ACT

Newsletter of the Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy

Union Station Toronto
What to do; walking tours and other news
TRAC summer activities being planned

WALKING TOURs:

Old City Hall
E.J. Lennox’s achievement in the Romanesque style, on Queen Street. Come and see for yourself the wonderful interior.

Osgoode Hall
Dream no more of marble halls. This is practical magnificence!

Clubland
A private and privileged world view. Where some of Toronto’s elite have spent their leisure hours.

Apartment Life
The high-rises of St. George Street.

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TRAC - new member application

Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy - new member application form:

TRAC is an all-volunteer non-profit organization, a branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Our programs of talks, publications and research activities, and initiatives in advocacy are made possible by your membership and support. We are entirely dependent upon your contributions and are grateful for all your donations. Donations can be specific to:

* the Rosedale Project
* the H. Napier Simpson Project or
* the TRAC general fund

Member enrolment, January 1997 to December 1997

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Please mail this form with your cheque to: Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, P.O. Box #7162, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1X8

Note: 1997 Tax receipts will be issued for any membership dues received at our Post Office Box before Tuesday, December 31, 1997. Tax receipts will be issued on or about February 28th, 1998. Dues received after the December 31 deadline will receive a tax receipt for the following year.

Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, registered charity no. 0235424-52-13

To preserve buildings and structures of architectural merit, and places of natural beauty in interest.

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Union Station is a National Treasure. It has this importance for several reasons. First, it is part of the passenger railway system, part of the communications infrastructure that keeps our country together and promotes commerce. Second, it has a place in the hearts of many of us, it has seen many of our meetings, partings and life events. Third, it is really great architecture.

The architecture of the station building, designed in 1914, is a superb example of the work of graduates of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Union station is important on this continent as an example of this style of architecture, absolutely outstanding in its own right. The Ecole des Beaux-Arts was set up in Paris centuries ago as a school for architects and artists, and became a very important training ground for aspiring American and Canadian architects in the second half of the nineteenth century and until after the first world war.

The Beaux-Arts training was rigorous. Students had to work hard to gain: mastery of mathematics, geometry and drawing; an understanding of the formal elements of design; and, an analytic appreciation of function as expressed in the connections between the design elements. Design projects were set for the students that called on all these abilities, and the grading of projects was consequently a serious matter, widely scrutinised and discussed.
The City Beautiful

Interest in a beautiful building in an appropriate setting, interest in making beautiful a city avenue, or perhaps indeed making the entire city beautiful, was one of the outcomes of the Beaux-Arts training.

Schemes for the beautification of Toronto were discussed at length. Even before the station was designed in detail, its location and orientation were decided upon. In 1911 the Civic Improvement Committee reported to city council on a plan to beautify the city. John Lyle, himself an Ecole graduate, was consulting architect to that committee, and later was a leading architect of Union Station. A road should be built, named Federal Avenue, directly from Front to Queen streets. It would begin at the main entrance of the new train station, and terminate in a civic plaza. City Hall would be to one side, Osgoode Hall to the other. These parts to be linked by another municipal building in the middle, and the whole framed with gardens. This scheme would have given Toronto a great avenue of approach, with an impressive vista in either direction. It would have been a dignified and spacious setting worthy of a great city.

However, even though Federal Avenue never progressed through to actualization, Union Station as we know it is part of a very impressive streetscape. Thomas Fuller’s Dominion Public Building and the former Toronto Customs House, set east of the station on Front Street are one with the station in their air of magnificence, grandeur and ceremony. The building has a curved front, classical orders and a restrained height. It has a presence that would be impressive anywhere. It complements the station perfectly in scale, and height. Across Front street, facing the station, stands the Royal York Hotel. That is outstanding architecture too, although in a different mood. The view of the top ten floors from the south is a protected vista. It can be seen clearly from Toronto Islands, and defines the city.

address

date

Dear Ms Coppins,

Please register my objections to the sale of Union Station to the Maple Leaf Gardens Limited. I understand that Maple Leaf Gardens propose to intrude other structures into the walls of the fine old monument, Union Station in Toronto. A building of this merit should be left entire.

This building is a living part of our Canadian Heritage, it has a place in the affections of many. It fulfills the important function for which it was built, that of a railway station. It must remain forever in public ownership, safeguarded for future generations. Please give Union Station the protection that it needs from you today.

Yours truly,

address

date

Dear Dr Alway,

It is with regret and concern that I see the Minister of Heritage is being asked to allow the sale of Union Station to the Maple Leafs, and I want you to do what lies within your power to defer this development. I have also written to the Minister to express my concern.

