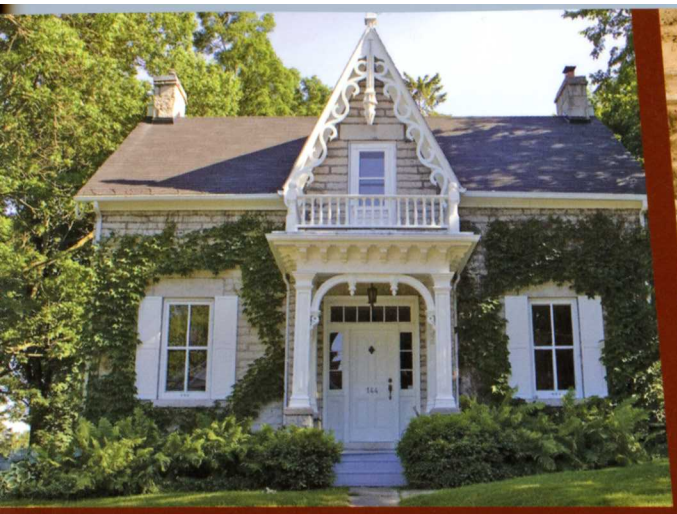
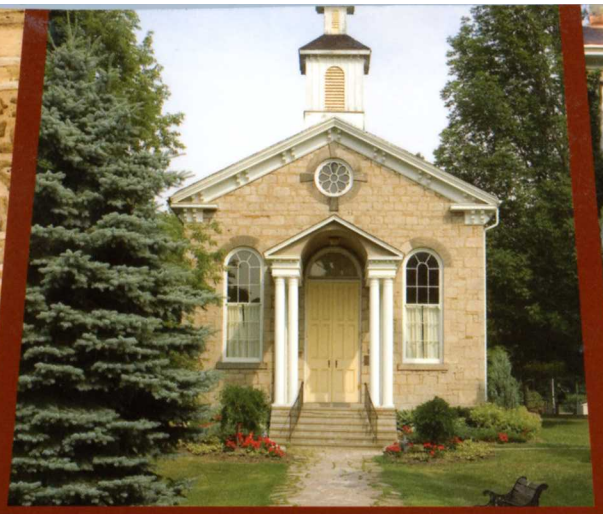
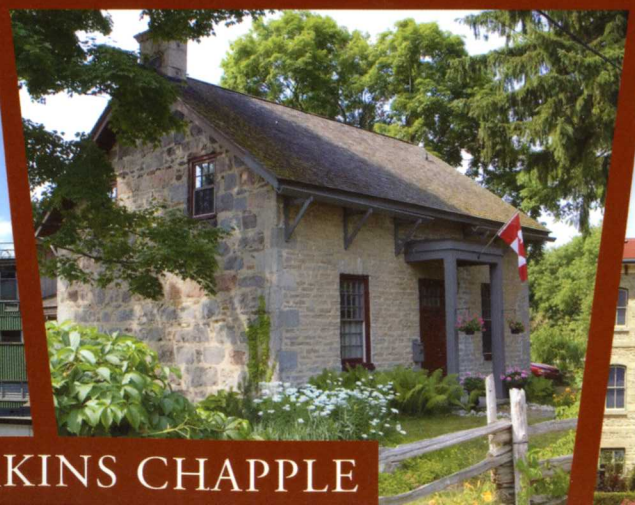
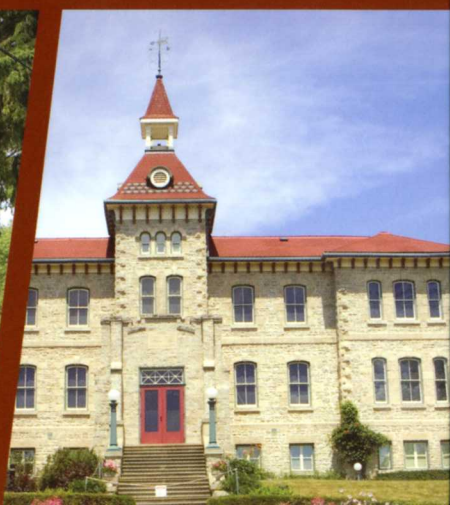





