirt and grime is only partly a conservation treatment,” Fram adds. “Its other purpose is almost emotional, appealing to our desire for newness in ‘revealing’ the ‘original’ look of the building. Unfortunately, aggressive cleaning to serve the latter purpose is not conservation at all, and even may be an agent of erosion and further deterioration. Cleaning, especially removal of dirt or old paint from exterior walls, must be considered very carefully – cleaning for conservation should remove only pollutants and grime that will attack those surfaces if left unattended and leave in place the protective patina or skin that age has left behind.”

In its *Policy on Masonry Restoration in Heritage Buildings*, the City of Kingston stresses the importance of restraint: “Historic masonry rarely requires cleaning to help stop decay. Patinas of age, found as a result of exposure to the elements, are what make historic buildings look historic. Indeed, some cleaning processes such as that commonly referred to as ‘sand blasting,’ can irreversibly



*Removing the paint from the front façade of 219-221 Hurontario Street (known as the Olde Town Terrace) revealed the beauty of the signature Collingwood brickwork.*

damage historic masonry. When cleaning is required, to remove graffiti, paint or rust stains, for example, the most gentle and environmentally friendly means possible should be identified by first testing in a discreet area.”

Fram advises against stripping paint from masonry that has been painted during most or all of its existence (except to repaint, and then only with vapour-permeable paint to prevent moisture build-up from inside). But, Phillip Carter, citing archival evidence, says few, if any, of Collingwood's historic brick buildings were painted from the outset.

“Historical photographs show that most original masonry in Collingwood was unpainted. Unless paint can be historically documented, it should not be applied, and existing paint should be removed.”

But how to remove paint in a gentle and environmentally friendly way?

While it's not hard to find local examples of what not to do – the craze for sand blasting in the 1980s left its mark – a growing number of once-painted historic buildings are showing their true colours, thanks to safe new methods of removal.

Ten years ago, The Tremont was an early adaptor of the Peel Away system, an environmentally safe and effective method developed by Dumond Chemicals. Using the new method was not without its problems, but the end result was transformative.

Owner Rick Lex also used the Dumond product to remove soot stains from historic brick

on the Tremont Annex at 77-79 Simcoe Street.

Recently, the new owners of 219-221 Hurontario Street (known as the Olde Town Terrace) relied on the Peel Away method to remove decades-old layers of paint. Removing the paint revealed buff-brick quoins contrasting the red brick body of the 1-1/2-storey residence. With its large bays and multi-gabled roof, the dichromatic brick terrace is characteristic of many homes built in Collingwood in the late 19th-century. But, its location and residential design in a commercial area set it apart.

In *Collingwood's Inventory of Buildings*, Phillip Carter describes it: “Residential building, set well back from and above street level, is unique in Main Street.”

Architectural clues suggest the structure was built in two stages: Carter estimates the north projecting, gabled section was built first, around 1870, while the southern gabled wing, with its slightly different mouldings and windows, may have been added around 1910.

Carter also remarks on the stone wall fronting the property.

“Front garden wall, built of local rubblestone with broad ashlar coping stone, is a rare piece of traditional stone masonry in a brick town. Remnants of base of former, cast-iron railings remain behind simple, metal picket railing – wall almost certainly predates present building and may even predate great Collingwood fire (1881), which makes this important.”