

First Parliament Site Saved For Future Generations

A significant part of the historic site of Upper Canada's first parliament in downtown Toronto was acquired recently by the Ontario government, in partnership with the City of Toronto and with strong support from local heritage groups.

Culture Minister Madeleine Meilleur said the Ontario Heritage Trust (formerly the Ontario Heritage Foundation) has assumed ownership of this portion of the site. The trust will work with stakeholders, including the federal and Ontario governments, the City of Toronto and community groups, to develop options and strategies for the long-term preservation of the site.

"The site of Ontario's first parliament buildings is our cradle of democracy – it is of historical significance," said the minister. "The Ontario Heritage Trust is Ontario's lead heritage agency and has extensive expertise in the conservation and protection of significant heritage resources. The trust is the government's right choice to ensure the preservation of the first parliament site for future generations."

"We are delighted to assume the lead role in preserving this significant heritage site," said Lincoln Alexander, Ontario Heritage Trust chairman and former Lieutenant-Governor. "It is the birthplace of our systems of courts, land ownership and civil freedoms – democratic traditions that are the very measure of our strength as a province and as a society."

Since the archaeological discovery of brick remains of the first parliament buildings in 2000, many individuals and organizations have rallied to support acquiring the site and promoting its rich history. The buildings, constructed specifically for the legislative assembly in the late 18th century, were burned to the ground by invading American troops during the War of 1812.

"The heritage community is very excited about the public acquisition of the first parliament site," said Peter Carruthers, chair of Heritage Toronto. "This is a tremendous victory for all of the individuals and organizations who have worked long and hard to see this first step become reality." He said the broad-based, community-driven volunteer group spent "much time and energy pressing governments to act on this site."

Mr. Carruthers said that with the Ontario Heritage Trust in charge, there will be a need for "continued community participation in the upcoming consultations" as options and strategies for conserving, promoting and using the site are developed. "We look forward to working with all parties as the project progresses."

Ontario Ministry of Culture press release

(<http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/about/n211205.htm>)

Built Heritage News, No. 74, 12/ 19/05,

(<http://list.web.net/archives/cnarchitect-heritage/2005-December.txt>).