A HERITAGE OF STONE

BUILDINGS OF THE NIAGARA PENINSULA, FERGUS AND ELORA, GUELPH, REGION OF WATERLOO, CAMBRIDGE, PARIS, ANCASTER-DUNDAS-FLAMBOROUGH, HAMILTON AND ST. MARYS



NINA PERKINS CHAPPLE

Introduction

Stone has always been considered the most prestigious building material. The pyramids and temples of antiquity and the great cathedrals and palaces of medieval Europe have firmly established the tradition that stone was the prime choice for building great monuments. Compared to brick and wood, stone is by far the oldest building material. The sedimentary (layered) stone of southwestern Ontario—limestone and sandstone—was formed as long ago as 385 million years, while the igneous (once molten) granite fieldstone is millions of years older. We live, work, and worship inside these buildings of stone with hardly a thought given to their primordial origins. Stone buildings hold a special attraction, a fascination with their ageless quality, strength, and endurance, and with the natural beauty of the stone itself.

As the strongest and most permanent building material, stone was traditionally used for important, large-scale engineering projects. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when British North America was just opening up for settlement, stone was frequently chosen for building new transportation and defense systems. Britain sent numbers of skilled stonemasons to the colony to work on such substantial masonry projects as the British Naval Yards in Kingston (1820), the Rideau Canal (1832), and Kingston's Fort Henry (1833). Stonemasons were also in demand for building the Erie Canal (1825) and the second Welland Canal (1845). The next demand came during the building of the railroads in the early 1850s as stonemasons were

Fieldstone was the masonry preferred by the Mennonite settlers of Waterloo, as illustrated in this side view of the Swope House in West Montrose.

sent out across the province to erect massive masonry viaducts and retaining walls. It was then that these stonemasons learned about communities that promised future work.

The timing was ideal for a sudden boom in stone buildings. Railways brought the promise of future growth, and the citizens of flourishing young communities were poised to transform their villages of pioneer wooden buildings into solid, ageless, stone streetscapes reminiscent of their homelands. Original settlers had acquired sufficient wealth; local governments were firmly established; and prosperity attracted more immigrants, including well-trained stonemasons primarily from the British Isles and Ireland. (By comparison, few masons came from America because building in stone was relatively rare during this era, being limited primarily to upper New York state and Pennsylvania.) In Ontario, the stone buildings erected during this transformative period of the 1850s to the 1870s include some of the most notable structures ever built in the province.

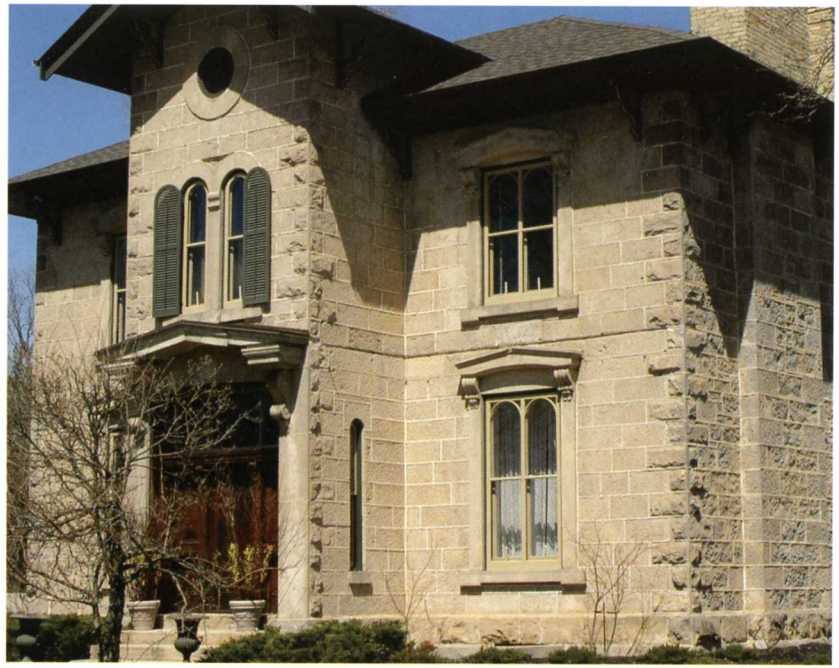
When I set out on my quest for stone buildings in southwestern Ontario, I discovered it was the landscape itself (the geography and the geology) that determined where building in stone became prolific. Although the region sits on bedrock, stone for quarrying generally became accessible by the action of watercourses over the millennia as they cut their way down through the rock, or by the gradual upheaval of the Earth's crust as in the formation of the Niagara Escarpment. Quarried stone consisted of various forms of sandstone and limestone (the latter is the term used generally in architecture; geologists break it down more specifically to limestone, dolomitic limestone, and dolomite). In southwestern Ontario, stone quarries appeared along the Grand, Speed, and Thames Rivers and along the Niagara Escarpment, starting where it rises out of the Niagara River at Queenston, and concentrating around the head of Lake Ontario. Because stone was not easily transported, stone towns developed where the stone was quarried.

