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Battell's bat

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It is easy to get excited about heritage architecture in towns like Cobourg and Port Hope. I have sometimes remarked that, where other towns may have some nice buildings that ought to be preserved, these towns are in

great ceremony, as for a cornerstone, but instead laid the last brick in the top of the church to solemnly complete the work, rather than the other way round.

Battell built his house for rental or sale, and the tenants most identified with it in early days were the Pringles. They owned a jewellery business in town, located opposite Victoria Hall where



the position of trying to maintain a complete collector's set.

As we all know, King Street in Cobourg has not only magnificent former residences like Sidbrook and Strathmore, but also one of Ontario's best Victorian town centres and some really nice intermediate street houses like Dressler House and many others of that ilk.

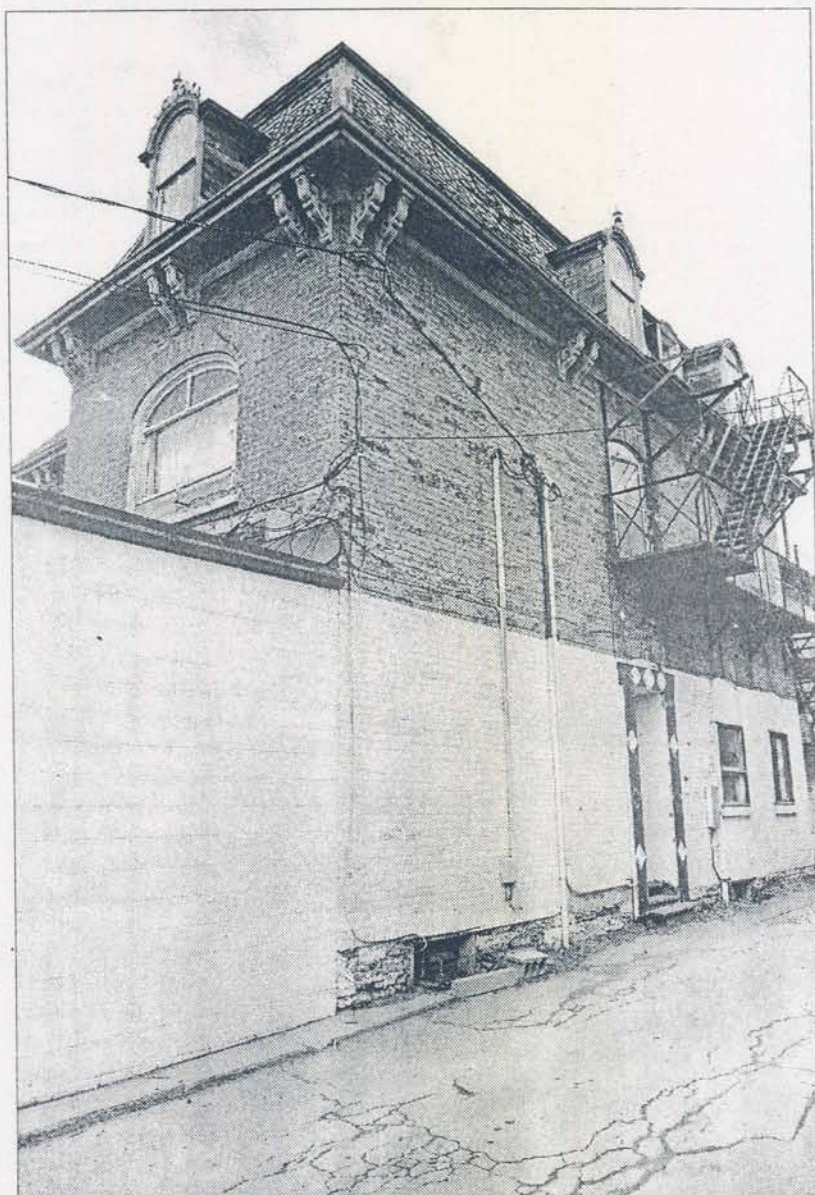
Then we have the Battell House, at 144 King St. W.

William Battell built this house in 1875. It stands on the site of what was once the Queen's Arms Hotel. Battell himself was a considerable soldier around town, and several old homes in that west end of King Street have been known as "the old Battell house", including, I believe the building on Spring Street opposite the present IGA.

Battell was a carpenter who owned a planing mill on Second Street. He was obviously successful, and at one time in the 1890s, took his turn as Mayor.

He also built the Methodist Episcopal Church (those were the American Methodists — the Wesleyan Methodists, the present Trinity United Church, were the Brits). That church, somewhat renovated, is now the Baptist Church on King Street West.

The building of that church is notable for the odd tradition of Battell himself having laid a "top-stone", rather than a cornerstone. When the church was finished, or almost, Battell climbed up with



Above. The once-grand Battell House has been through many owners and one addition since it was built in 1875. But its original structure remains, mostly untouched.

Top. Battell House possesses several fine architectural details, such as this mansard roof with its rounded dormers decorated with finials and fretwork and its unique — and delicate — diamond-shaped shingles.

May's Flowers is now. As jewellers they also repaired clocks. In the family tradition, the octagon window-opening (now a vent) in the gable above their store was originally intended for a town clock. When Victoria Hall's plan was made known, with its elaborate timepiece, the Pringles withdrew their more modest effort and the octagon became a simple window.

Whether there ever was a clock there or not, the Pringles did get a sort of revenge. In a story I have heard from several sources, it appears that the Pringle



attered glory

boys, jewellers and watch-makers both, found it irksome that their and their colleagues' stores were all still required to be open at the time when the steam-boats would arrive in the harbour. This made it difficult for them to take part in the excitement, for a small town, of seeing who had arrived.

So, in the course of their maintenance

This house is also blessed with a very delicate pattern of diamond-shaped shingles which make up the roof. Jim Burnett, the current owner, says that those shingles are so fragile he dares not touch them, lest any damage to one will wreck the whole.

The Pringles were succeeded by service clubs. At one point the old house

of the official town clock, they began adjusting the time, ever so slightly ahead, each day. Everyone in town set their watches by that clock, so, after a period, the young men had time on their side, in that the ferry soon was arriving each afternoon just after the town hall said stores ought to be closed. Standard time was new, so no one was the wiser.

The Battell house is built in what is known as the Second Empire style, the empire in question being that of Napoleon III in France (1850-70). (He is famous for rebuilding Paris.)

Its most prominent feature is the steeply sloping short-looking "mansard" roof (a characteristic of Second Empire) complete with rounded dormers decorated with finials (the end-pieces on top) and fretwork.

At one point the old house was Cobourg's Legion Hall, before the present one was built, and after that (I believe) it was the home of the Knights of Columbus. They moved to a smaller location downtown, and the house was taken over somewhat later by Canadian Tire. They added the front which now affronts us.

No one blames a business for making themselves a workable home. One can only thank heaven they just covered up the old building and didn't go all the way and tear it down.

One thinks with sympathy of the Cobourg Sentinel's entirely unconscious irony when they declared, in 1875, that the building only lacks "a large park with lawns and gardens suitable to its size and handsome appearance".

Indeed, yes.

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