

The Time is Now! The Rallying Cry of the Chapel Project

Genet Hodder

The Time is Now! The rallying cry of the Chapel Project committee and the Fanshawe Pioneer Village board expresses our determination to get the historic “fugitive slave chapel” relocated and settled after years of uncertainty. The Village will offer a safe, secure location for this historic wood building, and in its restoration will provide a focus for telling the stories of the original Black settlers in London and Middlesex county.

Those of us who have worked on the Chapel Project these last eight years have accomplished much. The building has been researched, examined, promoted at community events, written about, photographed and physically worked on—both inside and out—to expose original features under layers added over the many years it served as a private home. Ready for its future life at the Village are John Rutledge’s architectural plans, the beginnings of an archives, a binder of wallpaper removed from walls, and many photos to document the building’s life since it became threatened with demolition in 2013. We will offer a magnificent framed photo of Paul Lewis, an authentic pulpit from the period with a functional platform on wheels, and a substantial restoration plan that is being adapted for its new location. Hilary Neary has written a book about Lewis C. Chambers, the church’s pastor from 1860-63, which will be published this fall by McGill Queen’s University Press.



Our goal from the beginning has been to honour the original settlers who built the chapel, cherish the authenticity of this building, and aspire to the highest standards in its restoration—hence our work with heritage architect John Rutledge and heritage consultant Nancy Tausky.

ACO London Region has played a critical role in the project since its beginning in 2013 as the Fugitive Slave Chapel Preservation Project. The following members held firm to the original purpose: Janet Hunten, Maggie Whalley, Nancy Tausky, and Genet Hodder. In 2016, ACO London Region made a generous donation to support the chapel restoration, which has been well spent on work done to date.

In March 2019, the chapel was offered as a gift to Fanshawe Pioneer Village (FPV) by the British Methodist Episcopal Church, an offer repeated in 2021. We supported that offer, and were subsequently invited to submit a formal proposal for the FPV’s Board meeting in May.

Things moved quickly after that. The Village board accepted the proposal after a virtual town hall meeting determined substantial community support for the project. Their subsequent acceptance is conditional on raising the necessary funds (\$300,000) to relocate, restore, and support the chapel at the village. A small contingent from the Chapel Project now meets regularly and virtually with FPV officials and representatives from local Black organizations. We are united in our determination to make our goals a reality.

Although we are many players, meetings these past months have felt like those of newly engaged couples, a time to explore, listen to each other, consider possibilities and determine who will do what in the relationship. As I write this, Fanshawe Pioneer Village has fully taken control as it works through the legalities of ownership, heritage designation, and how this future addition to its “built heritage” family will fit into its interpretation and educational plans. The Chapel committee is there to support, raise funds, and guide decisions as the building is prepared for a new life in a culturally diverse environment. Local community groups—London Black History Coordinating Committee, Congress of Black Women, Black Lives Matter London and the British Methodist Episcopal Church—are all working toward preservation and programming for the chapel.

The Time is Now!—to raise the needed funds for the chapel’s relocation, restoration, and role of interpreting a rich past. You can support this goal by visiting the Fanshawe Pioneer Village or London Community Foundation websites:

<https://www.fanshawepioneervillage.ca/donate>

<https://www.lcf.on.ca/stories-backend/2022/2/3/the-time-is-now-support-the-restoration-of-londons-fugitive-slave-chapel-at-fanshawe-pioneer-village>

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ACO MISSION

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From the President...

Mike Bloxam, President

Regretfully Kelley McKeating had to step away from the role of president of our branch in December, and our vice-president, Joe O'Neill, also had to take a leave, leaving us in a quandary on how to fill the position. As the president from 2016 to 2018, and a sitting member-at-large, I offered to fill the role until this year's annual general meeting. I want to give heartfelt thanks to both Kelley and Joe for their dedication and passion for heritage conservation during their terms.

Kelley's term as president started in the early—and particularly difficult—days of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic surged onward in 2021, she also found herself having to take over the treasurer role for the last half of the year. Add to that our activities around appealing the rezoning of Bankers' Row and you can understand how Kelley certainly had her hands full. I want to express sincere gratitude on behalf of ACO London Region's local council for her service in the role of president. Kelley took on many diverse responsibilities throughout her tenure, fulfilling them with competence.

On top of the unusual complications of the time, there were also an unusually large number of heritage-compromising development projects during Kelley's term. We admired the consistency with which her letters and speeches to London City Council and appearances with the media were moving, relevant in their architectural defence, and incisive in noting relevant statutory concerns. We want to recognize the incredible value of the service that Kelley gave to ACO London Region and we appreciate the knowledge and dedication with which she provided it.