Fieldstone, including granite from the Canadian Shield, was left scattered across the landscape by glaciers as they retreated 10,000 years ago. Because of its widespread occurrence in the countryside, fieldstone

became a favourite building material for rural farmhouses and, occasionally, for entire barn buildings, not just the foundations. Supply as well as the ethnic background of the settlers largely determined where fieldstone buildings appeared. The stone, identified for each building in the text, refers to the walls of the principal façades. Rubblestone was commonly used in back and side walls.

The subject—stone buildings of southwestern Ontario—casts a wide net and catches an amazingly rich resource—literally thousands of stone buildings of all types. The 114 examples chosen for this book represent only a small fraction of stone architecture found in the area. While masonry structures are often well-known and even revered in their own hometowns, knowledge of their counterparts in other southwestern Ontario localities is limited. The book breaks new ground by introducing the reader to a broad overview of communities that were building in stone, all around the same time. As a result, the material for each area must be limited to a brief sample. This general approach, on the other hand, allows us to include all building types—whether houses, town halls, churches, commercial blocks, or industrial buildings—located in all types of settlements, from the small village to the large urban area. The purpose is to entice the reader to explore further, to discover the timeless beauty and skilled craftsmanship of these works in stone.

Choosing 114 representative buildings from the thousands of candidates meant narrowing the focus to a few prime elements. First, the buildings had to be built in local—not imported—stone because this embodies quite literally the natural, indigenous character of the site. Second, buildings in concentrated numbers (i.e., settlements) were preferred because, collectively, they could build a picture of a place, its character, and identity. (This decision unfortunately ruled out most of the historic fieldstone farmhouses and small hamlets that beautify the Ontario countryside.) Lastly, communities of different ethnic backgrounds—Scottish, English, and German—were chosen because masonry techniques show an amazing variety from place to place, according to the cultural heritage of the settlers. For each criterion,



Squared limestone masonry is used in Inglebrook.

Both the Ohio sandstone, used on the Hamilton Custom House (left) and the local limestone used on the Guelph City Hall (right) can be more easily carved than most limestones.

though, there are exceptions; for example, the Mennonite farmhouses of Waterloo are obviously not in an urban area, but, more importantly, they articulate clearly their Pennsylvania-German heritage.