I am opposed to any changes being made to the fabric of Union Station. This is a Heritage building, of great historic and architectural worth. It fulfills the important function for which it was built, that of a railway station. It must remain forever in public ownership.

Yours truly
**Write to the Minister of Heritage, Sheila Copps, opposing the sale of the building to the Maple Leafs. The application to sell has been made by the Toronto Terminal Railway Company Limited, and any objections must be made within sixty days. From June 2. If enough public opposition is received to the proposal, the decision will be delayed. Write on or before Monday, July 25 1997, in order to influence what happens next. Hon. Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, Leger Building, 12th floor, 15 Eddy Street, Hull Quebec K1A 0M5 Fax (819) 994 5987

**Send a copy or write another letter to:
Dr Richard Alway, Chair Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada,
c/o University of St Michael’s College, 81 St. Mary Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J4

**Also, write to your Member of Parliament.
No postage needed for a letter to any MP
Suggested form letters included in this newsletter.
THANK YOU! Your efforts are worthy, and really will help!

*If you are not yet a member of TRAC, we invite you to join. Be part of a cause you believe in.
Membership application form, page 19. If you are a member of TRAC already, thank you, we are most grateful for your support of architectural conservation.

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**Experiencing Union Station**

From outside Union Station, we can understand at once that this is an important public building. It occupies an entire city block, it is protected by a pedestrian moat. It is built in the style of the public buildings of Imperial Rome, and yet we are somehow welcomed to participate in that majesty. We walk with a confident step, past Doric columns that although three stories tall make us feel tall as well, for their plinths are at shoulder height.

The entrance to the building is through a beautiful, sturdy brass-trimmed door, a vestibule we are hardly aware of as crossed in a few paces and separates us from the outdoor climate and noise. We are in the ticketing hall itself, often referred to affectionately as the Great Hall. This is an impressive space. The ceiling is so high, we do not feel rushed. Possible destinations are carved in attractive Roman characters, as a frieze under a large cornice. Daylight surrounds us, coming through very large, round-headed windows on the east and west walls, and a celestery on the long walls. The traveller is soothed in his leave-taking, recalled to his purpose by this hall. In subjective terms, this is a good time to make decisions. Information on impending VIA departures is displayed, as it always has been, on a board in the centre of the hall.
The traveller will need a ticket next, and moves to the ticket counters, plainly visible along the north side. The ticket purchase is the function of this space. The scale chosen, and the light experienced have been carefully arranged by the architect to enhance that function of the space.

After ticket purchase, the traveller has two options. She may either proceed to a restaurant and waiting area, or down a ramp to the trains. The options are lit by their own daylight sources, which serve as a guide. The restaurant and waiting area to the west has a glass ceiling at normal height, which admits reflected light. It reads architecturally as a tranquil area, at one side and yet included in the main purpose of the building, which is travel. The ramp to trains on the south side of the hall is obviously more important. It is marked out by a pair of eighty foot corinthian columns. A high skylight lets in a beam of direct light that gives a traveller direction and encouragement to walk down the ramp and on to the train boarding area.

A train passenger arriving at Union Station, walks from the train platform down steps and into the basement of the station building. The ceilings here are at normal height, and there are marvellous fat columns regularly spaced. These are not just there for ornament. Their formidable job is to carry all the great weight of the platforms and trains! Through these fellows one can feel tremendous vibration as a train rolls to a stop just over one’s head. In the basement of the station building, the detail of the the brass work around the shops is original. No matter the contemporary signage, the shops are in the same position and same size as in the architects’ original concept. All arriving passengers on VIA come through the same passage with several sets of doors. This helps in meeting visitors. The ceiling height and lighting draw the travellers forwards to exit doors, where originally taxis and buses waited. The subway connection and suburban GO transit lines have been added since the building was complete, and the logic of finding those services is manageable. It might have been even more logical if the Beaux-Arts architects had worked on those developments, for their boast was “one needs never ask the way in a properly designed building”.

...and then, some questions
It certainly feels strange that suddenly our own Maple Leaf hockey team owners are applying to build at Union station.

Why add to the traffic load just there?
FOR: the number of rail junctions at Union station, and the immediate proximity of the arena will encourage the use of public transport. The infrastructure is there to be used!
AGAINST: The rail system is in steady use. Railway passengers would be inconvenienced by the extra traffic at game time and certainly during the construction phase. The heavy users, and those likely to have to endure maximum discomfort, are the GO line commuters.

