



Hello everyone, my name is Clare Cameron and tonight I am speaking as a Board Member of the Niagara Foundation.  
We are located at PO Box 790 in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

## Purpose and Goals

- Share Niagara Foundation perspective
- Offer alternatives to demolition at this time
- Advocate for more complete preservation of the 1948 Parliament Oak school building
- Expand on the Foundation's recent correspondence on proposed rezoning and demolition at 325 King St



This delegation shares the Foundation's perspective on proposed demolition of the former Parliament Oak public school building.

We will offer some options to you for consideration, and advocate for a more complete preservation of the 1948 Parliament Oak public school building.

This delegation also expands on the Foundation's April 18 correspondence to you all, expressing concerns with the current proposed rezoning and demolition at 325 King St. The Foundation is very interested in the history AND future of this site, and looks forward to participating in the public land use planning process.

## The Building at 325 King Street

- On Municipal Register, not designated
- Major part of streetscape and surroundings
- 1948 original structure
- Operated as a public school for 67 years
- Capacity for approx. 300 students, K to Grade 8
- Estimating 2,500 alumni from 1948 to 2015



325 King Street is on the Town's Municipal Register, but not designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The former school and grounds form a major part of the King Street streetscape. The original core of this building operated as a public school for 67 years, from 1948 to 2015.

In that time, we estimate that more than 2,500 unique individuals attended this school, and approximately 1000 families were connected with the property through its use for education.



Here are some of those lovely people.

## Historical Interest & Connections

- Camp Niagara, the Commons and military history
- Population boom post-Second World War driven by soldiers and their families who settled in Niagara-on-the-Lake during or after military training here
- One of the first public schools built in Ontario post-war
- Purpose-built classrooms for shop work, library space and home economics represented new innovations in public education
- A time capsule is located in the 1948 cornerstone

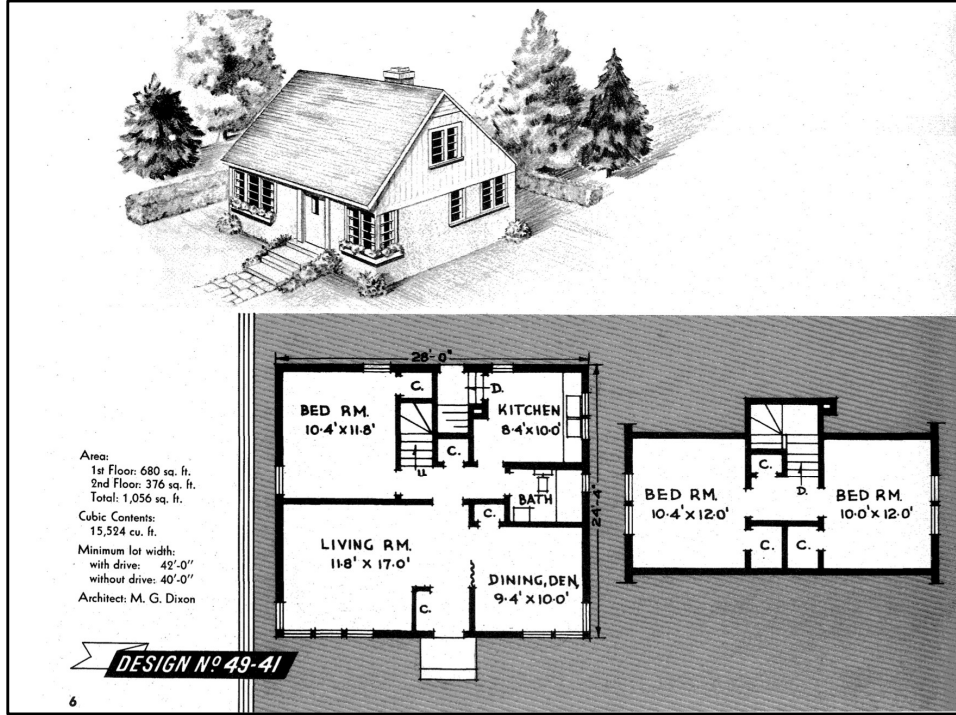


Three Heritage Impact Assessments and multiple staff reports in recent years have detailed the history of this site. We would like to highlight that Parliament Oak's construction was directly connected to Camp Niagara and the Commons' use as a military training ground. It was built in response to a population boom driven by soldiers and their families who settled close by in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We believe that Parliament Oak was THE first modern school built in the former Lincoln County after the Second World War.

The original structure included technical shops, library space, and classrooms for home economics. These were cutting edge topics at the time.

And there is a time capsule in the original cornerstone.



The simple homes on nearby streets like Nelles and Castlereagh are other signs of the connection between post-war building in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the need for Parliament Oak's construction.

