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Site of Centennial Museum, 1967

Celebrating Canada's Centennial - 1967

Arthur McClelland

Fifty years ago, London celebrated Canada's Centennial. A committee to celebrate Canada's centennial was first mentioned by City Clerk Reg. H. Cooper at a city council meeting on February 19th, 1962. Consequently, the Board of Control recommended that Mayor Frank G. Stronach, Alderman John A. Irvine and Controller Margaret A. Fullerton be appointed as the Centennial Committee. The first report of the Centennial Committee composed of Mayor Stronach, Controller Bentley I. Baldwin, Alderman Irvine and Stephen J. Hervoly, was presented on May 3rd, 1963. The committee recommended that the city clerk be authorized to gather information about federal and provincial grants to build a concert hall and auditorium at a cost of \$3 million as a centennial project. The following four organizations had already expressed an interest in the city's centennial celebrations and were invited to a meeting of the committee to present their centennial projects – Kiwanis Club of London, London Public Library Board, Military Historical Society and the University Women's Club. Among the many suggestions for centennial projects were the following – a museum by the London Public Library Board and Military Historical Society, a Confederation park at the Forks of the Thames by the Garden Club of London, a residence for handicapped adults, senior citizens' home, development of Broughdale lands, planting of maple trees by the London Garden Club and a cenotaph by Knights of Columbus. Centennial projects had to be approved provincially by November 9th, 1964. On June 22, 1965, the Centennial Celebrations Committee recommended that the city of London plan a mammoth inter-faith religious

celebration to include all churches within the city beginning on Sunday June 25th and ending on Saturday July 1st, 1967. It was suggested on November 18th, 1965 that the London Historical Society be requested to submit suggestions to the Centennial Celebration Committee with respect to the possibility of constructing a fort within the city with French and British colonials, fur traders, Indians, etc. On February 1st, 1966, the Centennial Celebration Committee accepted the offer of the University Women's Club to handle the preparation of an official 1967 calendar to be known as the "London Journal" with pictures of London buildings with historical significance, giving special emphasis to the Victorian architecture which is so prevalent in the city. The photographs were taken by William Lehman of 1057 Brough Street. On May 3rd, 1966, the Centennial Celebration Committee asked that the Board of Control extend an invitation to Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip to visit London since they would already be visiting Expo '67 in Montreal. On October 6th, 1966, the Centennial Celebration Committee referred the preparation of a factual history of London booklet by William Corfield to the Historical Society.

Centennial Hall/Square

On September 15th, 1964, the Committee recommended the construction of a Centennial Square including a convention centre and civic auditorium located near city-owned land bounded by Dufferin Avenue, Princess Avenue and Wellington Street and that this be approved as the Centennial project for the City of London. Centennial Square would include an art gallery and underground parking facilities for 600 cars.

On November 2nd, 1964, City Council approved the construction of a \$1,450,000 Centennial Centre. The Board of Control appointed Philip Carter Johnson as the architect on November 16th. By-Law No. A. - 3612-246 (Bill # 260) authorized the construction of the Convention Centre and Civic Auditorium. On June 14th, 1965, a portion of Princess Avenue was closed east of Wellington Street and all the buildings except for Central Secondary School, in the square bounded by Dufferin Avenue, Princess Avenue, Waterloo and Wellington streets were to be vacated by August 31st, 1965. Houses on Princess Avenue (294, 296 and 298) were expropriated and demolished for the construction which was to be completed by March 1st, 1967. Additional houses were demolished (284, 288 and 294 Dufferin Avenue; 291 Princess Avenue and 500, 508, 512 and 516 Wellington Street).

On September 28th, 1965, the Centennial Celebration Committee recommended inviting Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians to entertain at the Convention Centre on Friday June 30th, 1967 but Guy was unable to attend. The clearing for the convention site started on October 18, 1965. On November 9th, 1965, the Committee recommended a civic dinner be held on June 21st, 1967 before the official opening of the Convention Centre and Civic Auditorium and that Hon. John Robarts, Premier of Ontario, be invited to attend the opening. That same day the City received news that it would be assured of \$327,176 in federal-provincial grants for the construction of its concert/convention hall.

