MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 87-97 Walton Street

Known as: St. Lawrence Hotel Block

Architectural Style: Walton Street Heritage District - Italianate

Date Built: Circa 1853

Date Designated: September 19, 1983 to By-Law No. 51/83, SCHEDULE B-7

Lot Description: SMITH ESTATE PLAN PART TOWN PLOT LOT 55



Architectural Description

This attenuated version of the Italianate Style contrasts pleasantly with the classic blocks on Walton Street. It is a brick commercial building, the brick being of a stretcher bond design. It is four storeys high in five units and has seventeen bays to the main facade. It was designed for use as a hotel by American architect, Merwin Austin, who also designed the Town Hall, and by its date, this building is well ahead of its time. Cast iron is used extensively on the front window labels and columns to -the shop fronts. A heavy bracketed cornice fronts a low-sloped shed roof. Certain subtleties mark it as the work of a careful designer. For example, the descending order of importance and the elaboration in the cast iron window heads in succeeding upper storeys; the placement of the main brackets of the cornice, which could have been equally spaced, but are purposefully set to make the centre-piece two bays longer. Also, marching down Walton Street, the shop fronts increase in length an even amount each time, but the windows are always divided into three in height, which gives a remarkable visual effect.

The structure was restored by Peter Shultz when he purchased the building after a fire to prevent its demolition, and proceeded to reinstate stores. His plan was to convert the upper floors to apartments. Originally, the building had stores below as today, and two entrances to the hotel above, presumably with a lobby on the second floor. This changed around 1890 to a ground floor lobby and grand staircase to the second floor, with a canopy set over the sidewalk to the main entrance. As hotel use declined, the third floor was used for manufacturing. Then, the canopy was taken down, the front much altered by moving the cast iron column supports, and in more recent times, glass block and Permastone facings added. The subsequent owner converted the second floor to an office and computer centre for local industry. The block was earlier, and possibly originally, painted a buff stone colour in imitation common to the time. This block is a typical Port Hope structure inside, with cross walls supporting floors and dividing the building into compartments. The front and back walls are in effect, screen walls only, that in the front resting on a large square timber beam supported on cast iron columns, usually dividing each shop front into three bays. The long, narrow arching windows are of two-sash style, with four panes per sash and are supported by cast iron windowsills with brackets. The rear windows are similar, only with a flat brick arch overhead instead of the cast iron cappings. In the central area at the rear, there are larger arching windows on the second floor, possibly because of when the lobby was on the second floor.

Historical Abstract

During the years 1851 to 1853, four land transactions took place in which Hiram Gillett acquired the land on which the Music Hall - Opera Block (85 Walton Street) and the St. Lawrence Hotel Block (87-97 Walton Street) were located. Hiram Gillett, dry good merchant and property owner (29-33 Walton Street), purchased the property from Jacob Cundle, a sash, window and door manufacturer whose business was located on Cavan Street in 1851. John Cundle, Port Hope's first butcher, resided and ran his butcher shop on this site in 1826. The St. Lawrence Hotel was erected in 1853 designed by Rochester architect Merwin Austin

who also designed the Town Hall in 1851, the E.P. Smith Block and Smith Block in 1850 and 1851.

As noted in the description above, the progressive design of the St. Lawrence Hotel extensively incorporated cast iron. As an architectural metal, cast iron made possible bold new advances in architectural designs and building technology. Cast iron was a flexible material that could be cast into almost any shape but above all provided fire resistant qualities that were much sought after in an age of serious conflagrations. The use of iron in commercial and public buildings spread rapidly from 1849 to beyond the turn of the century. The St. Lawrence Hotel having been built in 1853 is notable not only for its design but also for incorporating a relatively new building technology. The cast iron integrated in the St. Lawrence Hotel was cast at the local iron foundry of John Helm (162 Peter Street).

Thomas W. Hastings, formerly the proprietor of the North American Hotel (28-32 Walton Street), was the first proprietor of the St. Lawrence Hotel. Numerous businesses have been located in the St. Lawrence Hotel Block since it was first constructed. After Gillett built the outstanding block in 1853, occupants have been far from few. In 1855, George Longman and Company ran a dry goods store in the east end, and R.S. Libby had a jewellery store in the west end. In 1873, physician T.W. Pomroy occupied an office in the building. In 1876, Captain George Wright, coal merchant, ran an office out of R.S. Libby's jewellery store. W.A. Sherwood sold paintings and ran a photo studio in the block in 1883. John Owen was the proprietor of the St. Lawrence in 1891 and auctions were held in the block. Previously, the auctions were held at Murphy's Auction Rooms in the St. Lawrence. In 1899, A.W. Winslow of the Ambrose and Winslow Brewery was the proprietor of the St. Lawrence (24 Bedford Street).

In 1865, Gillett sold the St. Lawrence Hotel and the corner property to James and Richard O'Neill. The O'Neill's had established a dry goods store in the Waddell Block (1-3 Walton Street) in the 1850's. In 1866, the O'Neill's relocated their store to the St. Lawrence Block establishing a stylish dry goods store, and a grocery and liquor store. The O'Neills built the neighbouring Music Hall - Opera House Block in 1871 (85 Walton Street), and the proprietorship of the St. Lawrence Hotel Hotel changed to Huffman and Sons. The construction of the Opera House, expansion of the O'Neill's store and change in proprietorship of the St. Lawrence Hotel elegantly transformed the corner of Walton and John Street. times, glass block and The O'Neill brothers briefly moved to Montreal and went bankrupt, sending their property holdings into insolvency in Port Hope. Through a number of transactions, the two blocks were sold in 1884, and then in 1894, Thomas Bradburn took possession of both blocks. The St. Lawrence Hotel and Opera House were sold separately in 1912. The land and buildings were divided when sold by Bradburn's executors, with the Opera House Block being sold to the Royal Bank of Canada. The St. Lawrence Hotel Block changed hands many times until, in 1965, the block was severely damaged by fire and was going to be demolished. Peter Shultz acquired the block, prevented its demolition and restored the building to its former grandeur.

Illustration & Archival Photo





Note the canopy over the main entrance on the street that was part of the St. Lawrence in the early 1900's.