

## **A HERITAGE REVIEW OF NORTH TORONTO COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE**

### **HISTORICAL**

The Municipality of North Toronto in 1909 established its first high school in two rooms of the Town Hall. Three years later plans were drawn up for a school building to be set well back from what is now Broadview Avenue, with five classrooms on three acres of farmland not far from the Town Hall. A photograph of the cornerstone laying ceremony in 1912 shows a large group of dignitaries including one identified as, Forsey Page the architect for the building. Forsey Bull Page (1885-1970) graduated from the School of Practical Science in architecture at the University of Toronto in 1907. He was a partner in the architectural firm of Page & Warrington that had been formed in 1910, so possibly the 1912 North Toronto Collegiate Institute building was designed as one of the first architectural commissions of the firm. The design for the building was executed in a popular architectural style of the period for institutions and schools known as Collegiate Gothic. Forsey Page later served in the army during World War I and afterwards became a leader in the architectural profession and a well respected citizen. In 1926 he established Page & Steele which continues to the present as a prominent architectural firm in Toronto.

The Town of North Toronto was annexed by the City of Toronto in the same year that the new Collegiate Institute opened. The North Toronto area generally developed rapidly in the years just after 1910. Four more classrooms were added to the original building in 1914-1915. Architectural drawings for the two-storey and basement original building, and the following addition, are not currently available but it is quite possible that the original design allowed for this type of expansion in the original plans. In 1919 there were over 200 students and 12 teachers accommodated in this building. In 1921 the building was doubled in size with a two-storey addition, constructed to the south of the original buildings, accommodating 10 more classrooms and related facilities, a boys and a girls entrance from Roehampton Avenue and alterations to the earlier buildings. These architectural plans were prepared in the architect's office of the Board of Education and the design followed the concept of Collegiate Gothic architecture that was the distinguishing feature of the original building design. This successive series of additions to the North Toronto Collegiate Institute building reflect the historical growth in the number of students in the local population and ever changing requirements for educational facilities to accommodate their needs.

In 1928 the architect's office of the Board of Education began to prepare plans for another expansion by adding a third floor over the entire area of the existing building to provide 10 more classrooms and related space as well as alterations to various other existing facilities throughout all levels of the building.

North Toronto Collegiate Institute by this time had become well-known in the city not only for its high academic standard but also for a well rounded program that included field and track sports, music, visual and dramatic arts and other extracurricular activities. This fine reputation continued throughout the depression years of the 1930's and the war years of the 1940's. Over 1000 students were enrolled in the school by 1950.

In 1955 the architectural firm of Gordon S. Adamson prepared plans for additions to the original 1912 building that included a two-storey wing, northwest of the 1912 building, for an auditorium and a two-story wing for a music room, a new larger cafeteria and kitchen facilities. This part of the addition on the site reduced the size of the playing field that originally extended the full length of the Broadway Avenue frontage of the site. Since then the resulting non-regulation length field has been unsuitable for intercollegiate sports events. A one-story mathematics wing was added to the east end of the 1912 building at the same time.

In 1966 plans for a two-story and basement wing for science and related facilities were prepared by the architectural firm of Bregman & Hamann. This addition extended south from the auditorium to Roehampton Avenue along the west property line with a narrow light well court between it and the main building.

In 1971 the formal address for North Toronto Collegiate Institute was changed from the original address at 17 Broadway Avenue to 70 Roehampton Avenue probably to identify NTCI with the most prominent pedestrian route from the major transit centre at the Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue intersection. A high-rise residential building was built in the same period on a site adjacent to NTCI that overshadowed the east area of the playing field during part of the day.

During the late 1900's public awareness of the strong academic tradition that had made North Toronto Collegiate Institute unique, combined with the continually growing reputation of excellence in music and the arts as well as outstanding achievements in athletics and a fine extra-curricular program, began to draw many students from all districts of the city outside the North Toronto district.

## **ARCHITECTURAL**

A review of the existing building reveals that very little of the early plan and architectural design is intact. Numerous alterations, re-alterations and additions over the life of North Toronto Collegiate Institute building have produced a very complex layout on several levels with obvious functional inadequacies and many outdated facilities. Deterioration in the exterior building fabric is also evident in a number of areas. For this reason it is only natural for the Toronto District School Board to consider what practical and economic issues might be faced if the entire existing physical plant were to be rehabilitated and renovated or whether it would be better for educational reasons to build an entirely new building. Perhaps the most important and possibly deciding issue could be the question of what would happen to the students and teachers during an updating process throughout the existing building. To provide for a full educational program in the existing facilities while extensive rehabilitation and construction work progressed in any part of the building would be disruptive and extremely difficult, if not impossible. The entire academic program and all other activities would have to vacate the building entirely for possibly two years if it could be proven that this course were to be an efficient and practical procedure for rehabilitation of the present building.

The proposed plan calls for an entirely new building and demolition of the existing building. It would be very important in this case to retain at least the most significant part of the North Toronto Collegiate Institute building as part of the proposed new building project. The most desirable approach would be to retain the entire structure of the original 1912 building intact and move it to become an integral part of the new building but to move a masonry building of the age, construction and size of the 1912 building would not be feasible.

An alternative procedure, known as “panelizing”, is a successful method that can be used to dismantle a building façade in manageable sections and later reassembled as a restored façade. Such a process was completed successfully in Toronto, on Temperance Street, where the former Aikenhead’s Hardware building façade was disassembled in sections of brick masonry, stored locally and finally restored in the original form as part of a new building.

In principle neither moving a building intact to a different location nor dismantling parts or elements of a building are considered to be ideal preservation practice but such procedures may be considered as a last resort when there is no other way to preserve the architectural presence of a building with important historical associations.

The parapet of the 1912 façade was partially altered in 1928 with the addition of a third floor. The decorative parapets crowning the two bay windows were also reduced when there were further alterations made in this part of the original facade in 1955. Full restoration of all missing elements of the original two-story façade design would restore the architectural integrity of the 1912 design where its relocation would be a prominent and appropriate part of the architecture of the new building. In this new location it would be a visual link and symbolic record of the history of North Toronto Collegiate Institute.

The addition of the third floor and other interventions also occurred in the 1921 south facade with similar effect to what happened to the architectural integrity of the 1912 north façade. The south façade of the building is of secondary importance in comparison to the north façade. Never the less significant elements of Collegiate Gothic detail could be dismantled and treated the same way technically as the 1912 façade and possibly incorporated into parts of the new building. This may or may not prove to be desirable architecturally but could be considered as an option. In this case preservation of building fragments should not take precedence over a full and proper restoration of the original 1912 façade as an important element in the massing and form of the new building.

The proposed master plan for the existing property provides for the new building to be constructed on a part of the property that is a considerable distance from the site of the existing building. This plan allows for the regularly scheduled academic and extracurricular programs at NTCI to continue without disruption in the existing facilities during the entire construction period of the new building. Dismantling of the original 1912 building façade and temporary closure of the remaining structure could occur during a summer break without affecting the regular school program. The masonry panels of the 1912 façade could be stored on site and would be available for inclusion in the new building whenever they might be required. Demolition of the entire existing old building would take place only after the new building is ready and occupied. The regulation playing field proposed in the master plan could then be completed with its north-south orientation extending the full distance of the site along the west property line between Broadway and Roehampton Avenues.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is recommended therefore that the architectural fabric of the front North facade of the 1912 North Toronto Collegiate Institute building should be dismantled and fully restored architecturally as an integral and functioning part of the design and plan of the new building where it will commemorate the architectural and historical importance and the unique educational record of North Toronto Collegiate Institute.