

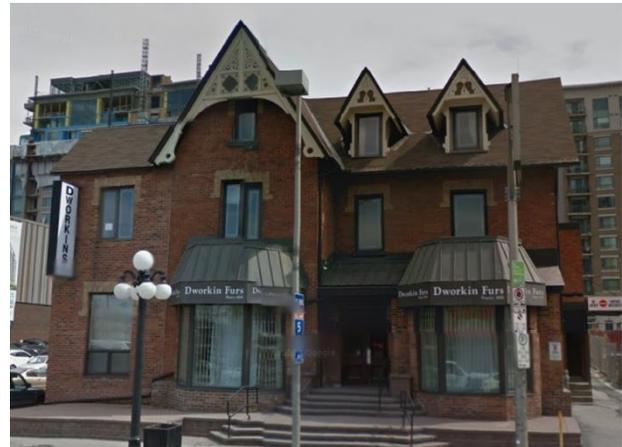
Heritage Under Threat, Rules Ignored

12 May 2014

Ottawa, ON – Demolition of another piece of Ottawa and indeed Canada’s built heritage started on Saturday May 10th. Action Sandy Hill (ASH) believes that as the nation’s capital we should be doing more to preserve our shared built heritage and that our municipal government should follow best practices for public consultation and transparency.



Then



Now

Heritage Matters

Thanks to the research done by Marc Aubin and the Lowertown Community Association (LCA) we know that this house was built in 1877 by Colonel John Stewart who was a soldier and builder of some renown. In 1921 Abraham and Rose Dworkin moved in and opened a furrier which remained in business at this site until 2012. For more information, see the supplement attached which better details the history and importance of the Stewart-Dworkin House.

This house is an important reminder of one of Ottawa’s early builders, and one of the few remaining buildings on Rideau Street that relate to the important part the Jewish community played in the development of Ottawa; not to mention that it is the only Confederation-era building remaining on Canada’s “main street”. It is a shame that, as preparations begin for the 150th Anniversary of Confederation in 2017, the City of Ottawa is allowing the demolition of one of the few remaining buildings from that time.

Rules Should Be Followed

Though the City of Ottawa has issued a demolition permit for this building, there is no record of an application for such a permit. Residents and community associations were not consulted prior to issuing this demolition permit or informed about it afterwards. There is a pending Site Plan Control Application for 256 Rideau which, according to the City, is still “on hold”. The City’s own rules indicate that a demolition permit will not be granted until plans for a replacement have been approved. Since the site plan application is still on hold, the City has ignored its own rules by issuing this permit.

Reality Check and Balances

We have been told that the City's heritage planners have, "determined that the building was not worthy of designation". There was no public consultation on this assessment, no one in the City has been willing thus far to provide us with a copy of the evaluation that was completed in order to make this determination and since this decision new information has become available. Action Sandy Hill is concerned about the lack of transparency in this process and we wonder why the City's built heritage sub-committee has not been given the opportunity to review this finding. The only historical information and photo we have of the building are the result of the research of the LCA.

ASH calls upon the City of Ottawa to follow its own rules forbidding demolition prior to Site Plan Approval. We ask city staff to respect the views of the people of Ottawa -- that more needs to be done to preserve buildings such as Stewart-Dworkin House and integrate them into redevelopments such as those on Rideau Street. The alternative is to lose Ottawa's connection to its Confederation-era history.

In the past day and a half more than 500 people have signed an online petition to save this building. Their comments are indicative of the sentiments of people from across Ottawa who have a great appreciation for our history and built heritage and want to see more effort made to save and repurpose our shared inheritance as we grow. As one petitioner wrote: "I am starting to feel ashamed of what the main street (Rideau/Wellington) of my capital city looks like. This house is one of the rare beautiful buildings left on the downtown Rideau portion of the street".

<http://www.change.org/en-CA/petitions/city-of-ottawa-and-phoenix-homes-save-the-last-grand-house-on-canada-s-main-street>

SUPPLEMENT

Background – Stewart-Dworkin House (256 Rideau Street)

Prepared by Marc Aubin

The Stewart-Dworkin House is a Confederation-era home built in 1877. This is one of a few grand homes built on Rideau Street and one of only two left. When built, this quality home included plumbing and gas. Electricity was later added. The front of the building has retained its original gables and elaborate trim - original ornamental barge board.

At the time this venerable landmark was built, most of the nearby property usages were mixed-use commercial and residential, including corner grocers, a biscuit works, stone cutters, a hotel, barber, dressmaker, Dufour carriage manufacturer, tinsmiths, tailors, and a flour store. The property has lost its original bay window, ornamental porch, and great elm trees. It is listed on the City of Ottawa's Heritage Reference List as a Grade 2 undesignated building. The house is an important example of the diverse mix of buildings that existed along Rideau Street.

History of Occupants

The Stewart Family

Colonel John Stewart came to Canada from Ireland. He was married twice and had nine children. One son who grew up at 256 Rideau, William James Stewart, later became the Chief Hydrographer of Canada. The family attended St. John's Anglican Church.

Colonel Stewart was a prominent member of the Ottawa Field Battery for 37 years (joined in 1857). The battery had four guns and thirty horses and was active during the Fenian raids between 1866 and 1870.

Colonel Stewart rose from carpentering to become a prominent local and national contractor. His work included extensive alterations to the Rideau Canal – a UNESCO world heritage site; an extension to the West Block of the Parliament Buildings, the original Supreme Court Buildings, and a commission for the RCMP in Regina. He was also a member of Ottawa city council, the Orange Order, and a Freemason. He died while leading work on new armories in Toronto in 1894. He is buried at Beechwood, the National Cemetery of Canada. The house at 256 Rideau Street is an important reminder of Ottawa and Canada's early builders.

The Dworkin Family and Furs

Abraham and Rose Dworkin, Jewish immigrants, came to Canada from Lithuania. They bought the house in 1921. The family's home also became the home of Dworkin Furs, a business Mr. Dworkin founded in 1901. At the time, at least four Jewish families were known to be in the raw hide and fur business. After raising eight children, the Dworkin's continued to live in the house in a small apartment on the second floor until Mr. Dworkin passed away in 1951. The business was sold to John Toth in 1969 and closed in 2012 after 111 years in business.

When Mr. Dworkin passed away in 1951, the Ottawa Journal referred to him as a "Prominent Ottawa philanthropist" and a "Leading business figure." Dworkin Furs is without a doubt a well-known Jewish-owned business in the history of Ottawa. The landmark building at 256 Rideau Street is one of the few left that is witness to this important part of Ottawa's Jewish and commercial history on Rideau Street.

Phoenix Homes Condo Proposal

Phoenix homes has proposed a mixed-use development containing two 27-storey towers connected by a 3 storey podium. The proposal would include the demolition of this historic Stewart-Dworkin home. The project was on-hold due to an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board brought by Phoenix Homes against the City of Ottawa. The appeal was not regarding the demolition. The hearing was originally scheduled for May 20th, but the city has indicated that a settlement was reached with the developer. Details of the appeal can be obtained from the city.