

Mohawk Chapel elevator 'melds the old with the new'

By Chase Jarrett
Writer

Smells of fresh paint and newly varnished hardwoods fill a recent addition to the Mohawk Chapel where a controversial elevator was installed into the back of the 200 year old building.

Ontario Governor General David Onley opened the newly finished section Wednesday to celebrate the chapel's new level of accessibility.

"Even a site as old as this must change with the times," said Lt. Gov-General Onley to about 30 gathered in the pews. "We are here today to celebrate the new improvements that have been put in place to make this site accessible."

The change is subtle. The new elevator door is next to the altar. It allows access to the chapel's lower floor, which has two accessible washrooms and a reception

space. Changes totalled \$320,000.

"It's nice to see a project like this that so sensitively melds the old with the new," Onley said.

"As someone who depends on accessibility I heartily therefore commend it, and as Her Majesty's representative here in Ontario, I applaud it even more."

The Trillium Foundation provided \$150,000 in funding.

Brantford Mayor Chris Friel, called Joseph Brant his personal hero.

Brant was a Mohawk leader during the American Revolution and instrumental in securing the Haldimand Tract for the "Mohawks and such others" that saw Brant and the Mohawks move here.

Brant is buried at the Chapel. His son, John Brant is buried beside him.

Six Nations Band Councillor



Ontario Lieut-Governor General David Onley signs the Queen Anne bible which dates to 1720 while Royal Chapel of the Mohawks committee member Leona Moses looks on. (Photo by Chase Jarrett)

Ross Johnson spoke on behalf of the Elected Council and called the day a "historic moment."

Visitors received a tour of the new addition, with Lt.



Ontario Lieut-Governor General David Onley arrives at the Royal Chapel of the Mohawks and is escorted by chairman Barry Hill (Photo by Chase Jarrett)

Gov. Onley taking the new elevator to the lower floor for a tea and biscuit reception.

He signed a Queen Anne Bible from 1720. His signature appears next to Queen Elizabeth II, who signed the book in 2010.

Construction stirred up controversy last summer when tombstones were moved, graves cemented over, and bones disturbed.

Jim Sutton, who was Chair of the Mohawk Chapel Committee at the time, has since stepped down.

When asked if he thought

installing the elevator was worth the trouble, Sutton answered: "Oh yes. I knew it would be." He said it was frustrating at the time, but was glad to have been part of the project.

The installation was prompted in 2009 by Ontario legislation changes requiring public buildings to be wheelchair accessible, even though historic sites were often "grandfathered" and exempt from the changes.

Leona Moses, a committee member, said she's pleased with the elevator too. "The

committee is very well pleased with everything."

Moses said the committee is looking into ways to generate revenue for the chapel, including turning the lower floor of the chapel into an interpretative centre and gift shop.

The addition and elevator was paid for by donations and a \$150,000 grant from the Trillium Foundation. A \$70,000 Parks Canada grant was also awarded for repairs.

Current chair of the committee, Barry Hill, took special note of the addition's exterior paneling. It was commissioned to match the existing chapel's exactly, he said.

The chapel committee also had to dip into the Mohawk Chapel trust, which Hill said is now down to \$112,000 from about \$250,000 over the summer.

Two decades ago \$1 million was raised by Six Nations for upkeep of their chapel.

Hill said the trust is diminished because of a lack of council funding that has forced the committee to use funds to pay chapel employees.

Her Royal Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks reopens for the 2013 season on May 4.