Why build on top of railway tracks?
FOR: minimum walk, maximum convenience for hockey fans
AGAINST: the passenger rail system is an important service, and what happens to the layout of rails and platforms when you have to drive in pillars for the superstructure? Might the future expansion plans for the railways be jeopardized? There are likely to be enormous extra costs involved, and would the Maple Leafs pay them?

Why in the world would a hockey team want to use the Great Hall as a foyer to their arena?
FOR: the building is not fully used now, more traffic would liven up the atmosphere.
Besides, there is a cachet, a zany touch of quality for sports fans in using the building that way.
AGAINST: the building is a heritage monument. It is in use for the function for which it was built seventy years ago. Plan to build more suitable entrance to the south of your arena.

Is the proposed construction good architecture?
FOR: this is a terrific engineering challenge, a most exciting project. Plus it is a design that meets the objectives of the financiers. Of course we only have a sketch so far.
AGAINST: it is not acceptable to attack the integrity of a national treasure. The Union Station building is a highly esteemed example of Beaux-Arts architecture. No intrusion should be made in the fabric of this fine monument.

What can I do?
Please... write letters immediately!
Get your friends to join TRAC!!
Turn the page for more information.
The style of the proposed structures, as seen in the small drawing made available to the public this May, is modern, but without any obvious design principles. It lacks scholarship in style. The new structures make no references to the old building. They do not have the kind of character that can say anything of individual significance. They are of modern materials. They make free use of glass, both for windows and pedestrian shelter at doorways and walkways. This is probably what we could expect of “a run of exterior stairs on either side of the central bridge down to the moat” which may be needed on the front (north elevation) of the existing building. This is a misunderstanding of restraint in design. It is sheep’s clothing for a wolf. The proposed design is lowest-common-denominator-modern. It would intrude upon the the masterpiece, in fact and in spirit. It would invite us to accept that the masterpiece is a masterpiece no more, by the obvious disrespect shown by the monster newcomer.

Union Station is a historic monument. It celebrates our railway system, and the political and economic struggles to unify the country that continue today. It is architecture of fine quality. It is a monument to take warm pride in, there for us to enjoy for what it is. We must strive to pass it on to future generations in as complete and authentic a state as we received it.

As music is the experience of sound and movement, so buildings are the experience of space and movement. Beaux-Arts buildings are always complex compositions. They have identifiable themes, a rather high degree of abstraction, and deliberate reminiscence and allusion. The Beaux-Arts architect would first determine the function of a building, and the elements it needed. Then he would determine how to make the elements into a whole, creating in this way a dynamic composition. When built, a successful Beaux-Arts building imparts to those who use it a mood, pace and comfort appropriate to the function for which it was designed.

Architectural changes
In recent years additional pedestrian access to the building was given to Skydome patrons. Their route is from the west, through what was originally office space. The walls are finished to represent ashlar and there is a referential cornice, and wood strips applied to the ceiling refer to the glass ceiling of the next section. The next section was originally a restaurant area with oak panelled walls. The original cornice and glass ceiling are there still, and the walls are refinished in a somewhat better representation of ashlar. Then the pedestrian route is through the travellers waiting room and Great Hall itself, and down stairs to the basement concourses. At peak times, there may be several thousand Skydome patrons travelling this route in a twenty minute interval.

Changes to come
The proposed construction would breach the Great Hall on the south wall, and intrude banks of escalators where the entrance to the trains is now. This is to bring sports fans to and from an
arena built over the VIA and GO tracks. Perhaps one in five of those fans will want the travel concourses in the basement. The rest are simply seeking the nearest exit, looking for the street where their cars are parked. A more efficient solution would be a route that delivered sports fans to the basement concourses directly from the arena. The proposal is really a massive interference with the Great Hall. The light available in the hall would inevitably be changed were this construction carried out. Light and movement are so intrinsic to the full actualisation and appreciation of the original design, any change would be immediately noticeable. But much, much worse the current use of the Great Hall, for ticket purchases and departures for VIA passengers, would become subordinate to the new use of the Hall as a mere foyer to the sports and entertainment complex.

Is it reasonable, is it just that our National Treasure should be devalued in this way? This building is not an everyday object, it is the opposite of commonplace. Its proportions are heroic and timeless. It is made of the finest quality materials - limestone exterior walls, and sawn zumbro fossiliferous limestone interior walls. It is an artistic conception of great power, a beautiful building outside and in. It expresses civic pride, confidence in the future of this continent and in our ability to shape our destiny here, a just and principled view of the relationship of man to mankind.

