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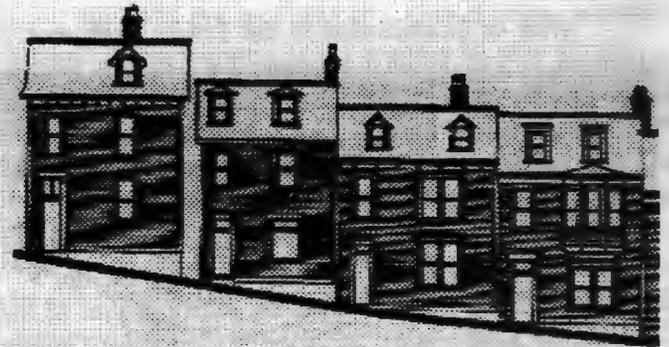
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

the trident

the Newsletter of the Newfoundland Historic Trust May 1995

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Twenty Years A-Dying: The Fate of St. John's Heritage

by Shane O'Dea (an address delivered to the Urban Environment Conference, LSPU Hall, St. John's, 17 February 1995)

I am come to you this morning to read you a sermon and to put in words an apocalyptic vision of the future of the downtown. But, as there is no perspective on the future without a memory of the past, we must look **back before** we can look forward.

"What do you want to see the harbour for, anyway?"

Twenty years ago the residential area was little better than a slum. Many of the houses were fire hazards, were occupied by tenants who only wanted a roof over their heads, and were owned by landlords who only wanted a guaranteed income in their wallets. But the tenants were not the only people who lived downtown: there were two other groups as well. There were older people who, as their families had done before them, had lived and worked in the area for years. Many were still living in the houses their parents or grandparents had built after the 1892 fire. There was

also a growing number of young people - the "pine and plants" set, of architects, students, lawyers, who were attracted to the downtown because of its architecture (to "the homogeneity of the cultural landscape" as one academic described it), its site above the harbour, and its potential for interesting living space. The older group might have been happy to stay downtown but were panicky about two things: property values and personal safety - a concern which was brought home to them most forcibly when they tried to get fire insurance. In fact, most of them might have moved earlier except for the fact that the deteriorating value of their houses had them trapped. The younger set were obviously less concerned about immediate property values but had to face serious obstacles not only with regard to fire insurance, but also with getting mortgage money. And City Hall had virtually abandoned the area, because most councillors and staff lived in bungalowoid suburbia, so that streets and services were poorly maintained, and building standards only enforced to a limited extent. City Hall and Confederation Building both thought the old town was a slum waiting for a bulldozer, and their attitude to it was best summed up in the puzzled question of one cabinet minister: "What do you want to see the harbour for, anyway?"

(see "Tipping the Balance" p. 3)

President's Report

by John Edward FitzGerald

This past year has been an exceedingly busy one for the Trust! In many ways, it has been a year of transition. Following the election of a new board at a belated April 1994 AGM (which was the AGM for 1993-1994), the executive undertook a comprehensive organizational review process, which was facilitated by Dr. Jo Shawyer, Past President of the Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador.

After an examination of the Trust's goals and objectives, it was decided to conduct a financial review, and revitalize some of the Trust's programs, such as the "Who Lived Here" Plaques, the publications program, and step up research and advocacy. During the summer and fall of 1994, the Trust became outspoken in advocating that the Provincial Government adapt and re-use the historic Marshall, Javelin, and King George V Institute buildings in downtown St. John's as part of the Cabot 500th Anniversary Archives/Museum/Art Gallery Centre.

However, by the summer of 1994, the Trust found itself fighting a proposal by the province to construct the Cabot Centre on a second site, the grounds of Government House. To make matters worse, the province had not consulted the heritage community, and was not communicating with the Trust about its intentions. Through the media the Trust mounted an intense lobbying effort aimed at Confederation Building, and in Ottawa lobbied Federal Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy, from whom the province expected to obtain \$35 million for the facility. The Trust succeeded in halting the destruction of Government House largely by arguing that it made little sense to destroy a historic building and its landscape in order to erect a monument to our history, and by reminding Minister Dupuy that by funding a Cabot Centre on the ground of Government House, he would be destroying a National Historic Site and its landscape, and a neighbourhood containing several national historic sites, all of which he was sworn as minister to protect.