On March 6th, 1966, the Centennial Celebration Committee accepted the offer of the London Garden Club to decorate the Convention Centre and Civic Auditorium for the opening. On April 9th, 1966, the Board of Control opened the following tenders which were received for the construction of the

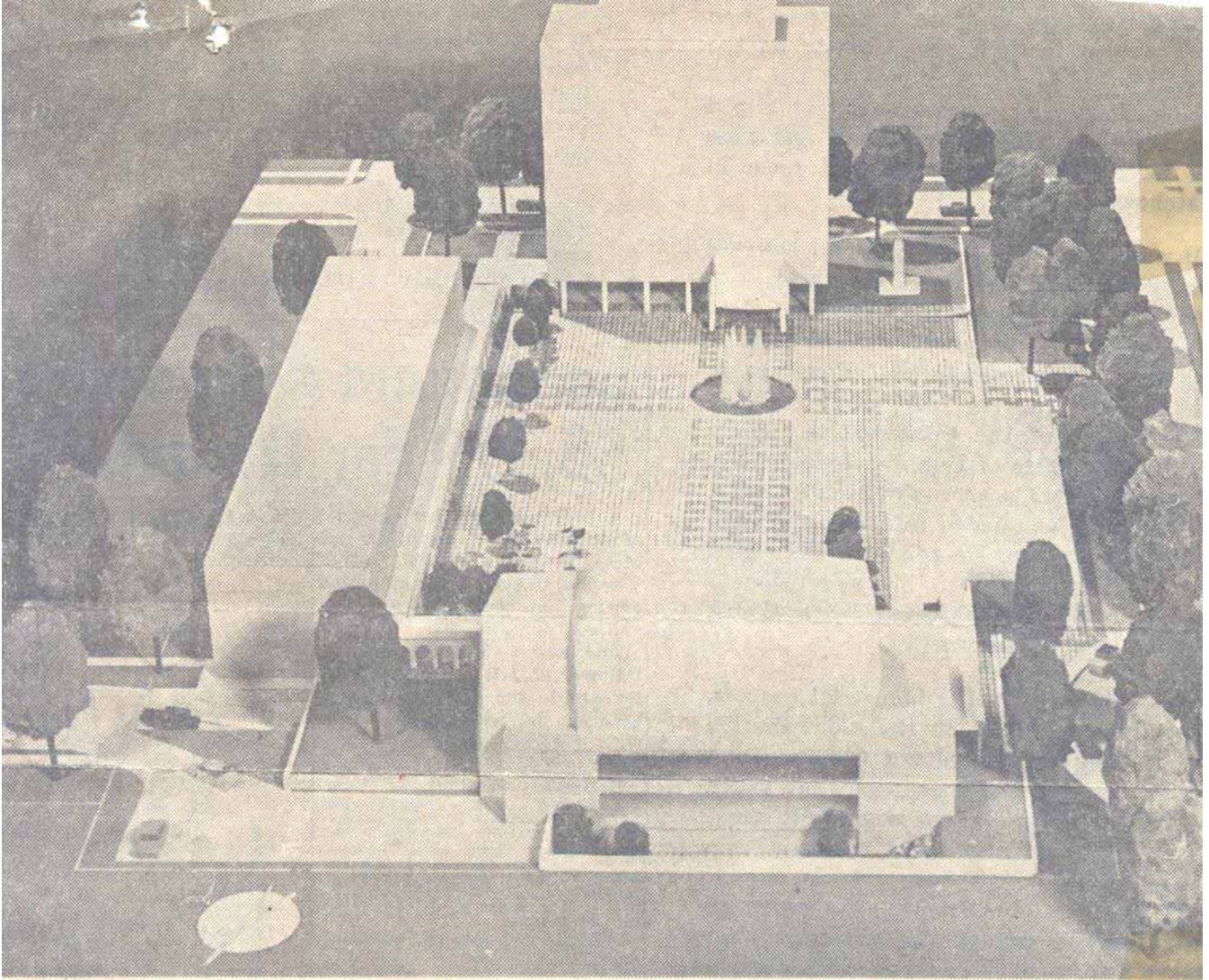
Centennial Convention Centre and Civic Auditorium:

