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The OHA at 50!

By Dan Schneider

Fifty years ago today, on March 5th, 1975, the Ontario Heritage Act was proclaimed and came into force. Most unusually, the new Act was proclaimed not in Toronto — the honour went to Kingston.

Pauline McGibbon, the Lieutenant Governor, signed the proclamation order in Memorial Hall in Kingston City Hall, completed in 1844. A National Historic Site since 1961, the monumental limestone structure ranks as one of the finest pre-Confederation public buildings in the province.



Kingston City Hall (photo credit: Wikipedia)

But the choice of Kingston City Hall for the proclamation of the first pan-Ontario legislation giving municipalities the power to designate and protect heritage property was not so much about the building itself, but about the city it represented. The Lieutenant Governor's presence and action in Kingston that day was above all a tribute to the city's pioneering role in pushing for legislation to protect historic buildings. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the efforts of Kingston — propelled by its citizen groups — to protect its "old stones" resulted in the first-ever Ontario statute to enable a municipality to designate property of architectural or historical value or interest.

While this legislation — The City of Kingston Act, 1970 — had so many limitations it was never used by the city, years later it became the model for better legislation: Part IV of the new Ontario Heritage Act.

The full story of the early development of our heritage legislation is told in Mark Osbaldeston's "The Origins of Heritage Preservation Law in Ontario." Originally published in 1995, the article has been revised to mark this year's 50th anniversary of the Ontario Heritage Act and can be read on the OHA+M blog of the University of Waterloo's Heritage Resources Centre here:

[The Origins of Heritage Preservation Law in Ontario](#)

Not surprisingly, the City of Kingston was one of the municipalities hot-off-the-mark to make use of the new Act. But the first designated property in the



Sandyford Place, Hamilton (photo credit: Carol Priamo)

Fifty years on the Ontario Heritage Act has seen a lot of changes — some for the better, others... not so much. Amendments in the last several years have compromised key measures of the statute and weakened its protections. But the real achievement of the Act endures: the empowerment of local communities and their impassioned citizens to preserve and protect the historic places they hold dear.

So seize the day... and raise a glass to the OHA!

Dan Schneider is chair of ACO's policy committee and creator of the OHA+M blog on heritage policy

Through advocacy and direct action, ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY ONTARIO (ACO) has been involved in preserving Ontario's architectural and environmental heritage since 1933.



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