

LEFT: THE OLD TOWN HALL AND MARKET BUILDING IN 1864. NOTE THE SHOPS ON THE GROUND FLOOR.

BELOW: UNVEILING THE FREELAND FOUNTAIN IN FRONT OF THE OLD TOWN HALL DURING QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS IN 1897. SHORTLY AFTERWARD, THE OLD CITY HALL BURNED DOWN.



The Queen of the Square

THE OLD TOWN HALL

The first town hall for Stratford was built on this site in 1856-1857 at the tip of the recently acquired "Market Place". Since the purchase agreement with Donald McDonald, former surveyor for the Canada Company and soon-to-be Canadian senator, required this land to be used as a market place, this first building allotted most of the ground floor to stores and market stalls.

The rectangular building was built in Neo-Classical style typical of the period for public buildings. The front of the building had a central entranceway that led upstairs to the council chamber, town offices, and other rooms, as well as to the concert hall which ran the full length of the building at the back above the market stalls.

The rest of the ground floor at the front consisted of four stores, apparently with cellars beneath. In 1864, one of these even housed a brewery. At ground level behind the stores were located the police station and, until 1893, the fire department. The whole building was crowned by a cupola and bell-tower.

Early on the morning of November 24, 1897, following a Scottish concert, the night constable noticed a fire as he was making his rounds. He released the two prisoners from the cell and called in the fire alarm. By the time the fire equipment had arrived, the building was thoroughly ignited. A gas jet in the janitor's room melted through and the gas was ignited causing the fire to spread even quicker. Poor water pressure was partially blamed for the loss of the building. Unfortunately, the new hook and ladder truck was in use for the first time and was a bit awkward to handle. Before the ladders got into position the second storey was a mass of flame.



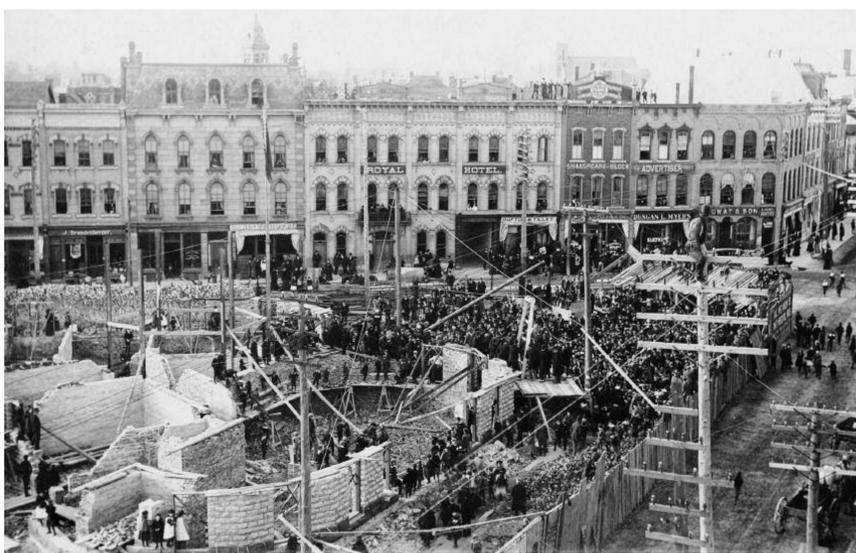
THE NEW CITY HALL

Two design competitions were held to determine the design for a new city hall. Local architect Alexander Hepburn won the competition for rebuilding by using the walls that remained, whereas George W. King of Toronto won the competition for a new building. A public referendum chose the new building, and King and his associate John W. Siddall proceeded with the design. Contractors were the local firm of Cawsey and Youngs.

The new city hall fits into the triangular site and fills the location by use of geometric shapes. Either side is a twelve-sided shape or dodecagon, with the centre a hexagon and the tower a circle. These geometric features can best be seen in the council chamber and hallway upstairs.

The building is an excellent example of Queen Anne Revival style, which began in Britain in the 1860s. The Flemish Renaissance gables, classical cupola, paneled chimneys, reflect the eclectic architecture of the original Queen Anne period and the revival. The combination of these features with the unusual shapes of the building, make this city hall unique. It is one of the most attractive city halls in Canada and was featured as the cover illustration of Parks Canada's book on Canadian town halls.

Plans for a new city hall were begun in 1969, but opposition from a local movement of concerned citizens and uncertainty about the choice of a new design, prompted the developer to withdraw his proposal in 1972. The building was instead restored with some renovation inside to accommodate more office space and to renew the auditorium. It was rededicated on June 2, 1974. City Hall was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 1982 and received a federal historic site designation in 1983.



ABOVE: LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE OF THE NEW CITY HALL, NOVEMBER 2, 1898. THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW BUILDING WAS PLACED ON TOP OF RUBBLE OF THE OLD BUILDING.

ABOVE RIGHT: VIEW OF THE BACK OF THE NEW CITY HALL ABOUT 1950. THE GEOMETRIC SHAPE (12-SIDED) AT EACH END CAN BE SEEN QUITE CLEARLY.

RIGHT: A FLEMISH GABLE ON THE NEW CITY HALL.