Respect for Architecture

When additions are required to an old structure, there is always the problem of how the new structures will relate architecturally to the old. Just as between any two people, there has to be mutual respect if they are to get along, and this is particularly important to consider if the connection is to endure. Respect between buildings includes the notions of similar mass and scale, and certain style considerations. The amount of respect that an architect feels called on to display will depend on how he regards the old building, and certainly not everything is to be revered just because it is old. Union Station is over seventy years old, but as public buildings go it is only an adolescent, and yet it is a masterpiece. We have spent the preceding pages describing some of the qualities that make up this conclusion. What should be evident in any new work is the respect shown by one architect for the achievements of another time, another architect.

John Lyle defined the outstanding features of architecture as: scholarship; solidity and simplicity; restraint; execution; and, handling of monumental work in a big scale.

The proposed new structures certainly demonstrate solidity and simplicity. They also demonstrate extreme restraint in ornament since there is none, and monumentality. Monumentality such as is only available with advanced methods and materials of construction. The proposed new structures over the tracks are large. The arena is nearly twice as long as the Great Hall and rises to 1.8 times the height of the central section of Union Station. Size is of course intrinsic to an arena, and in this case the impression of size is greater because the arena is both very close to the masterpiece, and elevated forty feet to allow room for the trains to run. Plus the sketch shows office towers to be built on the bridge as well. Size in the animal kingdom certainly implies dominance, and so it does in architecture. The proposed arena will dominate the masterpiece by its size. Size also gets attention because it defines the skyline. The skyline is important in forming a first impression of a building. So, this arena would take the skyline, make the important first impression. The impression the masterpiece can make is significantly weakened.
**Rail planning costs**

Both VLA and GO rail representatives have indicated that the current layout of tracks and platforms at Union Station is not satisfactory, yet they have no time or dollar budget to study the problem. It is imperative that this be done. Because the problem is not well-defined the cost of the solution can only be guessed at, but surely it is obvious that when the supports for buildings over the tracks are in place, it is too late to make major changes in platform width or track configuration. The problem of the track layout must be studied objectively, and costs assigned, before any further consideration is given to this proposal.

For the Maple Leaf representatives to enjoin haste while ignoring this problem shows a callous indifference to the public good. It is a cruel irony and a contravention of all the sacred ideals of design that Beaux-Arts holds most dear. If city council were to allow use of their land without these significant infrastructure costs being delineated, assigned and public knowledge, they would be highly irresponsible.

**Sports Arena Planning**

*The Raptors* The National Basketball Association awarded the Toronto franchise based on satisfactory site selection. The new basketball stadium was to be constructed at the southeast corner of Bay and Dundas Streets, adjacent to the Eaton parking garage. Then the new franchise owners discovered the site was wrong, it would not work out for them. They evaluated a series of alternatives. Union Station was not one of those made known to the public. Their second site selection was Charles Delphin’s 1938 masterpiece, the Postal Delivery Building, otherwise known as 40 Bay Street. Their plan required the demolition of this nationally important building, except for two walls and a frieze. As of June 1997, the demolition has been accomplished, the excavation proceeds on schedule.

Now they say they are contemplating deserting that site for a share in a place over the tracks at Union Station. Why the two teams must have their shared arena over Union Station is not clear. Why not have it at 40 Bay Street?

*The Maple Leafs* owners put the city on notice years ago that they considered the Gardens inadequate to meet the future needs of the hockey team. The owners also fought aggressively against the designation of the Gardens arena, but the city designated it anyway.

The city should have stipulated at the outset that there would be only one more stadium. To be fair to property owners, the city should clearly set out the planning conditions, and stick to them. The city should now, if it genuinely wants to protect the Gardens, insist that the owners should demonstrate to the satisfaction of the public that the Gardens cannot be retrofitted. Otherwise the city will be seen as an accomplice of the Maple Leafs in their desire to abandon the Gardens arena. The owner must be stopped from pursuing the removal of the only thing that keeps the Gardens financially viable - the team.

In failing to do this the city is having to adjust its plans too often. Maybe we should send those involved off to Paris to attend the École des Beaux-Arts where they would learn something about coherency, consistency and how to make connections.

The Maple Leafs should put their energy into building a winning team, at the Gardens.

**Protection of Access to Transportation Services in Toronto Union Station**

by Wilfrid Walker, Board member, Transport 2000, Ontario

The current proposal to change the basic functions of Union Station to permit the flow of pedestrians not primarily concerned with ticketing and accessing rail transportation, is the latest in a number of proposals and revisions put forward affecting the original passenger flow design of this classic edifice. The most drastic of these, the metro Centre proposal of 1969, would have demolished the station and moved all rail passenger facilities south to a point adjacent to the Gardiner Expressway. Happily a new City Council eventually rejected this questionable proposal.

