

# ACO MATTERS



Architectural Conservancy Ontario — Port Hope Branch

Newsletter — June 2021

## Chair's Report

Our executive launched May with a facilitated “Reset” discussion. A third of us were newly installed, and we wanted to review how we organized ourselves, structured our meetings, and might best develop a nimble forward-looking plan. Covid has separated us, closing down our social-glue events, while the heritage issues that challenge Port Hope have not abated. That has created an imbalance. More importantly, the closure of Tours, in-place Auctions, educational tours, and the social gatherings which all of us support, whether formally organized by ACO or by the Heritage Foundation, threatens to blur lines of governance for the two organizations, especially in these socially-distanced times. During Covid, cooperation among all partners has been essential; whether the issue be recovered histories, Penryn Park, care for our ravines, or fire damage in Wesleyville, everyone works with others.

Public education and advocacy for the retention and conservation of our cultural and natural heritage are the core of ACOntario’s mandate. **The Port Hope House Tour** has developed charming conversations with owners about their homes on **Barret St., Charles St., Walton St., Pine St., Mill St.** The House Tour YouTube channel is here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6qBrUbjABb8DFwzz-3bong>

The House Tour has also purchased the remaining stock of small pewter building models and is commissioning the design of new sets. Planning for revised walking tours to be accessed by phone is underway. Our chapter has filmed conversations about the chapter and the **Opera House**, as well as drone-video tours of the **Barn Quilt Trail**. The short version spectacularly displays our rural areas last fall; the “long form” is an educational “tour de force” that combines Phil Goldsmith’s description of barn types with each farm’s economic and family stories. We want our community’s researched and oral history stories to become a leading focus. The ACO YouTube channel is here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8GEMv6InXFkezA-lrJl6vg>

Finally, two posters, of Porches, and Porticos, photographed by **Nigel Dickson**, are being designed.

Port Hope is planning a refit of Walton St. from Mill to Church streets. The submission is similar to those developed for other Ontario towns. But Walton St. has no comparator, both by its curving rise to Pine St., and by its Georgian facades facing onto Queen, John, Ontario, Cavan and Brown streets. Alone of main streets, imported trees will not enhance its heritage visage. These points had been noted in Peter Stokes’ study for the creation of the Heritage District in 1995, but that volume had not been referenced. I dug it out for the Mayor, at his request. That street entry pattern continues all the way to Victoria: Hagerman, Church, Julia, Little Hope. Only Pine

and Bramley are through streets. Three of those short entries provide wonderful opportunities for beautification to be seen from Walton. This Uptown residential zone goes beyond Church St. — the end of the proposed sub-ground replacements — to Victoria/Toronto Rd., and needs its design to include that. Hidden in that cohesive residential zone is its historic commercial past of hotels, food businesses, stores, and a fire hall. Walton street’s downtown Heritage District would become so much more powerful as a defining feature if it could be extended into an Uptown Heritage District as its heritage entry corridor.

— Bruce Bowden, Chair, ACO Port Hope

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# Executive

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Julie Mavis

### **Projects**

Phil Carter

# Advocacy Update

The ACO Advocacy Committee is continuing to promote the preservation of Port Hope's built and natural heritage, and protecting the heritage attributes of the designated Penryn properties is still a major focus. We are currently preparing our statement for the Mason Homes LPAT Appeal. Needless to say, we believe that the loss of the Penryn woodlot and the close proximity of the proposed subdivision to these designated properties could seriously diminish the heritage integrity of this culturally significant area. Fortunately, Letourneau Heritage Consulting, the firm retained by the Town to evaluate the Cultural Heritage Landscape potential of the Penryn properties, recently established through their own research that the Penryn "buildings, setting, vegetation and circulation around the property support 19th century picturesqueness design ideals" and confirmed our opinion that Penryn Park, the Penryn Homestead and the woodlot do comprise a significant Cultural Heritage Landscape.

The careful stewardship of heritage windows and shutters is another focus of our advocacy at this time. Windows are an important and distinctive feature of a heritage building and their appearance, placement, materials, and design details play an integral part in defining the building's character. Unfortunately, windows are the feature of a heritage building that is most often changed or replaced often resulting in the loss of some of the building's heritage identity. The Advocacy Committee has therefore been developing a heritage windows information section for the ACO website. This section will include best practices for heritage window maintenance, restoration, and replacement along with an environmental sustainability and energy standards guide. A list of heritage window specialists working in this area will be provided as well.