Ellis Don Limited - \$1,073, 719.00

W.A. McDougall Limited - \$1,190,000.00.

The construction bid was awarded to Ellis-Don on April 25th, 1966. The Centennial Hall project officially started with the sod-turning by Mayor Stronach and Controller Margaret Fullerton on May 9th, 1966. The Board of Control also accepted the gift of a cornerstone and a copper archive box through the generosity of Geard Cut Stone Limited, Bennett & Wright Limited and Ellis-Don Limited. On February 22nd, 1967, the Board of Control recommended that the new civic centre be called Centennial Hall. Among the suggested names were Centennial Centre, Forest City Centennial Centre, Georgina Auditorium, Governor Simcoe Hall, Grant's Tomb, John Wilson Auditorium, London Athenaeum and White Elephant of 67. Some suggested it should be named after Sir John Carling or Peter McGregor.

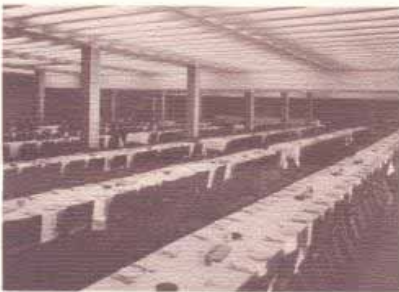
The cornerstone was officially laid by Controller Margaret A. Fullerton on Friday May 19th, 1967 at 10:00 a.m. Within the cornerstone were the following items – three small Confederation flags, a set of coins, a complete series of coloured postcards of local views of the city of London donated by Victor Aziz Photography Ltd., a copy of the *London Journal 1967*, a city map, a tape of CKSL broadcast, Centennial Hall stationery, front page of Section 4, *London Free Press*, May 18th, 1967 edition and the Municipal Yearbook for 1966. A scale model of Centennial Hall was used for promotional purposes. Centennial flagstones were available for \$10 to be engraved with a person's initials and laid in the Centennial Square (13,330 were available for sale).



Centennial Hall Model, 1965



Lobby



Banquet Hall



Banquet Hall Sunken Garden

CENTENNIAL HALL FACILITIES

- Auditorium** - seating capacity 1854
- open stage
- Banquet Hall** - meetings up to 1000
- catering capacity 900
- dinner dance, cabaret style, 550 maximum
- Lounge** - reception area and bar service
- Additional Meeting Rooms**
- Parking** - Underground, attached, south side, 430 cars
- Ground level, 300 cars
- Accommodation** - within 2 blocks of major accommodation and shopping areas
- For Information** - K. J. Burgess, Manager
- A. Lawson, Asst. Manager
- Telephone 672-1967
- Location** - 550 WELLINGTON STREET
- Opposite Victoria Park
- Easy access to Highways 2, 4, 22 and 401



