

ACO London Today



Moving the Fugitive Slave Chapel next to Beth Emanuel

Fugitive Slave Chapel

When 275 Thames Street came under threat of demolition, members of ACO London and other conservationists quickly took action. Known locally as the Fugitive Slave Chapel, the 1848 building served as a sanctuary for runaway slaves and a meeting place for abolitionists. In 1869, the church's congregation built and moved to a new brick building—the current Beth Emanuel Church at 430 Grey Street.

To ensure that this important Black history landmark was not destroyed, members of ACO London and others in the community formed the Fugitive Slave Chapel Preservation Project. From 2013-2015, the FSCPP raised funds and garnered support to move the chapel building to a lot next to Beth Emanuel, where it now awaits restoration.

Through a community consultation process, it was determined that the chapel will become a learning place to teach about slavery, the Underground Railroad and the history of London's early Black community. The chapel, restored to its original interior configuration as an open space for meetings, will be an inspiration and a place that honours those original settlers who built and worshipped in it.

The London Normal School

Built between 1898 and 1900, this Victorian building in Old South was the third teacher training facility to be opened in Ontario. The second oldest surviving Normal School in the province, the London Normal School combines many architectural styles, including Classical, Gothic, and Romanesque Revival.

ACO London has played an active role in the Normal School's conservation since the mid-1980s. When the school was occupied by the Catholic School Board, ACO London initiated a project to reproduce the original late Victorian light fixtures of the entrance and grand staircase.

ACO London came to the Normal School's rescue in 2001, when its vacancy prompted discussions of demolition. In partnership with the Old South Community Organization, ACO London organized a "Back to Normal" committee to advocate for the school's conservation. 2003's Geranium Heritage House Tour, "From Cottages to Mansions," put the Normal School as the focus of the tour, in order to raise awareness of the building's importance and possibility of demolition.

This successful advocacy work led to the building's extensive restoration between 2009 and 2010 by the province. In 2015, the City of London partnered with the YMCA of Western Ontario to continue restoration.



The London Normal School



The Red Antiquities Building

Red Antiquities Building

The bright red landmark of SoHo, the Red Antiquities Building came under threat of demolition in 2009. Built in 1872 to 1873, the Red Antiquities Building is one of the oldest surviving wood buildings in London and the only surviving building with tongue-in-groove boards. Recognizing the building's architectural and heritage significance, ACO London partnered with Heritage London Foundation and other concerned Londoners to found the "Save the Red Antiquities Building" (SRAB) committee.

In 2010, Pathways Skill Development purchased the building and entered into a partnership with SRAB, offering much-needed financial support and labour through their organization that provides supervised job training for unemployed and underemployed individuals. The collaboration between heritage and job training was a success! Between 2010-2012, the building was lifted to the rear of its site in order to build a new concrete basement, then moved back, restored and renovated to what it had looked like in early photos.

South Street Hospital

In 1875, London's first permanent hospital opened on South Street. Over the next hundred years, Victoria Hospital at South Street expanded, underwent many renovations and quickly assumed a place of importance in Canada's medical practice and research. Mid-century expansions and renovations allowed for medical discoveries and innovations, including the discovery by Dr. Murray Barr and E.G. Bertram of the Barr Body, a sex chromatin that distinguishes female cells from male cells and development of the first anti-cancer cobalt "bomb."

The South Street Hospital officially closed in 2013 and proposals emerged to demolish the hospital buildings. In 2015, Victoria Hospital and its accompanying facilities came under threat of demolition.

ACO London began vigorous advocacy work to educate the public and City Council about adaptive re-use and how the South Street Hospital grounds could grow into a historic district. Campaigns included "Old Vic Hug," a community walk and talk about the Old Victoria Hospital Lands.

In 2015, City Council approved the demolition of some buildings, while conserving others. Three buildings were saved, including the Health Services building (former Western University Medical School), the Colborne building and the War Memorial Children's Hospital.



Heritage advocates champion adaptive re-use at "Old Vic Hug" rally (Courtesy of Sandra Miller)