The ACO Advocacy Committee also continues to be mindful of the heritage buildings of Port Hope's beautiful Downtown Conservation District. Over the past 10 years, ACO Port Hope has put over \$250,000 towards the revitalization of these heritage buildings. Now that the Town is planning a reconstruction of the Walton Street infrastructure, our committee wants to ensure that the historic nature of these buildings is given due consideration as the planning process continues. An Advocacy Working Group has been formed to prepare a response to the Walton Street Reconstruction Plans presented thus far.

— Susan Layard, Advocacy Committee

# To the Writers Among You!

Have an idea for an article that would interest our readership bearing on Port Hope, its architecture, history and connected subjects? If so, let's hear from you. The next deadline will be early September.

Contact Patsy Beeson at [pbeeson@eagle.ca](mailto:pbeeson@eagle.ca)



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## Port Hope House Tour Announces Re-imagined 2021 Tour

The Port Hope House Tour (PHHT) committee has reimagined the traditional in-person house tour. Typically, this one-day event in early October would expect upwards of 1,000 participants to walk through 8 – 12 homes in the urban and rural areas in Port Hope. In the past, local restaurants and churches supplied special meals to attract the lunch crowds and retail stores saw an influx of shoppers over the course of the weekend. This annual event has been run in this fashion for the better part of 55 years. Unfortunately, the pandemic made this format impossible to emulate.

Back in January 2020, the PHHT committee met to consider ways to update some of the aspects of the tour and introduce it to new audiences. According to Committee Co-chairs Marnie & Bill Bickle, the 2020 focus was to build on the previous successful tours by sharing more content online that would help sell tickets for the tour. By the summer of 2020, the committee decided to postpone the tour and think forward to 2021. By February 2021, it was decided that the house tour would need to offer an entirely socially distanced experience due to the ongoing pandemic. “This was a massive leap for the group,” explains Marnie Bickle, “we were just wrapping our heads around the idea of small incremental changes, and suddenly we had to make a jump.” The committee had to come up with several different alternatives to engage both locals and tourists with the beauty and architecture of Port Hope homes.

Starting in the summer of 2021, the committee will be rolling out Self-Guided Walking Tours of Port Hope, primarily geared to local residents. Three different routes have been chosen with engaging information on homes, businesses, streets and history that has

created the unique fabric of the town. This tour will be available through a printed map or downloadable app. With the app, participants will be able to read, listen, and watch while strolling around Port Hope’s historic streets. “We really wanted to do something that was not exclusively in front of a screen,” committee member Ian Everdell said, “and one of the best ways to experience the beauty of Port Hope homes was just by taking a walk.” The app will showcase some of the interesting features and historical facts of the homes which would otherwise not be available.

While the Self-Guided Walking Tours are extensive and promote social distancing, they might not be for everyone. Depending on the status of lockdowns, the committee also wanted individuals or small local groups to be able to safely enjoy Guided Walking Tours. These would provide a heightened experience as participants are able to converse with a knowledgeable guide. Committee member Martha Ciana shared that, “people love to ask questions and interact with guides. They like to know the behind-the-scenes, the secrets and the hidden treasures that only come with guided tours”.

But that’s not all from the committee. They are also embarking on an entirely Virtual PHHT this fall. While it will not replace the in-person, it hopes to connect with House Tour participants who have previously supported the Tour. The one-day virtual PHHT is a way we can take participants inside houses and experience the personality, renovations, art, décor, and stories of a few properties in greater detail. These video tours will be available exclusively for a limited time in the fall, around our usual tour date at the beginning of October.

**House Tour, continued on page 7 →**

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# *Education in Port Hope since 1797* Part 2

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By Rachel Arnaud, Port Hope Archivist

We left off this story of education in Port Hope leading up to the early 1870s. A major change to our education system happened in 1871— the Act to Improve the Common and Grammar Schools of the Province of Ontario made schooling free and compulsory up to the age of 14. This meant that school districts needed to be able to accommodate all school -aged residents at the local schools. The move to make public schools free meant that there was a much greater need to accommodate the local school-aged children. Port Hope's school system by 1871 had been developed to accommodate only a portion of the local children.