Lounge and Reception Area

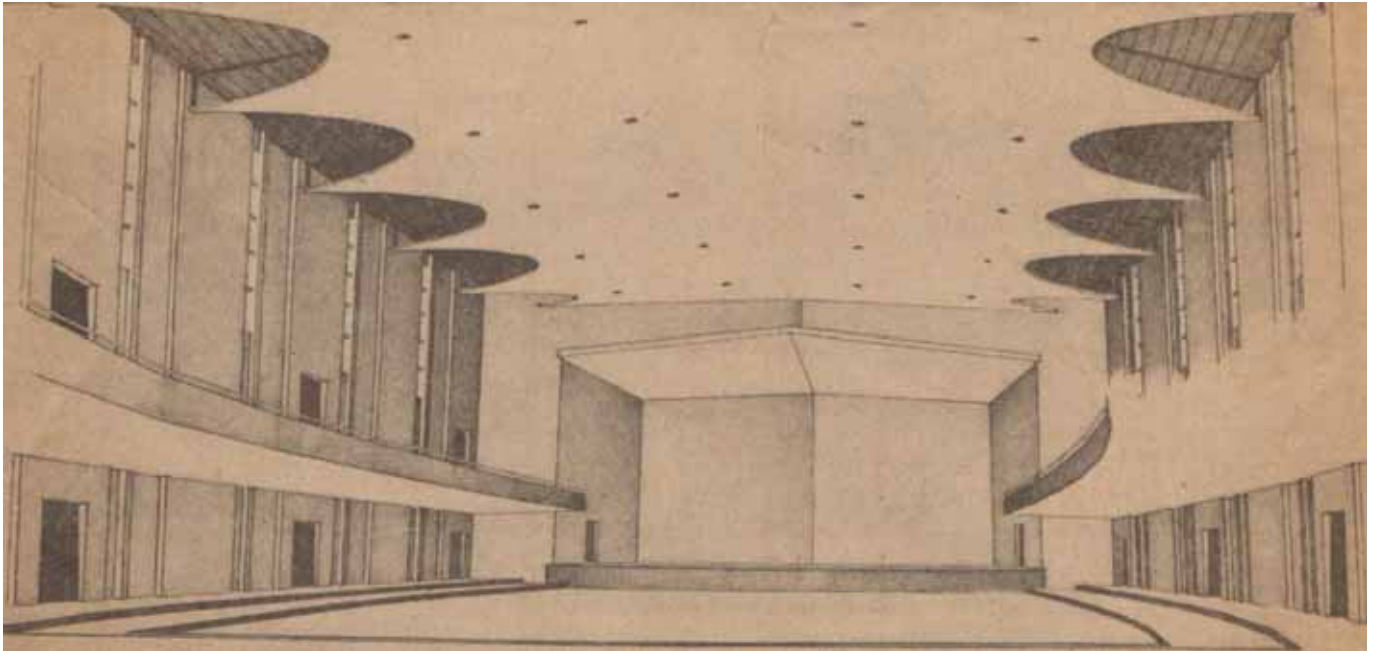


Auditorium — Cabaret Dinner Dance

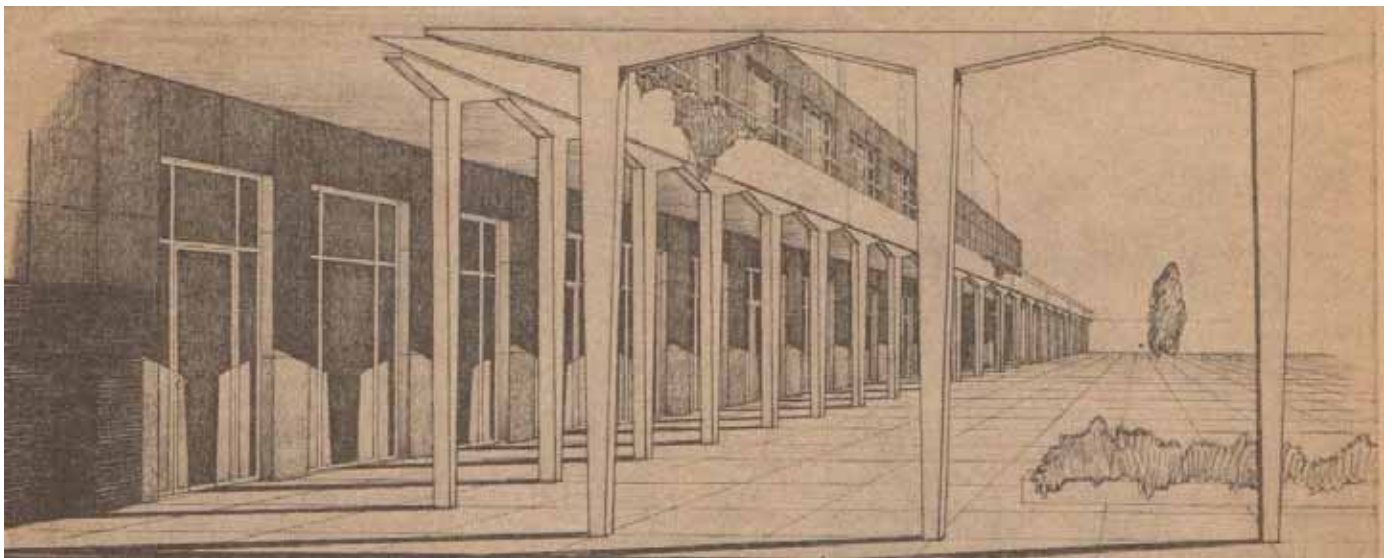


Auditorium — View from Stage

Centennial Hall Brochure, 1973



Centennial Hall, Interior drawings, 1965



Centennial Hall, Southeast Corner of Exterior drawings, 1965

The project was sponsored by the London Jaycees and the \$10 went towards the construction of an ice rink whose feasibility study was approved by the Board of Control on October 5, 1966. The proposed 200 by 300 foot ice rink would cover about one quarter of the northeasterly area of Centennial Square.

Centennial Hall officially opened at 550 Wellington Street at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, June 21st, 1967 by the Hon. John Robarts, Premier of Ontario and Mayor Frank Stronach. A dinner for \$4 a plate was supplied by Dufferin Hall Catering and was served at 6:15 p.m. to about 450 officials and guests, followed by the official opening concert at 8:30 p.m. by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Councillor Martin Boundy who was the chair of the Centennial Celebrations Committee. Centennial Hall could hold 800 in the centre of the floor, 500 in the two raised levels and 600 in the balcony for a total capacity of 1,900.

On July 4th, 1967, the Board of Control authorized the City Clerk, on behalf of the Junior Chamber of Commerce to obtain the necessary approvals to have the Queen's initials etched in a Centennial stone and placed in the centre of the Centennial Square. In October 1967, the City Clerk was authorized to send a letter of appreciation to the University Women's Club and Mr. Bieler for the \$4,000 sculpture in the sunken garden on the north side of the Centennial