

Property Inventory Evaluation

Courthouse Complex



The Frontenac County Courthouse Complex

National Historic Site

1. County Courthouse (A)
2. Cartwright Fountain (B)
3. Registry Office (C)
4. Jailor's House (D)



Old Sydenham Heritage Area Conservation District (2014)

County Courthouse

21 Court Street

Built: 1855-58

**Architect: Edward Horsey
& Son**

Rating: S (Part IV)

Easement: OHT - 1989

Alterations:

Dome rebuilt in 1875 by

Power & Son; Rating: S



A new site was selected in 1853 for a new building, designed in 1855 by Horsey & Son, as a replacement for the old downtown Midland District Court House.* The new location was on an elevated piece of land overlooking open ground, in the early stages of being landscaped for a city park (and once under consideration as the site of a proposed parliament building when Kingston was the capital of the United Canadas in 1841-44) and, in the far distance, Lake Ontario.

The winner of an architectural competition for the new court house, jail (demolished 1973) and jailor's house (see 150 West Street) was Horsey & Son (Edward Horsey and his son Henry). One of the firm's architectural drawings for the project has survived in the Queen's University Archives.† The cornerstone (on the lower northeast corner and simply inscribed "1855") was laid 24 October 1855. Court Street was opened in late 1856. The court house was in use in 1858 for the administration and judicial system of the United Counties of Frontenac, Lennox & Addington (until 1864 and then for Frontenac County until 1998, when the city of Kingston took over ownership; it functions today as a provincial court house).

* Jennifer McKendry, "The Frontenac County Court House National Historic Site: an Architectural History" for Bray Heritage and the City of Kingston, Sept. 2010.

† The signed and dated plan for the ground floor, Gage Drawings 35 - X, QUA.

On 24 March 1875, fire broke out destroying the interior detailing and Horsey's original semi-hemispherical, tin over wood, dome. The architectural firm of Power & Son (John Power and his son Joseph) were awarded the commission to design a replacement dome and a new, separate registry office. The new dome (restored in recent years) is elevated on a drum of arched windows placed between Corinthian engaged columns supporting a pronounced cornice, semi-hemispherical dome, which is topped by a round cupola with windows. This is an outer dome sheltering a much shallower inner dome, its underside visible from the interior of the second-floor. Horsey's stone walls and grand Ionic portico survived the fire. Unfortunately, almost all the post-fire interior detailing was destroyed, first in the east wing after a fire of 10 March 1931, and then throughout during a modernization effort in 1964 by Drever & Smith. At that time the east and west exterior entrances were modernized and a stone addition placed against the north wall.

In 1921, memorial stained-glass windows, made by N.T. Lyon Company of Toronto, were installed in the centre of the north wall. A memorial free-standing plaque to the county's dead from the First World War is located on the interior staircase landing, as well as the original zinc statue of a water nymph removed in 1997 from the fountain south of the court house.

In 1986, the Frontenac County Court House was declared a National Historic Site by the federal government.

The Kirkpatrick Fountain

(Fronting 21 Court Street)

Built: 1903

Architect: Power & Son

Rating: S (Part IV)

Joseph Power of Power & Son (the name continued even though John Power died in 1882) designed the memorial fountain to Sir George A. Kirkpatrick (1841-1899) that was presented to Frontenac County in July 1903.* Kirkpatrick was a lawyer, Conservative politician, and lieutenant-governor of Ontario from 1892 to 1897. Concern over the stability of the fountain and numerous instances of vandalism created the need for ongoing repairs, for example in 1955. In 1996, Inglis & Downey, Architects, were requested to assess the fountain's condition, and made repairs in 1997. The zinc statue, which graced the top of the multi-tiered fountain, was vandalized and replaced by a bronze version made by sculptor John Boxtel in 1997. The original statue is now in the court house. Zinc statuary was particularly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in cemeteries, garden and fountains. An identical statue tops a fountain of 1897 in a Halifax, NS, park (as well, the top basin in Halifax matches the one in Kingston). They could be ordered from American factories and shipped by rail. In 2002, the east-facing seated lion was damaged. Lions were associated with the power of the Roman Empire and the British Empire. Sentiment towards the latter was particularly strong at this time due to the death of Queen Victoria in 1901.



* Jennifer McKendry, "The Frontenac County Court House National Historic Site: an Architectural History" for Bray Heritage and the City of Kingston, Sept. 2010.