Kensington Apartments Among Finest in the City

January 26, 1924

Built in 10 months by The John Hayman & Sons Company Ltd., the Kensington

Apartments placed modern comforts at the disposal of 20 families. Located on Queens Ave, just east of Wellington St., the \$100,000 Kensington Apartments were the last of six apartment buildings built by John Hayman & Sons Company between 1909 and 1924. With two entrances onto Queens Ave half the apartments were accessed through the east door and the other half through the west door. The inside of the Kensington Apartments were constructed

using the finest materials such as white marble, oak and mahogany. Designed to be fireproof the building was also heated with steam from a central heating plant behind the building. The new building contained two-, three-, and four-bedroom apartments. The kitchens were wired to accommodate electric stoves and piped for gas. The Kensington still exists today—98 years later.

Photo source - <https://www.haymanconstruction.com/>

Info source: Jan 26, 1924 edition of the London Free Press, London Room Microfilm, Central Library



Annual General Meeting - Thursday, March 17th, 2022

If you missed the e-mail notice to save the date, we are hosting the annual general meeting online on Thursday, March 17th, at 7:00 PM. Please watch for the meeting link on Monday, March 14th. We will have a guest speaker from the Children's Museum to talk about moving the museum from one heritage property to another.

ACO Old South Walkabout, October 17, 2021

Ellen Harries, ACO London Membership Secretary

On October 17, 2021, ACO London Region held the first “in-person” event in almost two years.

We had a self-guided mini-tour of 15 homes in Old South: Bruce, Elmwood, Victor and Beaconsfield Streets. Homeowners stood on their front porch or in their driveway, and spoke to tour participants about their homes—architectural highlights, original owners’ names and their occupations, and interesting historical aspects.

Many of the homes had an historical sign obtained from the ACO London Region Historical Sign Program.

Tour goers needed to register ahead of time, and show proof of being double vaccinated. The organizers were pleased to have about 50 participants. Afterwards, we had an outdoor reception with refreshments of coffee, tea, cookies and apples. This was the first time that the new ACO tent was used! We received very positive feedback about the event.

One of the homes on the tour was 64 Elmwood Ave, currently owned by Dale and Andrea Manias. It was built in 1886 for Hugh A. Stringer, who acquired his wealth as a manufacturer and dealer in carriages and stoves. Largely Italianate in style, several features provide variety to the overall design: the variously shaped windows are capped by cut-stone lintel surrounds in Palladian style, along the front elevation the two-storey bay is balanced by an oriel, and between the first and second stories a double string course of decorative brick which breaks the exterior veneer of yellow brick. A kitchen and servants’ wing extends from the rear of the house. (*The South and the West*, John Lutman, 1979)

But this house is noteworthy because historically it was the boyhood home of Arthur Stringer (1874-1950), who was a novelist and poet, writing some 45 works of fiction. In fact, many of his books were sold to MGM in the 1920s to be made into movies. At that time he was earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year. (*Arthur Stringer papers*, Regional Collection, Western University)

Stringer is commemorated by Arthur Stringer Public School in London, Ontario, which opened in 1969. This house in which Stringer lived as a boy in London, Ontario has been preserved as an historic site: Arthur Stringer House.

Dorothy Palmer Recognized on Mayor’s New Year’s Honour List

Dorothy is a diligent and innovative advocate for heritage conservation in the city.

She was the principal agent for the installation of the architectural façade remnants of the Marshall Tea Room in the Central Library. Dorothy was one of the ACO London Region’s main movers in the initiative for installing historical signs on heritage properties. This has been an unqualified success with over 400 installed, significantly increasing Londoners’ appreciation and awareness of their precious architectural heritage.

Dorothy has been a hard-working, invaluable board member of the ACO London Region for over six years and is, at present, heading a group who are preparing a new publication about our unique “London Doorways”.

For her advocacy and contributions, Dorothy Palmer was recognized on the Mayor’s New Year’s Honour List in the category of Heritage.



