

## Ontario Heritage Conference, Brockville, 2022 – Report by Robert Honor

I attended the Ontario Heritage Conference (OHC) in Brockville Thursday, June 16 -18, 2022 on behalf of the Heritage Committee. Community Heritage Ontario invited Amherstburg to provide a speaker for their session on Remote and Rural Municipal Heritage Committees and they would pay \$1,000.00 towards the conference expenses. I attended the conference as a speaker.

### **I attended the following Sessions:**

Opening Keynote, by Miranda Jimmy, National Trust

Architectural Bus Tour

Cultural Heritage Landscapes: Challenges and Opportunities

Heritage Gardens at Fulford Place Museum Tour

Cemetery Management

Practical Lessons in Decolonizing and Diversifying Heritage

The Experience and Challenges of Rural or Remote Municipal Heritage Committees where I was one of three speakers.

### **My perceptions of the Conference:**

The conference had a theme of First Peoples values and point of view and the settler/colonial values and point of view in defining cultural heritage. Miranda Jimmy, a first Nations person with the National Trust gave a powerful opening Keynote session. The session on Decolonizing and Diversifying Heritage was also powerful and left us questioning how to tell the stories of cultural heritage in the light of Truth and Reconciliation. Reps from the city of Kingston spoke up in several sessions about their struggle to reconcile John A. MacDonald, a national hero and Kingston resident, in the light of Truth and Reconciliation. Their recommendation: not to act impulsively, but to work things through carefully and thoughtfully and not to be pressured into decisions. An example is their decision to take down a statue of John A. whose values represented by the statue may not be the values Kingston wants to portray today. However, the statue will be relocated to a less prominent position where his national contributions, both good and bad, can be outlined.

The architectural tour was great. It only pointed out to me the paucity of quality heritage resources that we have in Amherstburg. The Fulford Mansion, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century mansion now restored as a working museum hosting weddings and conferences (the rooms are furnished for use – nothing in a glass case) is our Belle Vue. Brockville has several monumental heritage public buildings and churches. It pointed out to me the urgency in Amherstburg to preserve and maintain the quality heritage resources we still have.

A new concept of cultural heritage resources was discussed, I think influenced by First Persons values. I don't think this has any validation in the Heritage Act, but it was an interesting concept. A heritage building exists in the present. It has its story to tell today. The heritage building exists in the past. Its story of many day's past can be told. A heritage building exists in the future. As each day comes and goes there will be new stories to be told. It seemed to me that the building was the tangible symbol of

the story, and that the story was the most important part of the heritage resource. Again, I don't think any of this is outlined in the Act.

I found the session on Cemeteries interesting. It was presented by the Bereavement Association of Ontario. Every cemetery must be licensed by them. This includes lost and abandoned cemeteries. It seems the municipality has some responsibility to see to this. Amherstburg has several lost and abandoned cemeteries. The licensee, whether a municipality or a private owner, is responsible for the safety of the cemetery – cut the grass, fill holes and tripping hazards, and stabilize monuments and structures so they will not fall on anyone. However, the monuments are the responsibility of those who put them up. In old cemeteries this responsibility falls to the licensee. As a cultural landscape, features, structures etc. can be given a part IV designation, which may help with grants for conservation purposes. This made me think of the monument for the fallen soldiers in the Battle of Pelee Island interred in the military cemetery on Gore St.

Archaeology came up in several sessions. Many municipalities are requiring archaeology before any kind of development. Often developers are not so careful or cooperative about archaeology and it was recommended by several municipalities that an Archaeology Management Plan is a good tool for a municipality to have. I would recommend that Amherstburg investigate the benefits of an Archaeology Management Plan.

Another tidbit that came up was that the MHC should be familiar with the Planning Act and its municipal documents, as well as with the Heritage Act and its associated documents. The Planning Act can provide useful tools for Heritage. We were advised to use both to our advantage.

Remote and Rural Municipal Heritage Committees. I spoke about heritage inclusiveness in the regional municipality of Amherstburg. My talk drew some questions and discussion. I think folks were wowed that we had so many designations and were completely jealous that we had Doris Gaspar's work about each lot, and that the next steps would be to get this information on other areas of the town. Our rural heritage is probably safer than our urban heritage, and unless we receive a boost of money and human resources the focus of the MHC will likely be in the old town.

A gentleman from Almonte, who had been on the committee 20 years, also spoke, as did the Heritage Planner from Timmons. The fellow from Almonte spoke on how there is no comparison between a rural and an urban MHC. He said that last week he got his first demolition request in 20 years – an abandoned, falling down house in the bushes far from the road that should no question be demolished. He gave the stats that Toronto had 19 staff dealing with demolition permits, so no comparison.

The Heritage Planner from Timmins spoke about the new MHC and her work getting it started, especially when heritage in Timmins means mining.

Please contact me if there are questions.

I would like to make a motion that the HC recommends Administration investigate the value of an Archaeology Management Plan and if found to be a useful tool, proceed to the production of an Archaeology Management Plan.