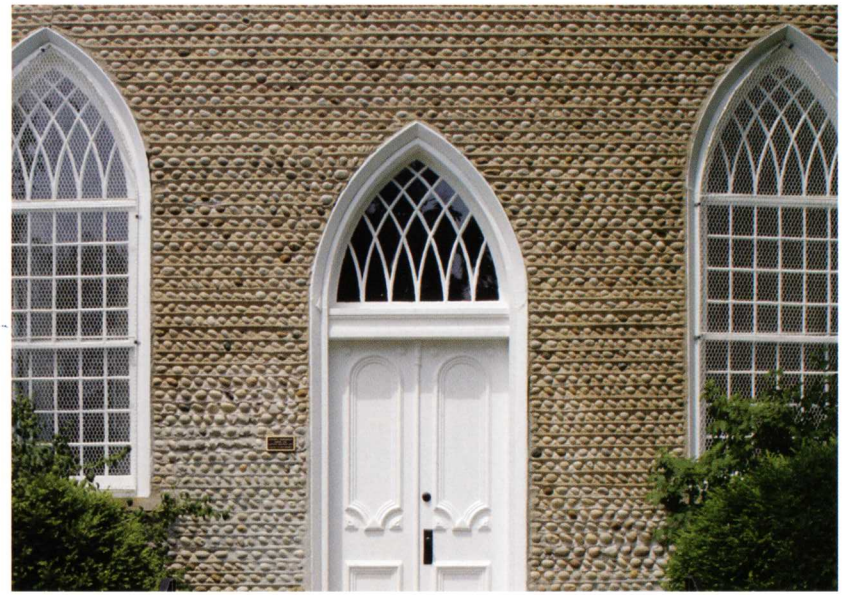
Perhaps the strongest message that comes out of this broad approach is the surprising degree of regional variation in stone architecture, even between nearby towns. These variations grew in part out of the difference of the local stone itself and how it was used. Stone buildings disclose all sorts of information about their makers: give clues to their origins: the Mennonites of Waterloo preferred unshaped natural fieldstone collected off their land and laid randomly in a wall, using an ample supply of mortar for support. Settlers in the Scottish settlements of Fergus and Galt built structures of squared stone, fitted tightly together in rows with relatively little mortar, often hammer-dressed (not smooth), and usually with little or no added decoration. On the other hand, Guelph's amber-grey limestone could be tooled or carved into an elaborate array of pedimental or segmental lintels and beautiful console brackets, similar to the ornamental work in Hamilton,

which was sculpted in sandstone from the escarpment. Each community, too, had its own sense of identity, that would be expressed in its architecture.

In every community, certain personalities became prominent because of their impact on their towns: the Elora Mill would not have existed without the indefatigable Scot, J. M. Fraser; St. Marys might have been slower to develop without the civilizing efforts of the Hutton family; Paris might never have acquired its legacy of cobblestone buildings if the American Levi Boughton had not come to town; and Guelph would have looked different without the remarkable talents of the English stonecarver Matthew Bell.

The stonemasons, carvers, and quarrymen are the real heroes of this story, but, unfortunately, information about their lives and work is sparse. These masons would also have had strong views on the appropriate mortar and pointing techniques to use. Because historic stone buildings have been repointed numerous times over the years, identifying the generations of stonemasons have added their own style of pointing over the years to a building, investigation into original mortar warrants an in-depth study of its own. (Owners of stone buildings should be warned against repointing in hard Portland cement—it can cause deterioration of the stone due to the freeze-thaw cycle.)

To put it in a larger context, the stone architecture of Quebec that had begun centuries earlier and culminated in such beautiful places as Montreal and Quebec City is deservedly well known, as are the stone buildings of eastern Ontario, found in Kingston, Ottawa, and Perth among other places. The stone legacy of southwestern Ontario, however, is still to be fully discovered. Collectively, this splendid heritage is an important dimension of the province's architectural resources. Perhaps our present-day eyes do not always see the subtle varieties in the masonry, or the art in the stone carvings, or the beauty in the proportions that our forebearers did. Every stone building is different; clues to its time, place, and builder are embedded in its fabric. It is well worth the time to take a second look. These buildings have their own stories to tell, if we listen.



Cobblestone was a specialized form of masonry used in Paris before Confederation.

