MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 56 Queen Street

Known as: Port Hope Town Hall

Architectural Style: Neo-Classic

Date Built: Circa 1851-1853

Date Designated: June 27, 1994 to By-Law No. 21/94, SCHEDULE B-1

Lot Description: PT 51 (PART OF ORIGINAL TOWN LOTS S 48, 49, 50)



Architectural Description

Set on a high stone basement, the arcaded effect of this ground floor opening is preserved with the elegant centre entrance to its seven-bay pilastered front. The notable treatment of this centrepiece with round-headed fanlighted transom to a handsome pair of doors and bracketed canopy is complimented by a Venetian or Wyatt window above. This civic building, designed in the neo-classic inspiration of the early Victorian period, has, with its capped pilasters of the front, a feeling from the Greek revival, the canopy to the entrance a touch of Italianate.

Brickwork and stone dressings belong to the original building, as do the hipped roof form with ornamental cornice to the eaves and survivors of the end chimney stacks. The central cupola, octagonal in form, is set on a high stepped base of such plan; the widely louvred faces alternately punctured with four-paned, heavily mullioned transomed windows and adorned with Roman numerated clock faces to the cardinal points. Louvred panels are separated by small slender Roman Doric colonettes with plan shafts having a slightly exaggerated entasis. These columns support a bold cornice with denticulated frieze carrying a metal-tiled roof, octagonal in plan, but extended in an ogre shape to an upper cornice surmounted by a cast iron balustrade and central flag staff.

Changes after the 1893 fire were elimination of the indoor market from the first floor. The French doors were replaced by one over one double hung sash and the steps were removed from the first floor to the ground except for the main entrance. The second floor windows were changed from twelve over twelve double-hung window to one over one double hung sash transom.

The multi-paned sash would do much to enhance the design of this building. However, L.A.C.A.C. has approved the restoration of the Town Hall to the period following the fire in 1893. The interior is basically a centre hall plan, notable throughout for its wainscoting and recessed door-cases with single leaf, five panelled doors with moulded trim. The central hall contains a moulded wooden staircase with square-edged balusters and newel post. Occupying the entire north end of the second storey is the Chamber or Council Room, with its vast floor space, high ceiling and five foot wainscoting.

Historical Abstract

In 1834, Port Hope was incorporated as a Town by an Act of Parliament, which provided for the establishment of a police and public market. For electoral purposes, the Town was divided into four wards each of which had an elected representative. The Municipal Institutions Act of 1849 eliminated the Police Board and established a Mayor and Town Council. Prior to the occupancy of the Town Hall, the council had no formal meeting place. The first Town Council held meetings at the Gillett Patterson Block (29-33 Walton Street). The need for a Town Hall and Market Building was apparent so the Town of Port Hope purchased from Elias P. Smith town plot lots 48, 49 and 50 for the proposed Town Hall and Market Building. Merwin Austin, a Rochester architect, was commissioned to design the new building.

Merwin Austin came to Rochester about 1845 and became an influential architect in that city during the ensuing decades. As Austin's prominence rose in Rochester, by 1850, he was commissioned to design the Second Monroe County Courthouse. The first courthouse had been built circa 1821-1822 and served the rapidly expanding population. However by 1849, the need for a new, larger courthouse was evident. The cornerstone for the courthouse was laid on June 20, 1850 on the corner of West Main and Fitzhugh Streets. Undoubtedly, it was this important commission that brought Merwin Austin to the attention of the civic leaders of Port Hope. Both buildings display characteristics of neo-classic inspiration typical of early Victorian civic buildings.

The building contract for the Town Hall was awarded to Philip Fox for ten thousand dollars. The cornerstone for the new building was laid on September 9, 1851 amongst much fanfare. Processions to the site of the new building were made by two bands, the fire companies in their uniforms, the Sons of Temperance, members of the St. George's, St. Andrew's, St. Patrick's, Orange Lodge and Masonic Order, the clergy, Mayor James Smith, M.P.P, and the architect of the building, Merwin Austin. Thomas Gibbs Ridout, Deputy Provincial Grand Master, laid the cornerstone. The evening concluded with a dinner for one hundred guests held at the newly constructed Robert Charles Smith Block (48-60 Walton Street).

The building was completed in 1853 at a cost of nearly $30,000, three times the estimate of the original contract causing the builder financial ruin. A clock and bell were added in 1855. H. S. Perry of New York provided the clock.

Town Halls in the early towns and villages of Ontario housed not only the council chambers and a courthouse, but were also combined with a market to form a market square or civic centre. The ground floor housed the market area and the council chamber or hall was located on the second floor. Until the Music Hall was built in 1871 (85 Walton Street), the Town Hall was used for the Town's social activities and for musical entertainment. Reports in the local paper, however, suggested the Hall was not adequately appointed with furnishings and furniture for such events.

