

Editor's Note

An interesting curiosity has been tucked in behind the Centre Block of our Parliament Buildings for several months now. Appearing as a massive white cake or mammoth igloo is one of Canada's architectural icons—the Library of Parliament—shrouded in thousands of metres of scaffolding fabric. After 128 years of almost continuous use, this pre-eminent building was showing its age. A leaking roof, crumbling masonry and antiquated systems are just a few of the problems the long-overdue conservation and rehabilitation project is tackling. The fascinating story of how this project is unfolding is our lead feature.

Continuing with the impact the National Building Code has on historic preservation (an issue we addressed in the winter edition) our Regional Highlights section looks at the development of fire safety alternatives for buildings in the historic Winnipeg Exchange District. These alternatives are equivalent to standards required by the Manitoba Building Code while allowing for the retention of heritage features. Hopefully this kind of flexible approach can be adopted by other municipalities in Canada. The article begins on page 27.

Carolyn Quinn

Letter To The Editor

I read with dismay the recent article on the Eaton's Building, "Jewel of the West' Tops Demolition List," Heritage, Winter 2004, pp. 14-16. While your first two pages recount the events and the reasons for retention, the fact that documentation considering soundness or economic viability was not available, and that the city and province weighed in in favour of the Arena are all true. What appalls me is the cavalier acceptance of only the Coalition's point of view.

You quote Christine Common-Singh as saying "neither Heritage Winnipeg nor the Manitoba Historical Society was prepared to fight for preservation of the building, despite its high historical rating." In editorial fairness the Editor should have picked up the phone and corroborated or found the other side of the story from at least one of your longest supporting organizations in Manitoba.

There were many hours spent by Heritage Winnipeg board members, our staff of one, the current Manitoba Heritage Canada Governor, and others seeking alternative uses for that building, but at every turn Heritage Winnipeg found the way for historical designation and reuse was blocked. The die had already been cast, for right or wrong, by the City. Heritage Winnipeg is a small organization with little funding, and has a mandate wider than just taking to the streets at every cause. With no way open and other demands on its scarce resources, it was felt that the Coalition as a single-cause group would be better suited to mount the offensive. To that end their work went ahead, using the charitable status of Heritage Winnipeg and considerable hours of our one employee in helping them manage the donations that were gathered. To toss off that large donation to the cause with the given statement "neither was prepared" shows that Heritage Canada was only interested in advancing their agenda of a sensationalized story.

Courtesy and responsible journalism would have included a call to any one of us to verify your information before going to press. But that, too, would have meant your story would not have been as dramatic. To reference only Web sites as your research further introduces the opportunity for bias. Surely, your members ought to be the first line of investigation in building a balanced story.

Readers should note that advocacy is not always the picket line. Often much can be gained by quiet diplomacy, an aspect that you refused to include in your story on the loss of Eaton's. It is to be hoped that future reporting will include an attempt to present more than one side of the story.

David McDowell, Past President, Heritage Winnipeg,
and Past HCF Governor, Manitoba

Editor's Note: The decision to emphasize the confrontational approach adopted by the Save the Eaton's Building Coalition was not to suggest that Heritage Winnipeg was inactive, only that the organization chose a non-combative role—which is what led to the creation of the Coalition. There was no ulterior motive behind my decision and I welcome the reminder that quiet diplomacy was ongoing during that difficult period.