St. Marys

Similar to the Grand River, the north branch of the Thames River originated as a glacial spillway whose swift current gradually cut its way down to bedrock. The earliest travellers to its juncture with Trout Creek observed that its shallow depth revealed flats of flag limestone which are still visible today. The first to seize the opportunity to settle here were the brothers James and Thomas Ingersoll from nearby Oxford County—James to buy 337 acres from the Canada Company in 1841 (fourteen years after the Company's John Galt had founded Guelph), and Thomas to build the first saw and grist mills in the next few years. By 1845, over one hundred settlers had arrived at the settlement, most of them of British or American origin who had resided in neighbouring counties. In 1851, J. B. Brown described the place as "... a most lovely spot. The north branch of the Thames here runs over a limestone bed, through beautifully undulating banks; and the stream is clear as crystal ... There is an abundance of limestone suitable for building, upon the site of the village." As in other stone towns, the quarrying of St. Marys' Devonian limestone began on a small scale. First, stone was taken from the river beds and banks; then, from individual quarries often owned by stonemasons; and only eventually, from huge pits the size of the town's swimming quarry, owned by large-scale companies.

Around 1850, pioneer Gilbert McIntosh built one of St. Marys' earliest stone dwellings, the McIntosh Cottage, next door to his woollen mill. Solid, unadorned, and durable, the cottage captures a

Left: The Sanderson House, built in 1849 and 1869, illustrates the contrast between the rustic, random-sized stones of the cottage wing and the sophisticated, squared, and coursed ashlar of the later Italianate house. The home has belonged to the Eady publishing family for over a century.

Above: The Tracy House of 1853–1854 captured the essence of Gothic Revival picturesqueness with its steep gables and wilderness setting. In 1926, the Rotary Club of St. Marys acquired the property and presented it to the town. The St. Marys Museum opened in the stone house in 1959.
Right: Despite drastic changes to its riverfront site—the loss of the mill next door, and the construction and subsequent removal of a downtown rail line along the river bank—the 1850 McIntosh Cottage remains comfortably nestled behind its enclosing stone wall, a work of enduring charm.

sense of those rugged frontier days. The limestone masonry work is typically rustic: relatively small stones, randomly coursed, with large lintels and no corner quoins. When landowner George Tracy came to build his new house a few years later, however, he approached the project in a diametrically opposite way—his vision was for a "Castle in the Bush," as it was known locally. Just as James Ingersoll had done the same year, George Tracy purchased four hundred acres from the Canada Company in 1841 (at $2.00 per acre), and planned to make his money by selling town lots in the south ward. Builder-architect Robert Barbour from Rochester, New York, erected the Tracy House in 1853–1854, one of the first estates in St. Marys. Three stonemasons—Frank Anderson, Andrew Knox, and John Whimster, who all went on to build numerous stone structures in town—erected the handsome residence with superior workmanship. The façade is constructed of squared, fifteen-centimetre coursed, local limestone, while the sides and

The Queen Street Block at Victoria Bridge, built originally in the 1850s, bears witness to William Veal Hutton's creation of a stone business sector, which has been sustained over the years although updated in 1884 and again in 1907.

back are of the customary rubblestone. In terms of fashionable style, stately dimensions, and prestigious setting, Tracy's elegant "castle" marked a new level of sophistication in the village.

Another of the founding families, the Huttons (the parents and four sons), emigrated from Hampshire, England, and in 1851 settled permanently in St. Marys, bringing with them considerable financial resources earned from the linen draper and banking trades. The Huttons built in stone, leaving an amazing legacy of seven handsome structures. Only William Veal Hutton's four-storey stone mill has been lost, destroyed by fire in 1921. His own substantial stone house, built in 1858, still stands across the street on the Queen Street Block at

Top: Water Street South, built in 1863, has survived intact, demonstrating the smooth, closely fitted ashlar masonry that was typical of the 1850s and 1860s, not only in St. Marys but throughout southwestern Ontario.
Bottom: St. Marys Junction Station, built in 1858, is one of the last remaining small stations of the Grand Trunk Railway and is recognized as a National Historic Site. The Sarnia line, closed further west at James Street North in 1989, was opened as the Grand Trunk Trail in 1998.

