

CITY OF ST. THOMAS

BY-LAW NO. 168-2001

A by-law to designate 40 Princess Avenue
in the City of St. Thomas, as a building
of historic and architectural value.

WHEREAS pursuant to the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.).18, the Council of a municipality may by by-law designate a property including buildings and structures thereon to be of historic or architectural value or interest;

AND WHEREAS notice of intention to designate the property at 40 Princess Avenue, St. Thomas, Ontario, has been duly published and served, and no notice of objection has been received to such designation;

NOW THEREFORE THE COUNCIL OF THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF ST. THOMAS, ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

1. There is hereby designated as being of historic and architectural value or interest the property known as 40 Princess Avenue in the City of St. Thomas, all of which is described in Schedule "A" attached hereto, for the reasons set out in Schedule "B" attached hereto.
2. The City Clerk is hereby authorized to cause a copy of the by-law to be registered upon the title to the property described in the aforementioned Schedule "A" in the proper Land Registry Office.
3. The City Clerk is hereby authorized to cause a copy of this by-law to be served upon the owner of the aforesaid property and upon the Ontario Heritage Foundation and to cause notice of this by-law to be published in the St. Thomas Times-Journal.
4. This by-law comes into force on the day it is finally passed.

READ a First and Second time this 3rd day of December, 2001.

READ a Third time and finally passed this 3rd day of December, 2001.

Original signed by "Peter Leack"
City Clerk

Original signed by "Peter Ostojic"
Mayor

Reasons for Designation

Historical:

The Princess Avenue Playhouse, home of the Elgin Theatre Guild, is a study in the re-use of a building. This former church was built in 1907, for the St. Thomas congregation of the Church of Disciples, as their new building to replace the first church, built in 1879, at this location. The church had relocated here from the sale of property they had held on Talbot Street near Centennial Avenue. A church had existed at that site from 1864-1879. When the congregation built the new church here in 1879, Princess Avenue was then called Railway Street. The first church was razed in summer of 1906. The new building was dedicated on April 28, 1907, with \$10,408.90 being raised that day for the building fund. The congregation of the Church of Disciples was here until 1986.

The building was given a new lease on life when the Elgin Theatre Guild purchased the old church in 1987-1988. Since that time the Elgin Theatre Guild has endeavored to create a home for community theatre in St. Thomas with supporting patrons from St. Thomas, London and surrounding areas. At the same time the Guild has ensured that much of the original features, both exterior and interior, of this fine building have been retained.

Exterior Features:

This handsome brick building, designed by city resident Neil Darrach, has three outstanding facades, the north, east, and south. The facades are framed by two distinctively different towers. Anchored in the centre of each of the three facades, at the second floor level in the gable ends, are sizable stained-glass circular windows. Noticeable in the brick construction of this building is the use of pink mortar.

The large square shaped three storey tower at north end of the east facade, once housed the formal entrance to the church. This tower gives a sense of strength and stability to the building. The large slab stones used in the step construction are still present at this entrance. As well the stone walls? Along the stairs are in place. However, they may require repairs. The double entrance doors are framed above by a 3-pane fanlight of stained-glass. The second level of this tower has a series of rectangular windows, and on the third floor level there may have been a church bell. This tower still retains its original slate roof, however that is need of repairs or replacing.

The opposing tower, at the south end of the east facade, is circular and only two storeys in height. The windows in this tower, are rectangular stained-glass, and seem to follow the interior circular staircase. Like the north tower, this tower is also capped with a slate roof, probably in need of repairs or replacing. This tower has its original cast iron finial in place, while the finial for the north tower is missing, but may be stored in the Playhouse.

Along the first floor level of the east facade is a series of vertical rectangular stained-glass windows. They are similar windows to those in each of the towers. These stained-glass windows allow light to flood into the front hall of the building. Equally similar but smaller square windows are found on the second floor, along the bottom of the large stained-glass window.

In the north facade, now the Elizabeth Street entrance to the Playhouse, are equally important details. Like the east facade, the dominant feature here is the large stained-glass window on the second floor level. The window design is the same, but smaller than that of the east window. A window of similar size and design is duplicated in the south facade. Like the east window, this one has smaller stained-glass windows beneath it. The memorial windows, which were at the first floor level of the north facade, were removed at the time of sale, but are safely housed at the Church on Wellington Street. The memorial windows have been replaced with textured glass. There are three painted windows on this facade that may predate this building. They are situated on the second floor level, on either side of the large window and near the front interior staircase. The painted windows have three different designs, those being an open bible, a dove, and a cross and chalice. At the formal entrance to the Playhouse, another half circle stained glass window rests above the door. A wheelchair entrance ramp was added by the congregation before the building was sold. A final series of stained-glass windows is situated on the first floor level, at the west end of this facade. A concrete

date stone set in the square tower, on this facade and a series of small windows on the second floor of tower complete this side's description.

The west facade has not been included in the description. At the east entrance and the north entrance the doors are sheltered by blue awnings with the Playhouse's logo.

Interior features:

Lobby:

Although this original entrance door has been changed to a fire door, the interior trim remains in place. The main floor lobby has been refitted with consideration for the staircase to the second floor balcony. Except for a newel post and part of the banister removed at the lower portion the staircase and bannisters all remain intact. A brass handrail has been added to conform with public building codes. A fine example of a five panel wooden door remains in the lobby at the stage entrance. It has its original trim work and working hardware. Similar doors are found in the backstage area, near the former kitchen area.

Auditorium:

The sanctuary of the former church is now used for the Playhouse's auditorium. In the lower level the original oak pews serve as seating. Some of these pews have the hymnal holders intact, and some of the pews are slightly curved. The rear of the room is wrapped in pine wainscoting, capped with a slight ledge. The woodwork around the doors remains as original, but like other places in this building, the exit doors are now fire doors. The wide pine planking used in the flooring has been painted.

The upper level of the auditorium is crowned with a sweeping curved balcony, supported in the lower level by three cast iron columns. Like the lower level, the seating in the upper balcony, is also oak pews, but there are two rows of double curved pews, which echo the sweep of the balcony. The bannister along the edge of the balcony has been replaced by brass mesh screening and a brass handrail.

Two school house lights, which hang in the upper balcony, were retrieved from the Talbot Street store, where the St. Thomas Little Theatre met in the 1950's. As well a sign from the St. Thomas Little Theatre "stage door" was presented to the Playhouse by Alderman Steve Peters. Both items show the direct link to this group's community history. Throughout the upper balcony the support arches, for the centre dome, are very evident. They were incorporated into the original design, with each of the three large stained glass windows set between the arches. The large centre skylight allows light into the auditorium.

Front Hallway:

The front hallway, which runs parallel to the east facade, was part of the formal entrance to the church. The hallway is lined on one side with a series of small, vertical of stained-glass windows. Pine wainscoting also wraps around the hall. A larger stained-glass window is situated in this hallway near the door.

South Tower

The interior of the south tower remains in the most original condition of any area in this building. The staircase, which follows the curve of the tower itself, is a fine example of the skilled woodworking used throughout the building. The staircase has three large square newel posts, turned spindles and carved trimmed banister. A short extension bannister runs along the second floor entrance to the balcony. This tower has been plastered and painted. Several rectangular stained-glass windows are also found in this tower. They have curved wooden window sills which appear to be original.

The lower level of the tower houses an entrance to the basement. The five panel wooden door to the basement remains in near original condition, complete with working hardware. The tower is supported by a base of field stone rubble, which forms the foundation. The basement of the Playhouse is mostly used for storage.