In response, the Province then turned its attentions to Fort Townshend as a third site for the Cabot Centre. In particular, statements by the Minister of Tourism, Recreation and Culture, Hon. Roger Grimes, gave no assurances that the house known as "The Observatory" would survive, while discussions

with government officials intimated that it was government's intention that the house be levelled. At the same time, the Trust, and specifically the President of the Trust were approached by the homeowner to help save the house, on the grounds that she was being hounded by real estate agents seeking to purchase the property before she herself had been informed by government of its intentions, and because government expropriators had been on her grounds inspecting the property without her permission. Government policy regarding the demolition of the house did change, but not before I was personally denounced in a 6 December 1994 Ministerial Statement in the House of Assembly as having "been the source of many unfounded rumours about the property", having caused a "negative reaction among the members of the Newfoundland heritage community", and having caused the homeowner "anxiety and inconvenience"!

Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Chretien arrived in St. John's from Europe to announce that the Cabot Celebrations of 1997 would be an event of National Historic Significance. Unfortunately, no federal funding was then announced, and since then none has been forthcoming. Planning for the Cabot Centre has continued, but with no funding in sight the project remains in limbo.

In January, the Trust made a presentation at the Town Hall in Bonavista to a Government-appointed commissioner urging that a re-zoning of the historic Cape Bonavista to allow "development" of the site not proceed. The Bonavista Historical Society and Parks Canada also made submissions urging the protection of the Cape, and were pleased to have the participation of the Trust. All groups presently await the outcome of the hearing.

Most recently, in a spate of budgetary reconfiguration, the Provincial Government eliminated the annual subvention to the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, an organization the Trust lobbied government to establish in the 1980s, and which under the Historic Resources Act is the Province's agency for designating buildings as provincial historic sites. While the Foundation has sufficient resources with which to operate during the coming year, it is a priority that funding be restored so that heritage grants may continue to be awarded to restoration projects. The Trust wrote the Minister, pointing out that in all cases the

Foundation's grant funding spurs other private funding of restorations, and that this was not only a direct contribution to the creation of jobs, but that it provides a heritage resource for the growing tourism industry. A recent discussion of this with the Minister proved encouraging, and it seems reasonable to expect that funding will be restored next year.

The Trust continues to monitor heritage developments around the province, and conduct research. It informs its members and the general public of threats to our built heritage, and seeks to broaden its ability to achieve these goals. In accordance with the custom of the Trust, at the Board meeting of 9 February, the Board of Directors decided to invite Ms. Linda White and Mr. David Bradley to become directors. Each holds graduate degrees in Newfoundland History, and by profession is an archivist. Each has been very active in the heritage movement in Newfoundland, Linda as Treasurer of the Newfoundland Historical Society, and David as a member of the Bonavista Historical Society. We warmly welcome them both. While we are a volunteer organization, subject to the energies and enthusiasms of our members, our work continues to be highly effective, and makes a considerable impact on the awareness of our built heritage by governments and the general public.

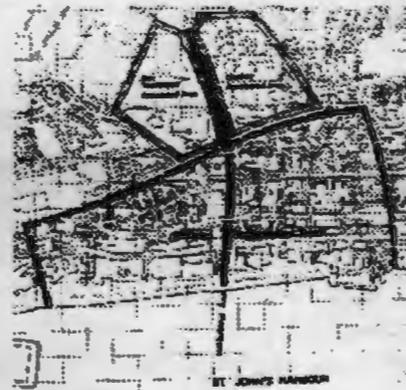
New Board Elected at AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Trust for 1994 was held on 30 November 1994 in the House of Assembly Chamber of the Colonial Building, on Military Road in St. John's. Trust President John FitzGerald welcomed an audience of about thirty-five members. Delivering the Treasurer's Report on behalf of Treasurer Kathleen Parewick, Board Member Gerard Hayes remarked on the financial health of the Trust. Trust President John FitzGerald noted that a condensed report would be published in the next issue of *The Trident* (see "Financial Report" in this issue). Following the Preservation report, and the President's report, longtime Trust member and Past President Dr. Paul O'Neill conducted the election of officers. The following members were elected to the Board: President: John FitzGerald; Vice-Presidents: Kerry Gosse and Ruth Canning-Saturley; Treasurer: Kathleen Parewick; Secretary: Penny Dobbin; Board Members: George Chalker, Gerard Hayes, Mona Rossiter, Lana Collins,

Aiden Duff, and Don Parsons. After the meeting the Hon. Fabian O'Dea delivered a lecture on the history of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment on the occasion of its bicentennial in 1995. John FitzGerald thanked Mr. O'Dea for his lecture, and congratulated him on his recent installation as Honourary Colonel of the Regiment. Refreshments were then served.