In 1868, the East Primary School was built at Elgin and McCaul Streets to replace the East Octagon. The West Octagon School remained in use until around 1873, but locals did not think too highly of this ‘modern’ structure. An article in the April 14, 1871 edition of ‘The Guide’ used words and phrases such as ‘shaped like a mushroom’, ‘gloomy’, and dark and dirty. Apparently it was nick-named the ‘Fort’ due to its lack of windows and strange shape. A new school, West Primary, was finally built in 1873 at the north-west corner of Bruton and Bramley Streets to replace the octagon, and was able to accommodate a greater number of students.



West Primary School Room 2, 1924 (Acc.#2014.85.1.5417)

A local school report, written by Rev. John Cassie in 1860, is eye-opening to some of the social conditions that the local schools dealt with—he writes “the non-attendance of so many children (about 300) is to be traced, in some cases, to indifference in parents, in others to extreme poverty, the parents not being able to give their child a decent outfit.” Despite schooling being made free and compulsory in 1871, only 64% of Port Hope’s children were attending school by 1872. Factors such as childhood illnesses may have caused long absences in some of these cases.

The East Primary School, located at the north-west corner of Elgin and McCaul Streets, was used as a primary school until 1923, when it was decided to build a new school. The new

school was built at nearby Ward and Hope Streets at the cost of approximately \$27,000 by local contractor Thomas Garnett & Sons, and was completed in 1925. The new school had just four classrooms but an addition was built in 1949 that added 8 new rooms due to a significant increase in students attending the school post-WWII. A 100' foot long army hut was purchased from Niagara-on-the-Lake and transported to Port Hope in 1947 to be used for additional classrooms at the school before the addition was built.

In 1930 this school was officially named ‘Dr. L.B. Powers Public School’ to recognize the 35 years that local physician Dr. Lafontaine Baldwin Powers had served as Public School trustee. In 1925 Dr. Powers had been initially opposed to naming the new school after him, as he disagreed with the cost to taxpayers of building the school, so the new school remained without a name until it was finally settled in 1930. Dr. L. B. Powers school remained open until 2006, at which point its students were moved to Beatrice Strong Public School on Rose Glen Road due to outgrowing the building. The Dr. L.B. Powers school building still exists today at 64 Ward Street, and was converted to residential units in 2009.



Dr. L.B. Powers School Students with Canadian Red Ensign, Late 1930s (Acc.#2016.31.2.6421)

The United Grammar and Common School, located on the upper floors of Knowlson’s Block (corner of Walton and Cavan Street) in 1856, was unable to continue accommodating its tightly-packed students and moved to Mill Street in 1861. The Union School is said to have reopened in what we now refer to as the Crawford Block (37-41 Mill Street). Within a few years, the Board of Trustees decided it was time to build a dedicated Union School, and after over \$10,000 was raised the Union School was built and opened on Pine Street in 1867.

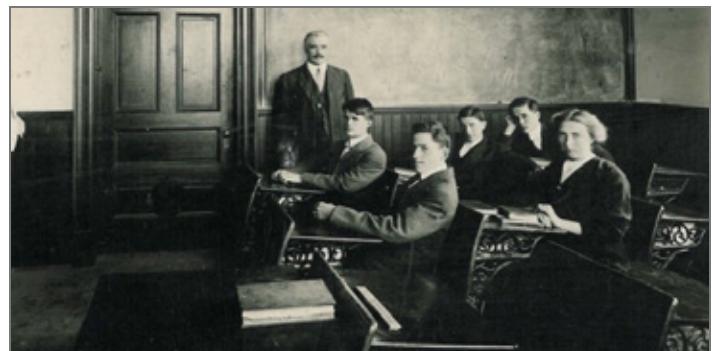


With the change in 1871 to free and compulsory education, the new Union School quickly became too small to hold both public and high school classes. The board of trustees, under the leadership of the high school's principal Dr. Adam Purslow, purchased what was known as the 'Old Kirk' at North and Brown Street and opened a new high school in 1872. The building wasn't 'old' at all, having only been built for the local Presbyterian congregation in 1860; when they merged with the Mill Street Presbyterian Church in 1872, the church was sold to the school board. As the town grew, and more students began to attend classes, the High school once again became too large for its current accommodations. It was decided in 1896 that a new building would be purpose built for a High School on Pine Street for approximately \$12,000.