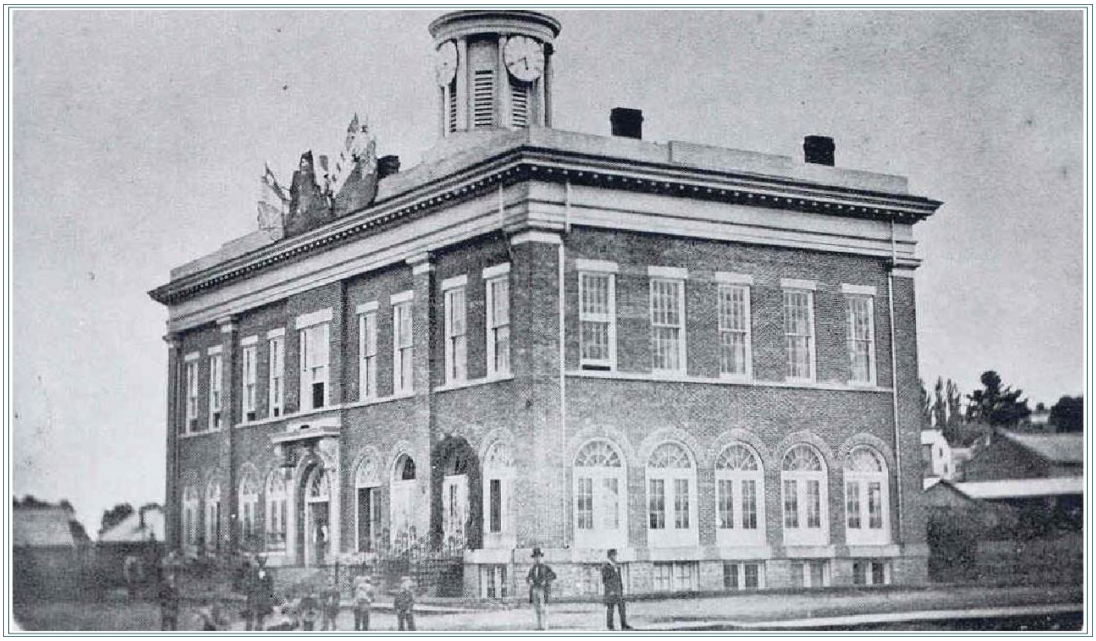
On February 3rd, 1893, the building was completely gutted by a fire that began in the northeast corner of the building. The walls were left standing but most of the timberwork and wood finish were destroyed. The Town clock and bell were destroyed as well. Toronto architect Samuel George Curry, a native of Port Hope, was hired to oversee rebuilding of the Town Hall. Within a year, the building was reconstructed and reoccupied by Town Council on February 26th, 1894.

There were a number of changes made to the original design. The buildings original multi purpose use as a market, police headquarters and lockup, town office and public hall was altered. Council chamber, which doubled as a courthouse and assembly space, was relocated to the north end of the second floor. Most of the covered market space was removed which resulted in the filling in of various openings or conversions of doorways to windows on the ground floor.

Exterior changes included the roof, which was replaced by a steeper pitched hip roof, and the old clock and bell tower were replaced with a higher and proportionately less pleasing structure. Later, seven of the eight chimneys were removed, leaving a furnace stack on the north side.

Changes in the fenestration include the replacement of the upper storey twelve over twelve double-hung sash with one-over-one double hung sash and transom. The centre Venetian window on the second storey was replaced with transom and single pane sash. On the first storey, the glazed doors within each entrance arch were replaced by a single pane casement sash, although the accompanying radiating fanlights remain. The fenestration on the north end underwent considerable alteration that broke the pattern of fenestration and subsequently the harmony of the building. The round-headed doorway in the rear was eliminated as were the wooden steps approaching each of the entranceways to the shops within.

The Port Hope Town Hall has remained the focal point for political, social and commercial activities within the town. Several prominent guests have visited Port Hope's Town Hall throughout the years. In 1860, the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward VII, paid a brief visit, and in 1879 Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria, and her husband the Governor General, Marquis of Lome visited the building. In 1889, Sir John A. MacDonald, Prime Minister of Canada, participated in the ceremony to unveil the statue of Colonel Arthur Trefusis Heneage Williams in the Market Square (56 Queen Street). In 1991, a Coat of Arms was granted to the town by the Chief Herald of Canada, and formally presented by Governor General Ramon Hnatyshyn in June 1992.



Before the fire, (photo from East Durham Historical Society)



After the fire, (photo from East Durham Historical Society)



Architectural Detail

The central cupola is octagonal in form set on a high stepped base with louvred panels separated by small slender colonettes with plain shafts. The colonettes support a bold cornice carrying a metal tiled roof octagonal in plan but extended in an ogre shape to an upper cornice surmounted by a cast iron balustrade.