

HERITAGE

1874: A momentous year

A-Bogot Street File (03-43) A-1
Bogot St.



John Thomson's house was built in the French Villa style in 1874.

Photo by Ted Amsden

though a century and a quarter old, still looks makeshift.

Also in the attic one can see where someone, of a succession of people, have carved the various owner's names and dates into the frame of the little Gothic window on the east gable.

John Thomson seems to have died sometime in the 1890's. Toward the end of the century his wife Mary, by that time living in Rochester, sold it to the well-known Judge Huycke. That is fitting, as Judge Huycke was a Vic graduate, and was a Master of Ceremonies for the final Cobourg Victoria College graduation.

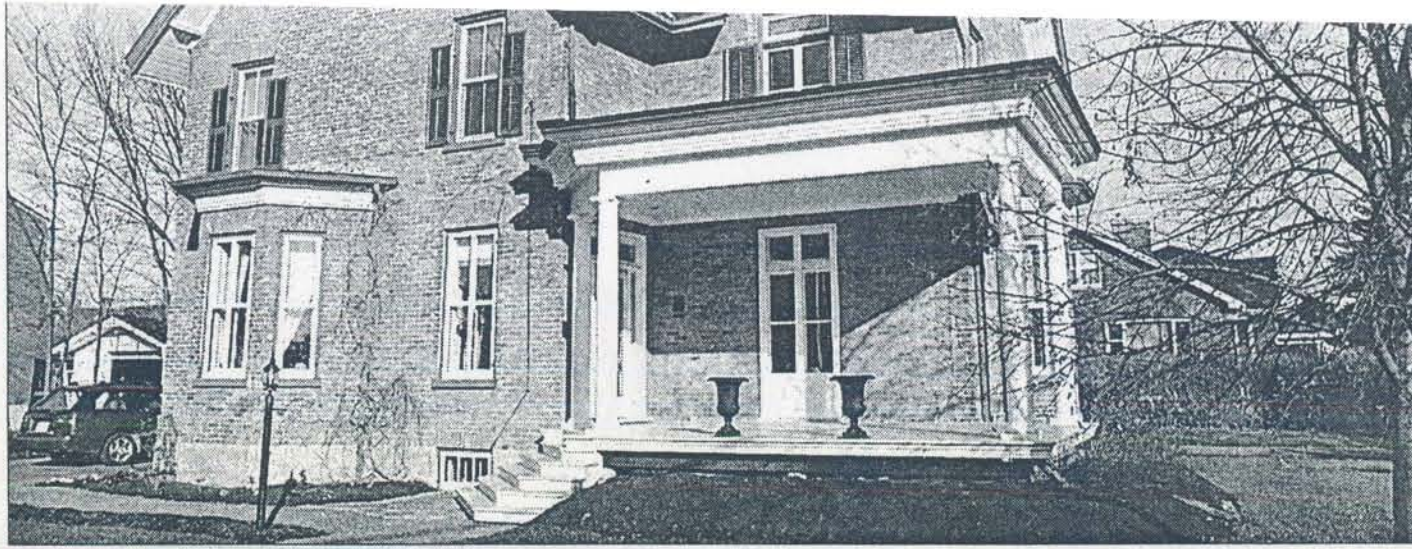
Eventually, in 1952, the house became the residence and office of Dr. Shaw. Old Cobourg residents apparently recall Dr. Shaw as a kindly man, who didn't hold strictly to set appointments. The

drill was that if you were ill you went to the office waiting area in the south drawing room, where you took a seat to the right of whoever was there first. As each patient went into the doctor's consulting room across the hall, all the other patients silently rose and moved one seat closer to the door until everyone had been seen to in that order.

By chance, it seems that someone, over the years, kept all the deed, mortgages and other documents for this house, which now form a collection held by the library's Local Heritage Room.

In conjunction with the scratchings on the little Gothic window in the attic, they provide a poignant link with the occupants of this beautiful old house, right back to that architectural annus mirabilis of 1874.

A-Bagot street (03-43) p92



John Thomson's house was built in the French Villa style in 1874.

Photo by Ted Amsden

By COLIN CALDWELL

In 1874, John Thomson finished his new house at the corner of Bagot and Albert Sts. The Cobourg Sentinel took note and complimented it as being "in the French Villa style".

Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's government had just collapsed over the Pacific Railway scandal. The North West Mounted Police had just begun their inaugural march. Their intention was to clean up Fort Whoop-Up, in what would become southern Alberta.

That year, In Cobourg, the Arlington Hotel opened. It was easily the most elegant establishment between Toronto and Montreal, and it launched Cobourg as one of the "Gilded Age's" principal summer resorts. Mrs. Dooley built her house at Henry and Queen Sts. that same year,

and Mayor William Hargraft, the coal importation king, finished his mansard-roofed palace, still to be seen to all its glory, on the east side of John St., above University.

Also under construction, and of greater importance to historians, was Victoria College's new science building, Faraday Hall. This was the first building in Canada devoted solely to scientific studies and it required careful attention to detail, since any flaw in construction, it was thought, could be disastrous for a student conducting some kind of outlandish experiment.

Call in the experts they did, but it was our John Thomson who actually built it. So it isn't surprising that his Albert St. house is a model of classic, but rather odd design.

Most of that section of Albert St. was empty when Thomson bought the prop-

erty. The house he designed for himself is "T" shaped, with parlour, dining room, and kitchen ranged along the north side of a central east-west hall. One large room forms the stem of the "T" on the southern, Albert St., side.

The west end of the central hall forms a vestibule for the south-facing main entrance. This would originally have opened on to a wrap-around verandah, but the present owner, John Houghton, has decided to take the reconstructed porch only so far, in order not to block the light.

The kitchen, in the east end, looks, from the inside, like an add-on tail, but, Mr. Houghton assures me it is contemporary with the original building.

Someone, at some point, removed the central staircase, perhaps because of some structural weakness, for otherwise it's hard to see what

that would serve. Mr. Houghton found some of the original bannister in the attic, so he was able to have it rebuilt.

Most of the house's surprises are to be found in that attic. In what must give the average brick-layer nightmares, the main chimney enters the attic directly above the fireplace in the parlour, but then curves at a "Leaning tower of Pisa"-like angle over to where John Thomson wanted it to exit the roof. Presumably this was to provide a decorous roof-line. The wooden scaffolding holding the structure in place,

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MAGIC IN COBOURG**