The new High School was officially opened on January 11, 1897 with a special reception at the Opera House at Walton and John Streets. This building was used as a High School until the 1950s, when the current High School was built on Highland Drive. This building on Pine Street was then used as a public school named Dr. M.S. Hawkins, named after Doctor Morgan Stanley Hawkins of Port Hope, a former school teacher, dentist, and Chairman of the Board of Public School Trustees. The school was open until the early 2000s, at which point the building was no longer needed and converted to condos. Dr. Hawkins Senior Public School is now located on Highland Drive with the High School

After the move of the High School to their own building, a Model School for the County of Durham (a teacher training school) was opened in the Union School building in 1877. The Union School added a new wing in 1883, which made room for 11 classrooms. The Model School ran at this site until the Union School building was torn down to be replaced by Central Public School on the same property. The new school was designed by architects Ellis & Connery and was built to hold 15 classrooms. It served as a public school in Port Hope until 2009, when its students were moved to Ganaraska Trail Public School.

Another school that served our community was Howard Jordan Public School, which was founded in 1958 and opened in 1960 on Percival Street. This L-shaped building had 10 classrooms, and before its closure in 2009 had just over 200 students. The school was named in honour of W. Howard Jordan, Supervisory Principal of the Port Hope Public Schools from 1934-1969.



Port Hope High School, Form IV, 1912 (Acc.#999.6.1.516)

Jordan laid the cornerstone of the school when it was built. Shortly after its 50th anniversary, the school closed and the students merged with the Ganaraska Trail Public School in 2009.

St. Anthony's Catholic Elementary School, on Toronto Road, has also been a part of our community since it opened in 1960. Monsignor Leo Cleary and the Sisters of Saint Joseph opened St. Mary's Elementary School in 1956 and then St. Anthony's in 1960 for the older students. An addition, including 8 classrooms and a gym, was added to St. Anthony's in 1996. In 2009 St. Mary's School closed and a new wing was added to St. Anthony's to accommodate the extra students.

Trinity College School has also been an important fixture in our community since 1868, when its early days of schooling consisted of a staff of nine teachers and only 70 students. On ten acres of land purchased in 1871, the new school was built and attendance and prominence rapidly increased over the next decades. The school suffered through major fires throughout its history, and after the last major fire in 1928 was built into the school we recognize as TCS today. If you're interested in the history of TCS, I encourage you to go and read the extensive history published on the school, called 'The School on the Hill', and visit their online Archives: <https://www.tcs.on.ca/who-we-are/john-d-burnsarchives>.

I hope this article has helped to show how our local schools and education evolved alongside the town as it grew, and as our priorities as a community and nation changed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. If you have any stories, memories, photographs, etc. of any of the schools please consider donating a copy to the Archives to help us preserve our local history of education.

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# Keeping an Eye on Ravenscourt

By Tom Cruickshank

It is a high-style house, standing just over the eastern boundary of Port Hope in Hamilton Township. Built about 1847, Ravenscourt is slightly newer than but definitely in the same league as the Bluestone, the Grange, Penryn Homestead or any other of our town's early architectural gems. A Regency tour de force, it stands a full two storeys high, encircled by a verandah modelled after a circus tent. It has two "front" entrances, one facing south toward Lake Ontario, the other toward the sideroad. Inside, Ravenscourt has 12-foot ceilings, back-to-back fireplaces and the grandest staircase in the county. Even better, many of its decorative surfaces — paint-grained millwork, fireplace mantels, trompe-l'oeil ceilings — are intact. It's a museum piece that leaves visitors stunned.



Caroline Hayward documented *Ravenscourt* in this lovely illustration, as seen from the south-west. Courtesy Royal Ontario Museum.

**C**hances are you've never heard of *Ravenscourt*. That's because it stands off the beaten path, with its back to the 401 and accessible only by a service road with no other houses on it. Its splendid isolation is both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because despite the din of traffic, *Ravenscourt* still feels a world apart. A curse because the house is so far from the mainstream that you have to wonder about its long-term future as a useful building. Alas, the issue is coming to the fore, because *Ravenscourt* is about to go up for sale and it's going to be a tough sell if it is to be preserved.

*Ravenscourt* is forever associated with Alfred and Caroline Hayward, who were rural gentry and parents to two renowned artists whose works are now in museum galleries. However, they did not build the house. That honour goes to Alfred's uncle, Francis Hayward, whose brief adventure as a gentleman farmer in Upper Canada began when he bought the farm on which *Ravenscourt* stands in the summer of 1846. At the time he was in his 60s, so it's a mystery as to why a single man required such a lavish estate, especially because less than a decade later, he retired back to England and bequeathed *Ravenscourt* to Alfred.



