

PARADE OF HOMES

By Mack Parilment
Director of Publications
Canadian Real Estate Association

There is no doubt that the preservation of Canada's past as represented by vintage buildings is alive and well and entering steam with each passing month as appreciation of our heritage grows.

Many such prizes have been turned into museums. Others have been restored, furniture of the period acquired and then opened to the public to vividly depict the life and times of our ancestors.

But like everything else moderation should be of paramount consideration. Museums and other restorations used as government-run attractions don't pay taxes like privately-owned buildings do. Therefore, while it is desirable to preserve good examples of the architecture of yesteryear, it is also desirable to make them pay their way. Other properties have to make up the difference which non-tax-paying properties escape.

The answer is not to stop rescuing and restoring vintage buildings, but to assimilate them as viable, tax-paying showplaces catering to a variety of social, commercial, industrial and residential uses. There is no question that we should be proud of and cherish the prizes of the past, but not to the extent that so many are the responsibility of government that funds cannot be found to keep them in a proper state of repair and they are allowed to fall into decay like some of the architectural treasures of Italy.

If history repeats itself - there there is every reason to believe that it would - a government bureaucracy charged with overseeing publicly owned historical buildings would grow as the number of buildings maintained by the public purse grew. Putting the cost of ownership, bureaucracy and preservation together to say nothing of property taxes lost, could add a new burden for already overtaxed Canadians, which they don't need, much less want.

Is it not better then to have most of Canada's heritage buildings, which started out in private hands remain in private hands - although not necessarily the same ones - put to useful purposes and paying their way in property taxes?

The Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) thinks so and supports the preservation of historical and architectural buildings. It also readily concedes there are many buildings of historical or architectural significance which should remain in the public domain. Some of these could be renovated and put to new uses; others could be rejuvenated and restored to their former uses, adding a new flavor, elegance and reminder of Canada's colorful past to the area in which they are located.

The Canadian Real Estate Association is interested in learning about single buildings, groups of buildings, whole city blocks of buildings, or neighborhoods, which are candidates for a new lease on life. The Association is also interested in learning about such buildings, publicly or privately owned, which have been rescued from obscurity, or renovated, or

put to new uses, or for which future plans are being formulated, or which have been remodelled and put to new uses. Correspondence should be addressed to Alec Murray, Canadian Real Estate Association, 99 Duncan Mill Rd., Don Mills, Ont., M3B 1Z2.

With this and other information the Association plans to encourage a preservation program with the co-operation with the co-operation of local real estate boards which would result in lasting benefits to communities. There is no desire or intention on CREA's part to conflict with the work of other public spirited groups which also want to preserve Canada's heritage.

However, the expertise of real estate practitioners and their various specialties should be extremely valuable in any projects undertaken.

There are other aspects of recycling existing structures which should not be overlooked. One is that we are being conditioned to switch from a consumption and throwaway society to a conservation and preservation society to protect our dwindling non-renewable resources.

Some of the nation's architectural masterpieces could never be duplicated at a cost which would make them economically viable. But they can be recycled and put to new uses at a fraction of their replacement cost. It must be remembered there are countless examples of modern architecture anyway, but historical examples are becoming fewer and fewer. This raises the question: Why tear down a structurally sound vintage building to replace it with another modern one if there are no other important benefits?

Many of these well-built structures can become proving grounds for new methods of conserving energy, not only through imaginative interior but through proper insulation and correcting energy hungry features. Some may lend themselves to installation of renewable energy sources for a large portion of their needs.

At the very least retention of existing buildings will preserve familiar surroundings, prevent disruption of sections of streets or neighborhoods and provide employment during the recycling process. The recycling process is also an antidote for urban sprawl, which in some areas has got out of hand. The infrastructure is already in place for existing buildings and this is another expense which can be avoided.

Some projects are too large for a single principal to undertake or the cost and length of time to bring the finished project on stream dictate a joint approach or partnership either among private entrepreneurs or as a government-private enterprise partnership.

One such project in Saint John, N.B., will take five years to complete and cost an estimated \$46 million. All levels of government will participate as well as private enterprise. An economic, social and physical revitalization of St. John's central area is the anticipated result and is a textbook example of the advantages of taking the best of the past and combining it with the realities of the present.

The project "will not only open up the waterfront for public access, revitalize historic buildings and renew the central area, but will also create many opportunities for employment," comments Michael Landers, M.P. for St. John-Lancaster.



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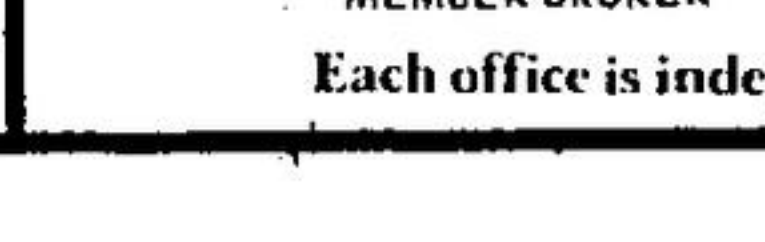
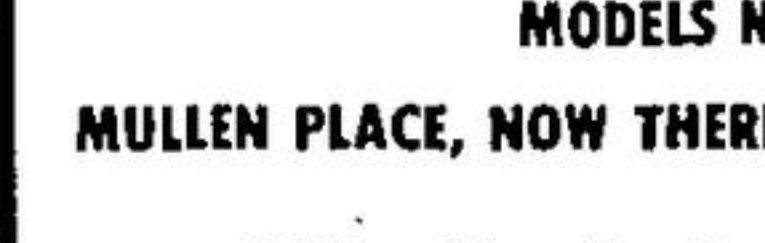
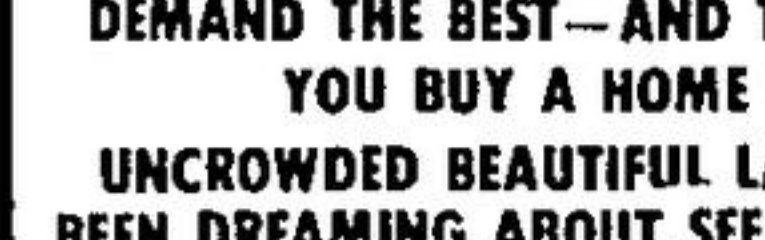
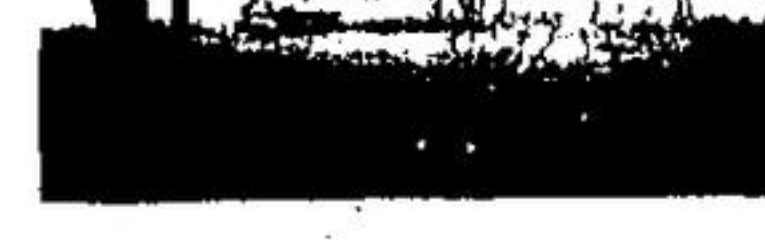
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