Two participants in the Old South Walkabout



Organizers Ellen Harries and Dorothy Palmer



Arthur Stringer childhood home, 64 Elmwood Avenue



Heritage London plaque, Arthur Stringer House

The Ridout Street Complex: Banker's Row, The Anderson House and the Ontario Land Tribunal

Submitted by Nancy Tausky

When a fellow ACO member first looked at the proposal submitted by the Farhi Holdings Corporation (FHC) for a development at the Forks, she thought it was a joke. Who would seriously propose a 40-storey high rise on the grounds of a National Historic Site? Surely it would never be approved! In June 2021, however, London's City Council did approve it by a large majority, with the result that London's most important cluster of historic buildings, the place where London began, will not only be compromised but also demeaned. **The Board of ACO London Region, has therefore determined to appeal the decision to the Ontario Land Tribunal.**

The buildings along Ridout Street now owned by FHC include, from south to north, the Classical Revival Bank of Upper Canada (c.1835), London's first bank; a Georgian terrace (1847), which eventually came to house three additional banks, leading to the streetscape's label as "Bankers' Row"; and the more elaborate and eclectic house at 451 Ridout Street (c.1852) that the one of the city's earliest doctors, and the owner of Banker's Row, Dr. Alexander Anderson, built for himself. Flanking this grouping to the north is the Regency Eldon House, London's oldest standing residence (1834-35), built for John Harris, Treasurer of the London District, and long the centre of the city's social life. To the south is the low-rise, modern Museum London, housing London's art gallery and historical museum, and, beyond that, the former London District Courthouse (1827-31), the first building planned for the town and modelled, in its original form, on Malahide Castle, the Irish home of the man responsible for moving settlers to much of southwestern Ontario, Thomas Talbot. Remarkable survivors, the five structures showcase the beginnings of London, and, situated at the Forks of the Thames, where Lieutenant Governor Simcoe had planned to locate "the metropolis of all Canada,"¹ they represent the symbolic beginnings of a unified Canada as well. **All five buildings are designated locally, and the Courthouse, bank buildings, and Anderson Residence are National Landmarks, and the middle grouping is described as "representative of the appearance of Ontario cities in that period and of London's early residential and commercial architecture."**² **Eldon House has Provincial recognition.**



East Perspective of the Proposed Development by the Farhi Holdings Corporation at 435 – 451 Ridout Street North, from the Report to Planning and Environment Committee, May 31, 2021

What FHC proposes is a 40-storey building that sits mainly behind the Anderson house, with a seven-storey addition to the north, four levels of parking underneath, 6,308 square metres of office/commercial space on the first four floors, and 280 residential units above. Its height and mass threaten to overwhelm the historic buildings, giving them a scale akin to Jack's toy houses up against the giant's lair. **Council approved the proposal before all of the conditional tests had been completed (for example, those related to flood control, vibration, and shadow), so it is uncertain how the building will interact with the flood plain, the stability of Eldon House and the other historic buildings, or the sun/shade components of the Eldon House garden and Harris Park.**

What is definite is that it will affect our perception of the many important relationships between these buildings and the River. While still in England, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe seized on the Forks as the site of Canada's capital because of the need for river transportation. His wife chose the Eldon House site as a family home before the Harris family did; in both cases, its position on a protruding cliff allowed particularly fine views of the river and the Forks. When artist James Hamilton became Manager of the Bank of Upper Canada, probably in the mid-1840s, he used his home and other sites along the Thames for superb paintings of early London. Ridout Street became a major business thoroughfare because Blackfriars Bridge offered the earliest means across the river. **The huge tower now planned will limit or obliterate some historic views and form a perceptual barrier between the city and the river.**

Moreover, at various times throughout its history, the landscape below these buildings has served as a centre for public enjoyment, from the days of horse races on the flood plain to the series of well-attended festivals now held in the environs of Harris Park. The determination to keep the head of the Forks as a public space is enshrined in the London Plan and has been the focus of several recent initiatives, such as the Back to the River Initiative and the One River Environmental Assessment. **Although the Farhi proposal promises to bring more people to the area, the people it promises to bring will be there as private residents; the very dominance of the 40-storey building will be a reminder that the waterfront is no longer mainly the playground of the public.**

There is also a good deal of concern that the Farhi proposal may be **setting a precedent for a more radical change in policy regarding the river lands**, especially with the requested zoning change. The City shocked the protectors of its heritage in allowing the Courthouse to be sold to a private developer, who is known to be planning a high-rise tower next door; plans for the Courthouse and Jail are still a mystery.

Much in this article will have been familiar to many of its readers. The public outrage against the Farhi proposal when it went to Council was overwhelming: many ACO members wrote letters, and nearly 1,000 Londoners signed a last-minute petition opposing the project. **ACO London Region is now appealing Council's approval of the Farhi proposed Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw Amendments to the OLT.**

ACO London Region will be seeking help from its membership and supporters to defray its legal costs.