Square on land that was former Princess Avenue. City Council allowed gifts by private individuals or corporations to be given to the Centennial Square project. The architect and committee supervising the project listed such items as a baby grand piano (\$3,000), eventually donated by the Japanese Canadian community in London, a fountain (\$300), lobby and promenade benches (\$400), movable theatre seats (\$60,000), an organ (\$50,000) and an upright piano (\$1,000).

Victoria House/Centennial Museum

As early as 1937, a plea was made to establish a historical museum in London. At the April 15th, 1937 meeting of the London and Middlesex Historical Society, 14 historical items were presented including communion tokens and minute books of the Telfer Presbyterian Church, an 1860 picture of Covent Market Square, a bench and table from the old barracks building, the cornerstone of the old Union School on King Street and a deck chair from the steamer Victoria. Most of these articles were stored in the treasure room next to the bindery under the front stairs of the Central Branch of the London Public Library at 305 Queens Avenue. Twenty-one years later on March 13th, 1958, London's newly established Historical Sites and Museums Committee asked City Council for the use of 512 Wellington Street as a temporary home for the museum until permanent quarters were acquired. In conjunction with the proposed civic centre opposite Victoria Park, in December 1957, City Council purchased the home which served as the manse for Metropolitan United Church from 1907 to 1957. The City granted the committee's request on May 20th, 1958 and on Friday November 7th, 1958 at 8:15 pm, London's first historical museum, Victoria House Museum, opened.



