

# De-listing of former Mann property called into question



By: Harry Rudolfs

Halton Hills' railway historian and heritage activist Jim Waldbusser believes that the Heritage Halton Hills committee may have erred by removing the former Mann property at 284 Queen Street from Phase 4 of its Heritage Register List.

The property in question was part of a 50-acre farm bought for Hugh Mann by his son Sir Donald Mann in 1888.

Sir Donald Mann is the only native-son of Halton Hills—born on a farm in Bannockburn, Hwy 7 and 4th Line—to be knighted and was an influential railroad tycoon and builder at the turn of the last century. As well, the house on the site can be traced back to 1851 and is among the oldest buildings in Acton.

The heritage committee de-listed the property on October 18 after a presentation was made by present-day owner and vendor Ray Arbic. According to the minutes of that meeting, Arbic stated that he had recently sold the property and wanted to see it removed from the list. He also said that Sir Donald never lived in the house and that he is already commemorated by Sir Donald Mann Park located to the south of the property.

In a telephone interview with Halton Hills' heritage planner Anne Fisher, she said, "We don't know how often Sir Donald ever visited the property...(and) the house had been greatly altered so they (the Heritage Committee) didn't think it was worthy of consideration from an architectural value."

But Waldbusser, armed with records from the Acton Free Press and historian John McDonald, believes that Sir Donald was not an infrequent visitor to his father's house. Waldbusser adds two funerals were also held on the property which were attended by Sir Donald and the movers and shakers from that

era. Further, Waldbusser also doesn't think that the alterations to the original house have much bearing on its significance as a heritage asset.

"I want Actonites to know that they are losing," said Waldbusser, who is also a former committee member. "De-listing it means that the 60-day breathing period is gone. There's no transparency in issuing demolition permits and that means this house could be demolished at any time."

Waldbusser said that the property is zoned medium-density, and he expects to see the new owner to build townhouses on the site. "Ideally, I'd like to see the house remain intact and incorporated into the development," he said. "There's no reason for it to be torn down. It's a perfectly good, functional house."

Ted Brown, chair of the Heritage Halton Hills Committee at the October 18 meeting responded via email. "The committee had a recommendation from Heritage Consultant David Cumming that the property lacked sufficient heritage value to be included on the draft Phase 4 list... in addition, when Town Heritage Planner Anne Fisher came onboard with the Town of Halton Hills, she too agreed with Cummings' position—the structure lacked sufficient heritage details, to be placed on the Phase 4 list...the committee unanimously voted in favor of removing it from the draft Phase 4."

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