1 From the diary kept by Major Littlehales as he accompanied Lt. John Graves Simcoe on his exploration of southwestern Ontario in 1793.
2 Official MS description of NHSC site.

Laura Susie Peers Wilson (*née* Bickle)

Jenny Grainger

Many members will remember one of ACO London's founders, Laura Susie Peers Wilson (*née* Bickle) who passed away October 29, 2021, one day before her 100th birthday.

Born in St. Catharines and raised in Niagara Falls, Sue finished her B.A. in Art History at the University of Toronto in 1944. At U of T she met her husband, David Wilson, and married him on a Saturday in May of that year, having written her final exam that very morning! Sue and David were a devoted couple for 53 years.



Sue taught school for some years before leaving to raise her family. But being a homemaker and full-time Mom did not prevent Sue from playing a major role as a community leader. Sue was keenly interested in urban issues and was appointed to the City Planning Board in the 1960s. There she became more aware of how development affected London's heritage, leading her to become one of the founders of ACO London Region in 1966. She was involved in starting the Geranium Heritage House Tour—or Germanium Walk as it was known then—and played a role in planning it for years.

Sue, David and family lived at 23 Peter Street, thus Woodfield's preservation became important to her. When their neighbouring Bible College residence was sold to a developer who planned to build a highrise at Peter and Queens, ACO tried to stop it. They lost that battle but won the war on the building of highrises elsewhere in Woodfield.

Unfortunately, the new apartment building blocked much of the sunlight from their backyard, preventing David from enjoying his passion, gardening. So, in 1973, the couple bought a 100-acre farm south of Melbourne on what is now Gentleman Drive. There, in 1975 and 1976, they built their dream home, based on an historic home near Kingston, Ontario.

Sue was lead researcher for the book *London Heritage*, edited by Terrance W. Honey, and published by the London Free Press in 1972. Many readers will also remember Sue's illustrated desk diary, commemorating London's architectural treasures in the Centennial Year of 1967. Although never President of ACO London Region, she was a Vice President of ACO Provincial in the '70s.

If all this wasn't enough, Sue found time to join the PTA at Lord Roberts School, the Caribou Ladies' Guild at St. Paul's Cathedral, the IODE Nicholas Wilson Chapter (she volunteered at their secondhand clothing store) and President of the Kiwanis Club of the Forest City. Sue and David were friends with ACO London Region founding members Ian and Ann McKillop, local artist Sylvia Clarke, and former mayor Jane Bigelow.

In later years, Sue and her son Tom owned the *Why Not Shop* in Glencoe. Tom has just donated to ACO London Sue's slide collection, featuring many pictures of buildings on GHHTs over the years. We are grateful for this gift, which will provide us with illustrations of many buildings as they used to look, as well as some which have since been demolished.

ACO's annual Heritage Week Lobbying Day focuses on reuse and housing

On Wednesday, February 23rd, members of ACO from across the province engaged Members of Provincial Parliament to discuss how adaptive reuse of existing buildings can create new housing quickly while benefiting the environment and the economy, nineteen MPPs in total—representing all four political parties and from all corners of the province—took meetings with ACO spokespeople throughout the day to learn about the importance of heritage, and discuss how conservation efforts are a boon to the people they represent.

The theme was "Keep | Fix | Reuse - Leveraging the huge potential of Ontario's older buildings", with emphasis on targeted training to optimize billions of dollars of assets and changes to Ontario's laws and policies to boost a multi-billion-dollar industry. Existing buildings are a job machine, with renovation being a \$45 billion industry in Ontario (estimated residential and non-residential), Canadians spending 47% more on fixing up existing dwellings than building new ones, and residential fix-up employing over 300,000 Ontarians. Proper training is needed to ensure the jobs are done right, since botched renovation by untrained workers puts people and assets at risk (façade failure, mould, crumbling masonry, fire, etc.).

As our planet is in a climate emergency, we also discussed the benefits to the environment of reusing existing buildings. Tearing an existing building down and constructing something new takes 20 to 80 years to recover the environmental impacts. It is much more sustainable to retrofit and add onto an existing building than tear down and start over. Reusing our building stock reduces carbon emissions and also cuts landfill waste, and the materials and embodied energy in an existing building stay locked up if demolition is avoided. Demolition activity itself, including transporting the waste, takes energy and adds to carbon emissions. As we've said for years, the greenest building is the one that already exists. Older buildings have inherent sustainability!