Although *Ravenscourt* stands in near-original state, the years are catching up to it. Only the rear tail has been updated for day-to-day living, while the rest of the house languishes. Surfaces are badly scuffed; there are visible cracks in the plaster; most of the house isn't heated. This is not to say the house has been neglected—indeed, the roof is true and the current owner painstakingly restored the verandah with his own labour, using archival evidence to guide the design. *Ravenscourt* still cuts a mean figure, but it would take to very deep commitment to restore the interior to modern standards of comfort and efficiency, let alone put it to good use.

So therein lies the problem for preservationists. *Ravenscourt* is an architectural gem worthy of the best restoration efforts, yet it stands in an inhospitable location. As it goes up for sale, an informal committee of enthusiasts is working with the owner to help look for a buyer, weigh the options and brainstorm for its future. One that deserves a happy ending.



The fanciest rooms in *Ravenscourt* are decorated in a riot of decorative motifs. See how the walls are framed in a curlicue vine pattern and the cornice is rendered in laurels and gryphons. Even so, the best effects are saved for the ceiling. The condition is only fair, but this is museum-quality stuff.



## Erratum: Octagons and Hexagons

By Jackie Tinson

In the December issue of ACO Matters the small house at 45 Bruton Street was incorrectly described on page 7 as an octagon. It is in fact a hexagon. The author apologises. She was alerted to her mistake by Leslie Benson, former owner of the house and the person responsible for its restoration. Interestingly the hexagon was a prototype (or variant — if that word doesn't currently strike

terror in the heart of the reader) for Fowler of his octagon design. Fowler had met Joseph Goodrich in 1850 and been invited to inspect the latter's house, a hexagon. The house was built using a compound of concrete, cement, sand, stones, and gravel, mixed wet and placed between boards to form the walls. Fowler refined the process to develop his famous "grout" wall. However, when it came to design, Fowler preferred an eight-sided to a six-sided structure, an octagon more closely resembling a sphere and the shape most often found in nature.

Leslie Benson bought the long-abandoned house on Bruton Street in 1979 and had to "shovel out the dead squirrels" with the help of her father before any restoration work could begin. The hexagonal shape allows for only two large rooms in the main structure although there is an extension or tail on the back. The front room Leslie chose as a living room and the back as a dining room. She believes the tail, where she found a large cast-iron sink, housed the summer kitchen. Where, then, was the winter kitchen? The basement, often a possibility, is low ceilinged with a dirt floor and is not livable space. A puzzle. Leslie installed a modern kitchen in the tail and extended it in board and batten to add a bathroom and bedroom. She later added another addition to the west for laundry, pantry, and second bedroom. The house, now owned by Christa Bisanz, is beautifully landscaped so that the two additions in no way detract from the original pretty profile.



45 Bruton Street, Port Hope

**House Tour, continued from page 3 →**

For these activities to be executed smoothly, the committee is asking for your support. For those who are interested, there are still sponsorship opportunities for walking tours and for the virtual house tour as well as custom video opportunities. If you have volunteered for the House Tour in the past, the committee thanks you and may need you as they sort out additional details.

Finally, for information about the tour activities, including sponsorship, plans for the summer and volunteering, head over to our new website: [www.porthopehousetour.com](http://www.porthopehousetour.com) or contact Committee Co-chairs **Marnie & Bill Bickle**, at [marniebickle@me.com](mailto:marniebickle@me.com), [bill@fordelm.com](mailto:bill@fordelm.com) or **905-885-6671**.

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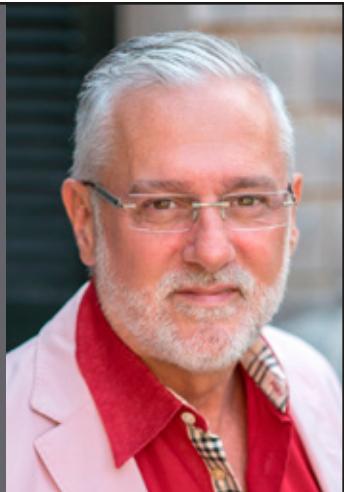
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