

LOCATIONS

THE LAKESIDE PARK PAVILION AT PORT DALHOUSIE

by IAN ELLINGHAM, PHD, FRAIC

Whenever I am in Port Dalhousie, Ontario, I imagine my grandparents and great-grandparents courting there. My great-grandfather was a captain on the lake boats, so would have passed through the harbour many times when it was the Lake Ontario end of the Welland Canal. Old photographs show a bustling area, full of cargo-schooners in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, featuring trams to the waterfront, an amusement park and steamers to Toronto. While the schooners, trams and steamers have disappeared, Port Dalhousie remains a popular summer destination, with beach volleyball, swimming, sailing, a century-old carousel, and pleasant restaurants and pubs.

The area is wrapped in layers of historical sentiment – including memories of one's grandparents and great-grandparents – so implementing any change was difficult. A few years ago, the wooden pavilion in Lakeside Park was found to be in very poor repair. Studies about the structure were inconclusive. Old written references and photographs did not clearly fit what was there. Some elements may have dated back several decades, perhaps reused, but newer pressure-treated wood was also found in places. The old pavilion had received numerous modifications and repairs, but rot was now so extensive that ad-hoc patching was no longer an option.

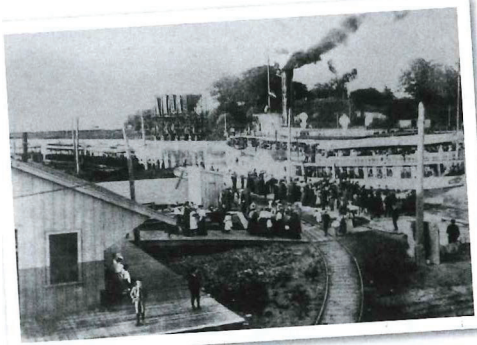
A picnic pavilion is a simple building – a roof providing protection from the sun and rain – and yet its very simplicity underlines the complexity of design issues. One challenge is to balance the provision of shade and light. Another, the main concern in this case, is reconciling the reality of a simple, deteriorating structure of unknown provenance with the emotions surrounding it.

Interestingly, attitudes about preserving heritage are not as old as Port Dalhousie itself. The 19th century thinkers John Ruskin, William Morris and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc all developed influential theories about how to deal with older buildings, which contributed to the emergence of preservation movements. Today it would seem bizarre to modernize an old cathedral, but that is exactly what happened for most of the past two thousand years.

The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* created by Parks Canada notes “heritage value” is “the aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present or future generations,” underlining the fact that human sentiment, which is not easy to assess objectively, represents a large component of this value. In the case of the deteriorating pavilion, it was not its specific characteristics that were important, nor whether it was actually old, but the individual and collective emotions that surrounded it. After much debate, it was resolved to build a new pavilion, and the St. Catharines firm Macdonald Zuberec Ensslen Architects Inc. undertook the project.



The new pavilion at
Lakeside Park
PHOTO: IAN ELLINGHAM



Garden City paddle steamer, Port Dalhousie, Ont., 1912.
Baldwin Collection, Toronto Public Library
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

A park pavilion essentially provides shelter from the rain and sunlight while remaining an outdoor experience, which means giving particular attention to light and how it works – an awareness that resulted from the characteristics of the old pavilion, which I remember as being dark, with an asphalt floor and a low ceiling of dirty boards concealing rather rough roof trusses caked in bird droppings. It was useful place, not a cheery one. Harald Ensslen, the partner in-charge at MZE, took a considered approach to light and shade to create something more inviting.

The new building has four substantial glazed gable ends, each representing an aspect of Port Dalhousie's heritage. The four-gabled arrangement was inspired by the pavilion in St. Catharines' city centre Montebello Park. Ensslen comments that having light come from multiple directions reduces the likelihood of uncomfortable glare. There are also glazed panels under the eaves that allow a higher roof, admitting more light, adding structural rigidity and anticipating future enclosure possibilities using garage-type doors. The black asphalt was replaced with lighter-coloured concrete. To reduce the build-up of bird droppings which can be a problem, the roof structure was designed to provide few places to nest.

Building through 2017 was a challenge, as the lake was at the highest level in a century, with water lapping onto the site. Ensslen says they were lucky to be using a contractor with a Dutch background; unfazed by the problem, he simply built a few dikes and kept pumping.

MZE believes the new building respects the heritage of the area, carrying on the traditions of the old building by having the same overall location, function, general form and colours, but offering a better balance between shelter and light. It should provide a new focus around which ongoing generations of users can build their own memories (real or imagined), family histories and romantic sentiments.

CREDITS:

ARCHITECT: Macdonald Zuberec Ensslen Architects Inc. CONTRACTOR: Brouwer Construction

STRUCTURAL/HERITAGE: Mark Shoalts, Shoalts Engineering

STRUCTURAL STEEL: Bradshaw Iron Works

IAN ELLINGHAM is an architect living in St. Catharines, Ontario. He is Chair of the Built Environment Open Forum.



**MACDONALD
ZUBEREC
ENSSLEN Architects Inc.**
39 QUEEN STREET STUDIO 403
ST CATHARINES ON L2R 5G6
WWW.MZEARCHITECTS.COM
P 905.685.8467 INFO@MZEARCHITECTS.COM