We had the welcome opportunity to speak with our MPP in London West, Peggy Sattler. She was very receptive to the ideas put forward by our group (three of us from London plus a former Londoner now in Toronto) and shared a few good thoughts of her own about training opportunities to help bolster adaptive reuse and grow the housing stock.

Of course, MPPs need to hear from us more than once a year. It never hurts to reach out to your local elected officials and let them know the importance of heritage conservation and how it is the best for the economy, the environment, and society. It's the sustainable choice!

On the Byron Blunder

Jenny Grainger

For those of you who didn't follow the saga of the "Byron Barn" at 247 Halls Mill Road, a brief recap: neighbours first became concerned about its condition in September of 2019 when metal sheeting was removed and the roof partially collapsed. The City of London issued a "make safe" order, requiring the owner to either repair the barn, fence it off, or seek a demolition request. It turns out the owner *did* have a demolition permit dating to 2008, but those permits expire after a year and he didn't act on time.

In January 2020, after activism from London's heritage preservationists, City Council voted 12-3 to designate the structure (Mayor Ed Holder and Councillors Paul Van Meerbergen and Michael Van Holst were opposed). Such designations take effect immediately. The owner called the designation "complete stupidity."

Two days later, on January 30, 2020, the owner bulldozed the barn.

City Hall then launched an investigation. There were two illegalities: First, the barn was demolished without a permit, which goes against the Ontario Building Code. Second, since it was heritage designated, the demolition defied the Ontario Heritage Act, meaning the building should not have been demolished or significantly altered without the municipality's permission. City bylaw officers charged the owner under both acts.

The property owner recently pleaded guilty and has been charged \$2,000.

Byron—in fact, London—has been polarized. The issue: Can he do whatever he wants with his own property, or should he have to comply with the desires of the broader community?

At any rate, there are a few lessons to be learned here by heritage preservationists:

1. We're not doing a great job of educating folks about architecture. The fact that this was no ordinary barn was missed by the media and most online commentators. Heritage preservationists aren't interested in trying to save the average ruined rural barn.

In fact, William Griffiths' 19th-century structure was a lot more stylish than the usual Ontario barn. It was built as a combination of coach house, barn and warehouse for his woolen mill. Note the decorative treatment of its centre section, the focal point of the long front. The round-headed window was recessed within a projecting gable. Below, another projection containing the main doors (originally solid) was covered with a hipped roof that reflected the dimensions of the gable above. There was a cute ventilator on the ridge. And there was once some symmetry, as indicated by the two ground floor windows equidistant from the main door. The other openings, probably later additions, have masked the former balance.

2. To many people, heritage designations appear arbitrary. That's because preservationists are often attempting to designate at the last minute, after they learn that a property is in danger of demolition. In fact, certain buildings should automatically receive designation based on their age, style or rarity. It should not be random or subjective.
3. Heritage law is still reliant on owners who actually desire to protect sites, which means that unwanted older buildings are usually neglected until they fall apart. Once a building falls into ruin, it's hard to convince people it has value. In order to prevent this, we need municipal ordinances requiring property owners to properly maintain buildings.
4. The barn decision sets a precedent for further destruction of heritage properties, since owners now know just how little they may pay upon pleading guilty. Not much of a deterrent for those with deep pockets.

Until these issues are resolved, we can expect the Byron Blunder to happen again and again.



William Griffiths' barn as drawn by Louis Taylor in Nancy Tausky's Historical Sketches of London: From Site to City. Broadview Press, 1993

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To All ACO members

Save this date!! April 8th 2022 - The ACO - HLF
London Heritage Awards Ceremony

This time last February, the Heritage Awards Committee members and the ACO and HLF Presidents were trudging through slushy streets and climbing snowbanks to present the 2021 Heritage Awards at each site.

This year, we are hoping against hope to return to an actual celebration at Museum London.

The ACO-HLF London Heritage Awards presentation is planned for the evening of April 8th. This still has to be confirmed in case restrictions on social gatherings return.

Nine awards will be given out, and this promises once again to be happy and celebratory event, though perhaps formatted a little differently than usual.

Watch your inbox for more information!



The Rotary Club of London South's Collectible Ornaments

Joan Fisher

The Story

My awakening and appreciation of London's history was first spurred on a "Geranium Walk" many years ago. Not being a native Londoner, I loved learning about the different styles of architecture in London's core, depicting different stations in life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the military style barracks in Woodfield to the elegant mansions of the businessmen and gentry, this living history enthralled me.

