



CREATING A LEGACY OF HERITAGE

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Growing up in Britain, centuries-old buildings in towns and villages spawned my excitement for presence of the past; gravestones and plaques in local churches reinforced the role of families in building a community.

My active involvement in heritage protection began in 1985 in Aylmer, QC – first settled in the early 1800s. Settlers cleared the land and cut the vast forests either side of the Ottawa River, starting the region's major industry: lumber. The steamboat era saw Aylmer as the regional transportation centre, when boats carried settlers and goods up and down the River; and lumber barons' mansions, elegant hotels, and a Court House – all built of local stone – were monuments to success and brought architectural diversity to the founding village of modest log cabins.

From the 1960s, bulldozers were destroying any log cabin or stone mansion standing where a developer planned to build a housing estate. Planning departments saw this as necessary for economic progress; a few citizens recognized it as loss of their built heritage. By 1973, the National Trust for Canada (then the Heritage Canada Foundation) was created, encouraging people to form local groups dedicated

to promoting an understanding of the value of heritage buildings to the life of the community; and to call for municipal by-laws to protect them from demolition.

Like other Canadian towns, Aylmer mourned the mindless loss of many 19th century buildings. But today, the presence of much of its built heritage is assured. Aylmer can boast the largest concentration of heritage buildings of any community in the region on either side of the Ottawa River.

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The challenges of heritage protection ('fighting city hall'; persuading a developer to change design plans to respect the architectural integrity of a 19th century street, etc.) are exhausting. Often, when we were on the verge of giving up, a copy of *Heritage* magazine (now *Locale*) would arrive and validate our efforts!

The National Trust's annual conferences informed us and gave us renewed hope and determination.

There are many causes worthy of support; among them – and on my list – is the National Trust for Canada. They know how to get things done. As a heritage advocate, I can't think of a better legacy than protecting Canada's heritage for future Canadians.