Victoria Bridge. The house originally faced the river with beautiful landscaped grounds in the foreground, while the back was attached to a two-storey commercial stone row he built in 1855. Changes have occurred to the block over time: Hutton's house is now commercial on the ground floor and the front door on the riverside filled in; a rock-faced façade covered the centre section in 1907 (which became the Royal Edward Hotel for eighty years); and the corner building at Water Street acquired a mansard roof in 1884. Hutton further capitalized on his stone complex by building an even larger row across the corner at 6 Water Street South in 1863. It has survived intact, still displaying the beautiful masonry of closely fitted ashlar blocks and compound lintels; eight gracefully arched store windows animate the street façades. His brother Theodore joined in by erecting another stone block at 14 Water Street in the 1860s (on the south side of the Opera House). Taken together, the Huttons' stone architecture virtually transformed St. Marys' earliest business streets.

St. Marys lost out to Stratford as the County Seat in 1853, but gained official village status in 1855, which further encouraged the community's progression towards a permanent settlement. Perhaps the strongest impetus to growth came from the arrival of two Grand Trunk Railway lines into St. Marys by 1858—one connecting Toronto to Sarnia crossing the Thames River (part of a Maine-to-Sarnia system), and the other connecting St. Marys to London (and the Great Western Railway) crossing Trout Creek. This massive undertaking catapulted the local stone building industry into unprecedented production: stone was needed for the Grand Trunk Junction Station, built in 1858 (eighteen by nine metres); the engine house (eighteen by fifty metres), now demolished; and the giant piers for the two viaducts over the rivers. (Just to build the Thames River viaduct required eleven stone piers twenty-one-metres-high—the newspaper advertised for twenty masons, fifty quarrymen, and one hundred labourers.) The Junction Station, located on the outskirts of town, once functioned as the centre of a small railway settlement, but now stands vacant in the fields, a rare survivor of the mighty Grand Trunk Railway system. It represents the prototype station of well-built masonry walls; wide, overhanging eaves; and arched

Upper left: St. James Anglican Church, built originally in 1857–1859 in local limestone, is St. Marys' oldest stone church. The church, with its 1880s belltower, 1907 stone Parish Hall, and spacious grounds form a lovely historic ensemble.
Above and left: The John Sparling House, built of local limestone in 1858, is believed to be the work of architect W. Graeme Tompkins who was associated with the Grand Trunk Railway. Magistrate Sparling was known as "Potato John" for sentencing local miscreants to plant potatoes on the fields behind his house.

doorways on both front and rear elevations. According to local lore, it was here in 1862–1863 that Thomas Alva Edison worked as the night telegraph operator. Today, local railway enthusiasts are actively involved in the Junction Station's preservation.

Stone, said to be left over from the Sarnia viaduct, went into building the John Sparling House, erected in 1858 at the eastern limits of St. Marys. John Sparling, a local magistrate and the first clerk of the village, is said to have employed the architect W. Graeme Tompkins to design a cottage of great charm. Its label mouldings over the windows, steep roof, and undulating bargeboards distinguish it as a delightful Tudor version of the Gothic Revival style. That the measure of the man proved not as solid as his building came out when he apparently absconded with some Methodist church funds and a parishioner's wife.

The first settlers of St. Marys were mostly a mixture of Scottish, Irish, and English stock, who by the 1850s had all built churches for

Above: The MacKay House, dated 1865, with its steep Gothic Revival gable, delicate bargeboard, and amazingly tall finial, imparts a joyous quality to the solid, well-proportioned structure, a combination not uncommon in St. Marys' stone houses.
Right: The Grant House was built by father and son stonemasons in 1863. Hailing from Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, Alexander and John Grant built a quintessential Ontario Cottage using traditional Scottish masonry.

their own denominations. The only stone church to survive from these early years is St. James Anglican Church built 1857–1859. Originally, the Gothic Revival church was a simple, rectangular building, built mainly by parishioners. However, in the 1880s, when church building was at its height in St. Marys, local architect William Williams provided new plans for St. James to raise the roof, erect a square tower and belfry, and reinforce the walls with buttresses. A parish hall was added in 1907. The spacious site, a gift from James Ingersoll in 1852, has allowed the church to grow and sustain a continuous presence for 150 years.