The Idea

Fast forward at least two decades, when my service club, the Rotary Club of London South, was casting around for a unique fundraiser. I proposed the concept of capturing London's history in façades of historic buildings in the form of limited edition, collectible ornaments. By its very nature, Rotary, a service club of 1.4 million business people and professions around the globe, raises funds "to do good in the world".

I had witnessed the success of this type of ornament in other communities and knew it would be a way for Londoners, and visitors alike, to keep their memories of London alive while also paying homage to its history. Countless stories have been shared by customers as to the meaning of a specific building to them or to the person to whom they are gifting the ornament.

The Moments

Like the man who waited patiently while the sales booth was being assembled at Covent Garden Market to buy the last two "Joe Kool's" ornaments – one for himself and the other to send to a university friend who now lived in California. Or the woman who bought the "Grand Theatre" ornament because her granddaughter had performed in the High School Project and where her daughter volunteered. Most people have a memory tied to the building they purchase or are a collector who cannot wait to see what we produce the next year.

The Buildings

Selecting buildings to memorialize each year is not difficult – London has a plethora. We welcome suggestions from patrons and have also developed a list ourselves. The trick is in obtaining the building owner's permission. We are usually working at least one year ahead to obtain the required approvals. Now that we are in our fifth year of production, we are even receiving requests from different historic sites.

Researching the history of each building is like peeling layers to the past. It is a fascinating and enriching pursuit. These collectible ornaments may be purchased year round at Boutique Firenze, 189 Adelaide St. S. or online at RotaryOrnaments.com.

The Cause

Funds from this initiative support local charitable initiatives like funding a school breakfast program and warm, winter accessories for the homeless as well as helping eradicate polio worldwide – Rotary's primary goal since 1988.



City Seeks National Historic Site Designation for Labatt Memorial Park

Michael Greguol, Heritage Planner

In November, London City Council passed a motion to direct City staff to submit an application to the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to designate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada.

National Historic Sites are places of profound importance to Canada, each telling their own unique story, contributing to our understanding of Canada as a whole. Over 2,100 places, persons, and events have been commemorated by the Government of Canada for their national historic significance. In Canada, National Historic Sites represent a variety of historic places, encompassing sites as diverse as sacred places, battlefields, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, ships and shipwrecks, structures, and districts.

Tecumseh Park

Opening in 1877, then known as Tecumseh Park, the Labatt Memorial Park was privately built as a new home field for the London Tecumsehs of the International Association, a competitor of the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs—now the National League of Major League Baseball. That year, the Tecumsehs beat the Pittsburgh Alleghenys at Tecumseh Park to become the first champions of the International Association, making them what journalist and baseball historian Brian Martin identifies as “Canada’s First Major League Baseball Champions.”

Baseball continued to gain popularity in London throughout the 1920s and well into the 1930s with the establishment of both men’s and women’s baseball and softball leagues, as well as church leagues, and industrial leagues operated and sponsored by businesses, all of which functioned in Tecumseh Park. It was during this period that the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL) was founded in 1919. London’s team, originally called the London Braves, changed their name often depending on company sponsorship. The team played under the names the London Winery, the London Silverwoods and, of course, the London Majors.

Labatt Memorial Park

By the mid-1930s, the future of baseball at Tecumseh Park was in jeopardy due to much-needed facility upgrades. Team sponsorships also gradually dropped due to the Great Depression, and the facilities at Tecumseh Park were in decline. John and Hugh Labatt purchased the park as a means to honour their father John Labatt Sr. The park was renamed Labatt Memorial Park, and given to the City with a donation to maintain and update the park.

Success at Labatt Memorial Park continued into the mid-20th century. The Majors won the IBL Championship in 1951, 1956, and 1975. On October 1, 2021, the Majors defeated Toronto at Labatt Memorial Park to win their first IBL Championship in 46 years.

Recognition

To show support, individuals and organizations provided letters to accompany the application. Remarkable accounts of the park’s importance to Canadian history and sport in Canada have been received from Major League Baseball, Paul Beeston (formerly of the Toronto Blue Jays), and Rob Thomson of the Philadelphia Phillies, as well as organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Baseball Research, the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, the Society for American Baseball Research, and the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

To highlight its importance in Canadian sport history, Labatt Memorial Park—the world’s oldest baseball grounds—is worthy of recognition as a National Historic Site of Canada.



Image showing an early baseball game held at Tecumseh Park in the 1870s. The Middlesex County Courthouse is depicted in the distance (Western Archives).