# 1948 Building Design

- Modern style with a prominent main entry, symmetrical stepped facade
- Large windows and geometric mass recalls Bauhaus design principles that form should follow function
- “Ugly” and “Unremarkable” vs. dignified, understated, practical and purpose-built



The original 1948 structure was intentionally modern, with a symmetrical stepped façade at the King Street entrance. Its original core included large windows and geometrical massing that recalls design principles from the Bauhaus and a belief that form should follow function.

For an interesting coincidental reference, the middle image here is from a factory in Germany, designed in 1913 by Walter Gropius, with similarly large horizontal windows, stepped façade and colour of brick.

Some may believe this kind of architecture is ugly and unremarkable. To others it is dignified, understated, practical and purpose-built.

## Lionel Ashton Hesson, Architect

- Born in St. Catharines, educated at the St. Catharines Collegiate
- Worked for Nicholson & Macbeth, architects of many distinct residential homes in Glenridge and the Glenridge Public School
- Worked for the Hydro Electric Commission and learned new techniques in the use of reinforced concrete construction, innovations at the time for building powerhouses
- Concrete construction methods were used in 1948 structure

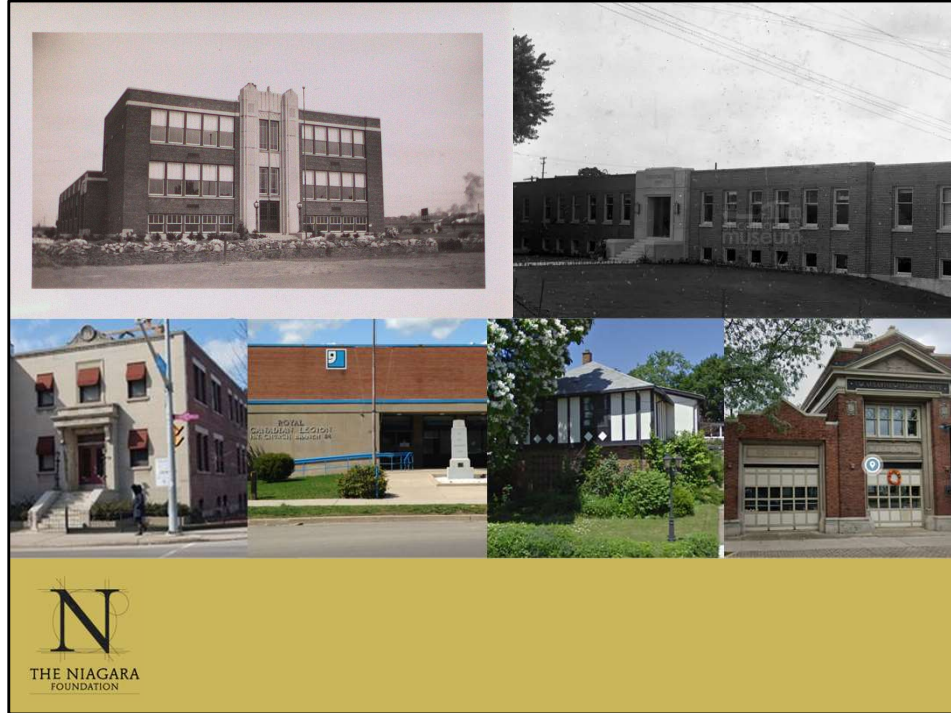


The Architect of Parliament Oak school has some interesting local connections that also deserve acknowledgement.

Lionel Ashton Hesson was born in St. Catharines. He worked for Nicholson & Macbeth, a well-known local design firm that built many distinct homes in the Glenridge neighbourhood through the 1920s and 30s.

He also worked for the Ontario Hydro Electric Commission during the First World War, and learned about new techniques for how to use reinforced concrete in construction. This was another innovation at the time and likely inspired Hesson's use of concrete in many of his own buildings.





Hesson opened his own office in the 1930s and some of his projects in St Catharines include:

- Merritton High School (Now Closed)
- the Lightning Fastener Co, which was the first purpose-built zipper factory in Canada
- Grantham Town Hall on King Street
- the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 24 (Now Demolished)
- and a Variety of homes

Hesson even designed a sympathetic modern addition in 1942 to the Neoclassical Fire Hall on Lake Street.

## Request to Demolish is Premature

- Assumes that demolition will or must proceed
- Rationale is driven by request for rezoning, and assumes the desired zoning change is inevitable
- Salvage plan so far includes nothing pertaining to 67 years of active use as educational institution
- Nothing to commemorate the generations of students who were educated in this building



The current demolition request was sparked by the applicant's desire to rezone 325 King Street for commercial use. The demolition request is premature. That zoning decision has not yet been approved by Council. The legislated Public Meeting for rezoning has not yet happened, and staff have not yet provided any analysis or comment on the proposal.

This is an important building in our community and on the streetscape. Council should not permit demolition until the requested zoning changes are discussed, debated and decided on.