Tipping the Balance: Heritage Conservation Areas (from O'Dea, "Twenty Years A-Dying", pg. 1.)

In 1975 the area was at a crucial point: would it continue to deteriorate until it became fit only for the vulture-like attentions of the slum landlord and property speculator, or would it be revitalized as a residential area where, as traditionally had been the case, a mix of income groups could live with some certainty that their lives and investments were secure? What tipped the balance was the determined action of two groups who saw the possibilities in some new federal programs. The Community Planning Association of Canada (CPAC) saw that neither the City nor the Province had the imagination or the intelligence to get access to the Neighbourhood Improvement Plan (NIP) funds in the east end. The Newfoundland Historic Trust saw that the newly-established Heritage Canada Foundation wanted to promote the idea of heritage conservation areas so that they sought planning support from them. The NIP funds were for the upgrading of infrastructure, but allied



with RRAP money, they meant that not only were basic services improved, but so were houses, in terms of fire separations, insulation, wiring, and plumbing. The establishment of Heritage Conservation Areas meant that many buildings with some architectural merit which would have been demolished were restored and put back on the market to create a revolving fund for heritage

development. However, because initial cost recovery was low, the revolving fund never grew.

Spin-offs From Heritage Restoration

What did grow was the spin offs from the restorations. For every house restored by the St. John's Heritage Foundation, two more were restored by private funds, so that by 1981 St. John's could be judged a remarkable success in terms of conservation. But it was also an economic and social success. Restorations provided the City with a whole new image based on



heritage, and a whole new tourism marketing strategy. And then the Province carried this strategy over into its tourism advertising program so that St. John's became a focal destination for tourism: on this, were the revenues of George Street built. It was a social success in that it fulfilled the joint goals of CPAC and the Historic Trust to develop an area where there was a mix of income groups, where living in a heritage area was a matter of pride, and where there was a strong commitment to the neighbourhood. The income mix was crucial to this because the professional group provided the technical skills and the connections to fight City Hall and the lower income groups provided the human stability in the neighbourhood - they would be there after the professionals might have moved on. The importance of this mix was best demonstrated if one looked west to what used to be the Midtown South NIP area. And what do you see? Half of it is gone, buried in the basements of Cabot Place and the Delta Hotel. Why? Because the neighbourhood got sucked in by the developers and, if they didn't approve the project, they didn't fight it.

But 1981 was a pivotal year for the downtown. It was the year in which all of the problems started by the controversy over the Duffett Building, now TD

Place, came home to roost. TD Place violated all the heritage regulations because it involved the demolition of recyclable heritage buildings, because it broke all the height and density restrictions, and because it blocked some great views of the harbour from the residential area. And TD Place was not the only violation. The Ayres then entered the fray with a proposal to demolish the Pitts Building for Scotiabank. And, because the City was quite clearly not prepared to stand by its own commitments to its own residents who had invested in their heritage but were prepared to crawl to the mainland bankers, the government decided that the St. John's Heritage Foundation was no longer worthy of support. It refused further funding, and that organization folded.

Taking Stock Twenty Years Later

That does not mean that heritage work came to a close. In fact it continued remarkably through the 1980s, but almost entirely by private individuals, and tapered off by the end of the decade. Now, halfway through the 1990s we have to take stock, to re-examine the experience. What these people achieved was something quite remarkable - the fact that this LSPU Hall is now a famous Canadian theatre is the result of a joint heritage initiative by CPAC and the Mummies Troupe.

But in truth, we are back to the same state we were in twenty years ago. If any of you live in the downtown, you will know how difficult it is to get insurance. One woman I know had her insurance cancelled by one company, and had to go through 23 others before she could find an insurer. Another had the same experience and the reason her insurer gave her for cancelling the policy was that her property was "commercial" - but how commercial? She had a study in her house out of which she did some of her work. I have no idea what it is like getting mortgages, but I do know what is motivating the insurance companies even though they won't admit it: the slum landlords and their residents. The downtown to them is a very high-risk area for two reasons: the frequency of fires, and the density of dwellings. The area has had a lot of fires and the fact that the houses are attached makes those fires more difficult to fight and more likely to be costly to the insurer.

The "Fry the Neighbours" Game

Wasn't this the case before, you may ask? It might have been when the buildings failed to meet the

fire code, but there is a new factor now: the phenomenal increase in the number of renter-occupied units. Between 1981 (the year in which City Hall abandoned the Heritage Conservation Area) and 1991 the percentage increase in such units was 55%. Renters are not responsible for building maintenance: they only seek decent accommodation. Landlords frequently attempt to provide this but not all do. You only need one slumlord in a row and you are into the game of "fry the neighbours". But if that figure is alarming, think of this one: since 1981, "non-family" households in the downtown have increased by 65%, and 127% since 1971. "Non-family" can be another word for boarding-houses, about which we have heard so much in the last year or two.