Victorian House Museum Leaflet, 1961



Victoria House Museum Opening Invitation, 1958



512 Wellington Street, 1965

In 1961, \$100 was spent to create and distribute a leaflet to promote the museum. On January 1st, 1963, the London Public Library Board assumed responsibility for the museum. On December 18th, 1963, London's first children's museum opened on the second floor of the Victoria House Museum. The Victoria House Museum vacated its Wellington Street quarters in 1966 and the house was demolished in January 1966. In October 1966 temporary museum quarters were found in an 1870 double house at 325-327 Queens Avenue just east of the Central Library.

The idea for Centennial Museum was conceived in 1962 when the London Public Library Board recommended to the Board of Control that a three-storey museum be built next to the Central Library at 305 Queens Avenue as the city's project to celebrate Canada's centennial in 1967. On November 29th, 1963 the Historical Museum Advisory Committee formed a sub-committee to compile information about this project. It was reported in the January 22nd, 1964 issue of the *London Free Press* that the London Public Library Board urged the construction of an historical museum at an estimated cost of \$350,000 to \$500,000. On April 20th, 1965, the recommendation from the London Public Library Board concerning the building of a historical museum as its centennial project was referred to the Centennial Convention Centre Committee. After lengthy deliberations, City Council decided to build a concert hall instead.

On April 26th, 1967, the London Building Trades Council announced that a \$50,000 one-storey historical museum would be constructed in the shape of the centennial symbol (a stylized maple leaf) on a site just east of the Central Library. The existing double house at 325-327 was demolished beginning on May 1st, 1967 and the museum building was constructed by local trades people, working on their own time and using no government

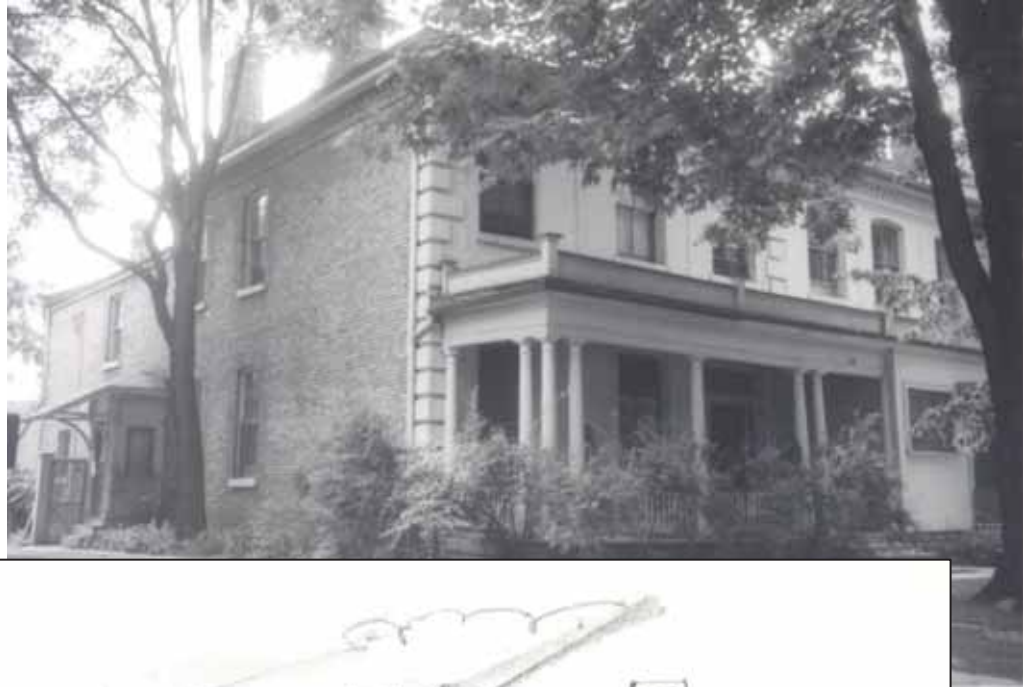
funding. Almost two years after Canada's Centennial Year, Centennial Museum was officially opened on May 9th, 1969 as an interactive museum, equipped with such innovative features as telephones that "talked" when receivers were lifted and film and sound that went on when people walked on certain carpeted areas. The Library Board closed the museum in December 1986 and it was then home for Information London for ten years from 1989 to 1999. The building was demolished on August 31st, 2005 and is now a parking lot.