With the request for a demolition permit, the applicant's representatives have proposed creating a commemoration plan. An actual commemoration plan does not yet exist. And the current list of materials proposed for salvage includes nothing to represent the 67 years and generations of students who were educated in this building.

## Municipal Heritage Committee April 5, 2023 Observations

- Style of proposed hotel refers to former home on site, a mansion used by one very wealthy family
- Retaining the name “Parliament Oak” in a proposed future building and green space on site is very positive
- Current focus on commemoration appears to accept demolition as inevitable, despite no structural concerns and no zoning approval to date



The applicant emphasized on April 5 that the proposed hotel for this site makes visual references to the Second Empire style house that existed here before Parliament Oak school was built. The Plumb residence was a mansion, built by one very wealthy family for private use.

Plans to retain the name Parliament Oak and ample green space are good news.

Through discussion, MHC members shared many suggestions for what to include in a commemoration plan. The tone of this discussion appeared to accept that demolition was inevitable. We wish to challenge that assumption, and raise a broader question.

## Is demolition becoming a foregone conclusion in NOTL?



Is demolition becoming a foregone conclusion in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Since the start of your term as a new Council, the buildings above at 177 Byron Street and 355 Mary Street, which both date to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, have been approved for demolition.

Miss Young's School at 360 King Street has been empty and deteriorating for years. This photo includes an order from the Town to comply with Property Standards for heritage buildings that is stapled to door. This neglect continues even though the structure IS designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The former Virgil Public School is another building with history related to education and the military, and it is undesignated.

Some day these properties will come forward with development applications. Will this Council continue wait until forced to approve demolitions as if they are the only realistic option for property owners when asking to change a land use? Will this Council approve demolitions as if they were the first logical step in rezoning requests, rather than the very least desirable one?

It doesn't have to be



Because it doesn't have to be this way. Here are three outstanding examples of preservation, redevelopment and reuse on former school properties in Lincoln and St. Catharines. Bench Brewing is now thriving in a former school building that was constructed in 1944. Gillian's Place provides shelter to abused women and children, and Glenridge Public School is now the centrepiece in a highly desirable housing development.

## Preserve the 1948 Building: Options for your consideration

- Refuse the demolition permit
- Refer to recommendations from the MHC in 2019 and previous HIAs from 2018, 2021 and 2023
- Work with the applicant to incorporate as much as possible of the original 1948 structure in to whatever new use is proposed for the site
- Designate the 1948 building under the Ontario Heritage Act



We offer these examples to show what is possible to create by repurposing historic buildings in their original location. To this point, we wish to strongly urge Council not to approve this demolition request, and instead require preservation of as much as possible from the 1948 Parliament Oak school on its original location facing King Street. With thoughtful treatment and creative design, it could become a very interesting and meaningful feature in any new development.

## If Demolition is Approved, Enhance Commemoration

Require a commemoration plan that includes all items described in staff report and by applicant's agents, and adds:

- The 1948 time capsule and contents
- Acknowledgment that this site was used for 67 years as a school, and educated thousands of local children
- Salvage and reuse of 1948 building materials i.e. brick, slate chalkboards, and hardware
- Preservation and reuse of "PARLIAMENT OAK SCHOOL" lettering from 1947 entrance above door on original facade
- Acknowledgment of Lionel Ashton Hesson and his work



If you decide instead that demolition of the entire structure will proceed, we strongly suggest that you require a commemoration plan that includes salvage of materials suggested by the applicant, and adds:

Preservation of the 1948 time capsule and its contents.

A memorial feature to remind visitors that this site was used for 67 years as a school, and educated thousands of local children.

Reuse original building materials including brick, slate chalkboards and hardware

Preservation and reuse of the "PARLIAMENT OAK SCHOOL" lettering from the original entrance,

And something to commemorate Lionel Ashton Hesson and his work.

## Ask of Council

- Refuse this demolition permit and use every available option to retain the original 1948 building, in its original location
- Resolve the request to rezone before allowing demolition
- If demolition must proceed in future, require an enhanced commemoration plan
- **Do not let the history of education, population growth, and youth be ignored, erased or dismissed as “unremarkable”**
- Advocate for the importance of practical things and regular people when commemorating history and heritage in Niagara-on-the-Lake



Tonight we ask that you refuse this demolition permit, and use all available options for you to require preservation of the original 1948 structure for the former Parliament Oak school, in its original location.

We ask that you resolve the request to rezone before demolition is permitted.

And only if you deem instead that total demolition will proceed as requested at this time, we ask that you then require a commemoration plan based on the applicant's suggestions, your staff's latest report, input from the Municipal Heritage Committee, and what we have proposed here.

Please, do not let the history of education, population growth, YOUTH and their experiences be bulldozed, erased and dismissed.

And please be advocates for the value of practical, everyday things and regular people, not only those who lived in mansions, when you are aiming to commemorate the fullest possible history of Niagara-on-the-Lake.





Thank you; we welcome questions.