

and securing a number of main floor tenants, there was no more money available for restoration,” said Birrell. “The upstairs auditorium had to wait.”

For the next few years, the building remained in a holding pattern, where the tenants’ rent carried the maintenance of the building and no further restoration was done.

“The real stimulus to get back on track happened in 1997, when Heritage Acton secured the attached fire hall, for \$2,” said Birrell.

“Heritage Acton bought the vacant former fire hall, when it was declared surplus by the Town of Halton Hills,” said committee member Kay Dills. “The upstairs was renovated, tenants were acquired, and the redecorated rooms were available to rent. The work restoring the Town Hall has gone on for years, and now, extensive repairs have been made, including a required second fire exit, which was built in 2003, from a Trillium Grant.”

Soon after, Ron Birrell was voted in as chair of the renovation committee.

“By then, both halves of the building (old fire hall and original Town Hall) were generating enough rent to carry themselves,” said Birrell. “And with a reenergized committee, it was time to move forward, and get things happening.”

When the original fire hall had been built, the back wall of the grand stage was knocked out, and blocked in. But the committee received the go-ahead to knock the stage wall out, and open up the back of the original stage.

“With the stage back in the picture, it was a reason to make the auditorium viable, and we could now spend money on it,” said Birrell. “Of course, the new executive determined that we needed a lot more money to proceed with the new project (the auditorium) which included needed maintenance repairs and do the restoration work at the same time— and do it once rather than twice.”

The Town Hall by then had more issues since it was first restored in the 1980s. There was a leaking roof, the bell tower was in bad shape, and the upstairs windows were in deplorable disrepair.

“It came down to we either fix it now, to get it closed up again,” said Birrell. “Or we fix it and fix it right, so we can generate revenue, and turn it back to the community.”

Fundraising chair Kathleen Dills agreed.

“We had a renewed look at the potential of the Town Hall, especially the auditorium,” said Dills. “This is a beautiful room, and when we looked at it, we said, ‘wow, we shouldn’t be wasting it.’ That was certainly the driving force behind getting the project underway.”



**Kathleen Dills and Ron Birrell display the old Acton sign which once graced the train station. The sign is one of the many artifact the committee hope to be able to display in the town hall heritage area, which will be part of Phase Two.**  
*Photo by Ted Brown*

In addition to the renewed potential, the committee had undergone a change. There seemed to be a passion that hadn’t been there before.

“When you take on a project like this, you must have a very willing and passionate committee,” said Birrell. “But in addition, you have to have people on that committee who are not only passionate, but tenacious about getting the job done. I believe that we had the right mix to get on with it.”

Not only did the committee push ahead with the project, but they did so with an eye to making the project as faithful as possible to the original building’s details.

The various moldings around the ceiling of the auditorium are replicated from samples of the originals. The colours have been selected by an interior decorator, with an eye to history, and many original doors and hardware have been re-used to keep the project as

historically correct as possible.

Birrell admits they had to make some compromises due to costs, but the choices were made with an eye to maintaining the original atmosphere of the building.

“MDF was used in place of oak for some painted woodwork— it will be painted anyway. To use oak would have been cost prohibitive,” said Birrell. “And the windows— to use wooden sash windows would have been too costly. With the MDF, we have maintained the ‘look’ and with the windows we’ve achieved the R factor, so the compromise was well worth the effort.”

Birrell said there have been some great ‘surprises’ with members of the committee. Many members have stepped forward, possessing skills that Birrell never knew they had.

Birrell admits that as the Town Hall’s opening approaches, he has many feelings.

“I’m ecstatic about it. The committee has gone very



Events at the original Acton Town Hall included, from left, commencement for Grade 12 students in 1947, the Beardmore Christmas party of 1946 and Boys’

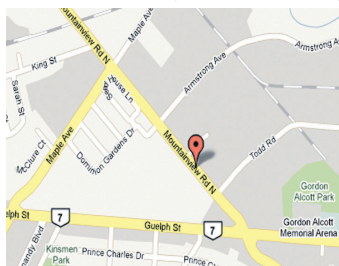


and Girls’ Band on the town hall stage in 1947.



*Photos courtesy Kay Dills*

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