By 1861, St. Marys boasted a population of 2,728 and 450 dwellings, sixty-seven of which were built of stone. In 1864, it became incorporated as a town. This enabled St. Marys to withdraw from Perth County the following year. Politically independent and now flourishing as a grain-shipping market, the town was in its heyday. In 1865, it built the stone-arched Victoria Bridge over the Thames River (restored and updated in 1984). Residents began building fine houses, many of stone, from small to large.

Left: Sanderson House displays elaborate woodworking in its decorative porches and eaves, not surprising from an owner who was a carpenter by training and then later a lumberyard owner.
Above: Westover Park was built in 1867 for the brothers Joseph and William Veal Hutton. Echoes of the earlier Tracy House are evident in its form and Gothic Revival style. Both were designed by architect Robert Barbour. In 1983, the Hutton estate became the Westover Inn.

Along Thomas Street on the west bank of the Thames, a number of architects, builders, and stonemasons erected their homes. One of the oldest is the Grant House, built in 1863 by Scottish stonemasons Alexander Grant and his son, John. Typically, the limestone was squared and evenly coursed and the structure strengthened by large lintel blocks and corner quoins. The fine proportions and recessed panelled doorway with moulded pilasters show the extra care taken in its construction. Larger houses were built more frequently on higher ground. In the west ward, another early pioneer was James MacKay, whose enterprising spirit ran the gamut of frontier careers, from store owner to a mail and stage coach business. In 1865, the MacKay House arose on the Queen Street West hill, a testimonial in stone to the owner's entrepreneurial success and fashionable good taste. Meanwhile, across the river valley on the Queen Street East hill, another prospering businessman, John Sanderson, was erecting

The Opera House was built in 1880 for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The rock-faced stone, attenuated Gothic windows, and Scottish Baronial battlements and turrets form a unique landmark. It is now converted into apartments.

his prestigious home, the Sanderson House, in 1869. But the Irish-born Sanderson kept his first home of 1849, the attached one-storey cottage, as a wing and perhaps also as a graphic reminder of his rise from carpenter to lumberyard owner. The difference in stonework tells the story of how masonry techniques had developed over those twenty years. This later Italianate house is thought to be constructed by James Elliott, stonemason for the Opera House. Ornate verandas and a stone wall set the property off to its best advantage. Meanwhile, on the west side of the river at Westover Park, the Hutton brothers, Joseph and William, were building their retirement estate in 1867 (while still in their forties, for "the quiet afternoon of [their] life"). Westover Park, designed by Robert Barbour, architect of the Tracy House, used a similar double-gabled form with matching bargeboard, yet updated this grander home to the 1860s with a bay window and larger ashlar masonry. The Huttons' lifelong horticultural passion came out in the landscaping of seven acres of gardens and lawn, augmented by a spectacular conservatory, said to be "difficult to equal in Canada." Happily, the "quiet afternoon of [their] life" lasted about forty years until 1910, when the property was bequeathed to their niece Mina. Mina carried on the Hutton legacy of steward and builder until her death in 1938. After a number of interim uses, Westover Park became an inn in 1983.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, brick became the dominant building material throughout Ontario. It was not uncommon in St. Marys to find upscale Victorian houses of brick, yet stone still remained deeply rooted in the town's psyche. St. Marys' pride in using its local stone continued longer than in other stone centres. Rock-faced tooling of local limestone became fashionable as a decorative treatment—imported stone was kept to a minimum. Near the end of the century, St. Marys' stone town image became firmly entrenched with the building of a series of high-profile, landmark buildings of local limestone: the Opera House; the Town Hall; and the two glorious churches whose steeples still dominate the North Ward hilltop—the First Presbyterian Church (1881) and Holy Name of