When opened in 1927, the design provided for the plurality of rail passengers to access the station from Front Street by transferring from street car service operating directly in front of the station. An additional flow from the street would constitute pedestrian traffic from the downtown area and passengers arriving by private automobile and taxi at the curbside. Auto transfers also had an alternate more protected access via the below ground taxiway or "moat", leading to the lower floor of the station, an area designed as a concourse for arriving rail passengers.

Passengers departing by rail entered the ticketing and information area (the Great Hall) directly from the street, or by stairways from the moat and arrival concourse. Access to the trains from the Great Hall was gained through the departure concourse running under the tracks at right angles to the Hall and leading to 22 gates and stairways to the trainsheds above. Passengers arriving by train used separate sets of stairs and passageways, leading down ramps to the arrivals concourse.

This design has functioned quite well through seventy years, handling traffic during the second world war that often strained it. In more recent decades, construction of Union subway station in 1934 and commencement of Government of Ontario (GO) transit commuter service in 1967 changed the access points and flows of traffic to some extent. Increases in commuter traffic required both GO and Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to make major changes in the early 1980's to create the present GO concourse under the east wing of the station, with a more direct connection to an expanded subway mezzanine level.

Prior to the opening of the Skydome in 1989, a review of the pedestrian system and the station's passenger capacities was initiated, assessing probable platform requirements of both GO transit and VIA rail and the likely pedestrian access needs, principally between the new station and Union subway station. One conclusion was that the "moat" was the logical route for large numbers of people destined primarily for the Skydome, because the "moat" was not used for much other than parking. However promoters of the project refused to finance the upgrading needed and another route was chosen.
The “almost weatherproof” skywalk provided between the subway and the Skydome routes those patrons from the subway mezzanine through the GO transit and the VIA arrivals concourses, up the stairs to the west end of the Great Hall, through the waiting area to a covered passage outside the station building. The protected passage ends some 300 feet short of the stadium, hence the need for the designation “almost weatherproof”. Possibly the money ran out at this point.

1990 Development Plan for Union Station

The skywalk attracts about 14% of Skydome patrons to use the Union subway station according to TTC estimates. We do not have a similar estimate from GO. Even these numbers create problems for the railway service, particularly when the stadium activities coincide with peak commuter traffic. The TTC assessment of a combined Skydome and the proposed hockey arena event justifies the need for major changes to Union Subway station. In their report on this problem, the Commission makes no comment concerning connections to or design of additional pedestrian routes.

The proponents of a new hockey arena to be constructed over the existing train shed propose using the Great Hall as the primary access route to that facility, via high capacity escalators rising from the floor into the south wall of this heritage building. To reach the Hall, subway patrons must pass through the lower railway concourses and mount stairs into the Great Hall, there to be met by other patrons entering from Front St. It is assumed that this routing would be expected to accommodate the 20% of the arena capacity presently using College Subway Station that adjoins Maple Leaf Gardens, plus an undetermined number from the downtown area.

Transit Commission staff estimate that capacity crowds exit Maple Leaf Gardens in approximately 20 minutes and this would mean that a minimum of 4,000 people heading for the subway would be expected to move through the Great Hall and the lower floor concourses in that period. A simultaneous exit from Skydome events could raise this figure as high as 13,500, according to the TTC study. Clearly, even the lower flows would severely disrupt the basic transportation functions of Union Station and if the proposal is to be considered further, alternative pedestrian routes from the subway to these facilities must be agreed upon.

The only practicable alternative for connecting the subway to this ill conceived proposal is to make use of the moat for pedestrian movement. This could lead to elevated walkways above the trainshed on either side of the proposed arena. Care must be taken that the walkways and the arena itself are constructed at sufficient elevation to permit a second level of platforms and tracks above the trainshed, as GO and VIA patronage will eventually increase beyond the restricted capacity of the present 13 platform tracks with the trainshed and there is no space to the south to expand the existing facility.

Lost in the present debate is the fact that the basketball arena south of the trainshed continues under construction, even though this facility would obviously be redundant should the combined arena proposal proceed over the trainshed. Pedestrian routes to the basketball facility have not been publicly discussed, however the above considerations would also apply to operation of this facility, particularly so if it eventually served as a dual use stadium in place of the Station plan.

Direct pedestrian access to this facility could also take advantage of the moat, proceeding at grade or underground along Bay and York Streets. This would be the least costly stadium to access from the subway, possibly involving no public funding for construction or ongoing maintenance. Essential to this concept is the need for the access to the facility to be the optimum route from the subway. If this can be established the prospect for the “short cuts” through the station itself would be minimized.

Wilfrid Walker