There are two tiers of round basins over a base guarded by a pair of seated lions surrounded by an octagonal basin and, at the fountain's top, the statue of a classical female holding an urn and sporting a shell necklace with bulrushes at her feet. She likely represents a Greek nymph associated with water, springs or fountains (Egeria was associated with the latter).*

* Recently the statue's identification has been given as Demeter but she is more matronly, an earth goddess who holds a sheaf of wheat or cornucopia.

Registry Office

1 Court Street

Built: 1875

Architect: Power & Son

Rating: S (Part IV)

Addition: 1963; Rating N



In the morning of 24 March 1875, fire broke out in the Frontenac County Court House, which had housed the paperwork recording land transactions for the county since the building's opening in 1858.* One of the first concerns was to save the documents, which had shaped the settlement and history of the area since the arrival of the Loyalists in the 1780s. The prudence of storing these precious records in as fireproof and theft-proof a building as possible -- erected independently of the court house -- was paramount in the minds of the councillors after the fire. The timing followed closely the 1868 guidelines by the province for a standardized form of registry office with certain cast-iron features and three, side-by-side, masonry barrel vaults spanning the main part of the interior.



* Jennifer McKendry, "The Frontenac County Court House National Historic Site: an Architectural History" for Bray Heritage and the City of Kingston, Sept. 2010.

The Kingston architectural firm of Power & Son (John Power and his son Joseph) was chosen after the fire to rebuild the court house dome and design to the east a new registry office, which was in use in 1877 by both the city and county. The building contractor was George Newlands & Son. The site is of historic interest: it is likely that part of a blockhouse or its perimeter defences dating from the War of 1812 were located here. In 1963, the registry office was enlarged to the west; this portion is not considered of heritage interest.

The registry office is of particularly fine stonework including Ionic pilasters, keystones, pediments and arched windows. The original front, facing the open land of City Park, is divided into three bays echoing the interior vaulting system. The windows and transom are protected by vertical iron bars. The east side wall, as it faces West Street, was formally designed with articulating pilasters and, within the pediment, a pair of blind, recessed, arched panels. There are three arched and barred windows along West Street including one in a parapet front, behind which is a low lean-to section.

This building is valued because of its handsome design in the classical tradition, its proximity and historical connections with the court house and the architectural features reflecting its function.

Jailor's House

150 West Street

Built: 1857-58

**Architect: Edward Horsey
& Son**

Rating: S (Part IV)



Built as the jailor's house, this two-storey stone building (leased to the Canadian Red Cross Society since 1976) should be considered an integral part of the Frontenac County Court House complex (see Court Street), even though it has a modern street address on West Street.* Located discretely behind the court house, it has a surviving stone passageway lit by oculi and leading to what was once the county jail (demolished 1973). While awaiting trial and after sentencing in the court house, prisoners were incarcerated in the jail, which they entered through an unusual arrangement of exterior staircases. A pair of flights of stone steps runs parallel to the jailor's house's front wall to reach the main entrance reserved for the jailor's family and guests who entered through a doorway, which includes sidelights and an ellipse-arch fanlight. Under the landing for these steps is a short vaulted passageway with an open arch entrance and a flight of steps down to the basement level, where prisoners and guards entered on their way to the jail. The family was protected from potential prisoner escapes into their living quarters by internal, iron, security grills and gates. Certain basement windows are barred against escape.

The building is Classical in style (and, as such, is compatible with the court house) with emphatic symmetry and central focus on the south and north faces, which have a number of similar features. The width of the entrance doorways is balanced by the tripartite arched windows in the south facade's second storey; this window motif echoes ones found on the court house. The theme of a triad is repeated in the grouped brackets on the cornice and in the three bays in each of the south, west and north walls.

* Jennifer McKendry, "The Frontenac County Court House National Historic Site: an Architectural History" for Bray Heritage and the City of Kingston, Sept. 2010.

Classical balance is spoiled by the loss of one set of stone chimney stacks on the west side of the hipped roof.

Placed outside of, but adjacent to, the stone jail walls (demolished 1973), the jailor's house's formal design was meant to be seen, as one approached the court house complex from the west. Now on the east, it sits exposed with its amputated jail passageway, because a parking lot has usurped the jail, its exercise yards and protective outer walls.