Mary Catholic Church (1892). Even the federal government carried on this local tradition by using St. Marys' stone in its 1907 Post Office and Customs building. Perhaps the most extraordinary of all these monuments is the Opera House, erected in 1880 by stonemason James Elliott in between the Huttons' formal stone rows on Water Street South. It was the novel idea of the St. Marys Independent Order of Odd Fellows to combine three different functions into a wonderfully innovative building: their private lodge premises were on the top floor; an 800-seat theatre on the middle two floors; and stores at ground level. Designed by architect Silas Weekes of London (a lodge member), this dramatic, castellated Victorian Gothic monument was the much-beloved entertainment focus of the town for the next forty years. The St. Marys Lions Club saved the Opera House from demolition in 1986 with help from federal and provincial grants. Could it be that these rock-faced turrets inspired the magnificent new Town Hall of 1891? Architect George W. Gouinlock of Toronto took these picturesque forms to new heights by incorporating them into a lively Romanesque Revival design. Constructed by John Elliott, son of the mason who built the Opera House, the Town Hall features a tall, corner belfry tower, turrets, and sensuously textured stone walls that flow around corners. When completed, an observer stated—and it still holds true—the St. Marys Town Hall is a "credit to any city in the Dominion."

"Born of water and stone," St. Marys has treasured these gifts of nature. The town has always incorporated the rivers into daily life and has spanned them in many different ways over the years. Builders throughout the nineteenth century stayed loyal to their own limestone, not looking to import building stone when it became fashionable elsewhere. Perhaps the town's early political independence (withdrawing from Perth County in 1865) and its role as a major supplier of building stone to western Ontario helped give it individuality and cohesion. With most of its stone heritage still in use, or adapted to new uses when necessary, St. Marys today is justly proud of its "stone town" identity.

The St. Marys Town Hall, designed by architect George W. Gouinlock and built in 1891, still serves the same function today. Its colourful Romanesque Revival features and rock-faced limestone façades with sandstone trim create an unusually engaging civic landmark.

Afterword

The years of the 1850s through the 1870s marked the heyday for building in local stone in southwestern Ontario. The period saw the transformation of pioneer settlements into stable, responsible communities under the leadership of the first- and second-generation settlers. By the 1850s, the founding fathers had accumulated sufficient wealth to create the type of community they had envisioned for posterity. It was a vision that relied heavily on the cultural preferences they had brought with them: for stone and certain architectural fashions. The stonemasons of this founding era similarly had brought with them the high level of the skills and craftsmanship that were the traditions of their homelands.

Beginning in the 1880s, there was a shift in the building industry in southwestern Ontario. Brick had become more fashionable and cheaper; where it wasn't produced locally, it could be easily transported by rail. Stone was typically used for high-profile public structures such as government buildings and churches. In these cases, the use of imported stone—sandstone from the Credit Valley, for example—became a popular trend. As the demand for locally quarried stone dropped off, there wasn't enough business to sustain those quarries specializing in building stone; some had already run out of usable stone. As a result, building in stone became more expensive; younger masons generally turned to brick or moved on. Stylistically, there was a change in favour of the more rustic, rock-faced masonry that did not require the high level of skill of first-generation stonemasons.

Exceptions to these trends seemed to concentrate in those areas where stone construction was the most popular and where stone was still widely available. The stone towns of Fergus, Guelph, Galt, and St. Marys carried on building in local stone throughout the nineteenth century and, in some cases, into the first decade of the twentieth century. Imitation cast stone became competitive after the turn of the century. By then, the use of reinforced concrete and steel skeletons began to take over, and stone was reduced mainly to a facing material, with Queenston limestone being among the most popular. Modern technology had displaced traditional stone construction; in effect, it was the final step in bringing to a close this chapter in Ontario's architectural history.

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A FASCINATION WITH THEIR AGELESS QUALITY,
STRENGTH, AND ENDURANCE,




AND WITH THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE STONE ITSELF.

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