London Public Library

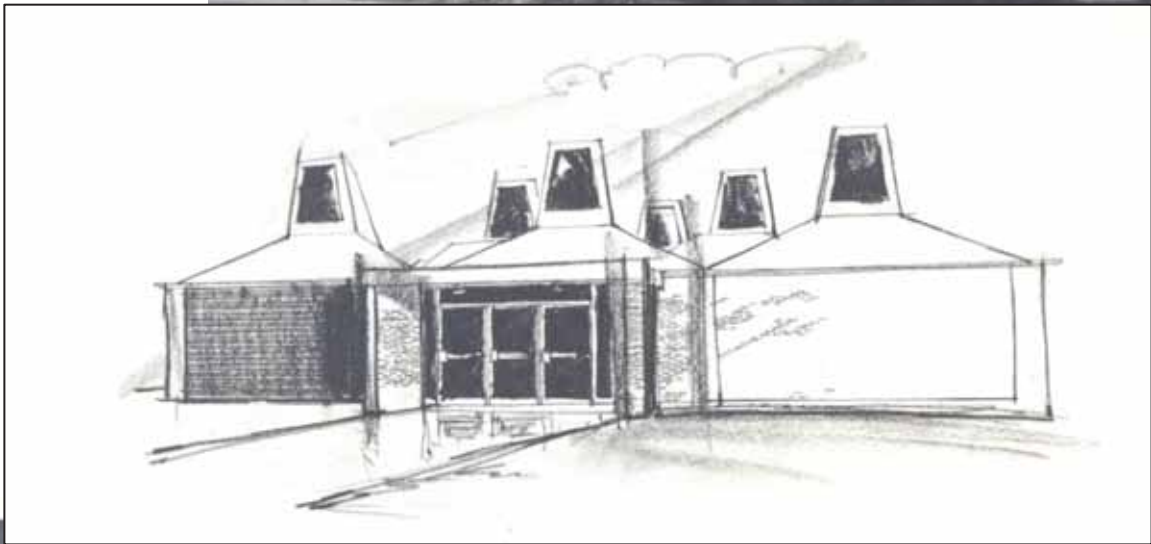
In the 1961 Annual Report, Chief Librarian Charles Deane Kent reported, "*One of the biggest problems now is the overcrowding at the Main Library and Art Museum, which is affecting all departments and services. The Planning and Development Committee of the Library Board has been studying this situation for some months and it has come up with the proposal that an extension must be built shortly to the rear of the present Elsie Perrin William Memorial Building.*" The contract for extending the library building was not completed until 1967. To make room for the extension, the Kingsmill property at 321-323 Queens Avenue was purchased and demolished in June 1965. Formal openings of the expanded building planned for March and October were cancelled. The new million-dollar extension to the Central Branch of the London Public Library was officially opened on April 26th, 1968 by the Hon. John Robarts, Premier of Ontario, providing a new children's wing, more book space and more gallery space and increasing overall floor space from 39,600 square feet to 97,480 square feet.

The official project of the London Public Library Board was the reprinting of *Illustrated London* which was first published in 1897 and reprinted in 1900. The Library Board also renamed the old main gallery, the Centennial Gallery.

