

For Immediate Release

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The Early History of the Paris Old Town Hall

Even as we pursue the dream of The Bawcutt Centre, we want to continue to tell the story of the Paris Old Town Hall and the role it has played over the past century and a half. Often people wonder about that grand old building up on the hill, so let's take a look at its glorious beginnings.

It was early in 1853 when a committee of citizens met together with the goal of building a town hall for the Town of Paris, which had just been incorporated in 1850. By the end of February, they had selected a site, architect and contractor. By June, the money was in place and construction began. The aim was to have the building erected by the beginning of the next year. It would function as the town's council chambers, offices, local market, fire department, police department and jail, and assembly room for the community. The budget was approximately \$12,000. The project would end up being finished on time and on budget, for the most part. The Paris Town Hall was completed in 1854, at a final cost of approximately \$14,000 – which included a fire engine and the furnishings for the building. It is difficult to imagine a building project of that magnitude being completed with such efficiency in today's society!

The Paris Town Hall was unlike any other building in town, or in Canada West. As Macrae and Adamson note in *Cornerstones of Order*, the citizens who formed the committee were well aware that the Greek Revival building style dominated Paris, and wanted something different for their new town hall. They immediately requested that a local architect come up with some drawings of a Gothic style building. John Maxwell was obviously aware of the latest trends of the day, for he quickly drew up plans for what is known today as the oldest example of civic Gothic architecture in Canada. It was such a new concept that it would be five years before Canada's Parliament Buildings would be built in the same style – government buildings that looked more like a church than a Greek temple.

While researching this project, I've learned that the work of our archivists at the Paris Museum and Historical Society is incredibly valuable. I was surprised and delighted to discover that our own home was built for the Wheelers – the entrepreneurs who would transform the town hall into the Wheeler Needleworks in the latter years of the 1800s. I highly recommend a visit to the Paris Museum if you are interested in discovering the story of your own home; they have diligently gathered a file of information for each address in Paris. - *By Kari Raymer Bishop, Member of The Bawcutt Centre/Paris Old Town Hall Advisory Committee.*

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