

City of Brockville  
LOCAL ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 1, 1978

Designation Recommendation  
and Description for

# First Presbyterian Church

*10 Church St.*

Corner of Church and William Streets,  
Brockville, Ontario.

Block 42      Lot 31

A.      REASONS FOR DESIGNATION  
UNDER THE ONTARIO HERITAGE ACT, 1974

The First Presbyterian Church is being recommended for designation for Architectural reasons.

It is a fine example of "Gothic Revival" Church Architecture, built during the "High Victorian" period. Its unique character is derived from the use of the four spires. The building's prominent location adjacent to the Court House contributes to the streetscape of the district.

The trustees of the Church have requested designation of the building.

B. ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

In 1816 William Buell, one of the original settlers of Brockville, deeded land for a Presbyterian church.<sup>1</sup> A house of worship had been built by 1819 at the corner of Church and William Streets. It was replaced in 1847 - 48 after a disastrous fire.<sup>2</sup>

As the years passed the congregation grew, making it necessary for a new building. From November 22, 1877 to February 6, 1878 several meetings were held to consider the construction of a larger building.<sup>3</sup> The building committee consisted of John M. Gill, Thomas Wilkinson, Newton Cossitt, William Gilmour, William McCullough, John Lafayette and W. R. Bell.

Plans for the building were drawn up by J. R. Johnston of Ogdensburg, calling for: "A stone structure of modern architecture capable of seating about 800 people".

Dimensions for the building were one hundred feet on Church Street and one hundred ten feet on William Street. The contract for construction was given to Moore & Fields Ltd. of Canton, New York. The estimated cost was set at \$30,000.00.<sup>4</sup>

On December 14, 1879 the third Presbyterian Church, on this site, was dedicated. The final cost was \$35,000.00.<sup>5</sup>

At a meeting in February of 1894 it was recognized that more space was required and that repairs were needed to the roof. A building committee was appointed, consisting of Newton

Cossitt, John M. Gill, W. H. Comstock, W. R. Gardner and Thomas Gilmour.<sup>4</sup>

It was decided that the roof repairs should be carried out first. A large quantity of slate was removed, which was replaced with new slate and the gutters were put in at all valleys of the roof. This work was done by Norman Cowan, a well known contractor at that time. The galvanized iron work was done by R. H. Smart, using over a ton of material.<sup>4</sup>

As these repairs were taking place, the building committee had decided upon some additional changes, including a gallery. The plans for the design were submitted by George A. Allan, a Brockville architect. It was to be located on the east side of the building (the William Street side). The dimensions were ninety feet by twenty-four feet. The gallery contains five tiers of pews capable of seating 250 people and conforms to the semi-circular seating plan of the nave.<sup>4</sup>

The total cost of remodelling the church was \$7,500.00. The building was reopened on October 18, 1894.<sup>4</sup>

C. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The First Presbyterian Church is a fine example of "Gothic Revival" church architecture. The exuberance and visual delight of the building's design are characteristic of the "High Victorian Period", in the last part of the 19th century.

This period is interesting because building form reaches a sense of maturity in such a way that construction materials are exploited for their full textural, colouristic and structural potential. Religious structures become more bold and massive in their proportions and ornament. To the people of the time this was how they expressed the status of such buildings.

The plan of the structure is basically a cross (+) with towers located at the three primary corners of the building which face Church and William Streets. The walls are constructed of coursed limestone with cut stone facings. The corners of the building and towers are angle buttressed, for added strength.

The structure is topped with two steeply-pitched gable roofs, at right angles to one another. They are covered with slate of various shapes and colours forming linear patterns. To add further accent, the ridge line of the roofs is topped with a railing of decorative ironwork. At the crossing of the two rooflines is a small tower or fleche.

The south and north gable ends are identical in construction and fenestration. There are three levels of window openings symmetrically placed in the wall. The first and second levels are narrow and relatively simple. The upper level contains a large pointed arch, geometrically traceried, stained glass window, flanked on either side by windows of a similar type

but in smaller proportions.

The east gable, and perhaps the most impressive, again contains three levels of fenestration. At the basement level is a row of simple elliptically arched windows. On the second level are two gothic traceried windows similar to those of the north and south elevations. The upper level contains a massive round opening with a stained glass rose window contained within, of large proportions and rich in detail.

A large expanse of glass, such as the one in the east elevation, needed some form of framework for reinforcement. The individual petals are outlined with a series of corinthian columns radiating about the centre. This type of window treatment is a prime example of the victorian decorative tradition of combining both beauty and structural quality.

Again noting the vertical emphasis of Citorian Gothic architecture, the edifice is surmounted by three towers at the building's three primary corners. Each is topped by an eight-sided, slate spire. Located in the base of each tower is an entrance into the church.

In the largest tower at the most prominent corner of the building is situated the main entrance. It is set above an impressive stairway containing two doric column light standards with a heavily-carved wood and decorative iron hand rail. Above

the oak doors is a large multi-foil stained glass window topped with a cut stone drip moulding.