327 Queens Avenue,
1966



Sketch of Centennial
Museum, Opened 1969



Demolition of 325
Queens Avenue, 1967

London Room

On July 31st, 1967, the London Room was officially opened with \$3,000 being donated towards the furnishing of this room by the London Rotary Club, celebrating 50 years of Rotary in London. The London Room was created as a research facility for genealogy and local history, housing a wealth of primary and secondary source materials on the city of London and the county of Middlesex.

The local history collection came into existence after Chief Librarian Fred Landon advocated the preservation of local records in public libraries in his 1917 *Ontario Library Review* article entitled "The Library and Local Materials." Following his advice, London Public Library began to collect historical material about London and Londoners. Discards, gifts and purchases were the means whereby this Londoniana collection grew. The concept of a separate room for local materials came from former Chief Librarian Deane Kent whose interest in developing an easily accessible local history collection began about 1965 when plans for an addition to the Central Library were being investigated. Mr. Kent instructed Miss Elizabeth Spicer, Head of the Humanities Department, who was to become the first London Room librarian, to undertake a detailed survey of local history materials so as "to build the best collection in the world on London, Ontario."

In 1967, the concept of a local history room became a reality when the London Room officially opened on July 31st at 1:00 p.m. Due to increasing interest in local history, the need for more space for local materials became acute. Following the departure of the Art Gallery in 1980, the second floor was renovated enabling library services to move into the space, including expanded facilities for the London Room. Eventually space became a pressing issue for all of Central Library and consequently on August 25, 2002, the new Central Library opened in the former Bay Department Store in Galleria Mall (now Citi Plaza) at 251 Dundas Street, with the London Room on the third floor.



Central Library Extension, Opening Ceremonies, 1968



London Room Official Opening, 1967

The London Room continues to attract researchers from around the world who make use of its genealogical and local history materials which are not easily found anywhere else. These materials include city directories on microfilm, diaries, published genealogies, handwritten manuscripts, high school yearbooks, original letters, photographs, programmes, scrapbooks and telephone directories on microfilm. Archival and rare

materials are stored in the closed stacks, a secure area.

In 2017, during the Sesquicentennial of Canada, the London Room also celebrated its 50th anniversary. A gala celebration was held from 1-4 pm on Monday July 31st, 2017 in the London Room. The event included the launch of a recently acquired London postcard collection, music, speeches and refreshments.

Sources of images

1. "Site of Centennial Museum, 1967" London Room Institutional Archives, Photographs, Centennial Museum Construction
2. "Centennial Hall Model, 1965" *London Free Press*. August 4, 1965
3. "Centennial Hall Brochure, 1973" London Room Archival Collection, Box # 312
4. "Centennial Hall, Interior Drawing, August 1965" *London Free Press*. August 4, 1965
5. "Centennial Hall Southeast Corner of Exterior Drawing, August 1965" *London Free Press*. August 4, 1965
6. "Victoria House Museum Leaflet, 1961" London Room Institutional Archives, Art Gallery and Museums Boxes
7. "Victoria House Museum Opening Invitation, 1958" London Room Institutional Archives, Art Gallery and Museums Boxes
8. "512 Wellington Street, 1965" London Room Demolished Buildings Files
9. "327 Queens Avenue, 1966" London Room Demolished Buildings Files
10. "Sketch of Centennial Museum, Opened in 1969"
11. "Demolition of 325 Queens Avenue, Summer 1967" London Room Institutional Archives, Photographs, Centennial Museum Construction
12. "Central Library Extension Opening Ceremonies, 1968" London Room Institutional Archives
13. "London Room Official Opening, Monday July 31st, 1967" London Room Institutional Archives



THE MEANING OF CONFEDERATION



BY the Confederation Act of the British Parliament in 1867, passed as framed by the merging partners, the Dominion of Canada was peacefully formed. It comprised a union, without internal tariffs, of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick under one central Government, with Provincial Legislatures for local affairs.

The four "original firsts" have grown to nine Provinces, by the addition in turn of Manitoba, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Alberta.