

Almonte Legion: Old Bank of Montreal Building

100 Bridge Street, Almonte

Architectural Features:

Dates: Built between 1870 and 1873

Style: Second Empire

Architect: Unknown

Current Owners: Royal Canadian Legion: Almonte Branch

Construction: This is a two story stone building built in a square plan. It has an imposing character despite many alterations to the original building. The roof is now flat but retains its original wooden cornice and brackets. It was a mansard roof with large dormer windows. Each dormer window had a pediment, the center one of which was arched and the others peaked- please see photo below. The stone is presumably local limestone, with dark stone bands running along the bottom and centre of the building denoting the stories. The main entrance is on the right side of the facade. It is no longer in use.

Openings: Six large windows appear on each side of the building: three below and three above. The front of the building has two windows and a door on the first floor. Each window has an arched and slightly protruding drip mold with keystones and labels of darker stone. The lower windows have more pronounced, semi-circular arches while the upper ones are shallower. At one time these were double hung two over two sash windows. The windows had shutters which have been removed. The windows are boarded over with murals on plywood; the windows that are visible are not original. A large street-facing front door is no longer in use and is not original. It is recessed and also has an arch above with drip mold, labels, and keystones. A stained glass panel above the door is older but also not original as is obvious from the photos that show the lettering "Bank of Montreal" above the door (see photo below).

Notable Features: The stonework, cornice, and brackets are the most notable features. They retain the look of the original building despite the many alterations to the rest of the structure.

History

This property was sold in 1870 to James Rea(Rae), a local businessman, by James Paterson, who owned much of the surrounding land, for \$530. Rea must have built the current building on the property because he was able to sell it to the Merchants Bank in 1873 for \$2750. More research would determine whether Rea intended to use the building himself or if he built it solely for the purpose of sale to the Merchants Bank. The Merchants Bank of Canada was Almonte's first commercial bank (a branch bank) and it operated out of this stone building on the corner of Farm and Bridge streets. It opened in 1869, suggesting that this building was perhaps constructed specifically to house that institution. It closed in December 1879 and was taken over by or merged with the Bank of Montreal.

The Bank of Montreal was established in 1817 and is credited with creating the first branch banking system in Canada. It also created Canada's first national currency. (Evidence suggests that the Merchants Bank reopened a branch in Almonte in the 20th century on Mill Street but this may have

been another Merchants bank which became the Royal bank in the 1920's). Almonte's Bank of Montreal was opened on March 1, 1880 by Angus Kirkland. Kirkland was the manager until 1884 when he was succeeded by T Plummer. In 1905/06 it was decided that the building was too far away from the main commercial area of Almonte and the Bank of Montreal was moved to its present location on Mill Street. However, the old building continued to be used as offices for the bank. In 1947 the building was sold to the Royal Canadian Legion (Branch 240). However, in the Insurance plan of the Town of Almonte dated 1950, the building is listed as a dwelling. There is no information on who lived there at that time. Perhaps the Legion rented it out for a time until it could be converted into more usable facilities.

In more recent times, the Legion has changed the building dramatically to suit the needs of the organization (see above comments). It is currently used for a variety of purposes, from offices to a banquet facility and meeting space.

Construction History and Current Building

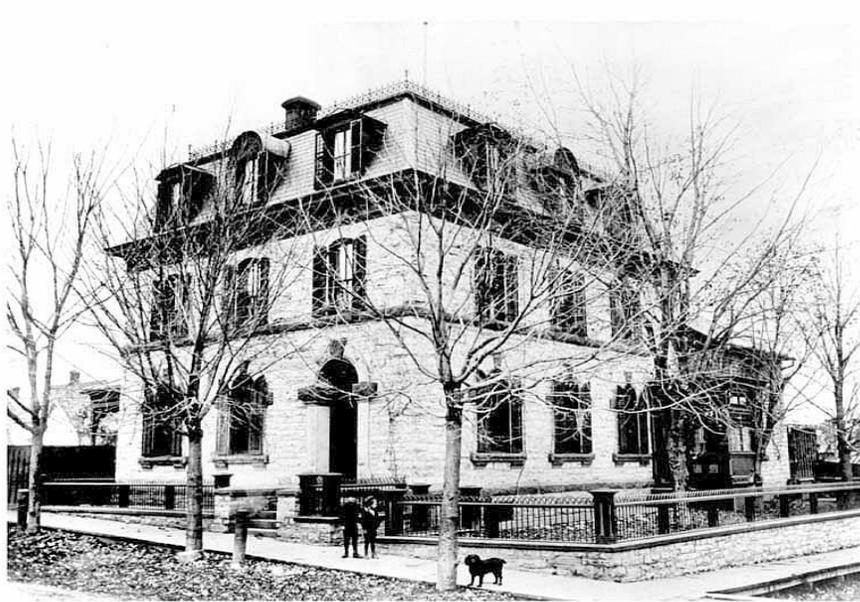
This building has been altered dramatically from its original state. Additions have been made at the rear of the building and entrances have been built into these at each side (although the original building did have a structure to the rear as well). The entire interior has been remodeled to suit the needs of large gatherings. New ceilings are in place. No original stonework, flooring, or molding is visible in the interior. Plumbing has been installed with washrooms on both stories. The roof has been flattened, removing the third story and dormer windows. As mentioned above, the windows are modern and have been boarded over with plywood panels. A fire escape has been added to the South end of the building.

Heritage significance

This building is recommended to be added to the Mississippi Mills Properties of Heritage Significance listing based on its historical relevance to the community, including it being Almonte's first commercial bank. The architectural heritage features of significance only include the stonework, cornice, and brackets on the original building.

Images

from www.almonte.com



*Compliments: Archives of
Bank of Montreal*



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Almonte Legion, May 2009



Almonte Legion, May 2009

Sources:

Almonte: Faces and Places 1880-1980

Lanark Legacy By Howard Morton Brown

Almonte in the Twenties

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~onlanark/scrapbook/Almonte1920.htm>

Almonte Public Library history scrapbooks

**Research completed December 2008 by Linda Hamilton
for the Mississippi Mills Heritage Committee.**