REFERENCES:

1. Copy of DEED, dated  
Registered in Leeds County Registry Office.
  
2. Article, "Ninety Years Ago, Rev. William Smart  
Organized a Sunday School in Brockville",  
Brockville EVENING RECORDER, 21 October 1901.
  
3. Church Records, Archives of First Presbyterian Church.
  
4. Article, "A Beautiful Structure, The First Presbyterian  
Church Re-opened Last Night",  
Brockville EVENING RECORDER, 19 October 1894.
  
5. Article, "Presbyterians to Celebrate 146th Anniversary  
Here", Brockville Recorder & Times, October 1957.

D. RECOMMENDATION

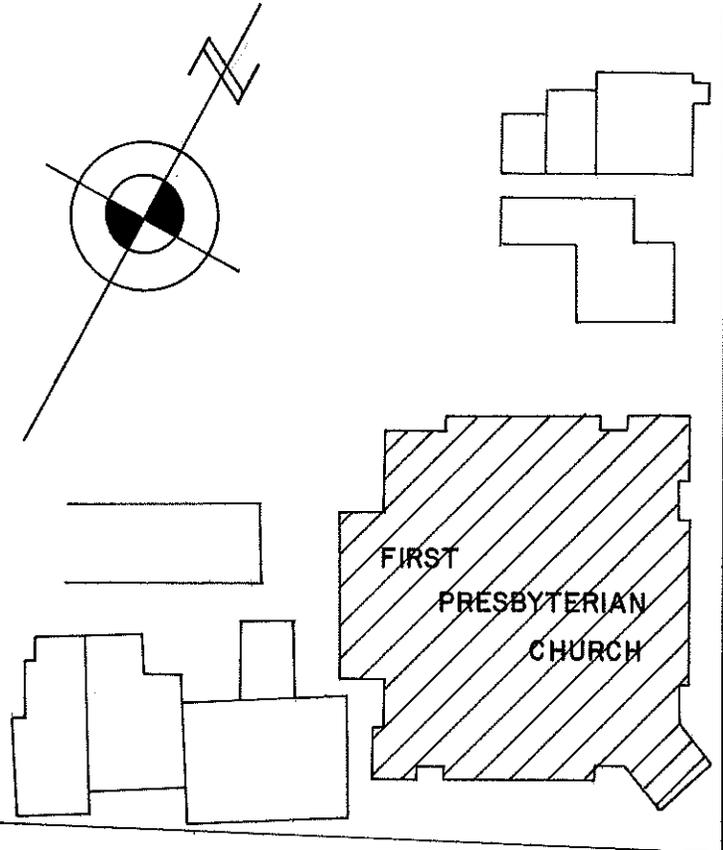
The Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee recommends First Presbyterian Church be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, 1974.

The First Presbyterian Church, with its prominent location, appears to stand as a sentinel to the Court House. The church adds a definite plus to the vista up Court House Avenue.

Its loss or extreme alteration would detract from the total view. It is hoped that through Council's designation, one of Brockville's most impressive buildings will be preserved, as an integral part of the Court House district.

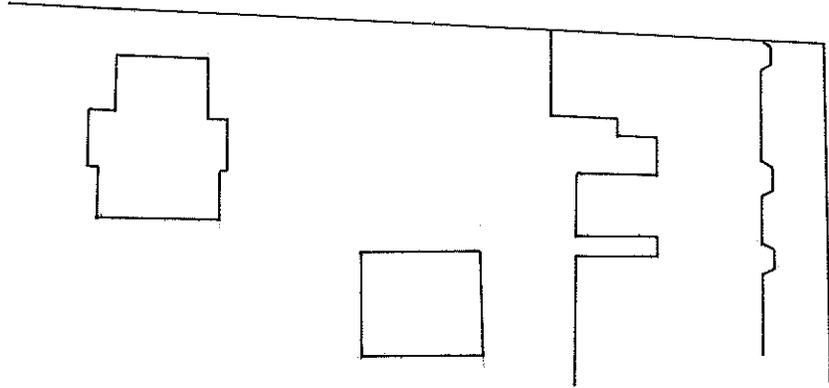
The Committee is particularly concerned with the preservation of the building's outstanding architectural features. However, it is understood that in order to retain the building's usefulness, certain alterations and renovations may from time to time be required. Areas of particular concern, in respect to the exterior are the facades facing Church and William Streets and the slate roofs.

Our Committee would wish to examine any proposals affecting these areas, such as the erection of signs, masonry cleaning, installation of exterior lighting or alterations to doors and windows.



WILLIAM ST.

CHURCH ST.



<b>CITY OF BROCKVILLE</b>		
ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE		
SITE PLAN OF		
<b>FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH</b>		
DRAWN BY: W.D.T.	SCALE: 1"=50'	GRID No.
CHK'D BY: D.G.	DATE: 9/6/77	B-5-2