Why the great increase? Are the landlords suddenly become heritage advocates? That they are not. So why have they reappeared so strongly since 1981 when the goal of the area was to produce a housing stock accessible to a mixed-income range of homeowners, to produce a settled downtown population, and consequently, a strong neighbourhood community? Landlords will only go where they are comfortable, where there is a nice bed for them, a place where what they do is not too controlled, a place which does not cost too much. A place where they can rip off heritage



features and slap on vinyl siding and slider windows. And who has made this bed so comfortable for them? In fact, who is (figuratively) sleeping in that bed with the most notorious slum landlords? None other than their self-proclaimed enemy: Andy Wells. It is he and City Council who through their failure to maintain and enforce effective heritage regulations have made it

possible for the slumlords to pick up these properties and despoil them. And who suffers for this? The neighbours, those who have put their life savings into their houses, those who have been given to the beautification of their street and to the economic attractiveness of their city. They can see only difficulties in getting and eventually paying for insurance. They can only see dropping property values and a deteriorating neighbourhood. And they do respond: they vote with their feet, and a vicious circle is born.

The Death of Downtown Heritage

What, therefore, two young organizations and the individual citizens of this city created two decades ago is now in jeopardy because of the virulent opposition of City Council. The figures are not yet in but the impressionistic data suggests that far fewer houses in the downtown now have heritage features than they did twenty years ago. There has been some wonderful work, but because of the failure of City Council to stick to its own regulations, the heritage character of the city is diminishing. And what was once working its way to becoming a potential candidate as a United Nations World Heritage Site (with all the incredible spinoffs in tourism dollars) is now a decaying corpse and a dangerous mess. Our heritage is dead.

Bulletin Board

Monday 29 May 1995

An Illustrated Public Lecture by architect Philip Pratt: "The Process of Architecture: The House on Middle Ridge, Brigus". At 8 p.m., in Room A-1046 of the Arts & Administration Building, Memorial University, Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's. Free parking in lot 16A, north side of Prince Philip Parkway, west of Alexander Murray Bldg.

Friday 23 June 1995

The Twelfth Annual Southcott Awards for Excellence in Historic Restoration. At 3 p.m. in the E.B. Foran Room of City Hall, New Gower Street, St. John's. The St. John's Day Reception hosted by the City of St. John's will follow.

Tuesday 27 June 1995

Official Opening of Hawthorne Cottage National Historic Site, Brigus, C.B. At 3 p.m. at Hawthorne Cottage in Brigus, hosted by the Newfoundland Historic Parks Association.

Financial Report

Reviews of the Trust's finances for 1993 and 1994 have been conducted by Sooley and Associates, Certified General Accountants. Original copies of the reports are in the possession of the President and Treasurer of the Trust; members may consult these upon request. The following are excerpts:

For the year ended 30 September 1993

Balance at beginning of year: \$12,302

Excess of receipts over disbursements for the year: \$ 398

Balance at end of year \$12,700

For the year ended 31 September 1994:

Balance at beginning of year: \$12,700

Excess of receipts over disbursements for the year: \$ 2,416

Balance at end of year \$15,115

Neither in 1993 or in 1994 were membership renewal notices sent out. In effect, membership was carried over from 1992. The surplus of funding received during 1993 and 1994 reflects grants and donations received.



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The Newfoundland Historic Trust

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The opinions contained in articles in *The Trident* are those of their authors and are not necessarily those of the Newfoundland Historic Trust.

Membership Renewal Notice 1995

Membership fees for 1995-1996 are now due. Fees are \$10 per person, \$20 per family, and \$35 for groups, institutions and organizations. Please clip and complete the following form and mail with a cheque for membership payable to The Newfoundland Historic Trust to: The Newfoundland Historic Trust, P.O. Box 2403, St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 6E7.

Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Town/City: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: (w) _____ (h) _____ (fax) _____

E-mail address: _____

The Trust is considering the possibility of faxing future editions of *The Trident* to members in order to save on mailing costs. Would you like be able to receive *The Trident* by fax? Yes ___ No ___ (If "yes" then please provide a fax number above). Are you interested in serving on any of the Trust's committees (Board of Directors, Southcott, Publications, Public Relations)? If so please indicate: _____